

The Gift Of Jesus For A New Beginning

I read where someone suggested there were four common obstacles to people becoming Christians. The 1st was *content*. There was something they didn't know or understand about the gospel, the grace of God, the need for the sacrifice of Jesus. They needed explanation. The 2nd was *coherence* (or credibility). These people understood but didn't believe it was credible. If these people were exposed to thoughtful Christian reasoning and evidence, they often discovered the Christian faith was more coherent than any alternatives. The 3rd hang up was *cost*. What would it cost me in terms of changing my way of life, if I were to trust in Jesus and follow him? That person has to wrestle with whether or not the gift that God gives them in salvation is worth the inevitable changes that will flow from it. The 4th issue was *confidence*. By which he meant that some people who are drawn to Christ are afraid that they could never live a truly Christian life. This is the person who looks at the life and teaching of Jesus about forgiving and loving others and says that appeals to me, but I could never live like that. Of course, the message of the gospel for a person like that is that you don't earn the grace of God you receive it. You don't change yourself to make yourself acceptable to God. You trust in Jesus as your Savior, and he begins to change you from within.

The popular author Tim Keller says for the person who says *I just don't see how I can do it*, Jesus says, *I'm not just giving you a blueprint to follow. I'm sending you a counselor to live with you*. The moment you become a Christian, you enter into deep spiritual therapy, and you'll be in therapy for the rest of your life. Another way to stress this is to say that ***authentic Christianity is life lived under the influence of the Holy Spirit***. This important truth is embedded in the story of the baptism of Jesus. As we've begun the story of Jesus, we've looked at some things out of order. The calling of the first disciples and the way the gospel of Mark pictures the heart of his early ministry. Those stories set the tone for all that follows. And there were some scheduling reasons for beginning with those stories. This weekend I want to step back to how the public life of Jesus actually began. It began with his baptism. Why is this so important? Because it marks a turning point, the beginning of something new distinctive about who Christ is and what Christ will do for all who believe in him.

In his baptism...

I. JESUS INITIATES A NEW BEGINNING WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

A. His baptism is the beginning of a life and ministry that will bring God and his people together in a new way.

1. It is the act of identification with his people. John was baptizing people who were repenting of their sins and turning to God. Jesus had no sins from which to repent, but in his baptism, he was saying these are my people. I'm with them and *for* them.

2. It was an act that occasioned God's approval. In **verse 11**, the voice from heaven says, "*You are my beloved Son; with whom I am well pleased.*"

3. It was an act that brought empowerment for Jesus in his humanity. **Mark 1:10-11** *And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.*

B. The life that Jesus lives and the life that Jesus gives is going to be a life enlightened and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

1st. The story of the descent of the Holy Spirit in the Baptism of Jesus is telling us that Jesus is initiating something dramatically new. For most contemporary Christians, the idea of the Holy Spirit appearing in the form of the dove is familiar, but that is because of this event, which is recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. For us today, it is a familiar image, but that was not the case when Mark wrote. There was only one place in the Jewish tradition or the Hebrew Bible where the Holy Spirit was compared to a dove. It was in the Aramaic version or translation of the Hebrew Bible, which was very widely used in the days of Jesus. It was in the story of creation. In **Genesis 1:2**, where it said that darkness was upon the face of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters, and God said, let there be light. And thus begins the creation story. The Aramaic version says the Spirit of God fluttered over the face of the deep *like a dove*, and God said let there be light. Remember, John 1 says that Jesus is the true light coming into the world to give light to all men? The Baptism of Jesus is the beginning of his public ministry, and it is marked out as the beginning of a new creation. That's how significant, groundbreaking, important it is! Jesus initiates a new world and a new creation and a new kind of person and a new way of living.

2nd The descent of the Spirit in the Baptism of Jesus is telling us that the newness Jesus is about the Holy Spirit. Verse 10, *And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.* The Holy Spirit descends on him in a visible demonstration of that which will be distinctive of his earthly life. Only two of the gospels tell the story of the birth of Christ, but all four tell the story of how the Holy Spirit came upon him in a gentle but dramatic and visible manner accompanied by the Father's approval. If we compare the gospel of John, we would see that he underscores something he wants to make clear. In **John 1:32** and **33**, he says the Spirit of God came to rest and then *remained on* Jesus. Before Jesus came, there were times when the Spirit came upon someone to empower them for serving God, but there was no sense of the Spirit permanently remaining. With Jesus, it is different. The Spirit stays with him.

