



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of July 16, 2023

Weekly Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, come. As I study your Word this week, give me eyes to see and ears to hear. Help me to understand the way to go and make me more like Jesus. May I connect with the Holy Spirit so I can experience the joy of walking with you and feeling your presence with me on every step of life's journey. Amen.

Monday, July 17

Scripture: Micah 3:8-12

But me! I am filled with power,
 with the spirit of the LORD,
 with justice and might,
 to declare to Jacob his wrongdoing and to Israel his sin!
Hear this, leaders of the house of Jacob,
 rulers of the house of Israel,
 you who reject justice and make crooked all that is straight,
 who build Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with injustice!
Her officials give justice for a bribe,
 and her priests teach for hire.
Her prophets offer divination for silver,
 yet they rely on the LORD, saying,
 "Isn't the LORD in our midst?
 Evil won't come upon us!"
Therefore, because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field,
 Jerusalem will become piles of rubble,
 and the temple mount will become an overgrown mound.

Observation

The prophet Micah said the power of the Lord's Spirit sent him to warn the people of Judah that their unjust ways were leading to terrible consequences. Other "prophets," he said, claimed the Spirit gave them "windy" messages that all would be well (Micah 2:11). The Hebrew word for wind and spirit is the same word (*ruach*). These prophets will have gone about claiming to speak with the spirit when their words are wind. Micah really does speak in the power of the wind—Yahweh's wind or spirit.

Application

Later the prophet Jeremiah also preached strong warnings. The officials in Jerusalem wanted to execute him for such an “unpatriotic” message. But “a few of the community elders” told the crowd they should listen, and quoted Micah 3:12 as evidence they shouldn’t kill prophets for delivering warnings from God (Jeremiah 26:1-19). What makes it important for you to listen to prophetic voices even when they tell you things you don’t want to hear?

Prayer

Lord God, you are a truth teller, so at times you need to warn me. But I thank you that the great ultimate truth you tell me is that, even beyond sad consequences, you always offer hope and restoration. Amen.

Tuesday, July 18

Scripture: Luke 1:28-38

When the angel came to her, he said, “Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!” She was confused by these words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. The angel said, “Don’t be afraid, Mary. God is honoring you. Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father. He will rule over Jacob’s house forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom.” Then Mary said to the angel, “How will this happen since I haven’t had sexual relations with a man?” The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God’s Son. Look, even in her old age, your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son. This woman who was labeled ‘unable to conceive’ is now six months pregnant. Nothing is impossible for God.” Then Mary said, “I am the Lord’s servant. Let it be with me just as you have said.” Then the angel left her.

Observation

God’s messenger promised that Mary, young and unmarried, would have a baby. Since human biology (Mary was a virgin) ruled pregnancy out, she logically asked, “How will this happen?” We often overlook this as we read the Christmas story, but the heavenly messenger said the Holy Spirit (“the power of the Most High”) would come over her. That was the message Mary trusted as she replied, “Let it be with me just as you have said.”

Application

Given what we know of her culture, Mary was likely in her mid-teens when the angel Gabriel unfolded a task she couldn’t (and we can’t) fully understand. Part of the power and mystery of that task was the Holy Spirit’s role in bringing her unique child into being. How does Mary’s response (verse 38) speak to your heart? Are you willing to surrender to the

Holy Spirit's leading, even when that calls for trust that reaches beyond full intellectual understanding?

Prayer

Holy Spirit, Mary's mission was a one-of-a-kind event in history. Give me an openness to whatever more "ordinary" (yet vital) missions you call and direct me to live out for you. Amen.

Wednesday, July 19

Scripture: Acts 1:1-8

Theophilus, the first scroll I wrote concerned everything Jesus did and taught from the beginning, right up to the day when he was taken up into heaven. Before he was taken up, working in the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus instructed the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed them that he was alive with many convincing proofs. He appeared to them over a period of forty days, speaking to them about God's kingdom. While they were eating together, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised. He said, "This is what you heard from me: John baptized with water, but in only a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." As a result, those who had gathered together asked Jesus, "Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now?" Jesus replied, "It isn't for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority. Rather, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Observation

Before leaving earth, Jesus charged his followers to witness to him. But he didn't ask them to trust in their own courage or cleverness. He said they were to wait for the Holy Spirit's power to make them effective in carrying out their mission. Some have even suggested that instead of "Acts of the Apostles" we might better call Luke's second book something like "the Acts of the Holy Spirit (through the apostles)."

Application

Jesus "ordered" (not "requested") that his followers "...wait for what the Father had promised... in only a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4-5). Especially when there is a big job to do, most of us want to "get on with it," not "wait." (I know that's hard for me sometimes.) Have you ever had to wait for God to clarify or empower some worthy activity? What spiritual risks does running on ahead of God pose for a Christ-follower?

Prayer

Jesus, I love your audacity, telling 120 people in a small Roman province to reach "to the end of the earth." I love the Holy Spirit's power that made that mission a reality. Give me your vision and power today. Amen.

