

What is the Baptism in the Holy Spirit All About?

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The Holy Spirit: Learning to Ride the Wave of God's Spirit

Acts 1:6-8; 2:1-21

If you were to ask newspaper editors, "What is the major religious story of the last century?" you would probably hear about the growing religious diversity in America and in the Western world. You might hear about the rise of militant Islam. Some newspaper editors might point to the historic changes in the Catholic Church as a result of Vatican II. And some editors might single out even the defeat of atheism with the fall of worldwide communism. These were all big religious stories.

But no religious story in the last century compares to the growth of the Pentecostal/Charismatic, and what we in the Vineyard call the "Empowered Evangelical" wing of the Christian church. The growth of Holy Spirit-empowered Christianity, with people experiencing something like the Acts 2 filling of the Holy Spirit, and practicing 1 Cor. 12 spiritual gifts, is by far the most significant story in religion for the past century.

The story begins at a little Bible college in Topeka, Kansas with a 31-year old woman who was seeking more of God. The woman's name was Agnes Ozman and she was attending Charles Parham's Bible School in Topeka. Charles Parham was a Holiness preacher who taught that the Spirit of God was going to be poured out in these last days, bringing about a worldwide revival before Jesus' return. But the way the worldwide revival would come would be that the Holy Spirit would give the gift of speaking in other languages that would create instant missionaries. In other words, Charles Parham taught that the gift of tongues that we read about in the Bible was a gift that would instantly give individuals the capacity to speak Mandarin Chinese or Hindi, or Filipino, or New York. And with this newfound ability to speak in languages that people hadn't learned, folks would become instant missionaries.

So Charles Parham secured the Bible College in Topeka to prepare perspective missionaries for the outpouring of the Spirit. He directed students to especially study the book of Acts and Acts 2.

During the Christmas break, a few students decided to fast and to seek God for the filling of the Spirit. One of those students was Agnes Ozman. And in the providence of God, as the 20th century began, God gave Agnes Ozman, this 31 year old single woman, who simply wanted to be used by God more and felt called to be a missionary, the gift of tongues. While people all over the world were celebrating the new century, at exactly 12:01 a.m. January 1, 1901 Agnes Ozman became filled with the Holy Spirit and received the biblical gift of tongues. Not a known foreign language like Chinese or

Japanese or Hindi, but a prayer language that assisted her to pray better, worship more fervently, connect more intimately with God.

The news about this phenomenon spread like wildfire throughout the Bible College and many other students began to receive the gift of tongues. They then went out to the churches around Kansas and other people began experiencing the Holy Spirit in a new and fresh way and they also spoke in tongues.

Parham took this message of the coming of the Spirit and the gift of tongues down to Texas and started a little Bible College where he taught the doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit accompanied by speaking in other tongues. Charles Parham was a terrible racist. There was a black man named William Seymour who wanted to attend his school. Some days Parham made him sit outside the window and listen to Parham speak. Other days William Seymour was required to sit in the very back of the auditorium, separated from the class.

Seymour left that Texas school and headed out to Los Angeles. Finally, in 1906 during Easter week, he experienced the spiritual breakthrough he was seeking for. The day after Palm Sunday several people who William Seymour was ministering to experienced the Spirit's filling accompanied by speaking in tongues. His little group grew. They needed a larger facility to hold the growing crowds. And so an old 2-story building at 312 Azusa Street was procured. The parishioners who were poor blacks and whites put together a little pulpit made of two wooden crates in the center of the room with a prayer altar in front of it. Redwood planks laid across nail kegs and old boxes formed the pews. The upstairs part of the room was called "the upper room" where people went to pray silently waiting for the Holy Spirit.

People came from virtually every segment of society over the next three years to that old building on Azusa Street – whites, blacks, men, women, the poor, the rich, folks from all over the world came to the meetings that were held three times a day for three years. Inside the building about 800 worshippers would pack in with about 500 outside. Women, in particular, were empowered by the Spirit and went out from that place as evangelists and Bible preachers, and missionaries.

This phenomenal revival on Azusa Street under the leadership of William Seymour gave birth to modern Pentecostalism and the modern Pentecostal churches such as the Assembly of God Church, and the Pentecostal Holiness Church. It also created division in many denominations as different denominations eliminated the name Pentecostal from their denominational names because they didn't want to be associated with this filling of the Spirit and speaking with other tongues. So the Church of the Nazarene, for example, changed its name from The Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene, to simply The Church of the Nazarene.

