

GOD'S CALL

Major themes in the Scriptures

The Holy Spirit (6)

Why baptism with the Spirit?

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, “The Holy Spirit”, the sixth message, in seeking to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures.

A short summary of today's message:

In the event of Pentecost described in **Acts chapter 2**, God poured out His Spirit on all mankind and the Lord Jesus baptized His praying disciples with the Holy Spirit. What is the meaning and purpose of this event and how does it apply to us today?

We will seek the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

[End of summary]

The subject of the baptism with the Holy Spirit is complex and difficult. It is not my intention today to go into a detailed consideration of this subject, but I want to consider with you some major aspects that are important for us to understand so that we can live our lives well in the way that God has intended and benefit from what God has chosen to give to us.

There are two common views with regard to the issue of the baptism with the Holy Spirit, apart from various others.

One view is that this experience of baptism with the Holy Spirit is very, very important and all Christians must seek for it because when you experience that, you will become a spiritual person and you will live life at a higher plane, which you cannot do without this experience. This is one view. And associated with this, sometimes there are other features where they say: in order to know that you have this experience, you need to speak in tongues or have other spiritual indications that show that it is such an experience.

Another view is quite the other way round: There is also a large group of people who say we must not seek for such an experience because since the event of Pentecost, all Christians have already been baptized with the Holy Spirit, and all have already experienced the baptism with the Holy Spirit. So we must not seek for it because it will cause us problems, frustrations and we will not grow well as a result.

What is the reality? What do the Scriptures tell us with regard to this important subject? It is complex, it is difficult, but it is very important, and there are many different issues involved and related with this: It has to do with the way that God wants to accomplish His purposes; it has to do with the way in which we go through life; it has to do with how we can be transformed to be like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us turn to **Acts 2: 1-4**.

Acts 2: 1-4

- 1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.
- 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.
- 3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.
- 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

We are told that this was the day of Pentecost and in that situation, disciples of the Lord Jesus had been praying, waiting for the day to come. The Lord Jesus had told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high – until the Holy Spirit would come upon them.

And so on the day of Pentecost, they were all together in one place. They were praying, looking to God. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting: so, there was outward physical manifestation in this event. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.

In that context, then we are told: And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

So we can say that this is a description of what the Lord Jesus had promised: that the disciples would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came upon them, and in that situation there was outward form of tongues as of fire distributing themselves. We are also told that they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. We are also told they spoke with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

So there are various physical outward manifestations in this event.

What does this mean? What is God trying to communicate to us?
In what way is this relevant to us today?

Is this just an event many, many years ago and it does not really affect us today? It has taken place and now, we have the benefit of the Holy Spirit having been poured forth on all mankind: so all of us have already benefited and all Christians would have experienced that – the baptism with the Holy Spirit; is that what it means? Or is it that we must look for it, we must seek for it, we must experience it for ourselves?

In order to try to understand the meaning and purpose of the event of Pentecost, we need to consider the nature of the event. What is it, what actually happened and what is the outcome in terms of our moral state of being?

For example, we have considered earlier the meaning of being born of the Spirit: A person can be born of the Spirit no matter what age he lived in in history. At any point in time, if a person sincerely repents of his sins, comes to God in humility, confesses his sins, seeks God's forgiveness, is prepared to follow God and His ways, he can and will be born of the Spirit.

That is because this is a spiritual reality that will always take place because God has determined that there will come about a moral change in our lives when we respond properly to Him.

This is the principle of: whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. "...whatever a man sows, this he will also reap": the apostle Paul says this in **Galatians 6: 7**. If we sow to the Spirit, we will from the Spirit reap eternal life. But if we sow to the flesh, we will from the flesh reap corruption.

So this is a principle that will always be true. So whenever a person repents sincerely and genuinely, turns to God for forgiveness, trusts in God, God will forgive – in all stages of history.

But the basis of forgiveness is always the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. No one can be forgiven outside of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ: there is no other way by which we can be forgiven. There is no other name under heaven... given amongst men whereby we must be saved. So whoever is forgiven has to be forgiven through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.

