

Jesus Promises the Spirit

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[0 : 00] Now, if you have your Bibles, we have a couple of short readings. This first one from Luke chapter 24, and at verse 45, which you'll find on page 1062, and then we're going to flick over to Acts chapter 1. So let's hear God's Word in Luke chapter 24, and at verse 45.

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, this is what is written, the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. 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. And then over in the book of Acts, page 1092, we're going to read the first 11 verses, part 2 of Luke's work.

In my former book, Theophilus—there he's speaking about the gospel—in my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 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 have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you'll be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Then they gathered round him and 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.

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid him from their sights. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. Men of Galilee, they said, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven. Amen. So we are thinking together for the next few weeks about the person and work of the Holy Spirit. And here in Luke's gospel and in the book of Acts, we're reminded of what Jesus said as he promised the sending of the Spirit. We're reminded that the promised Spirit gives us power to witness for Jesus. That's what I hope we'll see today, that the promised Spirit gives us power to witness for Jesus. Before we get into our text, let's think about gifts for a moment.

[3 : 52] Boys and girls, if I can have your attention for just a moment, I wonder if you can think about the worst gift you ever gave. Not the worst gift you ever received. We don't want to think about that.

The worst gift you ever gave. I have a list. My poor mother has a list. I remember when I was either eight or nine, it was my mum's birthday. I lived in Skye. There weren't many shops. I'm beginning my defence already. We went down, myself and my brother, went down to the local Christian bookshop and we found ourselves what we thought was a great gift. It turns out that we had bought my mum a car tax disc holder. Doesn't that sound special? With a driver's prayer. Okay, it was a terrible present for many reasons, not least of which my mum didn't have a car and didn't know how to drive.

Okay, the worst kind of gifts are ones that we do not need and we have no use for. And when I was a child, my mother got lots of those. That is never, ever true, boys and girls, of any of the gifts that God gives. Every good gift comes from God. And we're thinking about a wonderful gift. God giving the Holy Spirit. And we need that gift. We need Him to believe in Jesus. We need the Spirit to obey Jesus. And we need the Spirit so we can live for Jesus as King. Let's turn the question around.

What's the best gift, boys and girls, you ever got? It's a lot more fun to think about that. When I was thinking about that, I guess we always think about gifts to do with our childhood. I remember, this is like a history lesson for you kids. I remember waiting and longing for the classic video games console, the Sega Mega Drive, back when Sonic had just arrived in the world. And when I got that, it absolutely lived up to expectation. It was a brilliant console. Infinitely better. Way, way, way better is God's gift of the Holy Spirit. Way better. Brings God to live in our hearts. Means if we believe in Jesus, we have the power of God. So we're thinking about a wonderful, wonderful topic today. Luke is recording the story of the church as it began. And as he ends his gospel, and as he begins the book of Acts, he takes us to Jesus promising that the Holy Spirit would be sent, the Holy Spirit would be poured out on them. So Jesus is saying, we thought about this last week, he was leaving, but he wouldn't leave them alone. Jesus is leaving his work on this earth, but he won't stop his work. Now what we have, especially recorded in the story of Acts, and then as we think about the story of the church in history, and the church in the world, is that Jesus continues to be at work. Now by his Spirit, now through his people, the apostles, now through his church. Think about it in the negative. If Jesus never sent the Holy Spirit, there would be no Christians, and there would be no Christian church.

We need the Holy Spirit. So we're going to think about the Spirit and promise, the Spirit and power, and the Spirit and witness. If you want a third P, proclamation will do. The Spirit and promise. So in Luke chapter 24 and verse 49, we heard Jesus say, I am going to send you what my Father has promised. And then in Acts chapter 1 and verse 4, he told them, do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. So we put those two verses together, and we are led to discover that God the Father and God the Son have both spoken about the promised gift of the Spirit, that the Father and the Son will both send the Spirit of promise. the Father. The Father promised to send the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament as he spoke through the prophets. The Son, Jesus, promised throughout the Gospels in his teaching as the true prophet that he would send his Spirit. So let's reflect on those texts that we read together. First of all, where does the Father promise the Spirit in the Old Testament? That's why we read from Joel chapter 2. [8 : 44] And it's really interesting, isn't it? As soon as we come to Acts 2, we find Pentecost, we find the Spirit coming, Peter goes to Joel chapter 2, and he explains that what's happening, as the disciples are able to preach in different language about Jesus, what's happening is that Joel chapter 2 is being fulfilled, that the Spirit has been sent. And do you know what's really important for us to recognize is that the Spirit is now for all believers? How Joel puts it, I'll 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. In the Old Testament, key figures would have the Holy Spirit come upon them for a time. But now that Jesus has returned, and the Father and the Son have sent the Spirit. Young and old, women and men, we enjoy God in us, and in us, and with us, always. The second example where the Father promises the Spirit, that was Ezekiel chapter 36, where we were told that God would put his Spirit in us.