Well, the phenomenon associated with the Spirit's filling remained quarantined within poor Pentecostal churches that met in tents on the fringes of town and in storefronts in the inner city until an April day in 1959 when Dennis Bennett, the rector of St. Mark's

Episcopal Church in Van Nuys, California apprised his very proper and upscale parishioners that he spoke in tongues. This was not received as good news. He spoke of his experience at each of the three morning services. After the second service, his associate resigned and in a hastily called board meeting, called for Bennett's resignation, which he gave at the third service.

Dennis Bennett's admission in front of a large Episcopal Church that he spoke in tongues sent a shockwave across the American church landscape. The story was reported in Time Magazine and in Newsweek and in various newspapers around America. It shocked the church world and created an interest in Pentecostal phenomenon in mainstream churches, especially the Episcopal Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Roman Catholic Church. So you saw growing charismatic movements during the 60's in these various churches. And then in the growth of independent charismatic churches with the birth of the Jesus Movement in the late 1960's.

But there was still a portion of the church untouched by this 20th century move of the Holy Spirit and that was the conservative evangelical wing of the church. In 1982 the Holy Spirit breached the wall through, among other people—John Wimber, who was teaching a class at Fuller Seminary's School of World Missions. I have been told that there are only two famous seminary courses in the history of seminaries – theologian Karl Barth's famous course on dogmatics taught in Basel, Switzerland and John Wimber's MC510 "The Miraculous and Church Growth" at Fuller Seminary.

Now, Fuller was the bastion of evangelicalism. It was not known for any Pentecostal leanings, though it had a few Pentecostals on staff. Nevertheless, the course was the most popular in the seminary's history. I've been told that students were lined up outside the class to get in. John's class created a raging controversy within evangelical orthodoxy because he actually prayed for individual students. He just didn't talk about the Holy Spirit; for John, the Holy Spirit wasn't just a doctrine. John expected the Holy Spirit to actually come and do things in the class—things like healings and deliverances.

The class grew out of his study and work in church growth and world missions as he and several other professors observed the dramatic growth of Christianity in the third world through Christians addressing disease and demonic oppression in the power of the Spirit. They observed that the gospel was spreading more effectively when signs and wonders and the experience of the Holy Spirit accompanied it. Right now, there are about 600 million Christians around the world who not only have trusted in Christ as their Lord and Savior and believe in the Bible as their final authority for faith and practice, but who also believe in and practice to some degree the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we find present in 1 Cor. 12 and have experienced the Holy Spirit's baptism that we'll read about today.

In fact, by the year 2020 about 1 out of every 7 people in the entire world will be a charismatic Christian. Let me say that again. By the year 2020, with the present trend lines, about 1 out of every 7 people in the entire world, taking account of population growth and everything else, will be a charismatic Christian, or what we call here at

Vineyard, an empowered evangelical Christian. The vast majority of them live in the Southern Hemisphere or in Asia, in South America, in Africa, and in China.

What I want to talk about today is how you and I can get in on this. The momentum has been building for 100 years from a single 30-year-old woman who desired to be a missionary to a 600 million people today, and well over a billion by the year 2020. This is in the history of the church one of the most amazing stories, this recent outpouring, or baptism of the Holy Spirit. It's certainly the major religious story of the last century. I've called today's talk, "What is the Baptism in the Holy Spirit All About?" Let's pray.

Jews believed the end of the age would begin with the resurrection of the dead. Now, since the resurrection of the dead had happened, at least with Jesus, and Jesus is talking about the kingdom of God, the disciples naturally asked Jesus in v. 6,

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Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?

We read Jesus' response in vv. 7-8,

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He said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

A lot of people interpret Jesus' words as if he was saying, "Guys, you've got it totally wrong. The kingdom of God has not arrived. The beginning of the end has not taken place. You have to wait for my second coming before the kingdom comes. Forget about the kingdom of God. Forget about the end times. What I want you to do is focus on witnessing now. Don't waste your time thinking about the end times or the kingdom. Get busy with the job of evangelism."

They asked him, "Are you restoring the kingdom?" Does Jesus answer the question, or does he not? Does he say that the kingdom is irrelevant? Forget about the kingdom and just go out and evangelize?

