

ZION, ADVENT 2, 2020

Our God has come to us. That's what Advent is all about. In God's loving kindness and faithfulness, He reached down to us and made a difference in our lives. He did so by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, to this earth to die upon the cross for our sins. And for all of us who believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord, He sends the Holy Spirit to live inside us. The presence of the Holy Spirit, living within us, is what makes the difference in our lives. That's who and what the Holy Spirit is. He is the difference maker.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, a New Era dawned. Up to this point, people knew of the Spirit of God. They knew of His power as He hovered over the earth after creation. They knew He came to people at various times and seasons to carry out God's kingdom instructions. But He never stayed.

But now a New Era has dawned. One foreseen by the prophets. Especially John the Baptist.

"I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Mark 1:8

Later as Jesus was preparing His disciples for His departure, He said that He would send the Holy Spirit to indwell them. **"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth."** John 14:16-17a

The Holy Spirit would abide with them forever. He would no longer come down and then leave when the job was done. Further He would teach them all things. He would guide them into all the truth. He would remind them of everything that Jesus had taught.

When Jesus said that His departure was going to be a good thing, He was not just trying to soothe over the hurt of His leaving, He literally meant it. Because of His death, not only do we experience the forgiveness of our sins, but also, the indwelling of the very Spirit of God. Jesus said, **“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.”** John 16:7

A New Era for the people of God was about to dawn. Jesus knew that it would start with them, His disciples. That the Holy Spirit would come and take His place within those who followed Him. Therefore, right before He ascended into heaven Jesus said, **“Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but wait in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”** Luke 24:49 The Holy Spirit makes all the difference in the world, and in a believer’s life. Jesus has given the disciples, and for that matter you and I, an earth-quaking, world-shaking job. That is to preach the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ to the world. Our Lord’s parting words were these: **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.”** Matthew 28:19-20a

What is this good news? It’s about how God forgives our sins. How He transforms our lives where the old is past and everything is brand new. The good news is that we can be forgiven. A new life is ours with Heaven as our eventual home once this life is over.

Yet, having told them to go and preach this good news, Jesus tells them not to go just yet. They needed to wait for something. The Holy Spirit. To fully understand the difference the Holy Spirit makes we need to take a look at these disciples. No one less than Jesus Christ had taught them. In a sense they had just graduated from the greatest Bible school in the world.

These disciples had authority that very few people had ever experienced. Jesus told them to cast out demons, to heal the sick, and raise the dead back to life with the authority He gave them. But still, Jesus tells them to wait until they were endued with power. Clothed in and infused with the Holy Spirit.

Now, up to this point they knew Jesus. They had been with him through thick and thin for three years. They saw Him crucified, and three days later resurrected. So, they knew Him living, dead, and alive again. Then this happened: **“And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”**

John 20:22

This promise was the power of the Holy Spirit that was to enter into and possess them. It is this encounter with the Holy Spirit, this encounter with the very power of God, that would be the difference maker in their lives. Look at what Jesus told them. **“He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’”**

Jesus isn't waking up some latent power within us. He wants to fill us with His divine power. The power of the Holy Spirit. What makes the difference in our lives is Holy Spirit power. It is a power that can move mountains. A power that can warm even the coldest of human hearts. From the book of Acts, I'd like for us to look at five things that the Holy Spirit did for these disciples. The difference He made in their lives.

NUMBER ONE: A Consciousness of God's Presence.

They already knew & loved Jesus. But after the Holy Spirit descended in power there was the illuminating knowledge of God's presence within them. The light was turned on. The veil was torn away. Now they knew that nothing separated them from God. That they were in immediate contact with heaven itself.

In Acts chapter six, we're introduced to a young man by the name of Stephen. Stephen was chosen as one of the first seven deacons of the church. He was a man of good reputation. He was full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. He was full of faith and power and did many great signs and wonders.

The religious authorities arrested him on the grounds of blasphemy. At his trial he gave a Spirit filled defense. At the end he called them "stiff-necked and possessed of uncircumcised of hearts." It says that they were cut to the heart. They were convicted to their very soul. They became angry.

Of Steven the Bible then says, **"Being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, 'Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'"** Acts 7:55-56

At this the religious authorities flew into a rage and they took Stephen and stoned him.

We are endowed with the power from above. The Holy Spirit gives us a sense of God and of heaven. We live with the knowledge and consciousness of God and heaven every day. Only the Holy Spirit living within us can impart and maintain that sense of divine presence.

NUMBER TWO: They Received Holy Spirit Joy. Consider the story of Paul and Silas. They were unjustly tried. Their clothes ripped were from their bodies. They were beaten with rods. They were thrown into prison where their feet were placed into stocks, making it extremely uncomfortable for them. Now look at what they did. **“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.”** They had the same joy that we are called to have. Knowing we have already died with Christ. Knowing that we have likewise risen with Him in resurrection. Knowing that death no longer has victory over us. So, we can sing for joy in the midst of our suffering, because that is power of the Holy Spirit within us.

NUMBER THREE: The Power of Their Words. The power of their words penetrated every human heart that heard them speak. Words can either put us under conviction or leave us cold and empty. The difference between the one and the other is the difference the Holy Spirit makes.

After the coming of the Holy Spirit, Peter preached, and it says that those who were listening were cut to the heart. Their hardened hearts were pierced when they heard his words, much as the religious leaders when they heard the words of Stephen. **“When they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’”**

That is one of the workings of the Holy Spirit. He sharpens the point of human words to penetrate the heart. Right down into the soul and spirit of the person who is listening.

NUMBER FOUR: A Separation Between Flesh and Spirit. Acts records for us an incident that occurred in the first church. It says that everyone shared what they had with those who were in need. One person in particular, Barnabas, sold a piece of land. He brought the proceeds and gave it to the church. Seeing this, a couple named Ananias and Sapphira also sold some of their land. But they conspired to lie by saying that they were giving all of it to the church when they were only giving a portion. They didn’t have to sell the land. If they did sell it they could have given any portion of the proceeds they wanted to the church. So why lie. The point being made is this: they weren’t lying to man, they were instead lying to God. They were lying to the Holy Spirit.

Peter said, **“Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit... You have not lied to men but to God.”** (Acts 5:3a, 4b The Holy Spirit separates our spirit from our flesh. The Holy Spirit reveals those things that we have hidden in the dark.

NUMBER FIVE: The Word of God Comes Alive. Peter's sermon contained three direct references to God's word. He quoted from the prophet Joel and the Psalms. All told, almost half of his sermon came directly from God's word. Even in their prayers we see them praying the Scriptures.

Here's the point, we cannot read and understand the Scriptures outside of the presence of the Holy Spirit residing within us, because it is the Holy Spirit who authored it.

The Apostle Paul says, "**All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.**" 2 Timothy 3:16

When we speak, the Holy Spirit breathes out our words much as He breathed into those who wrote the Scriptures. They are God-breathed. The word "breath" in both the Greek and Hebrew language is the word for spirit. This was the understanding of the first church as well. It was the Holy Spirit that breathed out the word of God, that is, the Scriptures.

Peter said, "**No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.**" 1:20-21 Let's take this time and wait upon Him. Let's learn to love God and one another. Let's wait for the promise from on high, because that is the only thing that will make a difference in our lives. In our community, and in our world.