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After living a perfect, sinless life for 30 years, Jesus began His ministry, but not before He was anointed by the Holy Spirit. This same act was repeated before the disciples entered into their ministry after the resurrection of Christ. In Acts 1:4-8, we find Jesus speaking with His disciples, commanding them:

“Do not depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, which . . . you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. . . . [And] you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Whatever theory or doctrine you hold on the Holy Spirit, there is one point on which we all can agree—that we must be filled with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:18 exhorts us to not be filled with wine, which causes our ruin, but rather to be filled with the Spirit. And we are encouraged to be continually filled, just as the disciples were in Acts 13:52 (NASB) “And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” In the early days of my Christian work, I was very busy preaching and teaching in North India. Every night I was speaking somewhere, to some group of people. But inside I felt so dry and so empty. I desperately wished that somebody else would do the job.

But I never forget one day in Jammu when everything changed. An evening meeting was scheduled, and a very large crowd was expected to attend. A few hours before the event started I was in my room, kneeling beside my bed and crying out to God. My life had been a day-after-day struggle to spiritually stay alive as I served the Lord. And that night it was the same. I was so empty. I had my message. I had my outlines. I had my illustrations. I had everything together and ready to go, but still I was empty. I prayed like I had never prayed before, saying, “Lord, I don’t know what to tell You. I am so dry, so empty. There is nothing in me. It’s all in my head, but there is nothing in my heart. I have been going on week after week, pushing myself. Lord, I read in your Word about this thing called ‘the power of the Holy Spirit.’ I don’t know what I must do, but I ask You, would You please fill me with Your Holy Spirit and give me the power to minister tonight in Your name?”

That night the most incredible thing happened. Between the time I prayed and when the meeting started, it was like I had grabbed hold of 100,000 watts of electricity. I was changed that night. Honestly, I don’t even know all that happened, but I was never the same and the meeting was like no other. Hundreds of people wept and came forward to receive Christ. I didn’t even preach from my outline because the Lord stepped in and my plans went out the window. That was one of the most significant moments in my entire life of serving the Lord. So much of our daily life becomes a struggle because we live without the power of the Holy Spirit. Our lives often resemble the hand pumps along the roadsides in North India; if you want any water, you must continually crank the handle, sometimes just to get a single drop. As soon as you stop pumping the handle, everything stops. This is not the kind of life that was intended for us. Jesus promised, “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive (John 7:38-39, NIV, emphasis mine).

Every incredible miracle the disciples witnessed Jesus perform was done through the power of the Holy Spirit. Think about the time when the man possessed with the evil spirit, Legion, was set free (see Mark 5). By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus commanded those demons to come out. Or consider the time when Jesus spoke to the raging waters to be still and they obeyed. The disciples experienced the reality of the power of the Holy Spirit working through Jesus on a daily basis.

Miracle after miracle reinforced in the hearts of the disciples their own need to be filled with the Spirit. So when Jesus told His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit, I’m sure they had a solid understanding of why they were told to do this as they remembered Jesus’ words: “You can do nothing without Me” (see John 15). The only way for them to do greater works than Jesus, as promised, was through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Whatever your interpretation of Scripture is on this point, please listen: Be filled with the Holy Spirit. The reason for this is because serving God is not like working for a company or a political party. It is not accomplished merely by using money and plans. With enough skills, drive and money, anybody can do that kind of work. But building something supernatural—that lasts for eternity—can only be done by supernatural power from the living God. So much of “Christian” work is one day going to be burned into a pinch of ash simply because it was a work of the flesh, not a work of the Spirit.

When I studied the book of Acts in college, it was all history and Greek and geography. But the book of Acts was not written so that we could study and get a degree out of it. It was written in order that we could know today, just like in biblical times, that we can be led by the Spirit of God and live this life by His power. Just like the early Church, we are meant to experience a life in which the Holy Spirit speaks to us, leads us and guides us today and every day.

So I encourage you to come before the Lord and ask Him to fill you with His Holy Spirit. Read about A.B. Simpson, Charles Spurgeon, A.W. Tozer, Andrew Murray or any of the saints like them. Each one had their own experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit, and it was a distinct experience, separate from salvation. It’s

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the promise He has given you. If you will but ask and yield, He will fill you with His streams of living water, and they will flow out of you to a thirsty and dying world, enabling you to live and serve in His power. But without [Him] you can do nothing (John 15:5).