

# tSt Paul's Dorking Small Groups –13<sup>th</sup> September 2009

## The Kingdom, the Power and the Glory – Fully Charged, John 1: 29-34

**Read:** John 1:29-34, Eph 5:18-20, Matt 7: 7-11, Matt 3:17

**Key points from Sunday's sermon -** *One of the most lively debates concerning contemporary spirituality over the last 50 years is what is often called Baptism "in" or "by" the Holy Spirit. Despite the theological debate there is no doubt that we need to discover more of the power of the Spirit to be effective in demonstrating, and bringing in the Kingdom of God, into our lives and community.*

**Q1: Baptism in the Spirit- How does a Christian life start? Is Christian initiation a once for all experience or is there some kind of "second experience" that I seemed to have missed out on?**

Some of the theological debate:

- *All for one and one for all:* Many believe that Christian initiation is a once for all experience. There is only one baptism that is the true mark of Christian belonging and initiation (Eph 4: 5). This "Baptism" however has 3 strands: 1) The human side; repentance and faith. 2) The divine side; reception of the Spirit, and adoption into the family of God, the forgiveness of sins and justification. 3) And the Corporate side; baptism into the body of believers. All three belong together and are the necessary and complete requirement of Christian initiation- although corporate baptism may not be at the same point in time physically – it is spiritually! (See Rom 6)
- *A two stage initiation?* Others argue that Acts 8, 9 and 19 point to a two stage process whereby the writings of Acts indicate an initial beginning but a subsequent additional experience of the Spirit. (Think of it a bit like a pilot light and the subsequent full ignition!)
- The above viewpoints have been reconciled by those that argue that there is only one baptism and one reception of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9), BUT there is the necessity to be ongoingly filled by the Holy Spirit. *In short, "baptism" in the Spirit may be a bad choice of words theologically, to describe what is a necessary and genuine experience that is an imperative as shown in Eph 5:18*
- Dr M Lloyd-Jones helpfully suggests that often as Christians we focus on the love of the father and the life of the son, but we fail to tap into the more mysterious, less tangible and less obvious role of the Spirit. *The Holy Spirit can be the missing person of the Trinity.*
- David Watson summed this all up with this ... *"All Christians have the Holy Spirit, but does the Spirit wholly have all Christians?"*

**Q2: This all sounds a bit scary! I'm not really into all this supernatural and emotional stuff. I want to be 'touched' but not in any kind of dramatic way. Is that OK?**

- If God is God, He is supernatural!
- We are all different, but we all have emotions and God wants to touch our whole selves and work in our whole lives.
- The counterfeit doesn't erase the authentic – we have all heard stories of things getting out of hand and people doing weird and wonderful things, but this doesn't mean that the authentic, supernatural work of God should be dismissed.
- Many of us feel embarrassed or want to shun this aspect of Christianity and stay in our comfort zone, but the bible does seem to talk more about risky living than being safe and comfortable
- A useful way of ensuring that we have the right balance but also the right aspirations is to think of what some have called the "The holy trinity"; Fact, Faith and Feelings – God wants us to be involved in all three!

**Q3: I have been a Christian for many years but I have never felt the Spirit or had any kind of experience. Why have I been left out? Am I not good enough or something?**

- It's so confusing and contradictory – sometimes it seems that everyone else gets a blessing but not me, even those who seem less committed or mature in their faith. How can this be?-A mystery as the Spirit blows where it wills and God knows what is best(Mt.7 v 7-11)
- There is a difference between seeking and striving – some people have got fixated with this and it becomes unhealthy.
- There does seem to be times and seasons when God seems to act more powerfully and obviously.
- It is helpful to be reminded of Christ's own experience as it reminds us that the Spirit's work in us is to encourage and endorse God's love of us and our position as his children. (Matt 3:17).

**Q4: How does all this work out in practice? How can I recognise the work of the Spirit in my life?**

- Life ... but not as we know it. When we become a Christian our lives are turned upside down and a new dimension is brought to us as we receive the Spirit and he becomes a catalyst in our lives - A new life, a new power, and a new voice.
- But for some of us, it's a bit of a case of "been there, done that" and perhaps need to rediscover a new reliance on and a renewed sensitivity towards the Holy Spirit.
- What is the primary soundtrack of our lives? There are many "instruments" that play in our lives (our emotions, our past, our mind, our experiences etc... and the Spirit) but which instrument dominates the music and plays most clearly? "There is a new song in my life"?

**Q5: Why is this different? I have asked so many times to be filled and nothing really happens!**

- Why are we asking? For our benefit or for God's glory?
- By what measure are we gauging "nothing happens"?
- We are called to be patient, to persevere, to go on being filled. We are anointed not as an end in itself but for service.
- We are to focus on the exponent and not on the experience!!

### Questions to discuss:

1. **Icebreaker:** Share together what you might describe as a "mountain top experience", i.e. what has happened to you that most sticks in your memory as a magic moment – anyone done a bungee jump, anyone climbed Everest, anyone surprised themselves with some achievement? e.g. passing your A levels!
2. Share together your experience of the Holy Spirit. Have you had a time or place when you have felt particularly touched by God's Spirit?
3. Using the questions below, explore together your own understanding, thoughts and concerns about the Baptism of the Spirit.
  - **What do you understand by the phrase "Baptism in the Spirit"? What does it mean to you?**
  - **How comfortable are you with the more emotional/supernatural aspects of worship and faith? Do you naturally steer clear of this?**
  - **Do some of us feel a sense of being left out, never having had some so called "experience of the Spirit"? What do we think about this?**
  - **Have you sensed "a new song" in your life? How might we sensitise ourselves more to the work of the spirit within us?**
  - **How might this be different for us at St Paul's at this time- Do you think God may be doing something special among us now?**