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The Community God Intended

Text: Acts 2:37-47 NLT

I. A _____ that is ready for the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:37-39 NLT

37 Peter's words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" 38 Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away--all who have been called by the Lord our God."

Notes:

II. Salvation is _____, obeying Jesus takes _____.

Acts 2:40-41 NLT

40 Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!" 41 Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day-- about 3,000 in all.

Notes:

III. Living as the _____ that God intended.

Acts 2:42-47 NLT

42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. 43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity-- 47 all

the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

Notes:

“A healthy church requires healthy members.”

Some questions to ask:

1. Has your heart become hard or does your sin still grieve you?
2. How devoted are you to the rhythms of faith?

3. Does your life and our church show healthy hearts or hard hearts?

What do we do about it?

1. Repentance is key to getting back on track when we have gotten of course.
2. Get back to basics (what rhythms have you been neglecting)
3. Start serving others (it is the cure for self-centered faith)

Expanded Notes

Baptism

Ritual cleansings of the body were well established in Torah (e.g., Exod. 29:4; 30:17–21; 40:30–33; Lev. 17:15–16; Deut. 21:6), as throughout the ancient Near East. Naaman was told to wash seven times in the Jordan to be healed (2 Kgs. 5:10). Later, lustration played a central role at Qumran. Footwashing was used by Jesus as an example of his humility and of the need for submission and servanthood by his followers (John 13:2–20).

Prior to the NT period, a ritual cleansing was instituted for the purification of gentile converts to Judaism. If this was the antecedent to NT baptism, John the Baptizer assumed an altered meaning by which this earlier practice became a sign of repentance for Jews themselves. There are indications that later the Church found another crucial alteration in meaning for its own use of baptism. Had Christian baptism and John's baptism been viewed as identical, the report in Acts 19:3–5 would be inexplicable. Nor is this distinction peculiar to Luke's theology. According to Matthew, John was puzzled that Jesus should come to him for baptism, since repentance seemed to have no applicability to Jesus (Matt. 3:13–17). Within that narrative may lie the key to the distinction; Jesus requests baptism apparently not simply in order to identify himself with sinners but primarily "to fulfill all righteousness."

"To fulfill" can be translated "to bring to completion or perfection." Jesus' own baptism is thus an identifying sign about Jesus himself. He is the one who completes the intention of God, who brings to perfection all that God has envisioned since creation. Christian baptism is thus less a negation (in token of renunciation) than an affirmation of being incorporated into Christ, who is the perfection of all God wills, and thus of being granted new life as a gift.

This motif of bringing to completion all that God intends makes sense of otherwise obscure allusions in the narratives of Jesus' baptism. The Synoptics (Matt. 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22) mention water and a voice, together with the descent of the Spirit—all reminiscent of God's spirit hovering over the waters and speaking creation into existence in Gen. 1:1–5. Thus Jesus at his baptism is identified as the one who fulfills the old creation by instituting the new creation. Jesus, by going into the wilderness for 40 days, is portrayed as the new Moses and the new Elijah (Exod. 24:18; 1 Kgs. 19:8). Similarly the figure of the dove further identifies him as the new Noah (Gen. 8:8–12), thus intensifying the motif of the new creation. To be baptized as a Christian is to receive and to be received into the whole sacred story in its fulfillment—a

profound gift of the Holy Spirit, whose activity in baptism is so frequently asserted throughout the NT.

The precise sequence of water baptism, reception of the Spirit, and the associated laying on of hands is not clear, however. In Acts these come in a variety of orders (water, hands, Spirit: in 19:5–6 the use of hands is immediate; in 8:14–17 the laying on of hands is deferred and done by others; hands, Spirit, water: 9:17–19; Spirit, water, without mention of hands: 10:44–11:18). What is asserted overall by Luke, however, is that through baptism the presence and work of the Risen Lord (which is what the Spirit makes real to Christians) is shared within community (thus the importance of the laying on of hands). This gift is seen by Luke not as static transmission but as dynamic interaction—a perspective shared by Johannine teaching (John 3:1–8; 1 John 5:6–8). The importance of baptism to the ancient Church is attested by the evangelical status accorded the rite in Matt. 28:19.