I think Jesus is saying, "You guys are partially right in your understanding and partially wrong. You were right in understanding that because of my resurrection, the beginning of the end had come. The kingdom is arriving in this world in power. God will forgive your sins. God will write his law on your hearts according the promise of the new covenant. God will heal many of your bodies. And he will reconcile many of your relationships. He will work justice in this world. And in particular, the beginning of the end is going to be shown because I'm giving you the great end-time gift of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the baptism that my forerunner John promised."

“But men, you are partially wrong. This is not the time for the Romans to be defeated. This is not the time for you to focus on a little strip of land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. This is the time for the spread of the influence of King Jesus throughout the whole world. Spread my influence by the baptism in the Holy Spirit.”

Let me bring this down for you. Some Christians spend all of their time studying and writing about what is called “the end times.” And so they draw up these elaborate charts, graphs, and pictures, and pretend to show you how obscure scriptures, lifted out of context from a prophecy in Ezekiel, or Daniel, or the book of Revelation, is being fulfilled today in what’s happening in Iraq, Russia, the European Union, or in Israel. They write these incredible stories about the end-times and millions of people buy their books at Wal-Mart.

The average Christian reads the book and says, “Well, I don’t really know what this verse from Ezekiel means, but who am I to argue with these folks? After all, they are so much smarter than me and they’ve made millions of dollars selling books and making movies. So if these folks say that the third horn on the beast is France, they must have been let in on some secret information that I don’t have. They must know that this prophecy against Babylon really is referring to the Iraqi War that’s being fought today.”

Other Christians say, “Forget about the end times, all this stuff is so speculative. We have a job to do. We need to go out there and share our faith with people around the world. We have a job to do, the job of evangelism, the job of missions. People need to be saved.”

What was Jesus saying to the disciples? What is Jesus saying to us? Jesus is not saying to forget thinking about the end-times. He is saying I want you to think about the end times. You are right in asking me about the breaking in of the kingdom of God and the end of time. The end of time has begun with my resurrection. But I don’t want you wasting your time discussing speculative nonsense about date setting and focusing upon impossible-to-interpret events in the world, or obscure verses about ten horns and three-headed beasts. Reading the Bible is not supposed to be like reading tea leaves, or reading someone’s palm. You don’t have to be part of a special elite group in order to understand it.”

The great end-time gift of the baptism of the Holy Spirit awaited Jesus being resurrected from the dead, and ascended to heaven where he was glorified and crowned as King by God the Father. The gifts of the Holy Spirit, along with the forgiveness of sins, are the two great gifts that people who go to Jesus receive. I want you to see this. People say, “Well, what can I expect if I go to Jesus Christ? What will Jesus give me? Why turn to him in faith?”

In John 19, John records a little event that is not in the other gospels. He tells us that when Jesus died on the cross, a soldier came up and ran a spear through his side. We read in John 19:34,

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Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

Now, putting the medical aspects of this aside, there are some physical, medical reasons why blood and water would have flowed from Jesus' spear-pierced heart, but John clearly wants us to read in the flow of blood and water great symbolic significance. For the blood of Jesus symbolizes nothing other than the forgiveness of sins. The water symbolizes nothing other than the gift of the Holy Spirit that flows from the heart of Jesus.

This is what the baptism in the Holy Spirit is all about. The kingdom of God is about inheriting the precious promises reserved for the end of time and enjoying those promises now – the forgiveness of sins, the writing of the law of God on your heart, the experience of a measure of the healing of your body, the experience of the reconciling of relationships, the spreading of justice on the earth, and salvation, regardless of race, ethnicity, or age. The beginning of the end has come to planet Earth. And we know this by the gift of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

This is not just an end-time gift; this is also an empowering gift. Christ has not left us here on planet Earth alone to slug it out by ourselves between the beginning of the end and the end of the end. Christ didn't say said, "Well, I'm going to heaven, men and women, and in a few thousand years I'll come back and get all of you. But in the mean time, struggle on as best as you can. The job is going to be hard. You are going to face lots of opposition. Many of you will be martyred. But I want you to keep a stiff upper lip. Remember the Little Engine that Could. He was the train engine that repeated to himself over and over, "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can, I know I can, I know I can, I know I can," and he was able to climb the mountain. That's what I want you to do, to think positively.

Jesus did not leave us in the trenches to slug it out on our own. We read in v. 8,

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But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Jesus did not simply give us marching orders to go out into the world spreading the gospel. He said, "I'm going to go with you. I'm going to give you power to perform the mission that I gave you. I'm going to baptize you in the Holy Spirit so you can carry out my marching orders in this very difficult world."

