

Waiting for the Power of God



Gary Wilkerson July 17, 2017

If you need the power of God in your life, Jesus has special words for you. Just before he ascended to heaven, Christ knew his disciples needed power to do the works of his kingdom on earth. So he instructed them, “Behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49-50).

The instruction was simple: “Stay in the city.” But note this qualifier: “...until...” Jesus was saying, “Your lives will remain the same *until* the Holy Spirit comes upon you with power.”

This is true for a lot of Christians I know. They sense their life isn’t going quite according to God’s design. They’re dissatisfied, wanting more in their marriage, their work, their walk with Christ, their witness for him. Jesus is promising them, “God desires those changes for you. But such things only happen through the power of the Spirit. Until he comes, things will remain the same.” Luke wrote this scene in his gospel, and he repeats it in the Book of Acts: “While staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’” (Acts 1:4-5).

Jesus’ message in both passages is clear: “Wait on the Spirit! Don’t rush, clamor or panic. You can’t will your way to accomplishing the works of the kingdom. Wait in faith, and you’ll be endued with power from on high.” Indeed, it happened just as he promised. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were filled with a powerful anointing from God that the world had never seen. Two thousand years later, the world has never been the same.

Most of us need a lot of work at the discipline of waiting.

The more we hustle and rush to accomplish things for God in our flesh, the more his power drains out of us. This happened in the Old Testament over and over again. Israel was always moving ahead of God, frustrating his plans for them and robbing him of the glory he deserved as their faithful deliverer.

At times Israel even aligned with pagan armies to defend themselves against bigger enemies, which God forbade them to do. We have the same tendency today. Our flesh is simply inclined to move ahead of the Lord.

Elijah knew what it meant to wait on the Lord. I love this verse about him: “The word of the Lord came to (Elijah)...[saying] hide yourself ” (1 Kings 17:1, 3). I believe these are some of the hardest words any follower of Jesus can hear. It’s the equivalent of Jesus telling his disciples, “Wait.” Yet this word is always followed by a word of promise: “until”! In other words, the Lord is faithful to move at his chosen time if we will wait on him.

For the disciples, waiting was a matter of weeks; for Elijah, it was three years. That was the remaining length of the famine Israel endured after God spoke to him. Imagine how hard that period was for Elijah. He had a word from God burning in his heart—but he was commanded to stay silent for three long years.

Once those years passed, however, God told Elijah, “Go, show yourself...and I will send rain upon the earth” (18:1). At the appointed time, Elijah took part in an amazing blessing that God imparted to his people.

Today, a lot of us “show ourselves” before God’s appointed time. We end up spinning our wheels, tiring ourselves, becoming weary in doing God’s work. Friend, the only power we’ll ever have for God’s work will come from time spent in prayer.

So, what does it look like to wait on God? For many of us, any kind of waiting is a terrible experience; it speaks of boredom, mental torture, moaning and sighing. Scripture paints a different picture of the disciples’ waiting period: “While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God” (Luke 24:51-53).

What a picture of joy! There was no sackcloth, no groaning. For the disciples, waiting was anything but boring. Why? They had Jesus’ word of promise. That made all the difference. Besides, Christ emphasized that the timing is God’s alone: “He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority’” (Acts 1:7).

When that moment comes—when God tells us, “Go, show yourself...and I will send” (1 Kings 18:1)—he will endue us with his power. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). What an awesome moment that will be!

The power of the Holy Spirit comes to us in various ways.

Scripture shows us four ways the Spirit moves in our lives. First, as Jesus says, no one comes to know him unless they are *born again of the Spirit*. Therefore, in a sense, God’s Spirit dwells in every Christian. Second, we are called to abide in the Spirit, to remain intimate with him in prayer. Third, we are to be continually *filled with the Spirit*, to constantly drink from his well of living water. None of this means the Spirit leaves us, but rather that we have a part in our relationship with him.

Finally, there is an *outpouring of the Spirit that fills us with power*, something that is beyond us to generate. You may wonder, “If I’m born of the Spirit, and the Spirit abides in me, and I continually drink of the Spirit, why would I need the Spirit poured out on me?” We need it because it helps us understand our need for God. We could never do the works of his kingdom in our own passion or zeal. It has to come from him.

Sometimes we get it backward in the church: We think God chooses the fiery person, the one who’ll get everyone else zealous for God. But the Lord isn’t looking for a fiery heart; he’s looking for a hungry heart—one he can fill with his very own mind, heart and Spirit. That means even the meekest among us qualifies.

