



## **GIFT OF THE EXALTED LORD**

Text: Acts 2

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Do you remember the last time you were thirsty? You were so dry you just had to have a drink. Your mouth was dusty. And your throat was so dry you could hardly swallow. You even had that aching, yearning feeling in your chest. Man you had a thirst. You were desperate for a long drink. Something cool and refreshing. Something to make you feel alive again! In the Bible we see David thirsting like that for God. As he says in Psalm 42 *"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. my soul thirsts for God..."* In Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost, so many who were parched spiritually had their thirst satisfied. Pentecost was the day God poured out the Holy Spirit on all his people. It was not just a trickle but a flood. As the Apostle Peter said in his sermon that day, quoting the prophet Joel: *"In the last days I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. 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..."* As a result of Pentecost we acknowledge that we, the church of Jesus, are the temple of God. God himself with all his holiness and power lives in you and me. That's]what we believe and confess to the world.

So what is your personal experience of the Spirit? I ask because I have come across those who say they believe all this but have no real experience of the Spirit. They haven't really sensed his presence and end up wondering if they even have the Spirit. There are many Christians who are thirsting and longing for something to refresh them. Their spiritual thirst is like an ache in the chest. They want something to give them joy and peace. They want to experience love and warmth. They are longing for something to help them really praise God. And to love those around them. They are longing for something to help them witness freely and spontaneously. Well Jesus promised (John 7:37-38) *"If a person is thirsty, let them come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me,*

*as the Scriptures says 'Streams of living water will flow from within him.'* So if we come to Jesus and drink, then not only will he satisfy our thirst, but 'living water' will 'flow' from us. We will be a fountain of joy and hope to many around us. Such is the promise of Jesus, that if we believe in him, we will be filled to overflowing with his Spirit.

And yet, many Christians feel this is not their experience. May be you feel like that. You have been going to church for years but never felt the joy or warmth or power of God's presence in you. May be you sometimes doubt you even have the gift of the Spirit. Perhaps you look at other people in our church or at other churches. You hear talk of being filled with the Spirit. You perceive a joy and spontaneity in them. You see their love and witnessing. And you feel you are missing out. May be you do not have the Spirit you think. May be it takes more than a simple faith in Jesus to be filled with the Spirit. Well let's explore what Peter said in his sermon on that remarkable day of Pentecost.

Let's see on what basis the Spirit has been given. We will look at Acts 2:32-36. Peter is coming to the climax of his sermon and he says: *"God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."' Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."* We will set aside verse 34&35 for the moment. They are a quote from Psalm 110 and form a parenthesis, something extra in brackets. Verses 33 & 36 go together to make up Peter's argument in this final part of his sermon. In verse 33 Peter says Jesus *"...was exalted to the right hand of God."* As a result of his ascension into heaven, Jesus *"...received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit."* And what followed then was that Jesus *"...has poured out what you now see and hear"*. What did they see and hear? The people saw and heard (Acts 2:2-4) *"the sound like the blowing of a violent wind coming from heaven"* and saw the *"...tongues of fire..."* and heard the disciples *"...filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in other languages..."*

Now I want you to note the flow of what Peter says. Upon what basis was the Spirit given to Jesus to be poured out upon his people? It was upon the fact that Jesus was glorified, when he ascended into heaven. That is precisely John's comment in John 7:39.

Speaking of the living waters he wrote "*By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not yet been given since Jesus had not yet been glorified.*" Peter, here in Acts, makes clear as well, that the Holy Spirit was poured out because Jesus ascended into heaven and was exalted to the right hand of God.

So the question 'How can I be sure I have the Spirit?' does not begin with me. It does not begin with a look at myself. It does not begin with who I am or what I have done or how I feel. It begins with Jesus; who he is and what he has done. Jesus has risen. He has ascended and is glorified. Therefore the Spirit is poured out. All that we have is from Jesus. Jesus died on the cross. We have received forgiveness. Jesus rose from the dead. We have received new life. Jesus has been exalted. We have received the Spirit. All is because of Jesus. Nothing is because of us. It is for us. But not because of us. We did not do and cannot do anything to ensure we receive the Spirit. The Holy Spirit has been poured out on the children of God, not to show how good they are, but to prove the greatness of the Son of God. Look at verse 36. It begins with a very important little word '*Therefore*'. We use the word to refer to something already stated. 'Because of such and such therefore this.' The one implies the other. What is the word 'therefore' in verse 36 referring to. Well go back to verse 33. There Peter has just referred to the '*outpouring of the Spirit*' on the disciples which the people "*now see and hear*". And he says because of what they '*now see and hear...therefore let all Israel be assured of this. God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.*'. So Peter says, in effect, 'This outpouring of the Spirit, which you have now witnessed, proves that Jesus of Nazareth is Lord.' The Holy Spirit was poured out on earth to prove what had taken place in heaven. Namely, the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God. Jesus has ascended in victory. He is king and Lord of the universe and has showered his people with his gifts.