And we see all those wonderful connections in Ezekiel 36, those connections with being made clean from impurity and from idolatry, being given a new heart, a new heart of flesh that can love God, a new desire to love and to obey God's Word, because he would send the Spirit. Now, where does Jesus promise the Spirit in the Gospels? There's many places we could turn. And we're going to turn back just for a moment to what we heard last week. John chapter 14, and verse 16 to 18. Such significant words from Jesus. The night before he went to the cross, I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him because it neither sees him nor knows him, but you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. So the Spirit will come, another advocate. He will reveal the truth. He'll lead us in the truth. He'll live with us and be in us. He will bring the presence of the risen Christ to live in the hearts of his people. To put it another way, Luke chapter 24, verse 49.

[11 : 25] Here's Jesus promising, I am going to send you what my Father has promised. Stay in the city until you've been clothed with power from on high. The Father and Son promise to send, speak of the sending, because it is clear that we need the promised Holy Spirit. Why do we need the promised Holy Spirit?

We need him for salvation. We go back to Ezekiel again. What we're being reminded of is that it is only the Holy Spirit that can apply the truth of the gospel of the Lord Jesus to our hearts for real change. Unless the Holy Spirit acts in us, we will never come to Jesus seeking his forgiveness. We will never be transformed unless the Spirit works. So when Jesus is trusted, when Jesus is loved as Savior and Lord, we know that the Spirit is working and working for salvation. We also need the Spirit to understand Scripture. Luke chapter 24 and verse 45 says this of Jesus. Jesus opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. Jesus helped the disciples then to understand at the center of God's story of salvation is Jesus. His death on the cross for sin and for sinners, and his resurrection victory.

What Jesus did for his disciples then, the Holy Spirit does for us now. Without the Holy Spirit, we would never understand in such a way that our hearts would be changed God's Word. Yes, we could understand it perhaps in an intellectual sense, but we would never understand so as to be transformed.

As Christians, you'll know this experience of Bible reading moving from being very ordinary.

[13:58] Perhaps you do it because you have your daily reading plan or you have your Bible reading notes. We know that experience. We read the Bible and it seems ordinary, but we also know those moments, don't we, where it comes wonderfully alive. It's like the apostles on the road to Emmaus, their hearts burning within them. We know that to be true. We have that experience of delighting in God as his Word comes alive to us. When that happens, the Spirit is working. It's one of the reasons why we pray asking that God would speak to us from his Word and that we would listen and obey.

So we need him for salvation. We need him to understand the Scripture. We also need the Spirit for sanctification, for growing in holiness. Again, back to Ezekiel 36. Remember that when the Spirit would come, God promised that his people would be moved to follow God's law. That's not a natural movement.

So when people turn from sin to pursue holiness, when we resist temptation to choose obedience, when we find ourselves little by little growing in the likeness of Jesus, the Spirit is working.

By ourselves, we would have no desire and we would have no strength to obey and to want to be conformed to God's law. So we need, simply put, we need the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit within our lives personally and in our church together. And we also need, I think, to remember to give thanks.

When we see and when we experience God working by his Spirit, when people are saved, when God speaks from his Word, when we see people growing in faith and obedience, we are to be a thankful people. So that's the Spirit and promise. Let's think secondly about the Spirit and power.

Again, let me share something that I imagine is very familiar to all the drivers in the room. Friday afternoon travel chaos in Edinburgh. We understand it, don't we? Busiest time of the day.

Everybody's recognizing there are so many more road closures, potholes diversions. Well, this particular Friday, not this one, but the one previous, I was trying to get out of our junction onto the main roads. There's another junction this way. There's the main road coming that way. And in the middle, blocking three out of the four lanes, was this poor van driver, desperately trying to turn right, and his engine cut out, and he could not get it going again. Mix of frustration and sympathy. He wanted to move, but his engine had no power. Now, without the Holy Spirit, God's people in God's church, it would be like that van. You know, we're called to go on a journey of discipleship. We're called to go on a journey to be on mission.

