

Read also Joel 2:12-13, 28-29

Ever buy a car where you order certain stuff to be on it? Like power seats and windows? Air conditioned seats? Bose system speakers?

You really want that stuff but it's rather expensive so you say to the dealer, "Just leave off the steering wheel and give me air conditioned seats." Or, leave off the tires and give me that Bose system; or better yet, DVD player in the back seat.

But the reality is, even though I want the accessories, what I need is a good steering wheel.

Perhaps you have decided gas is too expensive so you are not to buy any more gasoline. You are going to get to work by the sweat of your brow.

You wouldn't get too far without gas.

The Christian life is like a car. There are the necessities and then there are the accessories. The Holy Spirit is NOT the accessory. The Holy Spirit is the steering wheel of your faith; the tires that carry you forward; the gasoline put in the tank; the horsepower in your life.

And, if you learn more about what the Holy Spirit does, He will far exceed the basics, and you will find the Spirit's presence as desirable and pleasurable as the greatest accessory.

The Holy Spirit is not only the power, but also the joy in the Christian's life.

Think back over Paul and his companions' lives as we have studied them in Acts. Their experiences were incredible. Their adventures were huge. From having a rally in jail, then being released by God's earthquake; and bringing salvation to the most unlikely people – jailers, prisoners, rich women, poor slaves, governmental officials, Romans, Greeks, and Jews.

They traveled extensively, crisscrossing Asia and Europe, with sights on Rome and Spain. He went to dozens of cities. He and his companions talked to anyone they could find; people of all nations and cultures, in the synagogue, in the workplace, in the marketplace; these believers were unstoppable. Where did he get all that passion? Paul's dreams and goals were enormous for those days.

In Thessalonica people said: "these people are turning the world upside down" (Act 17:6).

You might be very competent as a Christian; you might be skilled in accomplishing things for God. But only the Holy Spirit "turns the world upside down."

Today we talk about the Holy Spirit; that essential center or core of the faith. Let's hear the story. READ Acts 18:24-26.

Ah, so there are two delineations here: the baptism of John and the Way of God.

This man lived in Africa, far from the origin of the message. All the way in Alexandria with no internet he didn't have the whole story.

So Luke talks about that. Let's hear more: READ Acts 19:1-7.

We may think this a strange story. No one today is a disciple of John the Baptist, even though John's ministry was obviously extensive, reaching as far as Alexandria in Egypt. Why would this story be included in the New Testament?

Perhaps this story has been included for us; for 21st Century Christians. How much do you know about the Holy Spirit? Are you fuzzy? Let's face it, in today's culture we lack understanding of the Holy Spirit because of an extraordinary sense of self-confidence in our own abilities. This is the age of science. We have the world figured out. So we are slightly nervous about the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, I would say that most preaching sort of ignores the Holy Spirit and teaches more from the perspective of John's baptism. Let me explain.

John's message was, "Prepare yourself; repent." John confronted sin and told people to change. He admonished people to try harder; he said, 'get yourselves right,' 'live out your faith' (Mt. 3:2-11a).

Now isn't that how you primarily think of the church? John talked about human effort.

Human effort is important. Repentance is a big part of the faith. And, certainly we are accountable for the way we live. But even John said, "It's not about me. I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming . . ." He said, "That One will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Lk 3:16-17).

The baptism of Jesus is different from the baptism of John. It's the power of God on us, in us, and through us. We cannot do extraordinary things without it.

The Spirit is not a generalized sense that is sort of everywhere. It's not some "force." The Holy Spirit is a person – not a human person, but "God in Three Persons, a distinct part of the Godhead." Therefore, the Holy Spirit acts; there are visible signs. God gives these signs of grace simply for Jesus' kingdom.

How much do you look for those signs? Are you aware of them? They are the acts of God and Jesus Christ on this earth. You have to look for them.

When God does miraculous things, they bring honor to Jesus on this earth. And those visible graces honor all churches too. They are a witness to the community of God's kingdom. But you have to know Jesus Christ well.

Do you ever think, why am I a Christian? Just to be good? Remember the Scripture from Joel? "Tear your heart, turn to the Lord." But that's just the beginning. I hope you know that being a Christian, believing in Jesus sets you up as a recipient of God's great gifts.

Whenever some miracle happens here – and we have seen miracles here – they reflect the power of God. When you are healed, when prayers are answered, when our tower is lit, when you share your faith, these are way beyond John’s baptism of “get yourself right,” which is only the beginning.

So I encourage you to pray and ask. Live in the Holy Spirit.

Here are some of the things the Holy Spirit does:

- **The Holy Spirit is POWER.** Remember Simon the sorcerer who, when he saw the Peters miracles he said, "Give me this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:19). He recognized the power in the lives of believers, which was from the Holy Spirit. Do you have that power? Seek it. You have to know God to get it.
- **The Holy Spirit is WISDOM:** Jesus said, when you share your faith, the Holy Spirit will give you the words to say. (Mt. 10:18-20).
- **The Holy Spirit GUIDES us:** Over and over again in Acts the Spirit led people or prevented movement . . . the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away (Acts 8:39). I have experienced this many times as I was led here. Many of you have said, “We felt God has a purpose for us; there is something we are supposed to do.” That’s the Holy Spirit.
- **The Holy Spirit SPEAKS personally:** We gather for “Conversations with God” during Lent because Scripture tells us people constantly heard God’s voice personally in the Bible. (see Acts 20:23) Listening is a practice. The more we learn to listen, the more we know the Spirit, and thus will hear.
- **The Holy Spirit is HOLY:** Paul calls the Spirit “the spirit of holiness.” (Ro 1:4) I heard a young woman give this testimony. I share it as she shared it in public. She described herself as rebellious and promiscuous. One night as she was once again with a man suddenly she felt God right there with her. She said, “God I don’t know the way out.” And she heard a voice say, “Just get up.” And she did. The closeness she felt as the Spirit spoke to her, leading her out gave her the power to begin relying on Jesus’ love. The holiness of the Holy Spirit, couched in love, transformed her life.
- **The Holy Spirit is LIFE:** Paul tells us in Romans, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death” (8:2).
- **The Holy Spirit SETS YOUR MIND ON THINGS OF THE SPIRIT:** Again, Paul says, “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (Ro 8:5-6).

So the Holy Spirit gives us a truer vision of life. The power in life does not reside in our own ability. We live for more than that. Life is more than you can see. The Holy Spirit connects us to that which is eternal. That is God’s gift. We get a little of the kingdom ahead of time. That gives us great hope and joy and power. It’s like driving a powerful car.

The power of the Holy Spirit enables God's miracles through you. God desires to accomplish impossible things – through you. God wants to honor Jesus – through you to build God's kingdom.

I want all the Holy Spirit God is willing to give. Will you seek to be filled by the Holy Spirit today?

AMEN