Paul's alleged indifference to baptism in 1 Cor. 1:14–17 refers only to the person of the administrator: Whether one is baptized by Paul, Peter, or Apollos means nothing; one is to be centered on Christ into whom he or she is baptized. This sometimes distorted passage must be interpreted in light of Paul's clear affirmation of baptism as incorporation into the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:1–11) and as the putting on of Christ like a garment, thereby receiving a new identity beside which all of the usual distinctions dissolve (Gal. 3:27–29). Paul's more puzzling comment about Israel being "baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Cor. 10:2) actually is quite illuminating once one resists the temptation to suppose the apostle is referring to some literal rite. Paul is suggesting that as a fragmented band of refugees found a new identity in the Exodus and its aftermath in the covenant at Sinai, so those who are baptized into Christ thereby find a new identity through their covenant with God.

So also with Peter's comparison of baptism to salvation on the ark: both events bespeak a newness given by the grace of God by which humanity is rescued from destruction. In Heb. 6:2–4; 10:32 "enlightenment" alludes to baptism; and the ancient Church when instructing catechumens liberally used John 9, Jesus' healing of the man blind from birth.

The matter of the mode of baptism in the NT is much less clear than usually supposed. The baptism of 3000 in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41), a city without a river, casts doubt on the usual assumption that all NT baptisms were by immersion. Indeed, it can be questioned whether the NT proves immersion was used at all (though almost certainly it was). Ancient iconography persistently shows Jesus standing in water to his waist (hence the going down and the coming up of the Synoptics and of the story of the eunuch in Acts 8:36–38, as well as the need for abundant water in John 3:23), with the Baptizer pouring water over Jesus' head. When churches began to build

baptisteries, some were deep enough to stand in but not broad enough to lie down in—a strange fact if immersion was the invariable mode handed down from the apostles. Rom. 6:4 may refer to mode as well as meaning; but that is not certain; it could also refer to timing, if baptism in Rome during Paul's time was administered primarily at Easter, as certainly it was there in subsequent centuries ...

The argument that Gk. *baptízō* means immersion assumes that a given word can have only one meaning—as if use of the term “the Lord's Supper” today must necessarily mean an ample meal served only in the evening. If the word for baptism can mean nothing except immersion, the references from Peter and Paul make no sense, since neither in the great Deluge nor in the escape through the sea were people covered with water. Certainly the use of the word in Luke 11:38 does not imply a full bath.

Similarly, neither can the baptism of infants in the apostolic period be proved or disproved by Scripture. That there must have been infants included in the household baptisms (Acts 16:31; 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:16) is pure conjecture; the assertion that no infants could possibly have been so involved is equally the result of speculation, particularly in light of the traditional incorporation of infant males into the covenant through circumcision.

Both the mode of baptism and the age at which it may be administered must be resolved through systematic and ecclesiological theology, not by an appeal to the mandate of Scripture. Although churches differ on these matters, all agree that baptism is incorporation into Christ's community of the new creation by the grace of the Spirit. While not all churches recognize the baptism of every other church, this agreement as to essential meaning at least points toward the emphasis on unity in relation to baptism expounded in Eph. 4:5.

Bibliography. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1962); J. Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, 1956); W. F. Flemington, *The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism* (London, 1948); K. McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus in the **Jordan*** (Collegeville, 1996); **L. H. Stookey, *Baptism* (Nashville, 1983).**

Baptism of the Spirit.

Phrase that came into prominence in modern times in the holiness movement of the 19th century. It was used by such teachers as W.E. Boardman and Asa Mahan to describe the “second blessing” of sanctification. Toward the end of the century, partly through the influence of R.A. Torrey (1856–1928), the meaning of the phrase shifted from sanctification to empowering for service. With the turn of the century, baptism of

the Spirit as evidenced by speaking in tongues became the distinctive teaching of the emerging Pentecostal movement.