But people can be saved even before the event of the cross. People like Abel, Abraham, Job and many others could respond to God and become children of God, be born of the Spirit because that is a direct transformation in the spirit. The moral character is changed as a result of a proper moral choice. When we respond properly to God, the Holy Spirit works in us, brings about a change in our spirit, in our heart. So this kind of transformation will take place anytime, anywhere. This is the realm of transformation of moral character: Whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

But there is another category of life, where I would describe it as "experience".

In life, we go through many experiences. We can experience many situations of life. Such experiences do not directly change our heart: do not directly change our moral character.

For example, we can experience a situation of great pain or we can experience a situation of great pleasure. That by itself does not change our moral character.

Even in the spiritual realm, we can experience a situation where the evil spirits are very powerfully at work, the atmosphere is very evil and yet, our spirit may not become evil.

Likewise, we can be in a situation where the spiritual atmosphere is very good, God is powerfully at work and yet, our spirit may not become good. That is an experience. It is not transformation.

So it is important for us to see the distinction between the two.

Of course, experience becomes part of our life. When we have gone through an experience, we have gone through it: It becomes part of our life. But what kind of effect it will have on our moral character, on our moral being, depends on our moral choice: how we respond.

So for example, in a situation where we are in an atmosphere where the evil spirits are very powerfully at work, it is possible for us to take our stand against evil, look to God and as a result of which, we grow stronger in that situation.

But of course, it is a very dangerous situation and if we are not prayerful, if we are presumptuous, we think that we are able to cope with it, then we can easily be influenced in the evil direction.

On the other hand, when we are in a situation where God is present in a significant way, we can be readily helped to appreciate what is good and to choose in that direction.

But we can also harden our hearts, we can reject, we can not pay attention, we can refuse to be influenced in a positive direction, we can insist on going our own way. When that happens, our character degenerates.

So when we go through experiences, the outcome in terms of its effect on our moral character is dependent on the way we make our choices.

Then we may say: "If that is the case, then it does not matter what we go through; positive situations, negative situations, it just depends on our moral choice. We choose well, it will always be good. So why should we seek for more positive experiences? Why is there a need for the baptism with the Holy Spirit?"

In one sense, it is true. If you make your moral choice well in every situation: you are determined, and you depend on God; you are close to Him, and all your choices are very good; then in a sense, no matter what situation you go through, you will continue to develop and to grow well. No one can stop you from developing well no matter what situation you are in.

But in the realities of life, we can be very easily affected by the situations that we go through. A negative situation can very easily lead us into evil. A positive situation can help us to become good, but it is more difficult. It is much easier to follow a negative situation and become bad, than to be influenced by a positive situation and to become good.

We need to be very careful in the kinds of situations that we choose for ourselves.

There are various situations where we have a choice: whether I want to be in this situation or the other situation.

So if we choose a situation that is morally negative because we are self-confident, because we think we can overcome and we are not prayerful and looking to God, then we place ourselves in a situation where the influence can be severely negative and we can be negatively affected.

However, if we live well, we respond well to God, we are prayerful, but God in His sovereignty wants us to go through situations that are very difficult, He wants us to go through situations where we have to confront the evil one and overcome him then we need not be afraid: We can overcome – we can depend on God, we can trust Him and we can develop well in difficult circumstances.

So bearing this in mind, let us consider further the meaning of different situations of life. What would come under the category of experience that does not directly change your moral character and what would be a situation that directly changes your moral character?

For example, water baptism: Water baptism is an experience in the outward form. We go through such an experience, but water baptism by itself does not change your moral character. That is why many people can go through water baptism and still not be Christians. There are others who go through water baptism and they are Christians, but it does not strengthen their faith. There are others who go through water baptism with a proper, positive spirit of devotion to God and that experience intensifies their love for God.

So the outcome as to what will happen to our heart, the quality of our being depends on how we respond to that situation: What does it mean to us? When we go through water baptism, why do we go through it? What motivates us? How do we go through it? Are we doing it together with God? Or we do it because it is expected of us; we do it because we are confident of ourselves?

So too the baptism with the Spirit is in the realm of experience. The baptism with the Holy Spirit in itself does not change a person's moral character.

It places you in the atmosphere of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes upon the person and he experiences the Holy Spirit present very close to him. You can say it is an experience of the nearness of God: when God is very close to us, we behold Him, we experience Him.

