

STUDY 11

Pentecost: The Kingdom and the Great Bestowal

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THE KINGDOM AND THE SPIRIT

This study looks at the relationship between the kingdom of God and the Holy Spirit of God,¹ and asks the question: What kind of kingdom, or power, does the Spirit bring?

Acts 1:1–8 begins to open this up for us:²

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions *through the Holy Spirit* to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about *the kingdom of God*. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. ‘This,’ he said, ‘is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the *Holy Spirit* not many days from now.’

So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time when you will restore *the kingdom* to Israel?’ He replied, ‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that *the Father* has set by his own *authority*. But you will receive *power* when the *Holy Spirit* has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’.

The italicised references show in each case the close relationship between the Spirit and the kingdom of God, with its associated matters of authority and power. Arising from this passage, we can ask the questions:

- What is the place of the Spirit in Jesus’ exercise of his kingship in this age?
- What is the relationship between the Spirit and the promised kingdom in the Old Testament and in the preaching of John the Baptist?
- Whose kingdom is it: ours, the Son’s, or the Father’s?
- What is the nature of the power given by the Spirit to those who exercise the kingship?

¹ See four chapters on ‘The Holy Spirit & the Kingdom’ in Geoffrey Bingham, *Spirit-Baptism: Spirit-Living* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1989), pp. 13–29.

² Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version.

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JESUS AND THE SPIRIT

We note that the instructions given by the risen Jesus to his apostles were ‘through the Holy Spirit’, and that they were ‘about the kingdom of God’ (Acts 1:2, 3). Jesus never exercised God’s kingship apart from the Holy Spirit:

if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you (Matt. 12:28).

Even to speak in that way—as if it were possible somehow to exercise God’s kingship apart from the Holy Spirit—does not fit with how it is: the work of the Spirit is the identifying hallmark of the kingdom of God.

As fallen sinners we think that we can choose to exercise some authority we think we have, either with or without the Spirit of God. Such thinking would have been quite unthinkable for Jesus.

Jesus, as the true human being, was and did nothing apart from the Holy Spirit: from his conception, through his baptism, temptation, mighty words and works, and praying, to the work of the cross, resurrection and ascension.³ In other words, all this was done through the Holy Spirit. In particular, his anointing as Messiah–King, and all his kingly actions, were by the Holy Spirit. So it is hardly surprising to find that here, after his resurrection from the dead, Jesus gave instructions ‘through the Holy Spirit’. It was not as if he now had some power of his own by which he could do that.

Many of us are under the misconception that Jesus somehow did all his miracles and mighty works by virtue of a unique power he had as God the Son, which, by nature of the case, is not therefore available to us. Jesus in his flesh as a human being had no power other than the power of the Holy Spirit. He was living and acting as the true human being. What he did was nothing more than could be done by any human being rightly living by the Spirit of God. So he was able to say:

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father . . . for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you (John 14:12; 16:7).

This can change our estimate of what a human being is, and is for. It also tells us something of the nature of the kingdom of God: ‘he gives the Spirit without measure’ (John 3:34).

THE SPIRIT AND THE PROMISED KINGDOM

Throughout the Old Testament are promises of the coming kingdom of God. This is the time when God Himself will take matters in hand directly:

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice (Ezek. 34:15–16).

³ Check these references: Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:20; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:33; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1–15, 16–21; Acts 10:38; John 3:34–35; Matt. 12:28; Luke 10:13–22; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 3:18–19; 1 Tim. 3:16; Rom. 1:4; 8:11; Eph. 1:19–23. See Geoffrey Bingham, *The Day of the Spirit* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1985), pp. 41–73; Martin Bleby, *God’s Holy Love* (NCPI, Blackwood, 2000), pp. 133–8.

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This will be a time of judgement on those who do harmful wrong:

As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats (Ezek. 34:17).

There will also be the true king:

I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken (Ezek. 34:23–24).

This will be the time when the triumphant reign of God can be announced:

Your God reigns (Isa. 52:7).

The outcome will be pleasant for all who participate:

they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,
and no one shall make them afraid;
for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken (Micah 4:4).

Those who are ruled over by God in this good way will also themselves rule:

the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion
now and forevermore.
And you, O tower of the flock,
hill of daughter Zion,
to you it shall come,
the former dominion shall come,
the sovereignty of daughter Jerusalem (Micah 4:7–8).

The promises of the outpouring of the Spirit in the Old Testament are all associated with the coming of this kingdom; that is, with a view to implementing this kingdom's agenda. Isaiah speaks of a time when 'a spirit from on high is poured out on us' (Isa. 32:15). This is when 'a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule with justice', and 'The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever' (Isa. 32:1, 17). God later likens this to an outpouring of water:

For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground;
I will pour my spirit upon your descendants,
and my blessing on your offspring (Isa. 44:3).

This will issue in people belonging to the Lord as sole King:

This one will say, 'I am the LORD's,'
another will be called by the name of Jacob,
yet another will write on the hand, 'The LORD's,'
and adopt the name of Israel.

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god (Isa. 44:5–6).

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In Ezekiel 36, God's promise, 'I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances', issues in the result: 'you shall be my people, and I will be your God' (Ezek. 36:27, 28). This will come after a time of great judgement:

Then they shall know that I am the LORD their God because I sent them into exile among the nations, and then gathered them into their own land. I will leave none of them behind; and I will never again hide my face from them, when I pour out my spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord GOD (Ezek. 39:28–29).