Craig Keener, in his very helpful book titled, "Three Crucial Questions About the Holy Spirit," uses this illustration. He says imagine visiting a town at night that appears to have no lights, no televisions, not even alarm clocks. People are out on the streets beating their clothes against rocks. They have torches lit. They are cooking over

charcoal. When you go into their houses you discover that all of the folks have washing machines, electric ovens, electric lights, air conditioners, and TVs. You also find out that the town has an infinite power supply. But nobody told the members of the town that the appliances won't work unless you plug them in to the wall. Wouldn't that be a silly place to live?

And yet, this is the way that people live today trying to do the commands of Jesus when we're not plugged in. We don't have the power of Jesus enabling us to live the life he wants us to live. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is all about plugging you into the power source, so that instead of beating your clothes against a rock, or rather, beating your head against the wall, wouldn't it be nice if you had power to change, power to overcome what oppresses you, power to break the addiction that is in your life, power to bear witness to Christ in your home, with your loved ones, your roommates and coworkers?

Now, you know that the church today spends so much time arguing about the timing of when someone gets plugged in. Most Christians think about the plugging into the power source in one of two ways. Either coming from a Reformed or Evangelical tradition, a person is plugged into the power of the Holy Spirit at conversion. Or coming from a Pentecostal or charismatic tradition, they are plugged into the power source after conversion through a special empowerment. Both groups line up their favorite Bible texts to prove when you get plugged into the power of the Spirit. I'm not tremendously troubled to have people in either camp, so long as the person is plugged in.

To the person who says, "I have received the power of the Spirit at my conversion," I would ask, "Have you appropriated all of the power of the Spirit that you need for your life?"

Here is a different illustration. When the money is all there in your checking account and you have it all there at conversion. Have you been writing checks on your account, or are you living life as a pauper? Theoretically you know that all the money is there in your account. But do you know how to draw a check on your account? Are you living in the power of the Holy Spirit?

To my Pentecostal and charismatic friends I would say, "Maybe you had a subsequent experience of the Holy Spirit. But do you believe that you've experienced all that the Holy Spirit has for you? The power of the Spirit is not just the power to speak in tongues. It is a wonderful gift, spoken about in 1 Cor. 14, a gift that enables a person to worship God with more freedom, to pray more effectively. You should want to receive this wonderful gift. But charismatic and Pentecostal friends, have you received power to witness? Have you received power in your life to heal the sick, to deliver someone from a demon, power to overcome addictive behaviors in your life?

I, myself, believe that the term "baptism in the Holy Spirit" is best reserved for the conversion experience of Christians. I, myself, in forming my theology, would key off of 1 Cor. 12:13 where the apostle Paul said,

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For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

It seems to me that Paul does not know anything about a non-charismatic Christian. To be a Christian in Paul's mind is to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. We are all baptized by the one Spirit, the apostle Paul says. By the way, there is not a difference, as some Pentecostals teach, in the Greek between being baptized by the Spirit and baptized in the Spirit. The same Greek word is used for both. Paul goes on and he says,

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We were all given the one Spirit to drink.

But I would not spend much time arguing regarding the timing of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I think that the issue in Acts 1:8 is about receiving power. The issue is not, "is this a first experience, a second experience, or a third experience?" The issue addressed in Acts 1:8 is, "have you received the power of the Holy Spirit?" And indeed, coming from the evangelical side of the spectrum, or the charismatic/Pentecostal side, or the Roman Catholic side, or whatever kind of Christian position you are coming from, are you confident that you have received all of the power of the Holy Spirit that you need in your life? Whether you want to call it appropriating what has already been given to you, or receiving a subsequent experience, I believe Jesus is more concerned that you be empowered by the Spirit, than the way you explain your empowering experiences. How many of you could say, "I am so yielded to the power of the Holy Spirit. I've received everything God wants me to receive in terms of power to witness, power to prophesy, power to praise God, power over besetting sins in my life."

Let me make this more personal for you. Whatever your church background, whatever your theological orientation, will you ask God for a deeper experience of the power of the Holy Spirit so that you can be a more effective witness, so that you can give words of prophecy, so that you can heal the sick, so that you can praise him better, or that he might give you the gift of tongues and discernment, wisdom and knowledge. Will you ask God for more of his power?

