

There never has been a time in the history of the world when the church was faced with so many problems and at the same time had such tremendous opportunities. The question is, how can the problems be solved, and how can we take advantage of present opportunities?

Did you ever stop to think that Jesus' greatest concern was not that great people of the world should be favourable to his cause? It was not that great churches, temples, and monuments be built in his memory; it was not that the churches should possess an abundance of wealth; nor was it primarily that preachers should be highly educated and oratorical. It was not that many things upon which we too frequently place supreme emphasis, but His chief concern was that His followers received the promise of the Father – that they be filled with the Spirit. This is the greatest and foundational need of our churches today, our people and all who work and support the church. Call it what you may, argue about it, and even deny it, but it still stands out as the mightiest defence and the greatest power for offensive action that has been to us, has been given to us by God.

I have suggested many times before, we are going at this backwards. We stress people, methods, and money. What we need is a mighty infilling and overflowing of the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit can convert, regenerate, cleanse, empower, melt, mold, and make us. *Being*, must come before *doing*. We have criticized the people of the church because they are failing to manifest the fruits of Canaan. We have failed to recognize that many of them are still feeding on the garlic roots of Egypt.

Two things are absolutely indispensable, before humanity can manifest the fruit of the Spirit. First, there must be a personal, definite, heartfelt, soul regenerating, mind renewing, life changing experience with the Lord in saving power. That is the first stone in Christian life in service. Second, there must be just as definite, just as great, just as certain and just as personal a transaction in receiving the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 6, the apostles advised the church to select seven deacons to assist in discharging duties concerned with the church. They were recommended *to choose seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, (vs. 3)*. I fear that too often in ordaining ministers and electing church officials, we are more concerned about education, talent, influence, popularity, and many other things rather than the infilling with the Spirit. In many instances, a serious mistake is being made along this line. A person who appears somewhat pious may go to college for four or five years and then to seminary. We then tell that person they are fitted to undertake the ministry, and we lay hands on them, commissioning them to this solemn work. Such a person certainly is not prepared if that is all they have. It is all right to stress human qualifications, preparation, activity, and ability, but if the Holy Spirit is lacking, all of their efforts will be vain and futile. The one indispensable qualification for both minister and laity is the Spirit filled life.

Who is to be filled? Just before His ascension, Jesus met his disciples for the last time and repeated His command that they should *not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, (Acts 1:4)*, and reiterated his promise that they should be, *baptized with the Holy Ghost a few days after. (Acts 1:5)*. Soon they witnessed Him ascending into the heavens and then they were left alone with His promise, that another comforter would come and His promises of the power was ringing in their ears. For 10 days, these born again, believing disciples waited eagerly for the promise of the Father. They adjusted

their priorities and forgot personal ambitions; they stopped to judging and criticizing one another and in unity of brotherly love, and *with one accord* they prayed, they waited, and they rejoiced.

Finally, on the day of Pentecost, when they were all present, the windows of heaven were opened, and such a blessing as they could not contain was poured out upon them. That was the Inauguration Day for the church; it was the dawn of the dispensation of the Holy Spirit; it was the beginning of the days of power and revival.

In the morning of that day, there were only a few Christians in the whole world. They had no church buildings, no colleges, no religious books, and no New Testament. They were poor, despised, and uneducated, but before night, they had enrolled 3000 converts from among those who, a few weeks before, had crucified the Lord. What was the secret of it all? It was power! What kind of power was it? The power of God, the Holy Spirit. He had come according to His promise, and this work was His work, and they were his instruments.

For three years the disciples had been in close companionship with Jesus. From His lips, they had heard the great truths of His Gospel; He had commissioned them to preach the Kingdom of God, to cast out devils and had endowed them with the gifts of healing. They had been eyewitnesses to His miracles and the inner message of His parables had been explained to them. They had seen Him ridiculed, mocked, abused, beaten, spit upon, crucified, and had also seen and talked with Him after the resurrection. Yet, with all these wonderful privileges, these men were still unqualified to live the life and perform the work of the Master. They needed something more, and that something more was the abiding, comforting, and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

The command of Jesus was ringing in their ears, but they did not dare go on until they had received the indispensable equipment. This equipment, this presence, this power, and this person is what every born-again believer needs today. Repeated failures marked the work of these men before they were filled with the Spirit. Their efforts were not blessed with the salvation of souls. They no doubt were doing a splendid and commendable work, but it was only after they were Spirit filled that their work really began to tell. Without a doubt, more people were saved under Peter's first sermon on the day of Pentecost than by all the disciples together, and all their ministry before that time.

The reason why so much of our present day religious activity yields such little result is because too many people fail in recognizing the need of being Spirit filled. Many know Jesus; they love Him; they follow Him – some near and some afar off; but, like the Ephesians, they have not received the Holy Spirit since they believed. God has no favourites. The promise of power is to every believer. He is not out doing one here and another there, with power from on high, for some reason known only to Him. If there was ever a person who was filled and thrilled with the Spirit of God and who had a burning message which was divinely inspired, it was Peter. Here is what he said regarding this matter:

Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. (Acts 2: 38,39).

I'm sure this statement is very clear. My prayer is that everyone who had not yet been filled with the Spirit will realize that the promise is to you and me and that we will meet the conditions and experience the overflowing fullness of life.

When can we be filled? I have had many people ask, *when should I be filled with the Spirit?* My answer is, *if you are His child you should ask God to fill you right now.* In reading the Book of Acts, we are impressed with the fact that immediately after the people had confessed their sins and were safe, the disciples urged them to receive the Holy Spirit. As soon as God reveals this to the believer, they should immediately walk in the light. It does not matter whether it is God's call to conversion or His call to be filled with the Spirit, there should be obedience as soon as the need is revealed. The Hebrew writer very forcibly emphasizes this truth when he says today, *if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.* (Hebrews 4 :7).