Note the word Jesus uses to describe the outpouring of the Spirit: “Stay in the city until you are *clothed* with power from on high” (Luke 24:49, *my emphasis*). This suggests an external move of the Spirit in our lives, something that comes from outside us. All other moves of the Spirit in us are internal—being born again, abiding, drinking our fill. But this is an action God does for us. We depend on him to bring it to us.

Think about it. There comes a time in every believer’s life when the Spirit has to move in a way that’s external from us. We need him to do the work that’s needed—to speak, touch, deliver. That’s exactly what happened when the disciples couldn’t cast a demon out of a suffering person. Jesus told them, “This kind comes out only by prayer and fasting.” In other words, it required utter dependence on God. We have to say, “I can’t do this in my own power. It requires God’s strength.” Yet as Paul encourages us, “Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith” (Galatians 3:5).

If your marriage is falling apart, it calls for a spouse who’s clothed with power. A suffering relationship calls for more than a theological word; it needs a living word from God that comes clothed in power.

As for churches, they’re a dime a dozen if they are not clothed in power. It doesn’t matter how many elders are called in to provide counsel. A clear decision can be made by one or two who are clothed with power. All of this calls for time on our knees, waiting and trusting God to supply the need in his almighty power. And he delights to meet us! Jesus told the disciples, “I am sending the promise of my Father upon you” (Luke 24:49). This promise comes not by anything we do, but by the grace of our loving Father.

I tell you, when his power comes, there is nothing like it. We not only have a sense of the Spirit in us, but everyone in the vicinity does as well. A weighty, glorious presence descends, and everyone knows they're on holy ground. Paul describes this kind of scenario in the Corinthian church, where visitors would fall to their knees crying, "The Lord is in this place!" That kind of event doesn't happen among casual believers. It requires a people who are willing to wait on the Lord in joy and faith.

We face an entire culture that can only be transformed by prayer and fasting.

The disciples needed prayer and fasting just to cast out one demon. We need it to face an entire wicked culture. Change will come only through power that arrives from on high. And that calls for a people who are not only filled with the Spirit, abide in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit, but who wait faithfully on the Spirit to be clothed in power by him.

I wouldn't preach this message of "waiting for the power of God" if I didn't know it to be true. My wife, Kelly, and I have experienced it firsthand. I've written before of our prodigal son, Elliot, who was addicted to heroin. No word of theology or apologetics was ever going to touch him. At one point he was homeless, and Kelly and I cried ourselves to sleep every night over him. We thought of all we could do to help our son, from rehab programs to people who might be able to get through to him. During that agonizing time, we prayed with mourning as if our tear ducts were faucets. It was one of the most difficult times of my life.

Then one night Kelly came to me saying she'd heard from the Lord. I immediately saw that she looked different—that she truly was clothed with something of God. She told me, "I had a dream. Elliot was lying on the ground unconscious. Jesus told me to pick him up, and I did. Elliot's body hung limp in my arms, near death.

Then Jesus lifted him from me, and I was relieved. But he turned away from me so that I couldn't see Elliot. It disturbed me, Gary. But I sensed strongly that the Lord was telling us, 'You can't do this yourself. You've got to stop interfering. You're unable to see it, but I'm doing a work in Elliot that's hidden from you.'"

A few weeks later the Holy Spirit took hold of our son and transformed him. He redeemed Elliot completely, changing him and filling him, so that today he is a powerful young witness for God.

Church, if we're failing today, is it because we're not waiting on God's power? Is it because we're "showing" ourselves rather than "hiding" ourselves? I exhort you toward your holy calling to wait on Jesus. He is faithful. And when his word comes to you through the Spirit, whispering, "Show yourself," there is nothing in life to compare.

On that day, you'll see heaven touching earth in ways you never imagined. You'll speak with more conviction and boldness than ever. You'll have courage and wisdom that lead to breakthroughs for yourself and others. You'll be more brokenhearted—and motivated—over an anemic church. And you'll know pleasure in your walk with Jesus more than ever before.

Pray with me: "Lord, I can't live without you clothing me with power from on high. I'm going to hide myself in you, to wait till your word comes saying, 'I send you.' I'll spend that time in faith, awaiting the day you release your glory in my marriage, my home, my church, my world. What a day it will be—and you're faithful to make it happen. I trust you, Lord." Amen!

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