

Sunday 12th August 2018  
The Path to Power.

Luke 4, Acts 1.4-5 2.1-4 &14-16.

The basic proposition today is this. The purpose of God on earth is to create a people for Himself who are full of the Holy Spirit and who serve in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is glorifying to God, and the glory of God is the duty and privilege of all creation. There is, of course, a huge amount of Bible and theology that lies behind this statement. The summary of which is that man by nature is fallen, depraved and entirely dead in sin. A dead physical body cannot give itself life, so likewise, a spiritually dead body cannot bring itself to life. We are entirely dependent then on God, in His grace and goodness, to bring us to life, to cause us to be born of the Spirit, a new birth, a new creation, and this happens within us by the Holy Spirit. A poor picture of this is the difference between a teddy bear and a real bear – one has life, the other never has or ever will. We must have life, we must be born again of the Spirit.

God desires, as I said recently, to have a dwelling place constructed of living stones built into a living structure, the key concept is living, and this is all by the Holy Spirit.

God brings spiritually dead people to life by the new birth, becoming a Christian. This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit coming into our souls and imparting life to us. A Christian is someone who is filled with the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to be a Christian without this work of the Holy Spirit within us. However, the ongoing Christian life is one of being filled daily anew by the Holy Spirit, so we speak about being filled and full of the Holy Spirit.

As an aside, the only person this side of heaven who has ever been perfectly full of the Holy Spirit was Christ. We have other things in us that causes us to have less capacity than Christ. For example we are all, to various degrees, full of love for the world and other things, like ourselves, and the degree to which we are full of rubbish, is the degree to which we are not as full of the Spirit as we could be and will be. The work of the Spirit in us in sanctification is to empower and assist us in being cleaned out to make room for More of His presence. Paul in Ephesians speaks of this as putting off the old, and putting on the new.

Turn to Luke Chapter 4.

This is the well-known chapter about the temptations of Jesus and what happened next. The context is the end of Chapter 3 where Jesus is baptized, and as He comes up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended on Him from heaven in bodily form. It may have been dove like, or that could be a description of how the Holy Spirit alighted on Him. Either way, something significant had happened!

Now, I hope no-one would disagree that Jesus had never been devoid of the presence of the Holy Spirit, but the act of being baptized was the way that Jesus identified with humanity, He became one of us in every way, except in sin. Jesus, having become a

man, was going to create a new humanity which was shaped and fitted to be implanted into us, so He also had to receive the Holy Spirit's anointing as all Christians have to receive.

In case some people are getting confused by these different workings of the Holy Spirit, think of it this way. The Holy Spirit is a person. He is God, so is an eternal, infinite, boundless person. When we were born, did we instantaneously know everything there was to know about our parents? Some of us know relatively little about our parents, because they had a long life before we arrived, and few if any parents sit their kids down and go through their full life story. If we have limited knowledge of our mortal parents, how much more is there to know about the Holy Spirit? It will take all of eternity to get the basic acquaintance with Him. Therefore do not be surprised that the Bible speaks about having the Holy Spirit, receiving more infillings of the Holy Spirit, and there being further discoveries of the Holy Spirit. Even if He were to be poured out upon us beginning today, we would never come to an end of the stream of His life.

There is a lot of the Holy Spirit, so we are encouraged to 'be, being filled by Him', daily! No matter how confused we are, it is always legitimate to ask for more of, and further fillings of the Holy Spirit. As a tangent – these degrees of filling vary according to need. For example, when we are walking fast, or running up a hill, our breathing will become more rapid and deeper because our exertion is causing us to need more oxygen in our bodies. Likewise, when we are engaged in more active spiritual activity, we need more spiritual oxygen, more of the Holy Spirit.

After Jesus is filled or anointed with the Holy Spirit, Luke 4 verse 1 says that He was full of the Holy Spirit. However, look at verse 14. Here we are told that He returns to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit. There is a difference of language, and also a change in how Jesus conducted Himself. It was only after these 40 days in the wilderness that Jesus began His ministry. The rest of Chapter 4 is all about what Jesus began to do, so Luke wants us to see that it was this empowering of the Holy Spirit which made a difference!

So, here is the question. What happened between verse 1 and verse 14 which accounts for the change? The answer, the temptations. What is it that turns fullness into power? Trouble!

The other accounts of the temptation of Jesus leads us to believe that Jesus was in the desert and that it was at the end of these 40 days that the temptations came. For the man Jesus, 40 days without food and water, and 40 days of being alone in a wilderness is a most demanding and weakening experience. One account says that at the end, angels came to minister to Him, so His days in the wilderness were no picnic.