The people of Israel in the wilderness: they experienced God's presence in a very significant way. Not only did they see the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, but there was also the presence of God in that situation working in their midst. But that was an experience. Most of them did not benefit much from that. Their hearts were not right. They were still rebellious. They still wanted to go their own way.

Likewise, the baptism with the Holy Spirit can occur in many different ways, in many different forms in terms of the meaning and the effect of it. As we look at the Scriptures further, it may become clearer to us what this means.

But here, I want to explain first that the baptism with the Holy Spirit by itself does not change our moral character.

What changes our moral character is first, the reason why we experience the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and how we go through the experience, how we respond to that. These are the factors that will determine whether our moral character will be positively affected and changed.

What then comes under the category of transformation that directly affects our moral character?

An example would be being born of the Spirit. Being born of the Spirit is not just an experience. It is a spiritual reality of transformation.

When we respond properly to God, when our hearts are right, when we experience the forgiveness of sins, God does something in our being, and our spirit is quickened: We become alive in our spirit, we relate with God in a way different from before.

So that is in the realm of transformation, and anyone at any point of time throughout the history of mankind can experience this if they respond properly to God.

But of course, preaching the gospel, witnessing to them helps them to understand what is required in order to be born of the Spirit. So, that will be our helping people to have a better opportunity to know what it means and to choose well.

Likewise, the fruit of the Spirit is in the realm of transformation. The fruit of the Spirit is not just an experience. It is the result of our abiding in Christ and Christ abiding in us: the Holy Spirit bringing about a change in our moral character as a result of a proper response to God.

When the Lord Jesus Christ is our Lord and Master, and we follow Him; we are His disciple and He abides in us; the Lord Jesus dwells in us and He helps us, leads us, guides us; we follow Him: So, at the personal level, when we do that, the fruit of the Spirit will be formed in us. The Holy Spirit will teach us more about who the Lord Jesus is and will help us to behold Him and teach us how to live as He lived. And the Lord Jesus Christ, His character, will grow in us. So that would be transformation.

So, the two are related. Experience and transformation are very much related. That is because we are moral beings.

If we are not moral beings, then experiences remain as experiences: A dog, a cat, a cow, a sheep may go through many different experiences, but that would just amount to various experiences they go through. It does not change their moral character.

But for us, every experience that we go through can affect our moral character for good or ill, depending on how we respond.

So this is very, very important for us to recognize. Every moment of our lives, we can respond well and grow deeper and deeper in our walk with God; or we can degenerate and go further and further away from Him and enter more and more into the spirit of the world.

So, our moral character is dynamic. It is dependent on the way we respond, the way that we choose.

So then, let us seek to understand: Why does God give us such experiences?

We know from the Scriptures that a primary goal that God has in His creation of man is moral transformation: so that we can become like Him in our moral character, we can relate with Him, we can have deep fellowship with Him, we can participate in what He is seeking to accomplish, and we can have deep fellowship with all those who love God.

So God wants to bring about a moral and spiritual transformation in our being as a primary objective: This means that the character of the Lord Jesus Christ would be formed in us; it means that we would have partaken of the divine nature; it means we would be bearing fruit in the sense of what the bible describes as “the fruit of the Spirit” – various aspects of moral quality of character.

Bearing this in mind then, we can understand why God gives us various experiences in our lives or He allows us to go through various experiences in life. God's purpose is to help us to be transformed into the likeness of Christ as a result of these experiences if we respond well. He is giving us opportunities to develop; He is encouraging us to move in that direction. He is at times disciplining us, at times warning us, but the purpose is to help us to move in a positive direction.

But it may not take place because God has given us an independent moral choice.

He cannot and He will not violate your moral choice. You are free to decide: Will you obey Him? Will you choose positively? Will you go your own way? It is up to you but the consequences will be there. Whatever you sow, you will reap. The soul that sins will die. So these consequences will take place. If we walk according to the flesh, we will die; we walk by the Spirit, we will find life.

So God brings us through various experiences to help us, and there are different kinds of experiences. Let us consider some of these experiences.

An example of spiritual experience is the kind that the apostle Paul described in **2 Corinthians 12**, where he described the experience of being brought to heaven while still living on earth. So this brought about an experience in an environment of peace and righteousness and spiritual revelation in heaven. You can say it was a very exciting experience, a wonderful experience but it is still an experience that will not and does not directly transform the moral being. It depends on how a person responds to that.

