

# Life: Bold and spicy

## *The Secret to Bold Living – Part 2*

Acts 2:36-41

September 23, 2007

Last Christmas my son gave me this fountain. If you put water in this tank it will light up and flow with fresh water. Of course there's one more crucial thing it needs: a power source. You need to plug it in. Everything depends on the power source. (Plug it into the cord and let it run).

Back in the Gospel of John Jesus promised a fresh and abundant flow of spiritual power for everyone who believes in Him. Jesus said it this way, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." The Gospel writer John quickly clarifies this by saying, "By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given ..." (John 7:37-39). So Jesus promised us a supply of living water, a never-ending source of power for confident living in the midst of difficult circumstances. And he identified the source: the Holy Spirit living within you. That is THE power source for Christian living. But notice that Jesus also said that the Holy Spirit had not yet been given.

Now fast forward to Acts chapter 2 and in verse 17 we read: "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. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in these last days." In line with Jesus, it's another promise – this time from the Old Testament - about the coming of the Holy Spirit. But the startling thing from Acts 2 is that Peter stood up and told the crowd: today, this very day and every day from now on, this promise is now being fulfilled. The Holy Spirit is now being poured out on all flesh – young and old, men and women, sons and daughters, Americans and Koreans and Bangladeshis. For the people who heard this speech given by Peter this would have been astounding news. *You mean everyone gets the Holy Spirit? Everyone can receive? Not just rich people or powerful people or men or mature people, but the poor and the marginalized and women and the young?* Yes, everyone who calls on the name of Jesus will not only be given the gift of eternal life and forgiveness of sins but also power to live today: power to overcome the sin, power to love others well, power to display the healing of Jesus in a hurting world, power to love our enemies, power to bless those who curse us, power to trust God the Father's plan for us even when we suffer and grieve. How we need that power! If we don't have it, we're unplugged. You can be a spiritual leader or a church member or the senior pastor, you can have great ideas for God, you can help hurting people, but if you're unplugged, you're powerless – maybe busy and smart and efficient, but utterly powerless.

But this passage promises that it has come. In verse 4 of this chapter we read for the first time that they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Elsewhere in the New Testament (see Ephesians 5:18 for instance) this idea of being filled with the Holy Spirit refers to a

continuous process of being filled. In other words, even though every follower of Jesus has the Holy Spirit living within him or her, we also need fresh and continuous fillings of the Holy Spirit. Or in the imagery of verse 17, we need fresh outpourings of the Holy Spirit on our lives. We become the cup that God wants to fill with the power of the Holy Spirit. (Demonstrate with a cup and a pitcher of water).

Let me just stop and ask a few questions: Are you filled with spiritual power? Or are you just busy doing good things for God? Do you have a deep sense of the power of the Holy Spirit within you? The Apostle Paul said one of the signs of the Spirit's work within us is that we feel God's fatherly love in our heart so we often cry out to God, "Abba (or papa), Father!" Do you have a deep sense that the Father loves you – even in all your brokenness and sin? Are you growing in love for others? Is your life marked by patience for others so that you are willing to wait on God's timetable rather than insisting on your timetable for others? Are you filled or are you running on empty?

How do you get the power of the Holy Spirit? This passage describes the process of staying plugged into the power of the Holy Spirit. It's an ongoing process or infilling of the Holy Spirit. But for all of us it begins with one specific unrepeatable event: trusting in Jesus as our Savior. Verse 21 says: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved." Have you and are you now calling on the Person of Jesus? That's where it all begins. When I realize that I cannot save myself, I cannot deliver myself, but there is one who can save and deliver and forgive and make me a glorious new creation and wipe my slate clean and give me a new start every day and fit me for eternal life. He's the only one who can do that so I call out to him and say, "Help me. Take me. Forgive me and make me your new creation." That is where we all begin. And if you have never trusted in Christ this morning, I want to invite you do begin your life with him right now.

