

—The Message of Acts—

Lesson 3—The Spirit and the Servant

- I. Recognizing the Spirit
 - A. Would you recognize a Spirit-filled church if you met one? What are the signs and indicators? It's the presence of God's Spirit in Christ's church that makes it different from every merely human organization; but what does His presence look like?
 - B. The mighty activity of the Spirit in the church is a major theme in Acts. Luke reinforces the importance of the coming of the Spirit by recording repeated references to Pentecost (Acts 1.2; Lk 24.49; Acts 1.5, 8). And later in Acts, key transitions in the gospel's spreading to the ends of the earth are explained and verified by phenomena that recalls Pentecost (Acts 8.17; 10.44-47; 11.15-17; 15.8).
 - C. What is the significance of this new bestowal of God's Spirit? What difference did it make in the history of redemption? We need to know not only *that* the Spirit came at Pentecost, but *why*. First of all, the outpouring of the Spirit means the Father is keeping His promise.
- II. The Promise of the Father
 - A. At the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts we find two versions of the same command and assurance of Jesus, Lk 24.49; Acts 1.4. "The Spirit's work in the church is a climax of God's plan, announced through the prophets [*particularly Isaiah*], to heal and empower His people to be His servant-witnesses among the nations."
- III. Witnesses to the Ends of the Earth, Acts 1.8
 - A. It's clear from the disciples' question in Acts 1.6 that their vision and focus were still limited within the walls and ethnicity of Israel. Christ's answer in v.8 served to redirect their attention and expand their horizons to show them that God's work of rescue, repair, and restoration embraced not only Israelites and Israel, but all peoples to the ends of the earth in a triumphant conquest of grace.
 - B. Consider the parallels between Acts 1.8 and several prophecies in Isaiah 32.15; 43.10, 12; 44.8; 49.6; 45.22
 1. Christ's answer brings together three themes from the heart of Isaiah's prophecies concerning the Servant of the Lord (i.e. Jesus): 1) the Spirit of God is poured out on God's people; 2) God's people are witnesses testifying that He alone is God and Saviour; 3) Their witness extends to the ends of the earth. —Let's consider the context of Isaiah's prophecies.
- IV. *Witnesses in the Lord's Lawsuit: The Spirit and the Servant in Isaiah*
 - A. At the start of Isaiah's prophecy, the Lord "sues" His people, charging them with spiritual adultery and infidelity, calling heaven and earth to testify to Israel's guilt (Isa 1; cf. Dt 4.26; 30.10; 32.1). [N.B. the prophets of the OT are God's covenant lawyers, His prosecuting attorneys] But in Isa 41, the Lord lodges a different lawsuit, a challenge to the idols served by the pagan Gentiles (and too often by Israel as well), accusing these false gods of false advertising. The Lord taunts the pagan peoples, challenging them to present evidence that their gods can do what they claim, Isa 41.1-2, 4; 21-23.
 - B. Israel, Witnesses of the Lord
 1. So the Lord lodges His lawsuit, charging the gods of the nations with false advertising, breach of promise, and blatant perjury, Isa 43.9-10; 45.20-22. The idols have no witnesses who can testify to their power or activity. Israel's God, on the other hand, is Lord of creation and history and can call His people, His chosen servant, to the witness stand. They've seen and heard of His works and can support and testify that He is the only living God, the only Saviour.
 - C. However, there's a problem. The Lord's eyewitnesses are blind! Their infidelity has blinded them to the Lord's works, 42.18.19; cf. 6.9.
 1. So what will God do!? The only thing to do is to heal their blind eyes and deaf ears. In 42.6-7 the Lord promises such a cure, cf. 42.16, 18-20. In the court scene of Isa 43, the blind and deaf of the

nations are brought in as witnesses for their empty gods; but over against these the Lord brings in His people, whom He has healed (42.6-7, 16), so they can testify for Him and in turn lead the idol-blinded Gentiles (cf. Ps 115.2-8) out of darkness into the light.

D. The life-giving Spirit makes Israel fruitful in witness

1. How will the Lord heal the blind and deaf? By the outpouring of the Spirit on His people, Isa 44.1-8

E. The other Servant, the Faithful Witness

1. In the Servant Songs of Isaiah (42:1-4 [His introduction]; 49:1-6 [His mission]; 50:4-9 [His obedience]; 52:13-53:12 [His suffering]) there is an intriguing vacillation of in the referents to whom the title “servant” is applied. In some passages, *the people of Israel* are the Lord’s servant (e.g. 42.19-22; 44.1-8), while in others the servant is *an individual* who’s contrasted with the people, is faithful where they have failed, and is instrumental in their atonement and restoration (e.g. 42.1-7; 49.1-6; 53.1-12). The obedient, individual Servant is not only a righteous *replacement* for the wayward people, but also the redemptive *restorer* of this people. Through the faithful service of this Servant, the failing servant Israel will be restored to sight and hearing, to health and usefulness.
2. However, we also learn from Isaiah that the faithful Servant’s healing and saving mission reaches far beyond the bounds of Israel. This is the truth the narrow-minded disciples failed to grasp; and this is the point Jesus is making in His allusion to Isa 49.6, “to the ends of the earth.” According to Isa 42 and 49, the individual Servant would have a two-pronged ministry, both to Israel and to the Gentiles. Because the Spirit of God would be upon Him (42.1), He would bring righteousness on earth, even to the distant lands of the Gentiles (v.4), for God has assured Him (vv.6-7).
3. In His own person, the Servant would reunite the Lord and His people in covenant, but He would do more than that. He would bear the light of God’s glory to the Gentiles. Both Israel and the nations needed sight and release from dark dungeons, and this Servant would heal and liberate them both, 49.5-6. —So who could this individual Servant be?