A person who goes through such an experience may become very proud – “I have had an experience that no one else has or very, very few people have gone through” – and become rather proud and arrogant, thinking that he is very spiritual. But that is not true. That experience has not made him spiritual.

The experience can also help him to become spiritual. After the experience, he could ponder over how wonderful God is, how much he must depend on God, be prayerful and live for God because heaven is such a wonderful place. And he wants to prepare for heaven; he wants to help other people to reach that. And so he is very strongly motivated to live well.

So that is transformation: The experience can lead to either outcome, depending on how we respond.

Likewise, living in this world where God has allowed Satan to be present and the spirit of the world to operate quite freely is an experience that we all go through. And such an experience can very often involve sin and temptation that can be very powerful, sometimes difficult for us to recognize. But it is still an experience that does not directly transform our moral being.

We can live in such a world and yet become very positive, morally good, faithful to God, having deep fellowship with God. But we can also very easily follow the world and be far away from God, enjoy the things of the world and degenerate – spiritually die. It can happen.

So what is the difference? Why is it some people develop well, some people degenerate?

The reason is the way we respond to the experience that we go through.

Another example is the presence of spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit can give us different kinds of gifts in order that we may fulfil what God wants to accomplish. But these spiritual gifts do not make us spiritual. We can see very clearly in Paul's epistle to the Corinthian Christians: They had many spiritual gifts but they were very fleshly in their moral character. They were carnal, they were behaving like babies in Christ, they were living like mere men.

Spiritual gifts do not transform our moral character.

However, spiritual gifts can be very helpful if we respond well. If we do not respond well, we can become like the Corinthians: become proud, self-confident; and therefore, we degenerate. If we respond well like the apostle Paul – he made use of spiritual gifts to serve God, to do the will of God – then they become helpful, and they can encourage us to walk with God and move together with Him.

The baptism with the Holy Spirit can be likened to God being present in a closer and more personal way such as in different periods of history: for example, God led the people of Israel in the wilderness. But we can also see this in times of revival in the history of the church, where the Holy Spirit was so very powerfully present in a way that non-Christians could recognize the presence of God in a way that they would not normally do. But such an experience would not mean that they would respond to God, that they would become Christians. But it encourages them as they behold the glory of God, to respond to Him. But it is possible for them to harden their hearts.

So such a situation can be very helpful for those whose hearts are open, for those who are humble, for those who long for spiritual goodness and reality. Then such experiences can lead us in the right direction.

Why did God work in this way in terms of this meaning of the Holy Spirit being present in such a manner? From what I can appreciate in the Scriptures, there is a difference in emphasis in terms of the way that God has revealed Himself to us at different points of time in history.

In the Old Testament times, we see an emphasis on the manifestations of God the Father at work: God created the universe; God led the people of Israel; God worked in the whole situation in the world. We see manifestations of God the Father at work.

In the record in the New Testament, in the Gospels, we see more of the manifestations of God the Son at work: the Incarnation, what He did when He lived on earth, how He responded to situations, how He died on the cross and rose from the dead.

In the **Acts of the apostles**, we see more of the manifestations of God the Holy Spirit at work. Some people say it is more appropriate to call the **book of Acts** the Acts of the Holy Spirit because the manifestation of the working of the Holy Spirit is quite prominent in the **book of Acts**, if you compare that with the gospels. But I see that both titles are appropriate. The reason is: While it is true that there is the manifestation of the work of the Holy Spirit, it is in its outward working in the context God working through the apostles to a significant degree to establish the church. So we see the apostles moving together with God in various contexts: in Jerusalem, Samaria, in situations among the Gentiles. God was at work through the apostles to establish churches, to build up the body of Christ.

So in that situation, you can say it is the acts of the Holy Spirit through the apostles as a major manifestation. But of course, it is not only the apostles. All believers are involved. But there is prominence in that area.

However, we must remember that throughout the Scriptures, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit are always present. They are always present. We need to appreciate that. But there is a difference in emphasis to help us understand how to respond to God and the situations.

