

CLOTHED WITH POWER PENTECOST

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Luke 24:45-53

TEXT: *I am going to send you what my Father has promised;
but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high* (49).

INTRODUCTION

I'm sure many of you remember the Calvin and Hobbes newspaper cartoons with the little boy Calvin and his imaginary tiger friend, Hobbes. Early one morning, Calvin and Hobbes come marching into the living room where Calvin's mother is seated in her favorite chair sipping her morning coffee. She is amused to see how Calvin is dressed. He has on a large space helmet, a cape is draped around his shoulders and dragging on the floor, in one hand he has a flashlight and in the other a baseball bat.

"What's up today?" asks mom.

"Nothing so far," answers Calvin.

"So far?" she questions.

"Well, you never know," Calvin continues, "Something could happen today." Then he marches off saying, "And if anything does, I'm going to be ready for it!"

Calvin's mom looks out at the reading audience and says, "I need a suit like that!"

I think Calvin's mother speaks for all of us. We need a suit that has us equipped for anything life throws at us. That's how I think of Jesus' promise to His disciples and to us, that with the coming of the Holy Spirit, we will be *clothed with power from on high* (49). This means,

- power to cope with all that life throws at us;
- power to do what God wants us to do;
- power to live in victory over sin and the devil;
- power to heal;
- power to witness;
- power to be like Jesus.

The Day of Pentecost is when that happened for these early disciples, fulfilling this promise of Jesus, and marking the birth of the church we read about in the 2nd chapter of Acts. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit also marks the beginning of a new era of God's working. Often, I find Christians fail to appreciate this empowerment of the Spirit and live their lives in a more-or-less pre-Pentecost way. They are not living, "clothed with power." On this Pentecost Sunday, it

is good for us to reflect on the radical change this outpouring of the Spirit makes and consider how we too can be “clothed with power from on high.”

A NEW ERA

With the coming of God to us in the person of Jesus Christ, the way of salvation was opened to us—salvation as a gift from God by grace through faith in Christ. His death on the cross and resurrection provide for eternal life to all who receive Him. We recognize this significant new era in the division between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

But we need more than redemption from our sins. We need the power to live this new life— and that is the era Pentecost inaugurates. It marks the coming to the Holy Spirit to dwell within believers, empowering them to be and live like Christ. The teachings of Jesus, the life He lived, and the way He healed and helped people are all wonderful. But no human being can live up to that in their natural abilities. The wonderful news of Pentecost is that the Holy Spirit has come in a way to enter into our bodies and begin the transformation of our lives from the inside out. He comes to empower us to do the works of Jesus. The last night Jesus spent with His disciples, He went into extensive detail about the Holy Spirit whom He is sending to them from the Father. For four chapters (Jn. 14-17) Jesus over and over says, “I am leaving... I am sending [the Holy Spirit].” The Holy Spirit, also named the Counselor, the Spirit of Truth, is designated by name and pronouns 26 times. This Holy Spirit will be in them, doing what Jesus did among them. Through the Holy Spirit, God will be present to them as He was in Jesus. What’s more, God will now be present to others through them as they have this Holy Spirit within them. The life and work of Jesus will continue through them in the power of the Holy Spirit. In John 14:12-14, Jesus speaks this continuity and this power:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Have you ever wished you could get into someone’s mind and straighten out their screwed-up thinking? Have you ever wanted to be able to fix their inner heart, their motivation to get them going in the right direction— or just get them going? Of course we all have. We run into it with our children and others we love. We want to just get inside and fix what’s causing them to mess-up and not be what they were created to be. But we can’t. Everything we do is external: our advice, the consequences we enforce, the control we use to force things, our words. And, of course, most of us if we’re really honest have things inside we know need fixing, but we seem powerless to fix. But here’s the wonderful truth about the Holy Spirit. He comes into our hearts at our invitation and can actually make those fixes that are needed. Also, through our prayers, He is able to begin working on others who are not even Christians in their thoughts, conscience, and hearts to draw them to God.

I read about a little girl in her grandmother’s garden enjoying the roses blooming. Next to a beautiful red rose bush was a yellow one with several of its buds about to open. Anxious to see what they would look like, the girl began to try to peel some of them open. Of course she only

ended up with torn petals and frustration. She went to her grandmother and said, “Gramma, I just don’t understand it at all. When God opens a flower, it looks so beautiful. But when I try, it just comes apart.” “Well, honey,” her grandmother answered, “There’s a good reason for that. God is able to do it because He works from the inside out!”

That is the message of Pentecost. It is so essential that Jesus commands the disciples to not even leave Jerusalem until they’ve received the Holy Spirit. The disciples have a pretty impressive record for ineptness. In the crunch, they all deserted and hid. Jesus is acknowledging they can’t do it, they can’t fulfill the great commission. They are even asking the wrong questions. Look at Acts 1:6-8,

So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Ten days later, after their prayerful waiting in the upper room, the Spirit does come in power with the sound of a violent wind, fire, and the gift of speaking in tongues. Peter stands up and preaches. While I’m sure what is recorded in Acts 2 is only a summary of the sermon, it is pretty basic. It is not something we’d think of as a great motivational speech. But it is delivered with the power of Holy Spirit and we are told the gathered thousands were “cut to the heart” (37) and 3,000 received Christ and were baptized. Practically every chapter of Acts is a story of the power of the Holy Spirit healing, doing miracles, and transforming people’s lives through believers willing to be instruments of His.