V. The “Other Servant” in Luke’s Gospel

- A. Luke is the only author to refer to Jesus as God’s servant, Acts 3.13, 26; 4.27, 30. At Jesus’ birth, echoes of Isaiah hinted that He was the Servant who would restore Israel and bring light to the Gentiles, Lk 1.79 (cf. Isa 42.7); Lk 2.32 (cf. Isa 49.6; 52.10). The Spirit of God came upon Him in His baptism (Lk 3.22; Isa 42.1). Full of the Spirit, Jesus was led into the wilderness (as Israel had been) for the trial of His faith and faithfulness (Lk 4.1). Upon His triumphant return He entered the synagogue and claimed that Isa 61.1-2 (regarding the Spirit-anointed servant of God) was fulfilled in Him. When John the Baptist asked if He was the coming one, He pointed him to the signs of the Servant’s mission that He was accomplishing (Lk 7.20-22; Isa 61.1; 35.5-6). When He suffered, He suffered as the righteous Servant, who would reestablish the bond between the Lord and His faulty servants (Lk 22.20) and who would bring the same blessing of reconciliation to all the ends of the earth (Acts 3.24-25).

VI. So how does this connection between Servant and Spirit help us to understand the Spirit’s work among us?

A. The Servant is Lord.

1. In Acts, Jesus acts as Lord, taking on His lips the words of the Lord God, “you will be *my* witnesses” (1.8). Jesus is claiming to be the God and Saviour of the new Israel, whom He empowers with His Spirit and commissions as His witnesses. Those who worship Jesus as Lord, who pray to Him and serve Him, bear witness that He, not the idols, is the only God and Saviour. The Spirit is sent to empower us to testify to the divine glory that the Son deserves.

B. Witnesses attest God’s saving actions in history

1. “Witnessing” and “giving testimony” in evangelical circles have been treated as telling your own personal pilgrimage out of a life of sin. But in Isaiah and Acts, the *subjective* healing of the Lord’s witnesses enables them to declare the *objective* events in God’s redemptive plan. In Acts,

Jesus' witnesses testify to His deeds of kindness and healing and especially to His resurrection from the dead as Lord. Now, empowered by the Spirit, all believers are to be His witnesses, Acts 8.1, 4-5, 12.

C. The Spirit must heal witnesses' blind eyes

1. We cannot be God's servants unless we have been healed by His Spirit. Saul's blindness was a picture of Israel's failed to see, to take to heart the saving acts of God, particularly in His Son Jesus. But after that blindness was healed, Saul became the Lord's witness, 22.14-15; 26.16-18. And so it is with all of those whom the Lord calls. He heals their blindness by His Spirit and then sends them out as His witnesses.

D. Spirit-healed servants carry their witness worldwide

1. It's natural for all of us to be ethnocentric. But Christ the Lord is gathering His church as an international family. Jesus is the Saviour of the world, Jn 4.42; 3.16. The Kingdom of God is a universal kingdom encompassing people from every tribe, tongue, and nation (Rev 7).

E. Jesus' witnesses challenge people's hollow gods, encountering suffering

1. To bring God's salvation to the ends of the earth, Jesus' witnesses must unmask treasured idols, and as they do, they will encounter hostility from those whose security is shaken and by God's truth in Jesus.
2. Religious "solutions" apart from Jesus the Saviour are dangerous frauds with which there can be no compromise or polite toleration. Jesus' witnesses set out to conquer the world not through military might or political machinations, but through the Word of the Lord.

VII. Conclusion

- A. Jesus' words in Acts 1.8 point us to the Father's promise in Isaiah that He would send His Spirit to heal the blind eyes and deaf ears of His servant people, so that they could be His witnesses among the nations. Jesus, the faithful Servant, suffered and was glorified, and by His faithfulness brought healing not only for failing Israel, but also for the Gentiles. He is the Lord, who restores sight through the gift of His Spirit. Empowered by the Spirit, we can see and hear and bear witness.
- B. *So what is a Spirit-filled church?* It's one in which the redeemed people of God see His mighty acts of redemption, hear His Word as truth, and through faithful proclamation and living, witness to the Lordship and redemption work of Jesus Christ, the one, true, and living God.