Now, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is not only a gift of empowering, it is also a gift of experiencing God. Let's read together Acts 2:1-4,

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When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit involves an experience of God's presence. I use that term "experience" very deliberately. We see in the case of the disciples that the experience of the Holy Spirit was a felt experience. We read in v. 2,

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Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

The disciples heard something like a freight train, which shook the house. Not only did they hear something, they saw something. V. 3,

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They saw what appeared to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

Not only a sight and a sound, but there was also speech. V. 4,

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And all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is the experience felt presence of God. People in the church today are told to forget about experiences. Don't worry about whether you felt anything or not. Concern yourself with the truth, and that is sufficient. Now, on the one hand, I think that is partially right. You don't have to wait for a feeling to obey God, or to do what is right, or do to what is loving, or moral. You don't have to be swept away with a feeling for you to determine not to lie, cheat on a test, gossip, or slander someone, or to steal someone's client. The Christian life is not a life of waiting around for a feeling to do what is right or good. We do act, based on the truth. We know what God's Word says about telling lies, or sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend, or slandering, gossiping, stealing, or helping the poor. We know what God's will is regardless of our feelings.

But if you have never felt, or rarely felt God's presence, something is wrong with that. It is true that the Christian life is not based on feelings. But if feelings don't ever accompany your relationship with God, then we would say that you have a defective Christian experience. If you don't experience the felt presence of God through the baptism in the Holy Spirit, you are not living out New Testament Christianity. And what we are regularly told is that it is perfectly OK for you to never experience God's presence. However you interpret it, whether you say I haven't appropriated what was given to me in the salvation experience, or I need a second or fifth experience, if you have never felt God's presence, you are not living out New Testament Christianity.

I don't know how many of you have had the occasion to read one of those little booklets in the past published by Campus Crusade for Christ. They had one of the booklets titled "Have You Been Filled With the Holy Spirit?" We used to call it the "Little Dove

Book” because it had a little dove on it and taught you how to be filled with the Spirit. It says the way to be filled with the Spirit is to pray to be filled and to repent of all known sin, to ask God who promises to give us the Holy Spirit, to give him to you. And then it makes this point. It says, “Having asked God to fill you with the Holy Spirit, thank him for filling you with the Holy Spirit. Don’t wait for any experience. Don’t expect that you will have a dramatic touch, just thank God that you’ve got it.”

Don’t expect, in other words, one of these Agnes Ozman plunging in the Spirit experiences, this drenching of the Spirit, and the baptism in the Spirit. Don’t expect the freight train, the wind, and the sound. Have you read the promise? Just stand on the promise and believe that God has filled you with the Spirit whether you can feel anything or not.

Conservative Evangelicals often accuse Pentecostals and charismatics of “name and claim it theology.” Just declare that I’m healed and I stand on that whether I’m healed or not. Conservative Evangelicals laugh at that and say, “That’s so silly. You are obviously not healed. Why would you claim you are healed?” But if there’s ever been a name it and claim it theology, it is this idea that having asked God to baptize you in the Holy Spirit, to fill you, we claim that we are baptized or filled without having any experience whatsoever. Nowhere in the Bible do you read of anyone encountering the Holy Spirit who says, “Well, I felt nothing. I experienced nothing. I had no sense of God whatsoever. But I’m taking it by faith that I’m filled with the Holy Spirit and I’m just going to go on as if I have been.”

That is just autosuggestion. That is talking to yourself. You don’t need to have any interaction with God to do that.

I’ve often used this illustration regarding my relationship with my wife, Marlene. It is appropriate that I kiss my wife whether I strongly feel like it in the moment. And it is appropriate that she kiss me whether she feels like it in the moment. So it is appropriate that we obey God whether in the moment we feel like it or not. But if while I kiss my wife, if while I hugged her, I never felt anything, if all of my interactions with Marlene sounded like this,

“Marlene, as I look into your beautiful blue eyes, the only thing I am aware of right now is a deadness in my feelings. Right now, I feel toward you utter indifference. My heart is icy cold. I logically and reasonably love you based on the truth that you are my wife and that’s what I’m supposed to do. But my emotions are not alive now and they have never been alive. Rather, I base this kiss on the truth that we are married.”

Wouldn’t you say there was something terribly wrong with our relationship?

Now, friends, there are a lot of reasons why you might find in your life a poverty of feeling in your relationship with the Holy Spirit. Sometimes there is something between you and God that is getting in the way of your feelings. I know that there is something between me and Marlene, if I have done something to offend her, or if she has done

something to offend me. There is this thing between us and it is going to affect our feelings. Friends, if there is something between you and God, you need to clear it up and get it out of the way through confession and repentance. If you've offended God, if you know that there is unconfessed, unrepented sin in your life, don't expect a glorious experience with the Holy Spirit. Experience in that case will, likely be fraudulent. Clear up your relationship with God first. Otherwise, like a stopped up drainpipe, your feelings will back up.