That is also the beginning of the Holy Spirit's work in our life. Now the process of continually being filled is found in verse 38: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." How do we stay plugged into the power of the Holy Spirit? Three key words: repenting, obeying and asking. The first word mentioned in being filled with the Holy Spirit is the word repent. Most of us don't like that word. Repent! When I was a student at the University of Minnesota, every spring Brother Jed and Sister Cindy would appear with their big black Bibles and bullhorn and scream at us college students to repent. So they screamed at girls with short dresses, calling them whores who needed to repent. They screamed through their bullhorn at the guys and told them to repent. It wasn't a very effective message.

In sharp contrast, the Bible never views repentance as a negative experience or as a chance to harass others. Instead, verse 37 gives us the positive picture of true repentance. Repentance is a break-through to reality. That's what happened here. When they heard the truth of what they had done, they were "cut to the heart." They were pierced with the truth. And it was a personal piercing with the truth. I can never worry about your repentance, as in, *if you only you would repent and see the truth we could have a good relationship*. No, I must repent for me, for my sin.

You see, sin builds a wall around my heart. It blocks spiritual reality from entering my life. In my sin and the justification for my sin, I hide behind a wall of my own defenses. Everyone does this. Psychologists call them defense mechanisms and then give fancy names like minimization, denial, rationalization, projection and blame. It's too painful to face the truth head on so we deflect it, build walls to keep it out. Of course the Bible has an even richer and deeper vocabulary about our walls of self-protection. Ever since Adam and Eve put on fig leaves and hid from God and then blamed each other for their problems, we have been building walls around our heart, refusing to face the truth head on, and projecting blame from behind our walls.

Our wall-building activity blocks the flow of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Holy Spirit has to come and break through into spiritual reality. Notice what Peter told them in this passage. He explained who Jesus was and what Jesus came to do for us and then he told them (see verse 23) that you crucified him and killed him. Wow, and they thought they were doing God a favor by getting rid of Jesus. They were sincerely helping God, doing the right thing, but they were actually crucifying the eternal and holy Son of God. This happens to us too. Some of my best and most spiritual activities have really just been about me and my ego and building my walls. But there is hope. Repentance takes down the wall and lets the truth in. We hear the truth about how we have offended God and hurt others. We hear the truth that if we were standing underneath Jesus as he hung on the cross we wouldn't have been one of the righteous ones; we would have nailed the spikes or run away.

In repentance we realize the enormity of our sin and the depth and complexity of our defensive walls (Tolstoy story or David's story). Now when the reality of God's truth through the power of the Holy Spirit comes breaking through our walls it will hurt. It feels like our life is crumbling and our whole ego is crumbling, but it's just our false self, our phony defenses that are crumbling.

But this isn't a bad thing; this is a marvelous good thing. This is where the Gospel gets its power. Repentance means that with the Spirit's help I can change and grow. It means that I can be different than I was last year. And it also means that you can change. I don't have to lock you into a category or a label like: dysfunctional, addicted, control-freak, immature, drunk ... Repentance means that I have to toss out the labels that I slap on others. The Holy Spirit can break through and change them.

Who needs to repent? Everyone. Do you remember the promise of the Holy Spirit was to young and old, men and women, rich and poor, the powerful and the powerless? Senior pastors need to repent. All of us build walls. All of us minimize the enormity of our sin. (Tolstoy or David and Psalm 51)

What are your walls of defense? Maybe your wall is your godly image of yourself. Maybe your wall is busyness – if I can just stay busy enough I can prove that I'm an okay person. Maybe your wall is your own comfort or your favorite addiction. Perhaps some of you are hiding behind walls of alcohol or sex. Maybe some of you are hiding behind

walls of control. Or maybe some of you are hiding behind a wall of bitterness. What is your wall? What are you hiding behind that keeps the flow of the Holy Spirit out?