Ultimately, we worship God in His totality, but we seek to be transformed, to become pure in heart like the Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect Man: the incarnation of God the Son. And we do this through the ministry of God the Holy Spirit working in our hearts, in the context of our commitment in giving ourselves completely to God to live for Him. It is in that context when we want to live for God and we want to honour the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives that the Holy Spirit will work in us, to reveal Christ to us, to teach us, so that Christ can dwell in our hearts effectively in reality.

“Christ in you the hope of glory” is a reference to how the Lord Jesus Christ can dwell in our hearts and His character can be formed in us and we are transformed to be like Him. And it is the Holy Spirit who helps us to a very large degree in this whole direction – to understand what it means, how to respond, how to worship God, how to abide in the Lord Jesus Christ – and He will bring to us what the Lord Jesus wants to tell us, but in our hearts, there is a union with the Lord Jesus Christ: He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. So when we become a true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, we become united with Him in spirit.

So the apostle Paul prayed for the Christians that Christ would dwell in their hearts by faith and that is in the context of the Holy Spirit working in them, enabling them.

Another aspect to appreciate is that the baptism with the Holy Spirit can affect different aspects of our lives.

It can be primarily in the physical aspect, or it can be primarily in the spiritual, but it can also be both. And it can also vary very greatly in terms of the depth of the experience and its meaning. It is not the same for all people. Very much depends on the way we respond in that situation, what God wants to accomplish for that purpose, and the outcome of various events that take place.

So in the context of **Acts 2**, we see the Holy Spirit coming upon the praying disciples and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2: 14-21

- 14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.
15 "For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is *only* the third hour of the day;
16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:
17 'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says, 'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS;
18 EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT And they shall prophesy.
19 'AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW, BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE.
20 'THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME.
21 'AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.'

So we can see that this event was a fulfilment of prophecy, where God promised in **Joel 2: 28**: "I will pour out my Spirit on all mankind".

Why is it that God would choose to do that at a certain point in time?

We are told that this will happen in THE LAST DAYS. Towards the end of time, God is going to do this according to the prophecy. In THE LAST DAYS, God says, "I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND".

And there will be signs that follow: There will be those who prophesy, there will be those who see visions, there will be those who dream dreams, there will be WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW.

And in that context, EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED. What does this mean?

From this and the record in **Acts 2**, some people think that in order to know whether you have experienced the baptism with the Holy Spirit, you must speak with tongues then you will know you have experienced it. But if we look at this context – the prophecy – it says: YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS.

So does it mean that if there are those who prophesy, there are those who see visions, there are those who dream dreams, these people are filled with the Holy Spirit, they have experienced the baptism with the Holy Spirit?

Obviously it does not mean that. The evil spirits can also cause people to experience many of these things. What the apostle Peter is describing here is that God promised that He would pour forth of His Spirit and these are signs that may appear in that situation. But it does not mean that whenever these signs are present, they indicate that God is at work. Neither does it mean whenever they experience the baptism with the Holy Spirit, they must have all these signs. That is to just to help us recognize.

So the apostle Peter says: “...this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel”. And yet what they saw was: people speaking with tongues in that situation. They were not dreaming dreams or seeing visions in that situation.

So it does not matter. There can be different manifestations but the source is the important thing: It comes from the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit manifests Himself in many different ways. Sometimes it can come in the form of a rushing mighty wind; it can come in the form of tongues of fire. It can come in other ways. So we should not be concentrating on the physical aspect.

The important thing is that God is telling us that in the Last Days, He will do something different from what He has done in times past.

So this is in the category of experience: because in the area of transformation, it will be present throughout all of history. Whoever responds well to God will be transformed, but experience can vary. God can give different experiences at different points of time in history; He can give different experiences to different people in different situations.

For example, we know the Lord Jesus Christ came at a point of time in history. So the people in the Old Testament never saw the Lord Jesus in that way. So they would not have experienced Him in that form, but the people in Galilee at that time saw Him; they beheld God present in that situation. So it was the manifestation of God's presence and God at work.

What is the purpose?

In the context we are told it has a direction. The purpose is to help people to respond to God's grace. EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.

In the context where God is speaking, the Holy Spirit is at work, if our hearts are right, if we are responsive to Him, then we can benefit significantly from the presence of the Holy Spirit in that way.

When God pours forth His Spirit on all mankind, He is giving an opportunity to us to see more clearly, in a more personal way something that is much more real to us that can help us to respond if we want the path that is good.