The classic promise of the Spirit in Joel is no exception. It will come at a time when:

You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,
and that I, the LORD, am your God and there is no other.
And my people shall never again be put to shame.

Then afterward
I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.
Even on the male and female slaves,
in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls (Joel 2:27–32).

This is the establishment of the good rule of God over all whom He calls and who call upon Him, in the context of a great judgement, by the outpouring of God's Spirit.

It is hardly surprising, then, that when John the Baptist announced the coming of the kingdom, it was in connection with the promise of the Spirit:

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near . . . I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire' (Matt. 3:1–2, 11–12).

Once again, the outpouring of the Spirit is in a context of judgement, which Luke designates as 'good news' (see Luke 3:16–18).

It was no *non sequitur* then, when after Jesus made reference to the promise of the Spirit, the apostles asked him a question about the kingdom:

While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. 'This,' he said, 'is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'

So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' (Acts 1:4–6).

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It was a good question, which followed well from what Jesus had said. The Spirit comes to establish the kingdom. The apostles still had more to learn, however, of the nature of the kingdom that the Spirit would bring.

WHOSE KINGDOM?

Although we speak of the kingdom of God, we are often more interested in the kingdom of ourselves. It is in the teeth of the kingdom of ourselves that the kingdom of God is established. That is why the Spirit comes with judgement.

Jesus' answer to the apostles' question made it clear that it is not the kingdom of us. Wouldn't we like to know when it all will happen, and have it all sorted out! Then we would have some handle on it all, together with some inside knowledge that would give us some advantage. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil revisited! Jesus denies us that with his, 'It is not for you to know':

He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority' (Acts 1:7).

The kingdom is not ours. It is entirely in Someone Else's hands.

Characteristically, Jesus did not include himself in this knowledge, as he said elsewhere:

But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father (Mark 13:32).

We may want to exalt the kingly rule and power of Jesus, in order to compensate at least for some powerlessness we sense on our own part, but Jesus denies us that also. As the true and only Son, he delights to be subject in trust to the Father. It is to the Father, and His good kingly rule over all things, that he gladly and lovingly points us. The Father has set the times and periods by His own authority—why would we ever want to know more than that? If we truly know Him!

So the kingdom the Spirit brings is the kingdom of the Father, who loves His children, and is bringing His good purposes for all things to a right conclusion. Jesus sought to allay our fears in this regard:

Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:32).

This is not just about the Father ruling over us. Remarkably, as we have seen, those ruled over actually participate in the ruling:

You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:28–30).

This is implicit in the vision given to Daniel (see Dan. 7). The 'dominion and glory and kingship' that is given to 'one like a son of man'—'an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away . . . kingship . . . that shall never be destroyed' (Dan. 7:13–14)—is also at the same time given with him to 'the holy ones of the Most High' (vv. 18, 22, 27). The kingship given to the Son of Man, the (at last!) true human being, the Second

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Adam, is the reinstatement of the dominion originally intended for these wonderful human creatures made in the image of God (see Gen. 1:26–28), and the taking them on to the ever-intended new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells, filled with the knowledge of the glory of God. This is the grace of the Father!

The presentation of this dominion in Daniel 7 takes place in the context of great judgement on the fearsome kingdoms of this world. If that great judgement is necessary, to clear away the mean and petty kingdoms of ourselves, to make way for the wonderful kingdom of the Father, then so be it.

WHAT KIND OF POWER?

Jesus spoke of being ‘baptized with the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 1:5). We have got used to taming that into doctrinal domestication. The way Jesus used it of himself, however, shows us that it is anything but a gentle enduement of the worthy, but rather a bit of a rough ride:

I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! (Luke 12:49–50).

Jesus asked a couple of his disciples whether they were prepared to take that rough ride with him: ‘Are you able to . . . be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?’ (Mark 10:38). Jesus was speaking of the action of the cross, which he called elsewhere ‘the judgment of this world’—into which he would take us, with him (see John 12:31–33)! This is what it is to be baptised by the Spirit. This is the great judgement that the Spirit takes us through, to bring us into fitness for the kingdom of God.

Jesus said, ‘you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you’ (Acts 1:8). Yet elsewhere God had said: ‘Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts’ (Zech. 4:6). What kind of power is not-power? We can say, in an opt-out pious quietist kind of way: ‘Oh, it is not by anything we can do, but only by the help of the Spirit of God’—as if our own feeble strength, aided by some divine booster, can actually make it. We can say that, while the slimy God-opposed flesh is still alive and wriggling. The reality is more vicious, and more glorious, than that: we will grab any kind of worldly power or might we can lay our grubby little hands on to further the doomed agendas of the mean little kingdoms of ourselves. The coming of the Holy Spirit signals the end of all of that—in the judgement of this world on the cross of Christ.

The power Jesus spoke of is the power to be living witnesses of him in that:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

The word for ‘witnesses’ is *μάρτυρες* (*martures*). The same word is used in Acts 22:20 of Stephen ‘your *μάρτυρός* [*marturos*]’—‘your witness’, your *martyr*. The power of that witness to what Christ has done to us and the world and all our worldly ambitions on the cross, to bring us into the kingdom that is the Father’s—with the reactions in ourselves and in others that will be so costly—is what will keep on being so richly bestowed on us in the Father’s glorious gift of the Spirit.