Here's why this is so important. It means...

II. JESUS CALLS US INTO A NEW WAY OF LIVING IN THE SPIRIT.

All four of the gospels mention the Spirit coming to rest on Jesus at his baptism. This is important because the whole life of Jesus is marked by the presence of the Spirit of God. The gospels repeatedly tell us that Jesus was led and empowered by the Spirit. **Acts 10:38** says *God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.*

A. Jesus shows us a new way to live.

1. There are some things about Jesus that are so unique – they are beyond us. That's why we worship him. Jesus is unique because he is God incarnate. The Bible's teaching is that there is one God who exists as three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. These three spiritual persons share a unity, an essence so absolute, complete, uncompromised, and eternal that you can only rightly describe the three persons as *one* God. The once-in-all-of-history miracle of the incarnation is that God the Son, came into our world and became one of us. Without losing the essential qualities that make him God, he took on all the essential qualities of humanity. He kept his divine nature, but he also possessed a fully human nature with all our human frailties except for sin. He is unique in His absolute authority. He is unique in his power over the forces of nature. He commands the winds and the waves! The disciples witness this worship him and say, *"Truly you are the Son of God."* (Matthew 14:33)

There is much that is unique about Jesus. That's why we worship him.
2. There is much that is beautifully human about Jesus. That's why we can follow him. What we see in Jesus is not just a God treading the earth in a human body but a perfect human in total dependence on the Holy Spirit. Sure, Jesus was more in tune with the Holy Spirit than anyone before or after Him. But He is still our example. The life of Jesus represents the ideal for humanity: the grace, the purity, the humility, and the love of a human being rightly related to God and dependent on the guidance and power of God's Spirit.

Sinclair Ferguson is Bible teacher and respected Theologian who writes and speaks often about the Holy Spirit. In an interview with the *Desiring God* ministry he said, *"The best way to think about the Holy Spirit is to think of him as the closest companion of the Lord Jesus."*¹ The Holy Spirit was with him at his baptism and temptation and through every aspect of his life. At the end, when every other companion left him, Hebrews tells us the Holy Spirit empowered him in his sacrifice and vindicated him in his resurrection.² Ferguson adds this, *There are not two Holy Spirits – the Holy Spirit that was on Jesus and the Holy Spirit that indwells me. The Holy Spirit, who indwells me, is actually the Holy Spirit who lived and accompanied the Lord Jesus through his ministry.* It was popular years ago to see people wearing bracelets with the initials WWJD. It stood for the question: *What would Jesus do?* Consider this, part of the answer to that question is always that whatever Jesus would do, he would do in dependence on the guidance, and power of the Holy Spirit. How much are we like that?

But notice Jesus doesn't just show us a new way to live...

B. Jesus empowers us for this new way of living.

Mark 1:7-8: *"After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

1. Every believer is baptized with the Spirit by Jesus. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, Peter in **Acts 2** says that Jesus, having died for our sins, and risen from the dead has now been exalted to the right hand of God, and has *poured out* the gift of the Holy Spirit for all who believe in Him. This picture of the Holy Spirit being poured out is one of several strong images used in Acts wind, fire, water, baptism, the Spirit poured out by Jesus. It's clear that something important is being said. What is it? *It is that authentic Christian life is life in the Spirit. It is life lived under the influence of the Holy Spirit.*³

*Over the years, I've had people say: "I don't get this Holy Spirit thing." Do I have to have an experience to know I am a Christian? Isn't it enough to come to church, believe in God, and do your best? It is good to ask those questions. The answer is that while you don't have to have a particular experience, you absolutely do have to have the reality of the Holy Spirit. In **Romans 8:9**, Scripture says, *Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.**

2. How can you know if you have the Holy Spirit? Well, have you really experienced a genuine awareness of your need for God and for grace? Have you experienced conviction for your sin and an emptiness that thirst for connection with God and his love? Have you come to Christ and put your faith in Him? *The evidence of God's Spirit at work in you is not perfect sinlessness or perfect happiness.* But there is a stirring up of spiritual life. There is a new birth, and with that, there are new convictions and attractions. *Conviction*, that's a Christian word for a growing awareness of and aversion to what is wrong in your actions and attitudes. *Attraction*: there is a desire to know God, to relate to God to want to grow spiritually in love and good works. People who have the Holy Spirit experience real struggles and many sins. But you do not receive the Holy Spirit without *any* evidence of new life at all!