I see that this is a primary aspect in terms of the experience of the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

The baptism with the Holy Spirit can do damage to our lives if we respond wrongly: We can become proud, self-confident and assume that we are spiritual.

But the baptism with the Holy Spirit can do great good to us if we are very humble, we are truly dependent on God, we give our lives fully to Him, we trust Him, we walk with Him. Then God becomes very real to us. Each day of our lives, we can walk in His presence, in the atmosphere of the Holy Spirit. He will be pleased to guide us, to strengthen us, to enable us to go through each situation. Life can be a very meaningful experience even when it is difficult and we learn to see God at work in different situations of life.

So, it can be very helpful but it may not be. The critical issue is how we respond.

Acts 2: 32-33

32 "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.

33 "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

So this tells us that while Joel prophesied that God said He would pour forth His Spirit on all mankind, the apostle Peter explains that the Lord Jesus is the One who, having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

So the Holy Spirit is poured forth through the Lord Jesus Christ. God poured forth of His Spirit, but through the Lord Jesus Christ. He waited for the Lord Jesus Christ to come into this world, to live, to die, to be resurrected, to be exalted and then through Him, poured forth the Holy Spirit on all mankind.

This I see is to help us recognize who the Lord Jesus Christ is: the centrality of the Lord Jesus Christ in the work of God, in His purposes – that we behold Him; and the Holy Spirit has come to help us appreciate the Lord Jesus Christ. So He comes after the Lord Jesus has left this world. He comes to exalt Him, help us know Him, help us appreciate Him.

So that is why the Scriptures tell us that the Lord Jesus baptized His disciples with the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist testified to this, that the Lord Jesus would baptize the disciples with the Holy Spirit and with fire. And in the **gospel of John**, the apostle John also tells us that the Lord Jesus spoke of rivers of living water with reference to the Holy Spirit, but the apostle John said this was not yet: The Holy Spirit was not yet *given* because the Lord Jesus was not yet glorified. So this event would take place after the glorification of the Lord Jesus Christ. He would then pour forth His Spirit on all mankind.

Acts 2: 36-39

- 36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified."
- 37 Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"
- 38 Peter *said* to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- 39 "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."

So the people there recognized that this was a very special event.

The Holy Spirit was poured forth, they were convicted and they wanted to respond, so they asked the apostles: "Brethren, what shall we do?" So Peter said to them: "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit..."

So what he basically was telling them is that this gift is now available to all, if we fulfil the basic condition: We repent, we respond well to God, we become true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are prepared to follow Him, then God will forgive us and God will also grant to us the gift of the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that it is immediate and automatic, but it tells us that when we do that, then God is prepared to do so. How this takes place, the Lord willing, we will consider further.

But here, I want to point out that the apostle Peter says, "...you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit". So "the gift of the Holy Spirit" is another description of experiencing the baptism with the Holy Spirit. And so they received the Holy Spirit. So, that in this context is a description of that experience of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. So it can be described in different ways: the Holy Spirit came upon them; the Holy Spirit filled them; they were baptized with the Holy Spirit; they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. These are different terms that can be used at different points of time to refer to basically the same situation. Ultimately, what we are concerned about is the spiritual meaning and the reality. It is not so critical to be exact in the term and to argue about it.

What is important is to understand: What is God seeking to do, what does it mean, how do we respond to Him?

So all who truly believe in the Lord Jesus and want to honour Him may receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and be empowered to live for the Lord. That is available to all who desire to honour the Lord Jesus.

There are different kinds of gifts that God has given to us and the meaning and application are not the same. So briefly, I just mention that the Scriptures refer to different kinds of gifts that God has given to us, and all these gifts are very important, very helpful, but they may not benefit us if we do not respond well.

God has given us the gift of salvation through the cross of the Lord Jesus. Because the Lord Jesus died on the cross, God has given us this gift. We can be forgiven, we can be saved, but it does not mean that we will be saved. It is only when we respond in repentance, in faith then we will be saved. But God has given us this gift. It is offered to us.

