

Isaiah 43:1-7 But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called *you* by your name; You *are* Mine. ² When you pass through the waters, I *will be* with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. ³ For I *am* the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place. ⁴ Since you were precious in My sight, You have been honored, And I have loved you; Therefore I will give men for you, And people for your life. ⁵ Fear not, for I *am* with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, And gather you from the west; ⁶ I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' And to the south, 'Do not keep them back!' Bring My sons from afar, And My daughters from the ends of the earth -- ⁷ Everyone who is called by My name, Whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him."

Acts 8:14-17 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, ¹⁵ who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

"Spirit Baptism"

The Holy Spirit, now there's an interesting subject to talk. Indeed, who or what are we talking about when the subject of the Holy Spirit comes up? Is his presence among us just a profound sense among some but not all of the people in a church of what Isaiah says: that God has called us by name, created and shaped us, and saved us to shine forth his glory; that he is with us and loves us; that we are his beloved and highly esteemed sons and daughters called by his name, that God has really acted in our lives for our good so that we know this? Well, certainly that is one way of describing the effect that the Holy Spirit has on us. He creates in us a sense of our being beloved children of God by making us able to see the real works of God in, through and as Christ Jesus made experientially real in our lives.

Another way that some people talk about the Holy Spirit is that he is an unseen, silent, but real and constant person-like presence in our lives. Pardon my illustration here, but he is somewhat like high blood pressure. A person can have high blood pressure and not know it until either their doctor tells them they got it or worse, a major event like a stroke brings it to their attention. After being made aware of high blood pressure they have to make drastic changes to their lifestyle; taking daily medications and being careful to put only healthy foods into the body. So it is with the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit with us entails that we are in a relationship with God whom we realize to be an unseen, real, and constant person-like presence. Sometimes he makes us aware of this relationship by means of someone telling us it's there or by means of a major event he breaks forth in our lives causing us to turn looking for God. Upon realizing this relationship our lifestyles begin to change. We find ourselves

desiring a daily routine of prayer and Bible study and we begin to become mindful not to pollute this relationship by what we participate in. But, it often happens that just like realizing that high blood pressure is not going to kill a person immediately we get lazy about our medications and about watching what we eat, so also we get lazy about our relationship with God not fully comprehending that there is a grave consequence to this neglect...pun intended.

If you remember Jesus' parable of the ten young ladies waiting for the bridegroom to come for his wedding, they each had an oil lamp, but only five saw to it that they had enough oil to burn through the night. The other five had to go to town to get oil. While they were away the bridegroom came. When they returned, they were not allowed into the wedding for they did not care enough to have enough oil on hand, but were rather lazy or otherwise preoccupied. In the same way we must be careful not to miss out on the peace, love, joy, and hope of the feast both now and at the resurrection by neglecting our relationship with God the Father through Jesus in the Spirit. Indeed, what marriage can thrive and be healthy when there is no daily communication?

Another way that the Holy Spirit is talked about is in the terms of Spirit Baptism, where he falls upon us with real, felt, and visible effect. He is something new and different that has really come upon someone since their confession of faith in Jesus Christ. If he has fallen upon you, you know you got him – that you are made alive in Christ Jesus, part of his body – truly a new creation here in the midst of the old creation. On the other hand, if you do not know that you got him or are unsure, then you should be praying for him to come. As I said, his presence has real, felt, and visible effect.

This is the basic premise of the movement we know as Pentecostalism. They look at the Book of Acts and take it very literally when it comes to the work of the Holy Spirit. I will agree that the Holy Spirit does really and visibly add new life authenticating the Gospel message of God giving us salvation in, through, and as Jesus Christ.

