



Receiving Power Acts 2:1-13

Electrical TORCH – if there are no batteries in it, it has no power, no life. The same applies to the OLYMPIC TORCH which we've see so much of recently. However impressive these torches look they need to have a supply of gas or the flame can't burn!

TITLE PAGE

In the previous weeks in this series that a mark of being a Christian is the presence of the Holy Spirit. Last time we saw how it is the Holy Spirit opens our minds to understand the things of God. Today we look at something altogether more radical: if God is with us, He should show in our lives – in our words, in our actions; in every part of our lives.

How does the presence of the Spirit show in people's lives?

Changed Lives

It's rather obvious really, if we have the Holy Spirit in us, what comes out of us should reflect the nature of God. Wow! That's a huge thing to say isn't it? What sort of change should we see in our lives? At this many Christians start to think of sign gifts such as tongues or prophecy. Others will think of a heightened sense of worshipfulness. But actually the greatest mark of the Spirit is the adjective we most use to describe Him – holiness. He's the Holy Spirit.

Holiness means “set apart”, “different”. We have a God who is different from us. And He calls us to be holy as He's holy – to be like Him (1 Peter 1:16). We are called to be different. Not weird different but so like Jesus that we have a magnetic attraction. People see something in us that they want, that they need.

Let me bring you back to something I said the other week. Actually I'm told some of you were quite confused by a comment I made, so this gives me a chance to clear some fog. What I said was that in ourselves we have absolutely no ability to please God. That's the reason why no human being has or ever will be able to by their own good works please God sufficiently to become righteous before Him. That's excluding Jesus of course.

The thing about God is that His standards are beyond people. We're all sinners and have a sinful nature. *All have sinned and come short of God's glory* (Romans 3:23). And that's what the Bible says.

However talk to most people and they don't see it in such a stark way. As you know many people have this idea of balance. We all do good things and bad things. If the good outweigh the bad, then surely that keeps the “old man” happy. That's what may people are relying on when faced with God – do things to keep Him happy enough.

God doesn't think that way and He doesn't judge people in that way. Actually in the real world I can't think of anywhere that does. It certainly isn't the case in the justice system. Commit a crime, do the time it doesn't matter how many old ladies you've helped over the road or that you like puppies or not.

Or worse, the balances idea means that people only ever do enough to “keep the old man happy”. That is then an excuse to get on and do what I want. I found this as a teacher. There were plenty of mediocre students. People who did just enough to not attract attention to the fact that they were doing the minimum possible. They were most upset and indignant when they attracted my wrath. They were working – but not doing their best.

So if we by nature can't please God, why bother trying to? Indeed, there will be millions who slip into eternity this very day ; who tried to be good people, who were religious, but on whom the wrath of God will fall. Because all have sinned and fall short of God's glory.

HOW CAN WE REALLY PLEASE GOD?

But God can be pleased. He likes being pleased when people do the right thing. Because we can – we all can. How do we please God?

– BY ACCEPTING HIS OFFER OF SALVATION

There is nothing that brings more pleasure to God than when a man or woman, boy or girl accepts Jesus Christ. God knew that were powerless to change anything; powerless to please Him; powerless to make ourselves right before Him. He became one of us, lived as one of us and died a cruel and unjust death in order to take the punishment for our sins, so that we may be made right before God even though we didn't deserve it. All we have to do is recognise we are a sinner and can't please or know God of ourselves, ask God's forgiveness for our sin and accept the free gift of life and a relationship with God.

And the pleasure that gives God and the rejoicing it brings in heaven is just amazing! Have you accepted Christ. Do you know Him? If not, today He is calling you to come, follow Jesus and find that acceptance that knowing God brings.

– BY BEING HOLY

But if in our nature we can't please God because we're sinners, how can we live in a way that pleases God? Here's some verses from Romans

VERSES

Romans 8:6 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; 7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. 9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

Yes! That's it. The Spirit in us is able to control us, not our sinful nature. Therefore we have the power to become Holy people. We have power to do His will. We have power to do that which is right. We have the power to please God. Not by our power – the Spirit's power.

As Christians I find that we have two traits that we bring from the hopelessness of the world and from our sinful nature. One is "keep the old man happy". We sometimes think that if we give God His token, then that's fine. You know, come to church on a Sunday, read the Bible occasionally. Yet God calls us to be a holy people and being holy means that every part of our lives must be subject to His Spirit. Yet I know of many Christians there are so many parts of their lives where Jesus never reaches. And then we wonder why we don't sense the presence of God as we should and God sometimes just doesn't seem to be there.

