

The Church Acts Up: The GIFT. Acts 2:36-39

Portions adapted from "The Promise Of Pentecost." Jerry Lewis @ SERmon Central.com

Yates Pool is a famous oil field in West Texas. During the Great Depression of the 1930's, this field was a sheep ranch owned by a man named Ira Yates. But Yates' wasn't earning enough money out of his ranching operation to make his mortgage payment; he was in danger of losing his ranch.

With little money for clothes or food, his family, like many others during the depression years, had to live on a government subsidy. Day after day, Yates would watch his sheep as they grazed over those rolling West Texas hills. He would rack his brain trying to figure out some way to pay all his bills.

One day a crew of men from an oil company came into the area and convinced Yates there might be oil on his land. They asked permission to drill a test well. Yates agreed. At 1,115 feet, the drillers struck a huge oil reserve. The first well came in at 80,000 barrels a day. But that was only the beginning. Many more wells came in.

By the 1960's, after oil had been pumped for more than 30 years, a government test of just one of the wells showed that it still had a potential flow of 125,000 barrels of oil a day. As of the year 2009, Yates field was still one of the top 10 producers of oil in the United States.

When Yates purchased the ranch, he was more interested in grazing land for his sheep than he was in the oil and mineral rights. There he was, living on a government subsidy, but sitting on a mammoth underground lake of incredibly valuable oil. He was a potential multimillionaire living in poverty. What was his problem? It was simply that he did not know of the wealth that lay beneath him. [Citation: Bill Bright, "How to Be Filled with the Spirit" (Campus Crusade publication)]

Many Christians these days are like Ira Yates, not living in physical but rather spiritual poverty, because they do not know the wealth that lies within them. They do not tap into the knowledge and empowerment of the Holy Spirit; they are ignorant of "**the gift**"--the indwelling and empowering Holy Spirit.

Three Sundays back, we celebrated a historic Jewish, now Christian holiday: Pentecost. Pentecost was a Jewish festival thanking God for the new harvest. So it was no coincidence that on that day Jesus poured out His promised Holy Spirit on 120 disciples sending them out as the first workers in the spiritual harvest for whom Jesus had prayed (Matt. 9:37-38). Filled with joy, and courage, and the miraculous ability to speak the languages of the world, they spilled out into the streets and began to witness about Jesus the Messiah. The book of Acts records that there were religious people "from every nation under heaven" assembled in Jerusalem for this festival. Upon hearing this joyous commotion and the Good News proclaimed in their own language, they gathered around the disciples in amazement.

But when others began to scoff at the disciples, claiming that they were just drunk, Peter announced to the crowd that what they were seeing was nothing less than the fulfillment of Joel's "last days" prophecy and then he delivered a powerful sermon describing their participation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Hearing and being convicted of their own personal guilt in crucifying Jesus, these good religious people were "*cut to the heart*," and asked Peter what they should do? And that's where we picked up our scripture reading today.

Peter said to them,

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; **and you will receive the gift** of the Holy Spirit."
Acts 2:38

For the promise is for you,
for your children,
for all who are far away,
everyone whom the Lord
our God calls to him."
Acts 2:39

That very day—as Joel prophesied—some 3,000 "everyones" from all over the world, "*called upon the name of the Lord*," were saved and received "the gift" of the Holy Spirit. Then a few days later another 5,000 received this gift. And so from this dusty corner of the Roman Empire the Holy Spirit empowered Church exploded to the very ends of the earth; which is why we are sitting where we are today.

Two thousand years later, Christianity is still the world's largest religion, with an estimated 2.2 billion adherents, nearly a third (31 percent) of all 6.9 billion people on earth. But according to the Pew report, Islam is second, with 1.6 billion adherents (23% percent of the global population), and as the fastest growing religion in the world, is expected to outnumber Christianity by the end of this century.

<http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/04/02/397042004/muslim-population-will-surpass-christians-this-century-pew-says>

What happened?

We have stopped growing!

Something, or more appropriately, Someone has gone missing from the life of the church: the Holy Spirit. For whatever reason, having grown ignorant of God's gift, many of us Christians are now living in spiritual poverty.

Today we seem much like those disciples of John the Baptizer whom Paul met on one of his missionary journeys. He asked them, *Did You receive The Holy Spirit when You became believers?* They replied, *No, we have not even heard there is a Holy Spirit* (Acts 19:2).

Several years back Dr. Jerry Vines (former Presbyterian SBC) wrote that "*the average Christian and the average church are somewhere bogged down between Calvary and Pentecost. They have been to Calvary for pardon, but they have not been to Pentecost for power. **Bethlehem means God with us. Calvary means God for us. But Pentecost means God in us.***"

D.L. Moody said, "*You might as well try to hear without ears,...or breathe without lungs,...as try to live a Christian life without the Spirit of God in your heart.*"

What have we done with our gift? Scripture teaches that all who have trusted in Christ do get the Spirit placed inside them. The Spirit acts as our seal securing us for God, as our teacher leading us into all truth; and is the one who empowers our witness. So, we are all baptized in the Spirit (washed and immersed in the person of God).

We are all still getting the same Spirit yet somehow, like those white elephant gifts we get at Christmas, we haven't even bothered to open the package; we seem to have just stuck it in a closet somewhere and forgotten it. **We've got the Holy Spirit inside us, but we haven't accepted His gift. We haven't let him fill us like He did those Pentecost disciples!** Maybe that was what Paul meant when he warned us to **neither "grieve" nor "quench" the Spirit** by which we have been sealed (Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19).