Having said all this we need to look at this passage from Acts and try to determine what it says about the Holy Spirit. First, let me give you a little background. Samaria was the capital of the old northern kingdom of Israel that the Assyrians destroyed in the 700's BC. The Assyrians took a lot of the Hebrew people there and settled them in other places throughout their kingdom and also imported people into Israel. The remaining Hebrew people intermarried with these folks and their form of Israelite religion changed dramatically from that in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the capitol of the southern kingdom of Judah and was not conquered by the Assyrians. The Assyrians came to the wall of Jerusalem and began to take the city but God miraculously scared them off. As a result, the Jerusalem people began to understand themselves as the true people of God and stigmatized their cousins in Samaria as half-breeds and heretics. Jerusalem Jews had nothing to do with Samaritan Jews.

At the beginning of the Book of Acts at Jesus' last appearance to the disciples before ascending to heaven he told them that the Holy Spirit would come upon them and that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The Holy Spirit came upon the disciples

there in Jerusalem and they became Jesus' witnesses in Jerusalem and very little in Judea and certainly not in Samaria and beyond. Oddly, they holed up in Jerusalem claiming to be the true Jewish faith and began to become an institution. They made no known effort to go any further. Oddly, a persecution broke out against the Church driving most of them out of Jerusalem.

A man named Philip went to Samaria which is where Jesus met the woman at the well in John chapter four. He went on his own. He was not sent by the Jerusalem church. He proclaimed salvation and the Lordship of Jesus Christ to them, they believed, and were baptized in Jesus name. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard this they sent Peter and John to check it out. Actually, this should have and would have been very good news to the apostles because it would symbolize to them that all of Israel, both the Northern and southern kingdoms had been reunited under the Lordship of Jesus Christ according to prophecy. Oddly, though the Samaritans had faith to be baptized, the Holy Spirit had not fallen on them. The wording of the text suggests a bit of surprise on the part of the apostles that the Spirit had not fallen on them at or around the time of their baptism. Paul writes at 1 Corinthians 12:3 that no one speaking by the Spirit can say "Jesus is accursed" nor can they say, "Jesus is Lord" unless by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had to have been there to create the faith to be baptized. So why was the Spirit holding off on falling on them?

On the way down there the apostles prayed that the Samaritans would receive the Holy Spirit like the Apostles and other Christians in Jerusalem had on Pentecost and other times. When they got there they laid hands on the Samaritans and they received the Spirit. So why did the Spirit wait? I don't have time to lay out all the ideas but I will tell you what I think the best reason is. I think the Holy Spirit waited until representatives of the Jerusalem Church could come as a way of demonstrating unity between the Christians in Samaria and those in Jerusalem. There was not going to be two separate churches in the form of a Jerusalem Church and a Samaritan Church as there had been two separate forms of Jewish faith established along lines of ethnic purity. The Holy Spirit was demonstrating that the Church of Jesus Christ would be united under Christ instead of divided along ethnic lines of prejudice – one body, one Spirit, one hope, one calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in all. This is a huge argument against the many denominations that we have today but that is not the point of this sermon.

I think this passage implies that the Holy Spirit is as much concerned about creating unity and community in the church of Jesus Christ as he is in individual believers having an experience of God that authenticates the Gospel's proclamation of reconciliation to God and new life in Jesus Christ now and resurrection when he returns. This passage also points out that there is no experience of God apart from Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ who is the divine Son of God the Father. The Holy Spirit unites us to Jesus the Son so that we share in his relationship with the Father with the result that we experience ourselves as the beloved children of God to whom he is without a doubt faithful. The Holy Spirit reveals Jesus to us who reveals the Father and his love to us not simply as a matter of naïve belief but as a sure

knowledge that we can trust. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are One God and there is no other and this God has revealed himself to us in such a way that we know we have been drawn into the loving communion that they share as One God. God has brought us into a wonderful relationship with himself that sometimes looks like Pentecost but without a doubt it takes the form of a loving community of believers gathered around Jesus Christ. We must be careful not to neglect this relationship with God and not to neglect our relationships with each other and certainly not to neglect our neighbors who don't know Christ and are in need. The Holy Spirit builds community in Jesus name by making us each to know the love of God as Jesus' knows it, as beloved sons and daughters called to come home. That's staggering. Amen.