We've been asking, "How do I stay plugged into to the source of power – the Holy Spirit?" We cry out to Jesus. We repent. And then we obey. That's the essence of the command to be baptized. Baptism was an outward sign of an inward reality. It signified that I was dead and gone and I now belonged to Jesus – and the act of baptism reminded me every day of the forgiveness and cleansing of sin. For the early Christians baptism was an act of obedience because God said, "Do it" and Jesus said "Do it" so they did it. It would have been unthinkable for them to say, "Well, I guess I want Jesus in my life but I will not go to church and I certainly won't allow those imperfect sinners to dunk me in that dirty little tank at the front of the church. I'll opt out of that one."

This isn't just about baptism; it's about obedience, doing what God tells us to do. Again, obedience could be one of those heavy-handed, scary, controlling God-words that make you want to bolt. But remember that Jesus said so clearly: "If you love me, obey me." That's it: if you love you will obey. We could also say that you will obey something or someone – everyone does. You obey what you love. You love what you obey.

Do you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Do you want to find an overflowing source of power and life for your soul? Then walk in obedience. Are you obeying him? Are there areas of your Christian life where you are flat-out disobeying God? Areas where you've told God, "I'll do A or B but I will never do C, even though you've told me to do it." That is disobedience and you will stop the flow of the Holy Spirit in your life. You can coast in your own power and energy for awhile but the power will be cut off.

Now notice this: the gift of the Holy Spirit is given as we walk in obedience. In this instance, go be baptized and as you're going, as you're obeying, you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit. So we don't tell God, "Okay, you give the Holy Spirit and then I'll think about obeying you." No, God says, "You step out. You obey me. You do the hard stuff of the Christian life, and as you do that, I will pour out my Spirit in ways that you could never fathom." Don't necessarily look for powerful and ecstatic emotional experiences. Those come and go and we should always be open to them, but the real essence is this: do you obey? Do you have a desire to obey?

What would that look like for you? Is there some area of your life where you just need to step out and obey God even if it's hard and scary? Maybe you've never been baptized – either as an infant with believing parents or as a child or as an adult. Friend, you are walking in blatant disobedience to God. Do the hard thing and be baptized. Maybe there's someone who you will not love. You won't budge; they have to come over to your side of the fence. Friend, you are in blatant disobedience. Do the hard thing and start loving them. The Holy Spirit will meet you as you obey. Maybe there's something wrong in your life – a problem, a sin, a struggle – and you refuse to share the burden with someone else. Do the hard thing and obey God by sharing it with someone. The Holy Spirit will meet you as you obey. Maybe you're playing it way too safe with your money and your time and your service. Maybe you say, "It's all mine and no one can tell me

what to do with it.” Friend, you are living in blatant disobedience. Do the hard thing and serve and give generously. The Holy Spirit will meet you as you obey. Where did we ever get the idea that the Christian life is easy and unchallenging? Do the hard stuff and trust God and the Holy Spirit will fill you with power.

How do we stay plugged into the Holy Spirit’s power? We repent. We obey even when it’s hard. And, finally, and so simply, we ask for the Holy Spirit. It’s a gift and it’s a promise. Read verse 39. God promised the gift of the Holy Spirit. God the Father wants to give us the Holy Spirit. Jesus the Son died so we could experience the presence of the Father who pours out the Spirit. God as three-in-one agrees: ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So as we close this service, let me ask again: Are you filled with spiritual power? Or are you just busy doing good things for God? Do you have a deep sense that the Father loves you? Do you want to shout and cry out “Abba, Father!”? Are you growing in love for others, blessing those who curse you, serving those who annoy you? Are you filled or are you running on empty? Is there some truth that is piercing your heart? Don’t ignore it. It may be the Spirit speaking deep into your life. Do you have an area of disobedience? Are you actively asking, “God, pour out the Holy Spirit on me. Fill me with your power?” There is no other source of spiritual power for the follower of Jesus. Ask for it today. The Father is ready to give all his good gifts to you.