RELEASING THE SPIRIT

Most of us would confess to needing more of this power. Everyone who is a Christian has the Holy Spirit within— we are “born of the Spirit” (Jn. 3:8). But there is a further releasing of that Spirit for us in ministry, so that we are not just made new but we are empowered to do the works and ministry of Jesus— His hands, His feet, His mouth— through the Holy Spirit.

I came across this testimony in my reading. Dr. Walter L. Wilson was a Kansas City physician in the early part of the 20th century. After his conversion, he had a deep love for Scripture and became a lay preacher in addition to his medical practice. Yet, he was bothered that his life did not seem to bear much in the way of spiritual fruit. But others reassured him not to look for results, but to just faithfully sow the seed. Then, a missionary was visiting in his home and he shared some of his frustration with him. This missionary challenged Dr. Wilson with the question, “What is the Holy Spirit to you?” Dr. Wilson responded with the theologically correct answer about Him being the third person of the Trinity, a Teacher, and Guide. The missionary continued, “But you still have not answered my question, ‘What is He to you?’” And Dr. Wilson responded with a candor that even he was surprised at, saying, “He is nothing to me. I have not contact with Him, no personal relationship.” His visitor replied, “It is because of this that your life is so fruitless even though your efforts are so great. If you will seek personally to know the Holy Spirit, He will transform your life.”

The missionary's words haunted Dr. Wilson into the next year. He wanted this relationship with the Holy Spirit but was unsure about how to get there. Then he heard a sermon by Dr. James Gray, who later became president of Moody Bible Institute, on Romans 12:1,

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God— this is your spiritual act of worship.

Dr. Gray asked, "Have you noticed that this verse does not tell us to whom we should give our bodies? It is not the Lord Jesus... He has his own body. It is not God the Father... He remains upon His throne. Another has come to earth without a body.... God gives you the privilege and indescribable honor of presenting your bodies to the Holy Spirit to be His dwelling place on earth."

With that, things finally clicked for Dr. Wilson and he prayed, surrendering His all to the Holy Spirit to use as He desired. Here is part of that prayer:

"I have treated You like a servant... I shall do so no more. Just now I give You this body of mine; from my head to my feet. I give You my hands, my limbs, my eyes and lips, my brain; all that I am within and without, I hand over to You for You to live in it the life that You please. You may send this body to Africa, or lay it on a bed with cancer... It is Your body from this moment on.... Thank You."

The next day two women came into his office selling advertising. He'd spoken to them before about Christ. Now when he spoke to them, they immediately put their trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. And God continued to move mightily through Dr. Wilson. He wasn't aware of any change in the words he used, but the effect was now powerful. He became a pastor and founded a Bible college that today is Calvary Bible College and Theological Seminary in Kansas City.

When we realize we need a greater release of the Holy Spirit, it all begins with a new, deeper surrender of ourselves to Him. "Baptism with the Holy Spirit," "receiving the Spirit," being "filled with the spirit" are all good, Biblical terms. But it is more than a one-time experience. We need to be continually refilled with the Spirit. Yes, each day, we need to be "clothed with power" afresh— to be ready for whatever may come our way or for what God calls us to do.

CONCLUSION

To be filled with the Spirit means we allow the Holy Spirit to occupy and control every area of our lives. I came across an object lesson a seminary professor uses to illustrate being filled with the Spirit that has sparked my imagination. I have two glasses of water here and two packets of Alka-Seltzer. Imagine the water as the Holy Spirit and the Alka-Seltzer as our lives. Here I place the sealed packet in this glass of water. It is immersed in the water, but the water doesn't have it, does it? That's where a lot of Christians are. They have been born again, born of the Spirit, but they are pretty much living their lives still on their own terms. In contrast, let's open this other pack of Alka-Seltzer for the "Plop, plop, fizz, fizz." If you want relief, which glass do you drink? You see, the Holy Spirit wants our lives absorbed into His. Then we operate in His power.

As we come to the Lord's table this morning, I want you to reflect upon these two glasses in the quiet of our communion service. Are you like the unopened package? If so, what is holding you back from ripping open the protective covering? Is it pride, a fear of what others may think? Is it

a lack of control? Is it fear of what God may want from you? Are you wanting to keep God in just certain parts of your life? As you identify what is insulating you from the full movement of God's Spirit in and through you, let go, surrender it all to Him. That's where the thrill and adventure begins of life lived in the Spirit. Don't you, like Calvin, want to begin each day ready for anything? Don't settle for anything less than being *clothed with power from on high* (49).