

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 55 – THE HOLY SPIRIT - GAMECHANGER]

Last time we talked about the granting of the Holy Spirit to the disciples on the day of Pentecost.

- ◆ For the first time, individual humans through the Spirit would be gathered up, embraced and included in the life and love of the Godhead.
- ◆ We also saw how the emphasis of God's saving work has shifted to incorporating humanity into the new reality created by the atoning work of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ God is creating a holy people for Himself and the primary function of the Holy Spirit is to go and find the lost sheep and to persuade them to accept the precious gift Jesus is offering them.

One has only to look at the astounding change of behaviour that came over the disciples after the granting of the Holy Spirit to know that this event was a "game changer" for humanity.

- ◆ These were the same men who had slunk off into the darkness at Jesus' arrest, denied they knew Him, and watched from a distance while He died.
- ◆ Now they fearlessly stood up in front of those who had condemned and crucified Jesus just a few weeks earlier and denounced their actions (Acts 2).
- ◆ This dramatic transformation was the result of them having within them a resource previously unavailable to mankind.
- ◆ It was the result of the power of God the Holy Spirit coming to take up residence in individual humans (John 14:23).

What we want to begin to do today is to explore how the coming of God, the Holy Spirit, to humans is going to dramatically transform their lives.

- ◆ Up to the point of Jesus' crucifixion, mankind has been under evil influences beyond his control, and from which he has been powerless to extricate himself.
- ◆ However, as we have seen, Jesus, through His life, death and resurrection has overcome and defeated the powers that held him hostage: sin, man's fallen human nature, the devil and death.
- ◆ The house has been swept clean of the evil strong man, and was now about to be occupied by God Himself.
- ◆ In contrast to his previous existence, mankind is about to experience a totally different life under the guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ In place of sin, he will experience righteousness; in place of sinful human nature, he will develop God's nature (the fruits of the Holy Spirit); instead of the devil's evil presence, a holy loving God; and instead of death, eternal life.

So let's take a closer look at the work of the Holy Spirit as He sets about preparing a holy people for God.

- ◆ We have already spoken about the Holy Spirit being the "embracer," the one who goes forth to embrace the lost sheep and draw them into fellowship with the Godhead.
- ◆ In order for this process to have any chance of success, a miracle has to take place in the heart of the individual.
- ◆ But before this miracle can occur at the heart level, there are three other important steps leading up to this process.
- ◆ First, and this is something that everyone experiences, one has to go through a softening up process.
- ◆ In one of our first sessions, we spoke about the carefully created moral environment God has designed for this time of the flesh.
- ◆ While man is in agreement with the natural and spiritual laws God has established, there is a better chance of avoiding some of the major difficulties of this present life.
- ◆ However, due to man's decision to reject God's involvement in the process, and the subsequent weakness of the flesh, we know the sad outcome of what life is like without God.
- ◆ However, this is all part of the process. It is the softening up process in preparation for the personal encounter all humanity will eventually have with Jesus Christ.
- ◆ This process is dramatically illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24).
- ◆ In reality, this parable is a microcosm of the larger story of the relationship between God and mankind.
- ◆ It is the story of a son who rejects the love and security of his father and goes off in pursuit of his own lifestyle.
- ◆ Very similar to what happened in the Garden of Eden.
- ◆ However, as the wayward son in the story and mankind in general has discovered, life rarely has the happy ending they expected. In fact, in many cases the happy dream has turned into a nightmare.

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- ◆ And the key statement we are concerned with in the story is, ***“When he came to his senses”*** (Luke 15:17).
- ◆ The point being, this carefully created environment in which we live is designed by God to bring about this exact reaction, to help bring mankind to its senses.
- ◆ We see this same process repeated over and over again with ancient Israel. They only responded to God in the midst of oppression by occupying forces.
- ◆ Paul, too, speaks of this humanity-destroying process in Romans 1.
- ◆ ***Romans 1:28-29 Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity.***
- ◆ When the love and security of a loving God is rejected, humanity sets himself on a course that eventually ends in depravity and suffering.
- ◆ We descend into a hell of our own making.
- ◆ But we have to recognise this is part of the softening up process God is allowing all humanity to experience in preparation for that personal encounter with Jesus Christ.
- ◆ The second thing that needs to happen has already been accomplished. That is the reconciling work of Jesus Christ which has restored “peace” between the two parties.
- ◆ The gateway through the veil has been opened for humanity to approach God, and for God to approach humanity through the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ Because of Jesus Christ’s atoning sacrifice, God can now extend grace to sinful mankind, and because of Christ’s obedient response to the Father on our behalf, reconciliation has been achieved.
- ◆ Prior to this point, it was impossible for the unreconciled and alienated mind of humanity to even understand the things of God, let alone respond to saving grace.
- ◆ But now that Christ has provided reconciliation, the way has been opened for God to pour out His Spirit on mankind and for man to draw near to God.
- ◆ The third thing that needs to happen is a personal decision made by the Father Himself.
- ◆ ***John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.***
- ◆ Just for emphasis, Jesus repeats this statement in v.65.
- ◆ One of the great mysteries of the salvation process is this question of “election” or “calling” as it is called, this opportunity to experience and respond to God’s overtures of love.
- ◆ Traditional Christianity has maintained one has to respond in this life in order for one to be included in the “elect” and to be saved.
- ◆ If this statement were true, then this would automatically exclude all those who lived prior to Christ, including ancient Israel, and those who have never heard of Christ’s name. In other words, the vast majority of those who have ever lived.

