

# FROM COWARDICE TO COURAGE

What the Holy Spirit did for a fearful group of disciples hiding in the upper room, He can still do for you!

BY SABRINA PETERSEN

**B**ang, bang! The wooden door creaked at its hinges. “Who could it be?” fearful whispers passed among the men huddled in the upper room. Did their fate await them outside the door? Had soldiers found their hiding place?

Someone blew out the candles lighting the room, while another—perhaps John—crept to the door. Pushing it ever so slightly, he peered out.

“He’s alive! My Master—Jesus—is alive!” shouts of joy echoed into the room as Mary tried to catch her breath.

Could it be true? Could the hopes of these 11 cowardly men still be fulfilled?

Soon, Jesus would appear to them too—not just for a moment, or an hour, or a day, but for 40 days. He would instruct them and redirect their understanding to all they had misunderstood in regard to His life, death, and resurrection. And He would leave them a promise: “Wait for the promise of the Father...For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.... Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Acts 1:4, 5, 8, KJV.

They would again wait in that

upper room, but not with fear; they would expectantly plead for the promise and come forth fearless and empowered. What would make the difference?

## THE EARLY RAIN

While on earth, Jesus spoke some poignant words to the woman of Samaria: “The water that I shall give...will become...a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” John 4:14.\* The Greek word for fountain in this passage gives the idea of “gushing.” This water was not a stagnant pond or a small, pitiful fountain; it was an artesian well.

We often use this verse in reference to Jesus and salvation in general. But Jesus had a very specific

event in mind: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that was to take place on the Day of Pentecost. John 7:38, 39. John the Baptist called it the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Matt. 3:11.

All throughout the Bible, the Holy Spirit is compared to water. In Isaiah 44:3, God promises, "I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground: I will pour My Spirit on your descendants." Joel 2:23 speaks of the "former rain" or the "early rain"—a prophecy which Peter recognized as being fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost: "But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh.'" Acts 2:16, 17.

The term "early rain" comes from the agricultural cycle in the Middle East. At the beginning of the growing season, just after seeds had been planted, the early rains would come down to help the seeds germinate, grow, and develop. Then, right before harvesttime, showers known as "latter rains" would finish ripening the grain. The Bible fittingly uses these terms as metaphors for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

### THE DAY OF PENTECOST

On the Day of Pentecost, when Jesus began His work as our High Priest in heaven, the Holy Spirit could begin His unique role on earth: "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.... He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you." John 16:8, 14.

The Holy Spirit could not fulfill His role to glorify Jesus until Jesus had glorified His Father through His life, death, and resurrection. John 17:4; 12:28, 32, 33. Only after these events could the Holy Spirit be poured out upon the apostles to signify Jesus' ascension to the right hand of the Father. Acts 2:33. Then, the Holy Spirit could convict

the world of sin because Jesus had taken our penalty for sin. The Holy Spirit could also convict the world of righteousness because Jesus had lived a righteous life which He could bestow on us. And the Holy Spirit could convict the world of the judgment because Jesus stands as our Mediator in that judgment.

### EMPOWERED TO WITNESS

People today associate the Holy Spirit with fluffy feelings and a kind of transitory supernatural experience. But the purpose of Pentecost was not for thrill. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was what took weak, cowardly men, hiding in an upper

*The Holy Spirit combines our natural abilities with unique spiritual gifts and empowers us to share God's love.*

room, and empowered them to shamelessly "preach the gospel to every creature" as Jesus had commanded. Mark 16:15, KJV.

In fact, the Holy Spirit was to bestow special gifts, referred to as "spiritual gifts." 1 Cor. 12:1. He would give different gifts to individuals depending on what was needed to most effectively spread the gospel. These included the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, healings, working of miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Verses 7–10.

On the Day of Pentecost, these spiritual gifts were strongly evident: "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.... They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Acts 2:2, 4. As a result, the people of all different nations heard the gospel preached in their own languages, and 3,000 people were converted in one day!

This was not a human achievement by any means. Remember,

the Jews had very strong prejudices against the gospel, so Peter's preaching alone would have failed to change their attitudes. But the Holy Spirit, through the gifts He bestowed, pierced their hearts with the truth. Acts 2:37. The gospel came "in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction." 1 Thess. 1:5.

### PENTECOST CONTINUED

But is that where it all ended?

Hardly! All throughout the book of Acts, we find the Holy Spirit being poured out again and again. See Acts 4:31; 10:44–48; 11:16–18; 19:6. Pentecost was only the beginning!

The promise of the Holy Spirit was not just for that generation, either. Jesus promised that the influence of His Holy Spirit would be with those who love Him and obey Him to the very end of

time—"forever." John 14:15, 16. "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." Acts 2:39. That includes us!

You see, the evidence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the disciples was not only gifts but also the fruit of the Spirit—Christlikeness. Eph. 5:22; Acts 4:32–35. Pentecost continues with us daily as we seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts and use us to witness to others. The former rain of the Holy Spirit is accomplishing in God's people the spiritual growth which will be ripened by the outpouring of the latter rain in the end times.

Today, do you find yourself fearful, small, and inadequate for God's calling on your life? Don't be discouraged! The Holy Spirit still seeks weak, cowardly men and women whom He can transform into channels for the water of life. ❖

\*Verses taken from the NKJV unless otherwise specified.

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