One of the "gifts" of the Holy Spirit is, among other things, the power to witness.

Jesus told the disciples that they would be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, but first they must wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Because the Spirit would give them the "power", the courage and also the ability to witness (hence the speaking in other languages). Earlier Jesus had also said that the Spirit would do the convicting: *He will convict the world of sin, righteousness, and Judgment* (John 16:8). **So they definitely had to wait for the gift, because the Holy Spirit would be working both sides of the crowd: empowering their witness and convicting their hearers.** In other words, if they had tried to start witnessing without the Holy Spirit, they would not have had the same power.

Have you ever felt frustrated in trying to witness, trying to speak about your faith?

People don't seem to listen; they politely, or sometimes impolitely, cut you off. They have other things to do. It can be frustrating, extremely frustrating.

At times we might feel it would be so much easier if we could be like Lucy in the Peanuts cartoon:

Lucy says to Charlie Brown, "I would have made a great evangelist."

Charlie Brown replies, "Is that so?"

She says, "Yes, I convinced that boy in front of me in school that my religion is better than his religion."

Charlie Brown asks, "Well, how did you do that?"

Lucy answers, "I hit him over the head with my lunch box."

Now that may be a tempting way to witness...but probably not real successful. I am convinced that part of our frustration in witnessing comes from not understanding and not accessing the power that the Holy Spirit is supposed to be supplying when we share our faith.

As I said earlier, the disciples were promised the power to witness when the Holy Spirit came. This Spirit would be working (convicting) the hearts of their hearers; of all those whom God was calling to himself.

In other words, you and I do not have to convict people with regard to salvation. That is the Holy Spirit's job. We are just to witness; the Bible calls us "*ambassadors for Christ since He is making His appeal through us.*" (2 Corinthians 5:20)

In a court room,...there is a judge,...a prosecutor,...a defense attorney,...a defendant, ... and witnesses.

A witness...gives his or her testimony.

Do the witnesses prosecute the defendant? NO!

Do the witnesses convict the defendant? NO!

Witnesses..... witness. They do their best to give honest and true testimony.

Why? Because they realize that the verdict may hinge on how well they witness.

But their only job is to witness; to testify.

Convicting people of their sins, of their need of righteousness and the closeness of judgment...this is the Holy Spirit's responsibility. Not ours! Praise God!

But that does not mean our testimony isn't important.

Without our testimony, without our witness, the world would not know the Good News.

For whatever His reasons, God has entrusted the getting out the message into our care.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? **And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?**
Romans 10:13-14

Our witness.....is part of the Good News.

The Holy Spirit was given to both empower and guide us in sharing this Good News.

If you don't know who you could talk to, why don't you ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to someone; or better still to put someone in your path. The book of Acts is filled with stories of Philip, Peter, Paul, and others being specifically directed, or physically taken by the Spirit to certain people who needed to hear their witness. And He can still guide us in the same way to people we should meet with, talk with, pray for, and witness to by word, deed, or just our by the way we live. There are many ways to share the Good News. St. Francis advises us: *always preach the Gospel and if necessary use words.*

Perhaps we have let religious tradition rob us of this gift from God to aid our witness. Religious tradition says the gift of the Holy Spirit was for the Apostles, just to get the church started, or, just for the early church, to help them win pagans and heathen to Christ. Look around! There are more lost people, pagans and heathen in the world today than ever. We still need the power of God to witness today as much as ever!!!

The gift of the Holy Spirit is also for every believer, not just special people.

Somehow, some way, we need to recapture this power of the Holy Spirit in our lives in the same way as those disciples did on the day of Pentecost. My heart is hungry for this gift, this filling of the Holy Spirit. **But hear me clearly, I am not talking about Pentecostalism, or second blessings, or speaking in private prayer languages, just about ordinary born again Presbyterians living in the power and joy of a Holy Spirit filled life.**

Vance Havner said "*the average one of us is so afraid of getting out on a limb we never even bother to climb a tree.*" That's pretty true of us and the Holy Spirit, isn't it? Through the years we've seen abuse, misuse, even fakery of spiritual gifts and of God's power. **So we are afraid of the excesses and of those who go to extremes. But, we must not allow the fake to scare us away from the real!!! We cannot afford to ignore the gifts that the Holy Spirit would give us.**

Peter said, ***The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call.***

In effect he said this outpouring of the Spirit is not a "special" blessing for a "special" few in a "special" age. **IT IS FOR ALL** who have truly repented, believed the Gospel,

and placed their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. The Holy Spirit and His gifts are for every child of God in every age of the church's history. If He is not active in our lives, it is because we have not taken what God has provided for us.

What about you? Have you appropriated for yourself the promise?
Have you let the gifts that the Holy Spirit wants to give you fill your life?
Or, is He still an unopened package in some forgotten closet; quenched?

Peter, said "The promise is for you," so let's reach out together with arms open wide in faith, and say, Lord, thank you for Your gift, please fill me again with Your Holy Spirit! Help me let the Spirit empower all the areas of my life and send me out—just like those Pentecost disciples—to be a witness to all those whom you are calling.

Let's pray about this together.