C. Jesus wants us to follow him in relation to the Holy Spirit.

The gospel of Luke tells us that after his baptism, Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit. Later Paul writes to all Christians in **Ephesians 5:1** and says, *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.* Don't think you cannot integrate a deeply spiritual life into the daily grind of work, school or home. The Holy Spirit is for all of life. *Authentic Christianity is life lived under the Spirit's influence.*

1. What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? I saw an internet meme recently, and in the first frame, a man is saying: *"I've always heard it's not how many times you fall down but whether you keep getting back up that matters."* The next frame is a police officer saying, *"Yes, but that doesn't apply in a DUI test."* What is DUI? Driving Under the Influence. There are degrees of influence. If you drink enough what you are drinking affects your faculties and reactions. The Bible actually uses this analogy for our relationship with the Spirit. When you are attentive to and submissive to the influence of the Spirit, the Bible says you are filled with the Spirit. To the degree that your emotional, intellectual and volitional life is *under the influence* of the Holy Spirit you are filled with the Spirit.

2. Faith in Jesus gives you the gift of a continual source of spiritual influence. Drink deeply and continually. I was intrigued recently when I found a scholar, famous for his detailed reasoning and academic writing speaking so eloquently about the inward influence of the Holy Spirit. The late John Murray was a warrior and a scholar, he fought in WW1 with the kilted Black Watch regiment of the Royal Highlanders and lost two brothers and an eye in battle. After the war, He earned his doctorate and then taught theology from the 1930s to the 1960s first at Princeton and then at *Westminster Theological Seminary*. He was known for his emphasis on the authority of Scripture and for a careful, rational approach to Christian faith. He wrote this:

As the Holy Spirit is operative in us to the doing of God's will, we shall have feelings, impressions, convictions, urges, inhibitions, impulses, burdens, resolutions.

Illumination and direction by the Spirit through the Word of God will focus themselves in our consciousness in these ways... We must not think [these things] are irrational or fanatically mystical." ⁴

I love what he wrote. However the truth could be stated more strongly. Not only must we *not* think of these things as irrational or fanatical, we must test them certainly, but treasure them and be attentive to them. To be filled with the Spirit you have be sensitive, open, and submissive to how the Holy Spirit illuminates and applies the wisdom of God's word to the whole of our lives. That's what Jesus wants and you need. The Holy Spirit in you counsels you and works in you to heighten your desire for relationship with God. Don't quench that, treasure it and nurture it. The Holy Spirit stirs up the prayer that cries *Abba, Father*. He causes our soul to rise up in worship, overflow in love, bow down in humility, open up in repentance and gratitude. To the degree that you believe in his presence, yield to his leading and rely on his working in you he fills you. Under his influence you grow more like Jesus.

CONCLUSION

In Jesus Christ, God came down into this world in love and died on the cross to pay for our sins. That's what it cost him so that you could be redeemed and receive the gift of the Spirit through faith in Jesus. He rose again and gives the gift of the Spirit so that you can live the life of the Spirit. Believe in His presence, be sensitive and submissive to his leadings, rely on his power, and grow more and more like Jesus.

Amen

Prayer of Response

Our Father in heaven, through your Son, our Savior Jesus, you promise to give your children the gift of the Spirit. So we come, asking, seeking, and knocking. (Luke 11:11-13) Strengthen us by your Spirit in our innermost being so that Christ will dwell richly in our heart by faith. Enable us be deeply rooted in the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge so that we might filled up to all of your fullness. (Ephesians 3:14-19) Deepen our faith in and dependence on your Spirit. Heighten our sensitivity to his holy and gracious influences in our hearts that we might truly know and follow Jesus, We ask this in his name. Amen.

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/the-holy-spirit-jesus-closest-companion>

² Hebrews 9:14, Romans 1:4

³ 1 Corinthians 12:13 uses the same Greek construction as that used in Mark to describe the baptism of the Spirit as that which unites all believers into one body in Christ.

⁴ John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, ed. Murray, 1977, 4 vols. (1977), 1.188 Note: In his brief treatise on "The Guidance of the Holy Spirit," Murray is deeply concerned that we distinguish the work of the Holy Spirit in giving us illumination from that of revelation. He believe it is best to say that revelation ended with the completion of Scripture but the Illumination of the truth of Scripture continues in the lives of Christians through the Holy Spirit. At times his arguments can seem like splitting hairs, but he is concerned to preserve the uniqueness of the Bible while also acknowledging the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.