

Last week, we considered the vision in **Ezekiel 37** of God raising dry bones to life. It was a prophetic promise that He would breathe His Spirit into His people, bringing them life and vitality like they'd never known. Some told me how moved they were by the message. A few even asked what they could do to bring life to the church. I guess I shouldn't be surprised, but those responses came from some of the most dedicated servants of Christ we have; though already pouring themselves into the work of the kingdom, they were convicted to do even more. My reply wasn't what they expected. I told them there's nothing they could do_ other than pray to be filled and pray that for others, too.

Churches will likely *"come alive"* one member at a time. But, as the lyrics of an old camp song declare, *"It only takes a spark to get a fire going"*_ and I honestly believe that if only a few are filled with God's Spirit, the blaze will affect us all. If enough experience an awakening at the same time, we could see great revival. The question is: *"Will you be one of those God will use to ignite a fire in the rest of us?"* Will you hear the Word of the Lord today_ and come alive?

Open your Bibles to **Acts 1**. After His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus called His followers together and- ⁴**On one occasion, while He was eating with them, He gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but WAIT FOR THE GIFT my Father promised, which you've heard me speak about."** ⁵**For John baptized with water, but in a few days YOU WILL BE BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT."** ⁶**So when they met together, they asked Him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"** ⁷**He said to them: "It's not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority."** ⁸**But YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES on you; and you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."** ⁹**After He said this, He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from their sight.**

The record of what happened just one week later is found in chapter 2:1-17: ¹**When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.** ²**Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.** ³**They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.** ⁴**ALL OF THEM WERE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.** ⁵**Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.** ⁶**When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.** ⁷**Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?"** ⁸**Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?** ⁹**Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,** ¹⁰**Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome** ¹¹**(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs--we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"** ¹²**Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"** ¹³**Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."** ¹⁴**Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say."** ¹⁵**These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!** ¹⁶**No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:** ¹⁷**'In the last days," God says, "I will pour out my Spirit on ALL people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.** ¹⁸**Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy."** I don't intend to discuss, let alone debate the issue of speaking in tongues right now_

Other than to make the point that needs no discussion and should prompt no debate. *The followers of Jesus were empowered to do something they could not do before the Holy Spirit came upon them.* And, God's desire was to also empower everyone else in the crowd, young, old, male, and female. He said that He'd pour out His Spirit on them all_ even the skeptics. Perhaps, you're thinking that was then, not now. If so, stick with me. After the apostles seize the moment to be just what Jesus promised they would be empowered to be_ "*His witnesses*" proclaiming the message of God's love and salvation through the death of His Son on a cross_ Peter says this to those who were convicted by their sins of their need for a Savior:

Acts 2:38^{ff}: ³⁸ "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call." That sounds pretty inclusive. The promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit is for all who hear God's call. The power from above is available to every generation. Reading on: ⁴⁰**With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."** ⁴¹**Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.** Catch that? All those who accepted that message responded by obeying the command to be baptized_ and in the process they were added to **their** number. I've always understood that to mean they were "*added to the church*"_ and though the birth of Christ's church did take place that day, I'm not so sure that's what was intended here. It's just as likely that it's saying they were added to the number of "*the empowered ones.*" They were now among those who had received the Holy Spirit.

I've entitled this series of lessons, "*Led by the Spirit*" and the first thing the Spirit led the people in the crowd to do was to **repent and be baptized**. We touched on this last week. To repent is to lament one's sins and to be determined to turn their life around. To be baptized is to demonstrate faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus_ and to acknowledge that you're ready to die to self and live for Him; that you're ready to depend upon Him to empower you to live the new life He grants to you. What will that new life look like? Read on and pay close attention to the phrases I've highlighted.

Speaking of these new converts it says: ⁴²**They DEVOTED themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship; to the breaking of bread and to prayer.** ⁴³**Everyone was FILLED WITH AWE, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.** ⁴⁴**All the believers were together and HAD EVERYTHING IN COMMON.** ⁴⁵**Selling their possessions, THEY GAVE to all who had need.** ⁴⁶**Every day they CONTINUED TO MEET together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with GLAD & SINCERE HEARTS,** ⁴⁷**praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And THE LORD ADDED TO THEIR NUMBER daily those who were being saved.**

In the new life of these empowered people, we see ***new allegiances to Christ, His word and His church.*** The new life brought new perspective about material possessions. It was filled with awe and a deep sense of joy. Friends, neighbors, and family saw transformation_ and it was attractive and alluring. Folks who'd gone along with the crowd now wanted to be part of another crowd. And each one demonstrated that faith and desire by being baptized, ***just as Jesus did_ and so commanded*** His followers. Maybe you're one of the 1000's of people who were "*baptized with water*" as an infant, being dedicated to be raised in a particular denomination or church. Or, maybe you're one of the multitudes who were "*baptized in water*" to join a church or to be obedient to Jesus or to accept forgiveness of your sins_ but, dare I ask if you also "***received the Holy Spirit?***"

Don't misunderstand. Jesus intended that when someone **really repented** and **personally consented** to be baptized in water for the forgiveness of their sins and to be united with Him, they would **also receive the Holy Spirit**. But, it seems that these days, we may have a lot of folks who got wet_ but were never converted. And others who were sincere in their response and even saved from their sins_ but not empowered.

Consider Acts 19:1-6: ¹ While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ² and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." ³ So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. ⁴ Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

If we get nothing else from this_ we ought to see you can believe in God and be sorry for your sins_ even be baptized in water without receiving the Holy Spirit. What's it take, then? Faith in Jesus **and** an expectation of Jesus filling you and infusing you with power from on high. Jesus ascended to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to dwell within each of His followers_ leading and empowering them to live and to love like He did. **Receive the Spirit...**