Now, if the gift of the Spirit depends only on the exaltation of Jesus and not on any of our doing, is it possible for Jesus to be glorified and one of his people not to receive the Spirit? No! let me illustrate it like this. On what basis did you receive the forgiveness of sins? Was it because you prayed so hard? Or because you read the Bible from cover to cover? Or because you went to church every Sunday? Or because of all your good works? No! Never! You received forgiveness because Jesus died on the cross and rose again. It was Christ's doing and you simply received it by faith. Now the principle by

which we receive the Spirit is the very same by which we receive forgiveness. The Lord has been crucified. 'Therefore' our sins are forgiven. The Lord has been glorified. 'Therefore' the Spirit has been given. Jesus has done it all. And we receive it by faith. If we have done as Peter told the crowd at the end of his sermon: (Acts 2:38) "*repent and be baptized*" then we also have been "*forgiven and received the gift of the Holy Spirit*". There is no doubt about it.

Now, some of you may say 'I agree with all this. But I have no experience of it. Am I to sit smugly and say I have everything when I know perfectly well that I do not feel a thing'? No, we need to have the subjective inner experience of God's presence as well. But that inner experience will only come as we rest upon the facts of the Bible. It comes about when we accept what the Bible says. And then live on the basis of those facts. Think again of forgiveness and justification. How were you made right with God? Not by doing anything but accepting it. By accepting the fact that Jesus has gained for you forgiveness and eternal life. When you accept it for yourself, by faith, you then experience the relief of forgiveness. Not just the knowledge of forgiveness. But the relief of forgiveness. Let me illustrate that. If a man prays 'Lord Jesus I believe you died for sin and that you can forgive my sin and I know you will...' has he accepted the forgiveness in Christ? Has he experienced the relief and peace of forgiveness? No! He knows the facts. That is the first step. But he has not yet accepted it for himself. But if he prays 'Lord I thank you that I have been forgiven, that you died for me' then you can hear by his thanksgiving that he has experienced forgiveness. He has accepted the promise of Christ.

In the same way you can pray and wait for years and never experience the Spirit's power. But when you stop pleading with the Lord to give his Spirit or some extra blessing, and accept what has been given, then your problem will dissolve. When you accept the Spirit as Jesus gift in you, because he has been glorified and thank God, then you live with the Spirit. Jesus said in John 7 "*If a person is thirsty let them come to me and drink.*" Too many come to Jesus but are not drinking. That is, they are not putting their heads back and drinking long and deep of the life giving water. We can know it all. Like a glass of water set in front of us. We know it is there. We know that it refreshes. But to be refreshed we must drink the water. We must take in and accept what Jesus has given. Believe it. Accept it. Drink it in and live out of it.

For example (1) I know God lives in me. So I talk with him and share myself with him. Constantly, every day I talk with the Spirit. I share my joys and problems. I share my thinking and planning, my problems and frustrations. I share my hopes and dreams. (2) I know God lives in me so I am careful about what I think or say or do so as not to offend him. What a dramatic impact that would make on our lives, our marriages and families, our work if we lived from the fact God is in me. When Israel was in the desert for 40 years there was about two million people in the camp including all their animals. You can imagine all the noise. And yet near one tent it was quiet. People approached it in whispers. Do you know why? Do you know which tent that was? It was the tabernacle of God. There was the holy of holies. Because God was present people spoke in respectful hushed tones. By the outpouring of the Spirit, where is God present now? [POWER POINT PICTURES] Are you speaking and thinking in respectful tones in your own presence and in that of a fellow Christian. God is present!

(3) I know God lives in me. So I am not fearful when I have to witness for Jesus. I accept the promise that he will give me the words. So I will take note of the openings he provides and open my mouth and speak for him. Imagine you are playing a doubles match of tennis. You are not very good at tennis. But your partner is Novak Djokovic. With him as your partner do you think you could win the match? Indeed, but you would need to let him take the lead. If you dashed ahead and tried to take all the shots you would get in his way and mess things up. So too we can be a great witness with the Spirit. But we need to let him take the lead instead of rushing in our own strength without thought and prayer.

(4) I know God lives in me, so I need not fear this world, its pain and its loneliness because he is there with me. I know it and accept it. (5) I know God lives in me so I accept he has gifted me. So I will serve my brothers and sisters with those gifts. I will not make out I have no gifts and be spiritually lazy.

People of God you are immensely blessed! You have God almighty in your midst as a free gift because of Christ's ascension. Believe it. Accept it. And live out of that fact. Praise God that no single child of his needs to agonise or even wait for the Spirit to be given or some extra blessing. It's all a question of faith that comes by revelation. When our eyes are opened to see it, our prayers turn to praise. Are you thirsty? Come to Jesus and drink and from you will flow streams of living water.

# QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

*These questions can be followed up personally, with a Christian friend, in your small groups, or in discussion after the service. Reflection is important because too often we hear a good sermon and soon forget it without actually growing spiritually or changing in attitude or what we do. The reflection questions are meant to be challenging, because our spiritual growth and the salvation of others is so important.*

- Do you at times feel lacking in spiritual fervour, the power to witness? Why is that? What will you do about it?
- Explain the difference between knowing the doctrine of forgiveness and actually experiencing it. Is the latter your experience as well? If not, what will you do about it?
- Do you experience the presence of the Spirit in your life? What do you need to do to experience Him? What will you do?