Which leads me to the second trait: that we accept standards lower than God's because after all, we're only human aren't we? We read that our bodies are dead because of sin BUT our spirit is alive because of Christ. We're alive. Let's live like we're alive. It pleases God that we live as people who live by the Spirit, not by our sinful natures.

Which brings me to the second of my main points this morning.

Empowered Lives

We found in previous weeks that the disciples received Christ when Jesus gave Him to them. Their minds were opened, but it was 50 days later that they experienced another side of the Holy Spirit – a power experience. The Spirit didn't change them a bit, but changed their whole situation and everyone around them. I said on a previous occasion that for most Christians we have one, two or more really powerful encounters like this one in our lives. They make an impact on us and others around. We somehow think these are odd rather than normal which is a shame because I believe that God wants to bless us in this way, individually and as a church but so often we don't desire or ask.

Yet the church was to rise from a low point – actually a zero point here – to being a body of God's people that was to grow and multiply and change the world. In our land and our town we are at an historically low point, should we not be saying "Lord change me, change us, change Your church, change this community by the power of Your Spirit. I need it. We need it. They need it."

What changes do empowered lives bring?

NEW SKILLS. Whatever happened in that room was so totally amazing that it quickly spilled out on to the street. Something had happened to them. Whatever they said was being understood by people from different language groups from all over the Roman Empire. Now you don't hear that every day. It was something quite miraculous, amazing. As we read on through Acts we find that these people saw God use them in amazing ways. They changed from Galilean fishermen into missionaries, preachers, prophets, leaders, healers. Things that they never had been but were now equipped and empowered by the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit changes people. That's why we can become holy. That's how we can please God: by allowing Him to work through us. But more, the Spirit equips us to serve God, often in ways we never imagined or envisaged.

But that was them: what about me? That Pentecost day in his first sermon Peter quoted the prophet Joel when he said this: *17 "This is what I will do in the last days, God says: I will pour out my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message; your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams. 18 Yes, even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will proclaim my message.*

The Spirit is poured out on everyone – if you are a follower of Jesus then you're part of it.

NEW ATTITUDES What changed was not just that they were given power, but their whole view of God and what He could do changed overnight. They became people that did what Jesus did. The empowering of the Spirit changes attitudes.

WHAT NOW?

What is the relevance to us. God wants the Holy Spirit to empower us and change us. To make us holy. To make us more like Jesus. To be people who shape our lives, rather than letting life shape us.

There are two pictures that come to my mind that help us to understand just what our relationship to the Spirit should be. The first is that of immersing and filling. In Acts there are many references to the baptism of the Spirit. I prefer the word immersing.

BOTTLE

What happens when you immerse a bottle in water. If the top is off, two things happen. Firstly as it's glass it "disappears" underwater. Secondly it becomes filled with the water. Our relationship with the Spirit should be immersed and filled so that we are totally surrounded by Him, inside and out. Immersing and filling are two sides of the same kind of thing. If you draw water from a spring using a bottle, getting hold of the water demands immersing and filling. God desires that your experience of Him is full as possible.

It's not something wither that we need to wait for. It's something we can ask for. Paul says this to the Ephesians: *Do not get drunk with wine, which will only ruin you; instead, be filled with the Spirit.* (5:18). It's a topical verse. Even Christians can try to find meaning in life in a bottle. There's a whole generation doing it in Felixstowe. Yet the only thing worth being filled with is a person: the Holy Spirit because only he can produce a new life and new attitudes.

FLAME

Let me close with a second picture of the Holy Spirit which David Watson once gave. He said when we become Christians we receive the Spirit. He's like a pilot light in one of those old water heaters. He burns a little but He's not obvious. Yet to do anything useful for Christ, to live a holy life, to please God, we must turn the heat on so the whole burner is lit.

WHAT NOW?

We have a God who calls us today to be filled with the Spirit. Maybe you've been baptised or filled with the Spirit before. Perhaps you've dropped to pilot again. God the Father wants you to be filled with His Spirit afresh this morning to be the man or woman of God that you should be.

Perhaps you've never accepted Jesus before. Yet you know you need power: power to live, power to understand God, power to have a relationship with God. Then it's time you stopped walking your way and accept the forgiveness God offers you in Jesus and accept Him into your life, and in doing so, accept the Holy Spirit into your life.

Prayer. Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me.