For some Pentecostals baptism of the Spirit is seen as a “third blessing” distinct from and subsequent to conversion and sanctification. For others it is best regarded as a second blessing, with sanctification seen as part of conversion. But for all it is understood as a repetition of the day of Pentecost, when the disciples of Jesus received power to serve as his witnesses and spoke “in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 1:8; 2:4).

In the 1960s increasing numbers of Christians in the older denominations claimed to experience a baptism of the Spirit and understood the experience in terms of Pentecostal theology, that is, as a second religious experience beyond conversion, evidenced by speaking in tongues. As that development broadened out in the 1970s into the charismatic movement, an increasing attempt has been made, particularly in Britain and among Roman Catholic charismatics, to understand their experience of the Spirit through their own traditional theology—as, for example, a renewal or release of baptismal grace. Whatever the precise significance attached to the phrase, “baptism of the Spirit” has come to denote a revitalization of personal religious experience of immense potential for revival.

Though popularly used, the phrase “baptism of the Spirit” never occurs as such in the Bible. Instead of the noun phrase, “baptism in the Spirit,” the NT always uses the verbal phrase, “baptize [or baptized] in the Spirit.” That gives it a dynamic character which the noun phrase cannot fully convey.

1. *John the Baptist*. “Baptize [or baptized] in the Spirit” occurs seven times, all in the NT. The phrase seems to have been coined by John the Baptist: “I baptize you with water; but he [the One who is to come] will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire” (Mt 3:11; Lk 3:16; Mk 1:8 and Jn 1:33 omit the words “and fire”).

The phrase is clearly a metaphor: it stands in contrast to and as the fulfillment of John’s water baptism. First, it is a metaphor of *judgment*, as the context in Matthew and Luke makes clear. Purification or destruction in a river of fire, by a spirit of cleansing, in the fiery breath of God (“breath” and “spirit” are the same word in Hebrew), was familiar imagery in Jewish thought (Is 4:4; 30:27, 28; Dn 7:10). Second, it is a metaphor of *mercy*, since the purification cleanses; after winnowing, the grain would be gathered into the barn (Mt 3:11, 12). Third, it is a metaphor of *initiation*, John the Baptist’s variation on “the messianic woes,” the expectation that the messianic age would be introduced only through suffering and tribulation (e.g., Dn 7:19–22; 12:1; Zec 14:12–15; also the pseudepigraphal 1 Enoch 100:1–3; Sib Oracles 3:632–51).

Thus, at its earliest stage “baptism in Spirit” was John’s way of speaking about the suffering through which the new age would come to birth (the “birth pangs of the Messiah”; cf. Mk 13:8; 1 Enoch 62:4) and about the purgative experience through which the penitent would enter into the new age, refined and cleansed.

2. *Jesus*. Did Jesus speak of baptism in Spirit (and fire) during his ministry? The answer is not clear. Jesus evidently saw his ministry more as blessing than as judgment (notice where the quotation from Is 61:1, 2 stops in Lk 4:18, 19; and Jesus’ reply to John the Baptist’s puzzled question in Mt 11:3–5). In and through Jesus’ ministry the blessings of the new age were already being experienced: the poor were having the gospel preached to them (Mt 11:5; 13:16, 17); the kingdom was already present in power (Mt 12:28); the final rout of Satan had already begun (Mk 3:27). But looking to the end of his earthly ministry Jesus did refer to his death using the metaphors of baptism and fire (Lk 12:49, 50). And he did talk about the Spirit’s being given, at least to aid his disciples during the coming persecution (Mk 13:11; cf. Jn 14:15–17, 26; 15:26; 16:7–15). He may have used John the Baptist’s metaphor, his words in Acts 1:5 and 11:16 coming from his post-resurrection ministry (cf. Lk 24:49).

The fourth Gospel writer, John, depicts Jesus’ ministry as a kind of winnowing, a separating of wheat from chaff (cf. Mt 3:12), of light from darkness, of truth from evil (see particularly Jn 3:19–21). But Mark and John, by omitting the words “and fire” from the Baptist’s words, omit the judgmental or dividing effect of Jesus’ ministry as a fulfillment of John the Baptist’s promise.