Then we have here, the gift of the Person of the Holy Spirit. That means God gives the Holy Spirit as a gift to us, to dwell in us, to teach us, to help us, to enable us, to empower us. So it is a gift of the Person of the Holy Spirit, given to us after the Lord Jesus was exalted and He poured forth the Spirit and the Lord Jesus then gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit or baptizes us with the Holy Spirit.

Then we have the gift of persons that the Lord Jesus Christ gives to the church. The Lord Jesus gives gifts of persons such as apostles and... prophets and... evangelists and... pastors and teachers, in order to equip the saints for the work of service, in order to build up the church. So the Lord Jesus Christ as the head of the church, He gives gifts to the body of Christ of people, persons to fulfil certain functions, so that the saints, the people in the body of Christ can be equipped for the work of the ministry, the work of service.

Then there are spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to enable believers to fulfil certain functions. Sometimes He gives the gift of wisdom; sometimes He gives the gift of tongues, sometimes the gift of healing. There are many different kinds of gifts that the Holy Spirit may give to different people. But these are gifts to help us fulfil certain functions.

Ultimately, what is truly important is the way we respond to the gifts that God has given to us.

God has given us the gift of salvation, but the majority of people in the world will still perish without hope because they have not responded properly to the gift of salvation.

The Lord Jesus has given the gift of the person of the Holy Spirit, but many people may not benefit from that either. They think they do not need that: They are already Christians; they can just live for God, they just pray, they trust God; that is sufficient.

The Lord Jesus has given gifts of persons in order to equip the saints, but if we do not appreciate that, we may consider: every one of us can contribute in whatever way we see fit; we do not need to appreciate the gifts that God has given of persons to equip the saints. Then that can also lead to a context where the church is weakened. So God gives persons in order to help us.

That does not mean that we need these people in order to develop our life morally and spiritually in the realm of moral transformation. If our hearts are right, we can develop well in any situation: if our attitude is right, we respond well to God.

But in some situations, God wants us to learn from certain people and if we are not prepared to do that then we cut off that source of help that God wants to give to us.

So ultimately, we can grow, we can develop well in any situation, but that is on condition that our hearts are right, our spirit is correct, proper before God.

So likewise, the Holy Spirit gives many gifts of different abilities to fulfil what God wants us to do. But if we depend on our natural abilities and say, "I can't do anything", then we are not benefiting from the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to us to help us to develop well.

We do not have time to go through these issues sufficiently for today. So the Lord willing, we will continue and consider: in the Old Testament, how God worked amongst the people with regard to the working of the Holy Spirit and how that looks forward to the New Testament times; and how the baptism with the Holy Spirit is associated with the New Covenant that the Lord Jesus Christ established when He came to this world and He died on the cross.

If we appreciate these areas more fully, it can help us in deepening our worship of God, in responding more deeply to Him and in ensuring that our response is good.

So the main issue I want to emphasize today is to bring to your attention the importance of recognizing the difference between experience and moral transformation. The two are related but not the same.

We can go through many positive experiences and yet morally become negative.

We can go through many morally negative experiences and become positive morally, but we must be very careful to ensure that at all times, our spirit is right and we do not enter into morally negative situations because of self-confidence, arrogance, lack of dependence on God and not being prayerful because that will put us in grave danger. The evil one will have a lot of power to work in that situation.

But the responsibility is ours, ultimately: We will have to make the choice: What do you choose? Where do you want to go? How do you want to live your life?

What activities you want to be involved in, how you want to spend your time, your resources: all that you can decide, but there will be consequences.

Why do you decide in that way – on what basis? What is your intention? What is your motive? Is it truly for God, to honour Him? Is it for yourself? Is it to follow the world?

All these will determine the outcome in your moral character.

So the baptism with the Holy Spirit is very important, but only if we respond well will that become truly helpful to us. If we respond well, yes, it becomes very, very helpful and important for our lives.

So then, let us as we come before the Lord, ask Him to help us to appreciate these issues more clearly and to know what He requires of us: How should we respond? How can we develop well long term, so that in eternity, when we reach heaven, we can be truly glad, we can rejoice deeply that we have lived well and God is pleased with us?

Let us ask the Lord to search our hearts and help us to recognize if there are areas that need to be corrected, that we will acknowledge, come to Him for forgiveness and seek His help.

Let us ask the Lord to enable us to live well, that the Holy Spirit will empower us to live, to glorify the Lord Jesus.