Fortunately, in recent times, this rather narrow view is coming under more scrutiny and for very good reasons.

- ◆ The reasons basically revolve around the question of the nature of God.
- ◆ Would a God who claims to be love, create billions of children only to consign the majority of them to destruction?
- ◆ Who of us as human parents would chose to consign one of our two children to heaven, and the other to hell?
- ◆ The second question that needs to be asked is, “If we truly believe Jesus has already paid the death penalty for all mankind’s sins, why are they now required to pay the death penalty themselves a second time?”
- ◆ Personally I believe God the Father has made just provision for all men. He loves all His children and has gone to great lengths to secure their salvation and none will be forgotten.
- ◆ Back to this verse in John 6:44.
- ◆ Our calling then is one of the mysteries that is under the control of the Father.
- ◆ Previous experience would indicate preparing a holy people for Himself is a process similar to what we see in both the Old and the New Testament as we see God working with His people.
- ◆ In the Old Testament, God started with one man, Abraham, then the two patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob, then the twelve tribes, and finally the nation of Israel.

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- ◆ In the New Testament we see a similar process with Jesus calling the twelve disciples and the process of expanding and developing His church on the day of Pentecost.
- ◆ In other words, it is a process that is worked out over time.
- ◆ The major difference that concerns us here in the New Testament is this new nation or church is made up of people from all races and tribes in contrast to the one nation of Israel in the Old Testament.
- ◆ However as in the past, the evidence is, we don't see everyone included in the process during this present age.
- ◆ But as salvation is only possible "through" and "in" Christ through a personal encounter with Him, what are we to do with this conundrum?
- ◆ The short answer is, it remains a mystery, but it is a mystery in the hands of a loving Father who is "**not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**" (2 Peter 3:9).
- ◆ However there are a couple of things we can know, besides having a loving heavenly Father who wants to share His eternal existence with each of us.
- ◆ If we go to 1 Corinthians 15, we see Paul addressing the subject of the resurrection of the dead and we see it speaks about a process over a period of time.
- ◆ **1 Corinthians 15:20-26 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.**
- ◆ We have spoken about this representative principle before and the implication "**all will be made alive.**"
- ◆ Now notice the next verse concerning timing.
- ◆ **V.23 But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.**
- ◆ This applies to those who answer the Father's call and respond to that call in this life.
- But this is where it gets frustrating for us, as scripture goes silent as to what happens next.**
- ◆ What we do know is all will be resurrected, as we just read, "**all will be made alive,**" and in Acts 24:15 (NKJV), "**there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.**"
- ◆ The question is, who are the unjust and why are they raised?
- ◆ Is it just to send them off to their destruction again, or could it be, this is their chance for redemption seeing the vast majority of them have never even heard the name of Christ let alone had a personal encounter?
- ◆ Even the ignorant have to be included in the description "unjust."
- ◆ The point is, scripture is silent on what exactly God has in store for the unjust at the resurrection, and where scripture is silent we are better off not trying to second guess what God has planned.
- An important second question also revolves around God's loving nature.**
- ◆ We have spoken a lot about the grace God is able to extend to humanity because of Jesus Christ's saving work.
- ◆ But under the scenario where salvation is only available in this present age, this implies God's grace is restricted by a time frame and only to a select group. It's only good for those who live in this 2000 plus year period, then rescinded.
- ◆ More to the point, it's a timeframe imposed on God by fallible human beings.
- ◆ Of course, this is ridiculous. We now live in the time of the new creation whose defining characteristic is "grace" which has been obtained by the cosmos changing sacrifice of the Son of God.
- ◆ There is no going back to the old creation characterised by law.
- ◆ It also implies God is not a God of second chances, yet we see over and over again his dealings with a stubborn and recalcitrant Israel.
- ◆ If we are to anticipate or make an assessment on God's likely behaviour, we are always on safer ground to judge Him on past behaviour than try to predict what He will do in the future.
- ◆ In matters of dispute such as these it is always best for us humans to remain humble, and even silent and leave the salvation of mankind in the hands of our loving Father.
- ◆ Paul continues the discussion.
- ◆ **V.24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.**

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- ◆ The best way to destroy all dominion, authority and power is for the unjust of any age to surrender their lives into the loving arms of their Savior.
- ◆ We in faith need to trust the Father who knows the best time and place to call someone to optimise success, that is, when this personal encounter between Jesus Christ and the individual happens.
- ◆ I recently read a book on the history of western civilization.
- ◆ At the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in England, (1800-1830), children as young as six, worked 12-16 hour days, six days a week, in the cotton mills and coal mines in order for their families to survive.
- ◆ If they arrived late for work they got the strap. If they nodded off at work they got the strap.
- ◆ Do you know what their life expectancy was? 17.
- ◆ Were these children born just to experience eleven years of drudgery and then cease to exist forever? Personally, I don't think so.
- ◆ Let me finish with this verse, as there may be a few surprises for some at judgment time.
- ◆ ***Luke 13:29-30 People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.***
- ◆ What our loving God has planned for the judgment remains a mystery, but based on past experience, it just may be a happy time for the vast majority.
- ◆ We will discuss this further when we get to the subject of the judgment.