

## **The Promise of the Holy Spirit**

Acts 1:4-5

Some people might accuse us who are reformed and/or presbyterian of not emphasizing enough the work of the Holy Spirit. After all, we don't believe in the continuing gifts of the Holy Spirit identified as tongues and prophesy, believing, rather, that those gifts were revelational and therefore identified with the apostles and ended with the last of the apostles. Some would point out that our written confession of faith, the Westminster Confession, doesn't even have a chapter on the Holy Spirit. And some would say, perhaps at times with reasonable grounds, that we are too passive, too quiet, too reserved to even talk about the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. They would say we diminish the influence of the Holy Spirit because we are too objective, too rational, too intellectual, too stiff, too strait-laced, too restrained, too reserved, too cold or even lifeless. As we study in the book of Acts this morning, I particularly want to dispel any thought of those latter concerns, that we would, somehow, be guilty of missing or even diminishing in the slightest the biblical emphasis upon the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

So we will linger this morning on verses 4 and 5, two verses that give obvious emphasis upon the third person of the Trinity, the blessed Holy Spirit. In that connection, I should also note the lecture I gave on Friday night, Reformation Day, on the Nicene Creed, where the great emphasis of that creed focused upon the relationship of the Father and the Son. As the creed was developed from the council of Nicea in 325 to the Council of Chalcedon in 451, there was equal emphasis given to the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, with many phrases added to the original, simple statement, "We believe in the Holy Spirit." The emphasis of that lecture regarding the relationship between the three persons of the trinity is very much a foundational

backdrop for our study this morning.

In that regard, let me just state the basic idea of the trinity, that there is one God. And this one God exists eternally as three distinct persons, the father, the son and the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit, just like the son, is fully and completely God, from all eternity. Like the son, the Holy Spirit was not created nor made, but from eternity before the creation of the world, he has existed as a person in relationship to the Father, equal in power and glory to both the father and the son. And it is that person of the Holy Spirit whom we focus upon this morning.

Remember the sermon last week, the story of Jesus which Luke continues from his gospel to this second volume of history. The gospel of Luke ends not simply with Jesus' resurrection but also with reference to his ascension into heaven, and that is, of course, where the book of Acts begins, with the ascension. But there is a 40 day period of transition, when Jesus appeared to his disciples on the earth before he ascended into heaven.

v.1-3

That brings us to verse 4, with a direct and explicit command from Jesus to his disciples who had gathered together at Jerusalem. He had previously commanded them to remain in Jerusalem,

Luke 24:46 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 And you are witnesses of these things. 49 Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."

That command is repeated here in the book of Acts.

So the command to wait was a command to wait for a promise. It was the promise of the Holy Spirit, which would be poured out upon the apostles as the foundation of the church. So we read,

v.8 “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

We see and study the fulfillment of that promise when we come to,

Acts 2:1 “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

Peter would then preach with these words on that day of Pentecost,

Acts 2:32 “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. 33 Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.”

We will also study the results of Peter’s preaching that great day,

Acts 2:40 “And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” 41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship,

in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

But before we look at all those events, let’s go back to the promise, and note just how clearly it is,

## **I. A TRINITARIAN PROMISE.**

That is to say, this promise embodies all that there is to know and understand about the three persons of the Trinity, each equally eternal, equal in essence, equal in being, equal in power and glory with the other two.

### **A. The promise is the promise of the Holy Spirit.**

The Holy Spirit is the focus, and the pouring out of that spirit is described as a baptism in verse 5. Verse 8 simply says that the Holy Spirit will “come upon you,” just the ordinary Greek verb. But don’t forget, this promise was not new. The Old Testament prophet Joel had clearly prophesied what was about to take place.

Joel 2:28 “And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. 29 And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”

The Holy Spirit was clearly proclaimed to God’s people from the days of the Old Testament prophets, and while we can never be sure exactly how much the apostles understood when, they knew well of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit was not just a new testament experience, for the people of God in Old Testament Israel also knew of that blessing. For example,

Ezek. 39:27 “When I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them out of their enemies’ lands, and I am hallowed in them in the sight of many nations, 28 then they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who sent them into captivity

among the nations, but also brought them back to their land, and left none of them captive any longer. 29 And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel,' says the Lord GOD."

Just for emphasis, let me note that the presence of the Holy Spirit was evident and acknowledged all the way back at creation.

Gen. 1:1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light."

All three persons of the trinity are there, God the father. The word which God spoke to create, that word, John 1 tells us, was Christ. "And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all three persons acting together. The Holy Spirit had a very personal presence with God's people as well, remembering David's confession of his sin in,

Ps. 51:10 "Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me."

Thus Jesus' last words to his disciples before his ascension would also be understandable with such a trinitarian emphasis,

Mat. 28:19 "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."

The promise is the promise of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the trinity. And that promise,

## **B. The promise of the Holy Spirit is given by the Father.**

Luke even calls it "the Promise of the Father" in verse 4. The Promise given by the Father. Let me refer again back to the lecture Friday on the Nicene Creed, with that language in the creed, "we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son." Those words were chosen to define the relationship between the Father and the Spirit. With reference to the Son, the creed declares that Jesus is "the only-begotten Son of God," and that he is "begotten, not made." So Jesus is not a created being, but the eternal second person of the Trinity. The corresponding language for the Holy Spirit is "proceeding." And I might add for emphasis, "proceeding from the Father, not created." Proceeding, not made!