Thursday, July 20

Scripture: Acts 2:4, 4:8-12

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

Then Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, answered, "Leaders of the people and elders, are we being examined today because something good was done for a sick person, a good deed that healed him? If so, then you and all the people of Israel need to know that this man stands healthy before you because of the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is the stone you builders rejected; he has become the cornerstone! Salvation can be found in no one else. Throughout the whole world, no other name has been given among humans through which we must be saved."

Observation

At times, the Holy Spirit performed "signs and wonders" through the early Christians. (Luke used the phrase about 8 times in the book of Acts.) But the apostles never made healing, speaking in tongues or any other extraordinary happening an end in and of itself. When those things happened, they were vehicles the apostles used to turn people's attention to Jesus' power to save. (And in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 the apostle Paul warned that signs and wonders could also be used to deceive.)

Application

How many of today's avenues of healing were unavailable to the apostles and the people around them? To what extent do you believe God worked through available mechanisms, then and now? Do you believe the same Holy Spirit who healed through the apostles later led Christians to establish hospitals, medical schools and other ways of restoring people to health?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you came - and you sent the Spirit - to offer salvation, not just to put on a show. Whether in an amazing event or in quiet everyday change, work through my life to build your kingdom in human hearts. Amen.

Friday, July 21

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:27-30; Ephesians 4:11-13; Romans 12:6-8

You are the body of Christ and parts of each other. In the church, God has appointed first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, the ability to help others, leadership skills, different kinds of tongues. All aren't apostles, are they? All aren't prophets, are they? All aren't teachers, are they? All don't perform miracles, do they? All don't have gifts of healing, do they? All don't speak in different tongues, do they? All don't interpret, do they?

He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. His purpose was to equip God's people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ until we all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of God's Son. God's goal is for us to become mature adults—to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ.

We have different gifts that are consistent with God's grace that has been given to us. If your gift is prophecy, you should prophesy in proportion to your faith. If your gift is service, devote yourself to serving. If your gift is teaching, devote yourself to teaching. If your gift is encouragement, devote yourself to encouraging. The one giving should do it with no strings attached. The leader should lead with passion. The one showing mercy should be cheerful.

Observation

The apostle Paul wrote the three passages you just read over two thousand years ago, yet they are timeless, applying to each follower of Jesus in 2023. As the body of Christ, each member works together to create the whole. If one person with one gift is missing, the entire body suffers. As the body works together, unity and power come into being. We do not acquire or use these gifts on our own strength, but only through the Holy Spirit at work within us.

Application

Are you clear about which of these gifts the Spirit has given you? If not, ask one or more people who know you well what gifts they see in you. You can also [click here](#) to access a short spiritual gifts inventory. Once you have a sense of what your gifts are, how are you using those gifts to serve and build up the body of Christ? (We have Messiah Church members who are Spiritual Gift Coaches and available to work one-on-one with you to discern how best to use your gifts. If you're interested, just reply to this email and I'll get you connected to one.)

Prayer

Lord Jesus, the Spirit has gifted me in unique ways so that the Kingdom might come to earth. Help me to recognize the joy and responsibility of my giftedness. Amen.

Saturday, July 22

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I didn't come preaching God's secrets to you like I was an expert in speech or wisdom. I had made up my mind not to think about anything while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and to preach him as crucified. I stood in front of you with weakness, fear, and a lot of shaking. My message and my preaching weren't presented with convincing wise words but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of

power. I did this so that your faith might not depend on the wisdom of people but on the power of God.

Observation

Corinth was a large, wealthy city infamous for its immorality (which took some doing in the Roman Empire!). Preaching Jesus there must have been scary. And preaching Jesus “as crucified” was even harder. Scholar N. T. Wright showed the difficulty for Paul: “Imagine finding yourself standing up to speak...and having nothing to say except some stammering words about a strange thing that happened a few years ago which you know sounds crazy but which you happen to think contains the secret to everything.... Crucifixion was regarded in the ancient world as so horrible, so revolting, so degrading that you didn't mention it in polite society. Imagine someone at a fashionable dinner party going on loudly about how he'd seen rats eating the body of a dead dog in the street; that's the kind of impression you'd make by standing up in public and talking about someone being crucified.... But Paul believed, and the newfound faith and life of the Corinthian Christians bore this out, that this was the clue to the mystery of life.” (Wright, N.T., *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians* (The New Testament for Everyone) (pp. 21-23). Westminster John Knox Press.)

Application

Paul was well educated (Acts 22:3). Paul knew the culture and ideas of the Greco-Roman cities he preached in well enough to quote from their writers (Acts 17:28, Titus 1:12). But he also knew that his message sounded ridiculous to many of them (Acts 17:32). So he didn't rely on glib slogans or catchy marketing, but on the power of the Holy Spirit—and it worked. In Corinth, of all places, he saw the Spirit produce a vibrant, growing community of Christ-followers. They had lots of growing and learning to do (just read 1 and 2 Corinthians if you doubt it), but he trusted the Spirit to stay at work in their hearts and lives all through that process (1 Corinthians 6:11, 19, 2 Corinthians 13:13). How has the Holy Spirit's power shaped your faith and growth in Christ? How have you learned to trust the Spirit's power in your own efforts to share that faith with others?

Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit! Do the wonderful, mysterious work of the kingdom through me, teaching me how to rely on your power to reach beyond anything I could do on my own. Amen.