[17:22] We're called to worship. But without the Spirit's power, we would get nowhere. That's why Jesus teaching on the Spirit as a source of power is so important. Again, to hear Luke chapter 24 and verse 49 is to hear Jesus say, you will be clothed with power from on high. God's power. Or in Acts chapter 1 verse 5, he says, John baptized with water, but in a few days you'll be baptized with the Holy Spirit. And then in verse 8, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes. When God sends the Spirit, there is power. The Spirit brings the transforming power of God. He is the engine that drives our faith. One helpful way, I think, that we can see the transformation is to compare the disciples, and especially to compare Peter before and after Easter, but especially before and after Pentecost. So to just think, what do we know about

Peter before? Well, think about the number of times where Jesus predicted his death. And he said very clearly to his disciples, this must happen as part of God's saving plan. Now, the first time Peter heard that, he said, no way. You'll never experience that. And the other times, he simply didn't

understand the gospel writers say. When Jesus is arrested, Peter is among those who run, among those with a sense of despair. When Peter then arrives to where Jesus is on trial, and somebody questions him, weren't you with Jesus? He denies even being his friend. And after Jesus dies on the cross, we find Peter and the other disciples behind closed doors. The door is locked there in hiding. That's Peter before Easter Sunday and before Pentecost. Now, if you have a Bible, turn to Acts chapter 4. I just want to read

Acts chapter 4 from verse 8 to verse 13. And notice how different Peter is, and why is he different? Verse 8.

Jesus is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved. When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished. And they took note that these men had been with Jesus. Now filled with the Spirit, Peter has a new understanding of Jesus' identity. In the previous chapter, verse 14, he's called Jesus the holy and righteous one. He's called him the author of life. And now here, he makes plain that salvation comes because Jesus died, was crucified, and is now risen. That's all part of God's plan. He has this new understanding of God's way of salvation. The only way to be saved is through trusting in Jesus, what he has done for us on the cross. And now, with the Spirit, there's a new courage to stand up for Jesus.

[21 : 44] Here is Peter facing the same kind of opposition that made him run and hide, but now he boldly speaks truth. In the same way, we need the power of the Spirit at work in us. In the first place, we need the Spirit at work in us so that we can understand Jesus. To understand that we need him to be our Savior.

To understand that he is the Son of God. The truth of the cross is not understood by human wisdom. Paul will say in 1 Corinthians, it seems foolish. It seems pointless. It seems hopeless. But by the power of the Spirit, we are able to see that it is the power of God for salvation. We need God's revelation. We need the work of the Spirit. So we say yes to investigating and exploring God's Word, to reading it for ourselves. If you're not a Christian here today, absolutely yes to readings trying to discover more about Jesus. But we also say yes to the need to pray, recognizing that we need God to work by his Spirit. To pray, teach me. Show me you're real. Show me Jesus in your words. As C.S. Lewis said, pray, may the real me meet the real you. So we need the power of the Spirit to understand Jesus. We also need the power of the Spirit to be saved by Jesus. The Spirit in one sense functions as a spiritual eye doctor dealing with our natural spiritual blindness. Left to ourselves, we are spiritually blind to the glory of God, to the good news that he sent his Son into this world to be a substitute, to be a sacrifice, to save us. We are blind naturally to how serious our sin is, how awesome God's holiness is, how much we need Jesus. So he functions like an eye doctor, revealing our need of salvation. But he also functions as that spiritual heart surgeon bringing life in the place of death, bringing new birth by the grace of God. And again, this encourages us, and we'll think about mission in just a couple of moments. But we are called as the church to do what we are called to do. We go to live for Jesus, to speak for Jesus. But we always do that in the power of the Spirit, recognizing that it's this power of the Spirit that applies God's grace. It's the power of the Spirit at work to save sinners. And in the same way, we also need the power of the Spirit at work in us to live for Jesus. It's a wonderful statement, isn't it, in 4.13, that the enemies saw the courage of Peter and John and realized they were ordinary men, but they took note that they'd been with Jesus. The Spirit does this wonderful thing of connecting us with the risen Lord Jesus, so he comes to be present in our hearts. And that reminds us, as [25 : 17] Christians, we have the Spirit. If you're a Christian, you have the Spirit. We have all the power that we need, but we must be connected to the power source. So the Bible will say, you have the Spirit, but you must keep in step with the Spirit. God sends his Spirit to live in our hearts, but we must walk in step with the Spirit. Because it's the Spirit who will guide us into God's truth, and it's the Spirit who will enable us to obey, even when it's costly. It's the Spirit, Jesus says in Luke chapter 12, who will give us words to speak when we face opposition. It's the Spirit's power that will strengthen us to stand in our spiritual battles, and to help us to spread the gospel. Because we're not left alone, and we're not left to do it in our own power. That takes us to the third thing we want to see. We want to think about the Spirit and witness. Back to our initial summary statement, the promised

Spirit gives us power, and we've seen Jesus talk about that, lastly, to witness for Jesus. This is where we are called to live by faith. This is where it can sometimes be hard and a bit scary to live out the truth. It's truth for tomorrow, or it's truth for Tuesday. Boys and girls, when you go back to school, or when you find yourself in your university seminar group, or in your workplace, or among unbelieving family members and friends, to remember we have the promised Spirit to give us power to be witnesses. Verse 8, 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. Jesus calls his church into global mission to go to the ends of the earth, but also and always to go to the other side of the room, too.