Jesus' own words are consistent with that, as I read earlier, Luke 24:49 "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."

I send the Promise of My Father, such that it is the father's promise.

Joel 2:28 "I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions."

I will do it, says the Father. It is the Father's promise. And yet, with all three persons of the Trinity involved, this promise of the Father was delivered by Jesus!

## **C. The promise of the Holy Spirit was proclaimed by the son.**

Referring again to the language of the Nicene Creed, the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son." The Holy Spirit has reference to both the Father and the Son, and the language here in Acts certainly stresses that as well.

v.4 “[Jesus] commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me.”

It was the Father’s promise. And it was proclaimed by Jesus, the promise of the Holy Spirit. Peter certainly understood that when he preached on the day of Pentecost,

Acts 2:32 “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. 33 Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

So the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. And going back to,

Luke 24:49 “Behold, I [Jesus] send the Promise of My Father upon you...”

The promise of the Holy Spirit was given by God the Father and proclaimed by Jesus the Son. Jesus had made that very clear throughout his earthly ministry, especially when he offered comfort to his disciples as they began to realize that Jesus would die and leave them.

John 14:6 “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you...25 These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”

Similarly, John 15:26 “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds

from the Father, He will testify of Me.”

And then,

John 16:7 “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. 8 And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment...13 However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.”

The Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son,” all three persons of the Trinity working as one God. And so,

v.4 “And being assembled together with 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.”

Then verse 5, with reference to and focus upon,

## **II. BAPTISM.**

It is unfortunate that baptism remains a subject that separates and divides true Christians to this day, for there is so much about baptism that transcends and goes beyond those matters of disagreement. So my focus as we study this text today is not upon the question of the baptism of our covenant children as infants nor upon the mode of administering that baptism, as practical and significant as those questions are. Those are good discussions to have on another day, but there is more to baptism than those questions, much more. Namely, the connection of baptism and its meaning with reference to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

So let's look at verse 5, and I'll try to explain why Luke immediately refers to baptism, comparing and contrasting the water baptism of John and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The most direct connection between those two is, of course, the relationship between the outward symbol and the inward reality. It is a sacramental relationship, which is to say, the outward symbol is a sign and a seal of that which is actually promised by God inwardly.

So Luke mentions John's baptism. We'll see more of this later in Acts, but suffice it to say at this point that John's baptism was not fully what we understand as Christian baptism. John's baptism was, in and by itself, still a part of the Old Covenant, a precursor to Jesus. So John's baptism wasn't the fullness of New Covenant sacramental baptism. Rather, it was a preparation for Jesus, a baptism of repentance. In that context, we read,

Acts 19:1 "And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples 2 he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." 3 And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism." 4 Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. 7 Now the men were about twelve in all."

John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, signifying the repentance necessary to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. Matthew teaches us that same thing in Matthew 3,

quoting John the Baptist,

Mat. 3:11 "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

Those who received the baptism of John still needed to be baptized with Jesus' baptism, but for Luke, writing in Acts 1, the point is not so much the sacrament of baptism, per se, but rather the contrast between the promise of the Holy Spirit and its fulfillment. Or, I could say, the contrast between the outward symbol of that promise of the Holy Spirit and the actual fulfillment of it.

And so, thinking about Jesus' declaration of the promise of the father to send the Holy Spirit, Luke refers to...

#### **A. The outward symbol of baptism with water.**

v.5 "...for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

There is an outward symbol, the pouring out of water, baptizing with water. There is an external demonstration of the promise of the Holy Spirit which was very helping as such, an outward testimony of this great promise of God the Father to send his Holy Spirit. And John's baptism with water is a sufficient symbol for that purpose. "John truly baptized with water," a baptism to express repentance and the needed preparation to receive Jesus. But the whole purpose of that outward symbol of John's baptism was to make clear what it represents,

#### **B. The inward reality of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.**

That is what Acts chapter 1 is all about. The language of the gospel writers is also consistent.

John 1:32 And John bore witness, saying, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. 33 I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ 34 And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”

Luke 3:16 John answered, saying to all, “I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Here in our text,

v.5 “...for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

The point, so clearly and plainly, is that the Holy Spirit will soon be poured out upon the people of God assembled together in Jerusalem as the church. So just as the water was poured out upon those whom John baptized, in so much a greater and more powerful way shall the Holy Spirit be poured out upon the church. And that is the baptism of the Holy Spirit!

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not a second blessing given only to some Christians on particular occasions. Rather, it is the once and for all powerful outpouring of God’s blessing of salvation, personally bestowed upon individuals as they believe. And, in this great day of transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant which we call Pentecost, on that great day the baptism of the Holy Spirit is such that the whole church receives the blessing which would equip them as we read and will study next week,

v.8 “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

The promised Holy Spirit is what transforms the church, it is the Holy Spirit enables and empowers the church. The Holy Spirit is what gives life to the church. And so, according to Jesus’ command, the apostles and disciples were to be gathered together in Jerusalem until that day when God the Father would pour out his spirit upon the church, that great day we simply call Pentecost.

On that great day, the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon all the nations, not just Israel. The Old Covenant will be ended, the New Covenant inaugurated, and the great promise of that New Covenant as announced at Pentecost, is simply that,

Acts 2:21 “And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved.”

Or, in the language of,

Rom. 10:11 “For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”