3. *Acts*. In the two post-resurrection uses of the metaphor (Acts 1:5; 11:16) the shorter form is found: “baptize in Spirit.” It is possible that the phrase “and fire” was thought of as having been fulfilled in the “tongues as of fire” on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:3). But the fire spoken of by John the Baptist was something very different (“unquenchable,” Mt 3:10–12). Luke makes no attempt to link the “tongues as of fire” and the sound “like the rush of a mighty wind” with John the Baptist’s words. It is also possible that the reader is intended to understand that Jesus’ death exhausted the fiery judgment of God, so that the entry of the new age (“the last days,” Acts 2:17) comes only through baptism in the Spirit alone (and not in “fire”).

Two group experiences are described in Acts as being baptisms “in Spirit”: the disciples at Pentecost, and Cornelius and his friends at Caesarea (Acts 1:5; 2:4, 17, 18; 10:44; 11:15–17). Three relationships need to be explored.

(1) The relation between Spirit baptism and water baptism. It is clear from Acts 1:5 and 11:16 that “baptized in Spirit” is being used metaphorically, for it stands in contrast to “baptized in water.”

typical of what it meant in the beginning to become a Christian—the whole event involving repentance and faith, baptism in the name of Jesus, and the gift of the Spirit.

subsequent Christian experience (cf. Jn 20:22 with Jn 4:14; 7:37, 38; Acts 2:38).

In Acts 8, the second passage, it is probable that Luke understands verse 17 as the initial reception of the Spirit. (1) In 8:12 he does not use his normal phrase for conversion (i.e., “believed into [or on] the Lord”—committed themselves to the Lord; occasionally, “believed the Lord”). He says merely that “they believed Philip,” probably implying a belief that fell short of commitment. (2) In 8:16, “they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus,” that and nothing more. (3) In Acts there could be no doubt as to whether the Spirit had been given or not. Luke does not know of any silent, invisible giving of or filling with the Spirit (2:4; 4:31; 8:18, 19; 10:46; 19:2, 6).

(3) The relation between Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues. Thus, all four occasions in Acts where the initial gift of the Spirit is actually described, his coming was evident from its effects. In three cases the effects described are inspired speech: speaking in tongues and prophesying. Similarly in 4:8, 31 and 13:9–11, the filling of the Spirit evidenced itself in boldness of speech and words of effective judgment (cf. also Eph 5:18, 19). According to 1 Corinthians 1:4–7, the gift of grace to the Corinthians came to expression in a wide range of spiritual gifts (gifts of grace), including “speech” and “knowledge.” We may conclude that inspired speech, including speaking in tongues, was a regular manifestation of the Spirit’s coming on an individual or group. But to conclude that speaking in tongues was always or ought always to be the evidence of Spirit-baptism goes beyond the intention of Luke or Paul.

4. *Paul*. The one remaining explicit use of the metaphor in the NT is 1 Corinthians 12:13. Again it is clearly *initiator*, but also *dynamic*: it is by being baptized in one Spirit that men and women become members of the one body of Christ, the charismatic community (1 Cor 12). Baptized in Spirit is evidently just one among many metaphors used by Paul to describe conversion, becoming “in Christ” or united with Christ. Others include being drenched with or given a drink of the one Spirit (1 Cor 12:13), putting on Christ or the Spirit of Christ (Gal 3:27; cf. Jgs 6:34; 2 Chr 24:20; Lk 24:49), and being crucified with Christ (Rom 6:6). Paul, like Luke and John, speaks of an initiatory experience of the Spirit and other religious experiences, but does not describe any distinctive second (or third) experience.

“Baptized into Christ” (Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27) is probably a briefer form of the metaphor “baptized in Spirit into Christ.” Many take it instead as synonymous with “baptized in the name of Christ” and hence as a reference to the baptismal ritual. That is done despite the contrast elsewhere between baptized in water and baptized in Spirit. Either way it should be noted that, for Paul, “baptized into Christ” means baptized into Christ’s *death*

(Rom 6:3). Thus to know Christ means not only to experience the power of his resurrection but also to share his sufferings (Phil 3:10).