The devil comes to Him, and tries to do an Adam and Eve on Him. You see, Jesus came to instigate a new humanity. Since the devil had led the first Adam into unbelief from this into falling from grace, this was the devil's desire to do to the second Adam, Christ.

Jesus overcame the devil by His adherence to the word and promise of God. Adam and Eve fell by unbelief and eating, Jesus overcame by faithfulness to the word and fasting! Notice, every temptation was overcome by adherence to the word of God. This is the only weapon we have against the devil. Eve should never have debated with him, but she did and was deceived by the devil's lies. One wonders what Adam was doing while the devil chatted to Eve. The hint is that she was deceived, Adam sinned – Adam was there to protect her. He failed to do so is perhaps a fair comment.

Jesus overcame three temptations, but do you think that it was as simple as that. Luke writes under inspiration, and the three temptations of Jesus, as recorded, are really the only three categories of temptation that exist! We could say that Jesus was universally tempted.

The first temptation is this question – will God provide? Make these stones bread, take steps to take care of your own interests because God is not really to be trusted. How much of our time do we spend worrying and fretting about 'stuff'. I do it, we all do it, but I am trying to sort this one out. It is not always easy to differentiate between legitimate responsibilities and fears. The only way is to follow the word. Jesus said not to be anxious about tomorrow. That includes pensions, children's exams, job prospects, health and all that. It does not mean that we do not pray for our daily bread, but we also look to the good will and kind hand of our heavenly Father, lover and master, and move from faith to trust. How cruel it was of the devil to present bread to a hungry man! The devil knows which of our buttons to press, so what gets me may have no effect on you, and vis versa.

The second temptation was to gain our purpose by the wrong means. The devil craves worship. Why else do you think idolatry was so much of a feature of the OT and is such a feature of the present day. I wonder if hero worship has now actually become more than what used to be meant? I have heard of people having plastic surgery to make themselves look more like their hero! Have you noticed how all sorts of religious stuff has come and gone during your lifetime? We are to worship God alone. He is to be our highest and principle matter of our admiration, and everything else far, far behind. The most common sort of false worship is the worship of our selves. This comes in numerous forms, from regarding ourselves as autonomous self-made people, to the arrogance that comes from success, wealth, beauty, accomplishments or reputation, and so on. Because we have a strong tendency to this, Jesus gave us the Beatitudes, a sober evaluation of our true condition before God.

The third temptation was to test God. This arises when we think and say things like this, 'if God really loved me, He would have done this or that, or prevented this or that. It is in effect to have the attitude that regards God as being duty bound to put me first! It is not going to happen that way!

There is so much more to all this, but consider it yourselves, and I think that you will find that these temptations come in many colours, flavours, sizes and packaging, but they all

fall into these headings. Jesus faced them all, everything that can come our way, and overcame them as a man, for us.

The purpose of these temptations of Jesus in the wilderness was for Him to learn, as a man, how to overcome the devil. (Jesus was both God and Man. When I say the man Christ Jesus, I am referring to His humanity, not denying His deity) Jesus did this as a man, because it is His nature that is implanted into us when we become Christians. We receive a new nature which has been test run and programmed to overcome, and all this by Jesus. That is a pretty non-theological way of saying it, but it is true. Jesus stood where Adam and Eve fell, so that He could give us a new human nature, perfected by Him, to keep us in the life. Jesus becomes an overcomer so that we might become overcomers in Him.

Someone might object and ask if being an overcomer will not make us proud and arrogant? Let me ask you, do you think that the Prodigal son became proud when he was restored to the father's home? I don't believe so. The process of becoming an overcomer is not completed this side of heaven, so there are battles to be fought. Some of these we will lose and sin, but as we learn, we will win more and more often, and the memory of the pain of failure, and our treachery, will keep us from being puffed up with pride.

Becoming an overcomer, someone who is growing in the experience of the power of the Holy Spirit, is only possible for a Christian by the sovereign working of the Holy Spirit in them. We never learn, because this is not God's way, to make it on our own, to win battles on our own. God is to get all the glory. This was one of the big mistakes the Israelites made. They came to think that it was by their power or goodness that they conquered!

Temptation can come directly, but more often we fall into it through the circumstances of life, difficulties, trials, and things that we consider at the time to be 'end of the world events.' Trouble faced in God's way, by His word, turns fullness of the Spirit into the Power of the Spirit.