Maybe the question we have is, how is this ragtag bunch of Jesus followers, this small group, this small band, going to turn the world right side up for Jesus? Remember their context, so many different worldviews, so many different gods, so much opposition, and yet they did. How will it happen today?

So many different worldviews, so many other gods, so much opposition. It's the same way. The mission of Jesus continues as he sends his Spirit with power to us, and to churches, and to Christians just like us.

It's interesting how that verse, verse 1, verse 8, the context for it. In verse 6, we find the disciples asking the question, is this the moment you're going to restore the kingdom to Israel?

[28 : 30] They had this expectation still that the kingdom of Jesus would come now, and it would come on this earth, and it would be political in nature, but they're going to discover that Jesus' kingdom is gradual and growing, and it's a spiritual kingdom. They're going to discover that power in the kingdom of God works differently, that Christ sets up his rule, where? In people's hearts, by his Spirit, causing us to proclaim by faith that Jesus is Lord. And they discover that for the kingdom to grow, and for mission to take place, they're told in verse 4, do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised. They must wait for the Spirit of promise, the Spirit of power to be sent. And when that comes, the book of Acts records the record of the beginnings of global mission by the power of the Spirit, as they're sent out to boldly proclaim the good news of the Lord Jesus. There's a really interesting pattern that Luke records at the beginning of Acts. In verse 2, we discover that these apostles are those that Jesus has chosen. And then in verse 3, we discover that these are apostles who have had Jesus reveal himself to them personally after his resurrection. And then in verses 4 and 5, they're promised that they'll be given the Holy Spirit for their task. And then in verse 8, they are going to be sent and commissioned to be witnesses. So that's a very specific pattern for the apostles, but that becomes the general pattern for all Christians and for all churches. We discover this good news as we're saved by grace, that we've been chosen by God. That we have this personal encounter with the living God through Jesus. And then when we put our trust in Jesus, he sends us the Spirit, and then he sends us to go to represent him. The Holy Spirit fills his church to send us out to witness. Sometimes, as we said, that'll be across the world, and we always need to be willing and ready and open to God's call, but always he will send us to send us into the world. As we think about the idea of witnesses, maybe we can think about two different types of witnesses that we would see in a courtroom setting. You know, there are those eyewitnesses who bear witness to the truthfulness of events as they're recorded. And we know that about the apostles, don't we? We know that they were eyewitnesses of the truth. And Jesus would help them to understand the significance of what they had seen. Well, what about the church today? We are called to bear witness to the truth that the apostles have recorded. That the Spirit confirms to us that the Word of God is true, that Jesus is the Savior that we need as we meet him in God's Word, and that's the truth that we bear witness to. We pass on to others. But you also meet in a courtroom character witnesses.

Those who speak for someone who is on trial. And I think that's a helpful reminder of part of our calling as Christians, that we go into the world to testify that Jesus is wonderful, that he is good, that Jesus gives true happiness. And we can speak of that from our own experience, that Jesus gives peace in the storms of life. And we can speak of how we know that to be true.

We can testify that Jesus gives the deep love that people are looking for and longing for, that we can testify that there is no one that compares with our Jesus when we are trusting in him and resting in him. So the Spirit brings us Jesus, unites us with him, and we have good news to share. Good news we want to invite others to discover for themselves. Just as we finish, let's finish by filling in this blank together.

Let me give three possible answers. Christ's people are saved and filled with the Spirit to model God's good purposes in the world. That as we live together in a fellowship of love under King Jesus, we are called to model the goodness, the beauty, the joy that's found, the peace there is in living under the good rule of King Jesus.

[33 : 40] Christ's people are saved and filled with the Spirit to, second answer, declare, to speak, to declare by our words and our worship that Jesus Christ is Lord. It should be so clear that what unites us is Jesus. What makes the church different is Jesus. What we talk about is Jesus. Third answer, Christ's people are saved and filled with the Spirit to fulfill God's promise. God's promise made from the very beginning to be God who is with us, God who is for us, the God who is in us. That is true for us as we gather together in worship.

It's true as we scatter, as we go into the world, that God will fulfill that promise to bless the nations through Jesus, Jesus Christ the Lord. Let's pray briefly in his name together.

Amen.