The same writer also very impressively states: *let us therefore fear, lest, a promise been left us of entering into his rest, and any of you should seem to come short of it.* (Hebrews 4:1).

One of the grave dangers of the Christian experience is for believers to fail in asking and trusting God to fill them with His Spirit. Every believer needs the instruction, guiding, comforting, and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in their life and as your work, and as your pastor, I urge you to obey the injunction of God's word to be filled with the Spirit.

The purpose of being filled. God certainly has a definite purpose in commending His children to be filled with the Spirit. We should be appreciative of the fact that this purpose can be realized. As sinners, the one thing that engaged our attention was our guilt and condemnation, the consequent results of our sins, and finally, how we can find deliverance from all this and obtain the favour of God. Sinners under conviction for sin do not feel the need of being filled with the Spirit. Their great concern is to have their sins forgiven and pardoned. After sins are covered by the blood of Christ, peace and joy are flood the soul and then there is naturally a desire in this born-again believer to live an overcoming life.

Old things are passed away, and God has given that person new desires, new ambitions, new aspirations, new purposes, and a new spirit, and now having had their sins put away, they want to be a victorious Christian. What a grand thing it is that God has made it possible for every individual to be an overcome. John says, *you are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in this world.* (1 John 4:4).

There are many people who have been born again, but because they have never received the light of the Spirit filled life, or if they did receive the light, they failed to walk in it, living up and down lives and having constant trouble in being overcome by the world, the flesh, and the devil. God not only saves sinners in order that they may go to heaven, but they He also saves them to be a blessing in this world. This can be fully realized only when they are Spirit filled.

This is also true with the church as a whole. God did not say that we were to go into all the world and give lectures on monkey-ology, organize cocktail parties, have card parties, serve chicken suppers, operate dance halls and bowling alleys. God has never needed the devil's co-operation and the devil's contraptions to run His business. And He doesn't need them today. If God can get a few people who are saved and filled with the Spirit, He can still put great armies to flight and turn the world upside down. It is surely a sad sight to see an institution, claiming to be a church of God, undertake to do with organizations, entertainments, and festivals, the work that can only be done by the endowment of human power which comes with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The apostle realized this when he said, *we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* (Ephesians 6:12).

The inducement of power is not only to enable people to be victorious over Satan and sin, but for the purpose of liberating lost in hell bound souls from the chains and dungeons of the devil. The work of winning souls from sin to Christ is not alone the work of a minister, but is the duty and privilege of everyone who is saved by the blood of Jesus.

With such a tremendous task before us, it is a dangerous and arrogant presumption to undertake the work of Christ and at the same time, refuse to accept the equipment and the power that He has promised and provided. Why should people go forth into battle against these many foes in their own strength?

When our citizens go into battle our government furnishes them with arms and ammunition. Those who enlist in the services of the King of Kings may be sure God will not ask them to go to war against the diabolical forces of Hell without ample equipment.

For a moment I ask you to consider, what are you doing? Are you battling against the mighty forces of Satan in your own strength or have you faithfully, humbly, and submissively waited before God for the coming of his Holy Spirit and the power which His coming brings?

Let us remember then, that God's purpose in saving us, cleansing our hearts, and filling us with His Spirit, is not only that our personal need may be met and desires satisfied but that our souls will be saved and His kingdom enlarged.

There are multitudes of people whom God cannot trust with the power of the Holy Spirit. Their hearts are full of pride, and they only want more power so they can be whatever they are in the church. Some preachers, teachers and so on because this will make them look great in the eyes of their fellow beings. They are more concerned about the applause of the people around them than the approval of God. It is not spiritual power they want, but rather a position.

The Spirit-filled life is not an end in itself. We are to be channels, not cisterns. A cistern full of water is worthless until the water begins to flow. Jesus said, *whoever believes on me, as the Scriptures have said, out of their inmost being shall flow rivers of living water.* (John 7:38).

God will never fill anyone with His Spirit just to make them holy, happy or great in the eyes of their brothers or sisters. After Pentecost, Peter was very careful to attribute the glowing success to the power of the Holy Spirit and not to himself. Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, was hated, despised, and then stoned to death. I do not know what it will mean for you to be filled with the Spirit – it may mean opposition, unkindness, sarcasm, hatred, or persecution – but whatever the cost, I am sure it will be worthwhile in the end.

It will mean that people will see the life of Christ in you. They will recognize and know you are filled with the fullness of God. They will see that you are seeking not your own interest, or pleasures, or ease, or reputation. Your life will proclaim the message of Paul as in Galatians 2:20 (RV), *I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me.*

How to be filled. Let me conclude, that in order to receive this fullness, there must be purity of motive. There must also be a full and glad surrender. Many times, sinners find there is one sin, some pet Agag, that they do not want to part with. The same thing is true with those who desire to be filled with the

Spirit. It is really a foolish thing not to give our all to God. He has given, and is continually giving, His best to us, and we should not hesitate to give our best to Him.

There must be *implicit trust*. When the heart says, *none of self and all to the Thee*, then God will meet the need. Some people whom I know, and I believe they are very sincere, say they are waiting for the Holy Spirit. Some of them have been doing this for a long, long time. The pre-Pentecostal waiting does not refer to us. Trusting is the medium through which we are filled. The first disciples had to wait because the Holy Spirit was not yet given. On that eventful day, He did come, and thank God, He has never been withdrawn. Now we are to seek and claim His presence by prayer, for Jesus plainly said, *the Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask for Him* (Luke 11:13).

How many people may be saying,

Lord Jesus, I long to be perfectly whole;

I want Thee forever to live in my soul;

Breakdown every idle, cast out every foe;

Now wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

Amen.