If you look at Philippians chapter 2 verses 5-11, you will see a very important principle. The way Jesus arrived at His present exalted position was by descending into humility which arose through trouble. The ultimate step of humility for Jesus was to be crucified on the Cross, naked and shamed before the world, His mother, and the Romans, rejected and abandoned by God and man. Before this, and even on the Cross He could have called upon legions of angels to come to His aid, but He did not do this. He trusted in the promise, the word of God, and surrendered to death. Therefore God has highly exalted Him! The way up is by going the way down. The way to powerful living is by going down into the troubles and trials which come, walking in them according to the word, and having God sanctify our experiences and turning them to our good, which is our sanctification and growth in holiness. If you read the lives of the heroes of faith from Hebrews chapter 11, you will find that this is the path they all went.

It is no different in New Testament days, and many good biographies speak of the astonishing accomplishments of people, but not one of them came to such effectiveness except by great trials and weakness. Romans 8 is often quoted, 'all things work for good' and so on. It is true, but read the context, it is tough!

Let's look at the aftermath of the Temptation narrative in Luke chapter 4 verses 14 to the end.

Jesus reads the passage in the temple and the people go 'wow!' They had probably never heard the Scriptures read as Jesus read them, and they had never had them expounded as Jesus expounded them. He spoke with authority and grace. However His application of them angered the people, and so one of the first consequences of the power of the Spirit was rejection! This is still true. People do not like home truths which challenge their settled life outlook, and whatever the Spirit says, it is the truth!

Verses 31 and 32, Jesus taught with authority. Jesus said this is the way it is, this is the truth and not that. The teaching of the Pharisees was speculative, and most heavily leaning to their interpretations of the Law which was all about externals. Jesus spoke not only about externals, but firstly, and mostly He spoke about our internal condition, the state of our hearts. The Pharisees didn't like this, and they still don't like being told that faith is firstly a matter of our hearts. God is interested in what arises from the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Anything which we do which does not arise from a changed heart is unacceptable to God. Would we want to eat a meal made by someone who had just cleaned the drains and then cooked without washing their hands and changing out of their work clothes? Why would God accept our works from our flesh!

Verse 36. Jesus expels a demon from a poor soul. At least the people had a more realistic understanding that many problems people have are animated by a demon. We are so rational, thanks to David Hume, that we exclude everything that we can't see, touch, taste or hear! Jesus commands the demon to go, and it does, and the people go, 'wow!' Authority and power!

Verse 40. Healing and healings. Jesus commands a fever to leave Peter's mother-in-law. He does not command the mother-in-law to go, only her fever. Read the next verses as you wish, but it looks to me as if the moment Jesus does this, the mother-in-law swings her legs out of bed and gets on with the chores!

Wherever there is such power, the needy come. Jesus heals many, and many demons depart from the sick.

Finally, verse 42. Jesus departs to a solitary place. It does not say it in Luke, but elsewhere in the accounts of Jesus life, we are told that He went out to a solitary place to pray. There is no reason to think that this means anything other than prayer.

Even for Jesus, the power of the Holy Spirit was not given to Him like a battery pack to turn on and off as He wished. Since the Holy Spirit is a person He is to be cultivated by

personal relationship, and this is what prayer is about. Jesus lived as He did as a man because He constantly cultivated a relationship and friendship with the Holy Spirit. There really is not secret to Spiritual power, it is an open secret. However, because it is a relationship with the sovereign Holy Spirit, He gives His power as He will, not as we will. This power is not always, or even mostly the things we call supernatural, miracles, healings and so on. There is the fruit of the Spirit as well which is the Power of the Holy Spirit, and there are times and seasons of the Spirit.

If you read Church history, you will read about people of great holiness who never or rarely saw miracles, who were not delivered from the sword, but died as shining lights. Read Hebrews 11 again! We will also find others of equal holiness who saw many miracles. We will also read of some very earthy people who saw miracles! You see, it is by the will of the Holy Spirit! We may not be seeing or flowing in the sorts of power events of the Holy Spirit that we would like, but growing in holiness is itself one of the most powerful workings of the Holy Spirit within us.

If I had a choice between signs and wonders and holiness, I would choose holiness, because that will carry through into eternity. However, we will never have to make such a choice, because the Holy Spirit works all these things as He will. Holiness is primary, the manifestations of healings and so on are at His digression, and how I long for these as well.

Finally, if this is the path Jesus trod in His life, what makes any Christian think that our path will be any different? The passages in Acts listed at the start gives a taste of this.