

At Ephesus Paul found some disciples and asked them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' They answered, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.'

Acts 19.1-2.

Extraordinary! These believers at Ephesus had never even *heard* of the Holy Spirit. But then, neither had our friend Apollos whom we met last week. He knew only the baptism of John the Baptist, 18.25b... So what was the baptism that John was offering? 19.4 tells us that it was a baptism of *repentance*...

If you turn to p1029, to *Luke 3* you will see what John's message was: 3.8a... He was demanding a complete change-around in the people's attitude. Stop the greed and start sharing, vv10-11... Tax-collectors, stop your cheating, vv12-13... Soldiers, stop abusing your power, v14... He was a brave man to challenge the public, but they *responded*, and were baptised.

I *long* for God to raise up a prophet again like John the Baptist to call our own nation to repentance. There is so much rottenness, greed and sheer childish stupidity in our society. But where is today's John the Baptist to say, 'Enough! Enough of this filth, this greed and stupidity. Stop it and return to God!' When was the last time we heard the Abp of Canterbury confront us like that? We need someone to call us back to God.

But desperately as we need a modern-day John the Baptist to call us to national repentance, Jesus once strangely said of his cousin, 'There is no-one greater than John, yet the one who is *least* in the kingdom of God is greater than he,' (*Lk7.28*). What did the least in the kingdom of God have which John did *not* have? The answer is the Holy Spirit. Apollos knew about repentance, but nothing of the Spirit. And so it was with these

disciples in Ephesus. So Paul laid hands on them and they received the Spirit. Immediately they did things they couldn't do before: they spoke in tongues and prophesied, *Acts 19.5-6...*

Two baptisms are contrasted here for us: the baptism of repentance, and the baptism in the Spirit. What's the difference? *Repentance* is what we do for God. We make the decision to be done with our past ways and follow God. Baptism in the *Spirit* is what God does for us. The Spirit came on those disciples and they were now able to speak in tongues and prophesy. The Spirit came on Peter who earlier had denied Christ. Now, with the Spirit's power, he was able to stand up to the Jews who had murdered Jesus only weeks earlier. Now, Peter was able to heal the sick and raise the dead like Dorcas.

And here's the crucial point. Is Christianity about what we can do for God? more morality, more law, more attempts at good works and better behaviour? Or is it about what God can do for us? Is Christianity *Good Advice*, or is it *Good News*?

Recently I heard a story about a young student for the ministry called Jason. He went to a fast-food restaurant where he saw three men order food at the drive-in window. They parked up to eat their food, and Jason went over to them. He was keen and wanted to tell them about Jesus! But he noticed a lad in the back with a broken leg. Jason jumped in and prayed for the Holy Spirit to heal him. And he *did* heal him. The youths were so stunned that they opened the boot of their car and threw out all the drugs stashed inside. Jason brought the three to his church and it wasn't long before they had come to Christ.

Do you believe that the Holy Spirit can do that? And if

you don't, why do you pray each Sunday, 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done *on earth*, as it is in heaven?'

Can I tell you why people don't come to our churches? It's because we're useless. It's just talk, words. They can see that we don't really believe that God is able. We behave as though he can do no more than we can do. Nearly everything we do in this church, we could do without God, couldn't we? That's just 'religion' and religion is 'form without power'. People see in the church just weakness; they want a God who can *do stuff!* who can get slaves out of Egypt; who can heal the sick, free the addicts, raise the dead. They want a God who is able. Aren't we like the Ephesians who had never heard of the Spirit? 19.2-3...

When people come to our churches, all they get is moralising. They want to see amazing things happening. They want to see God working in power. Do we really believe in the supernatural? Do you really believe in miracles? *I do.* My baby didn't live long, but he was most certainly a miracle. It's a miracle that Laura and I are still here in one piece. The doctors had given up all hope of Bobby Pearson. One night I prayed over him and nearly 15 years later he's still with us.

God is on the throne. Nothing is impossible with him. Through the Spirit Jesus conquered illness and death, the domain of satan, and still today the Spirit is powerfully at work among us. If we don't believe in the powerful presence of God among us every day, why should the world want to join the church? Are we believers at *all*? Pray for the Holy Spirit to come into your life. Let's stop the weakness, the talking and the defeatism. Let's proclaim a gospel of *power* and victory.