There are reasons why some of you have never felt any touch from God. Clearly, if you've never completely surrendered your life to Christ in faith, you aren't going to experience the gift of the Holy Spirit that comes from the heart of Christ. Some of you went to churches where you were told that it was positively dangerous to feel anything with God. And so you have been afraid of feeling God's presence. Perhaps when you begin to feel something with God, you shut those feelings down because you have a little voice in your head from your old pastor or leader or parent who said, "This is dangerous." You are afraid of experiencing the Holy Spirit because you don't want to be wacko like those people back there in that other church, or the people you see on television jumping around, despite the fact that the Bible consistently presents the Holy Spirit as someone who can be felt.

You know, we in the Vineyard stand in a long line of witnesses telling Christians to expect, or experience something in their relationship with God through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Charles Finney, the great evangelist back in the 19th century, he was later the founder of Oberlin College here in Ohio. He explained his experience using baptism in the Holy Spirit language. You might say that he was just appropriating what he received at conversion. Here's what Finney said,

"I received a mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost. Without any recollection that I've heard of the thing mentioned by any person in the world, the Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me body and soul. Indeed, it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love. [I love that language – waves and waves of liquid love.] It seemed to me like the very breath of God. It seemed to fan me like immense waves. I wept aloud with joy and love and I do not know, but I should have literally bellowed out with unutterable gushings of my heart. These waves came over me one after another until I recollect I cried out, 'I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me,' yet I had no fear of death."

Many people in the history of the church felt so inundated, so drenched, so overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit, that they felt that they were going to die, to explode.

Let me share a personal experience. Shortly after coming to Christ I went out to California to work with my dad building houses. I was 18 years old. Every night I took a long walk around a park to pray and be alone with God. I had heard about dramatic

fillings of the Holy Spirit and so I began to pray, “God, fill me. Allow me to experience your presence.”

One night, while I was by myself walking in the park, I felt the presence of God descend on me powerfully. I felt utterly drenched by the Holy Spirit. I began to speak in tongues. This experience lasted for about an hour as I walked around the park. If anyone was looking at me, I looked like a lunatic. Fortunately, it was at night and there was no one around.

Let me ask you a personal question. Have you felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life? Have you experienced God in some significant way?

I want you to open up your bulletins. This next weekend we are going to have an “Experiencing the Holy Spirit” seminar here. If you say, “Rich, I’ve never experienced the Holy Spirit in any dramatic way. This is all so new to me,” I would like to encourage you this next Friday night and Saturday morning to go to the seminar. Learn more about the Holy Spirit. Put yourself in the position of being able to receive from God.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is also the spirit of witness and world missions. We read,

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Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked, “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

The Spirit of God is driving the disciples to preach the gospel to residents of the entire known world. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is designed to empower us for evangelism and world missions.

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For you will receive power, Jesus promised, when the Holy Spirit comes on you. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

The baptism in the Spirit sweeps you up into something bigger than yourself. You are swept up into this incredible mission to the world. You are swept into the body of Christ. Again, the apostle Paul says in 1 Cor. 12:13,

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For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Baptism in the Spirit means that your reality can be larger than your individual circumstances. Listen, last weekend was really hard for me personally. I had planned to take my father to France this next week for the 60th anniversary of the D-Day Invasion. We were going to go a month early. My dad landed on the beaches before H-hour. He piloted a landing craft and he was landing on the engineers to clear the beaches with half tracks, and bulldozers, so that the other troops could sweep in. My dad celebrated his 21st birthday on the beach in the Normandy Invasion.

A year ago I realized that the 60th anniversary of D-Day was coming up and I thought, “Wouldn’t it be nice to take my dad over to France and to walk the beach with him where he was 60 years ago?”

I have lots of good intentions in life. But so many of them I never follow through on. Maybe you are a little bit like this? But I thought to myself, “This time I’m going to do it. I’m going to take my dad to France.” So, I planned this for six months. I had enough frequent flier miles to fly us both over. I got a hotel in Paris. I rented a car to go to Normandy. I haven’t spent a week alone with my dad, since I don’t know, maybe when I was 18.

Anyway, last Saturday my dad called me in tears. He said, “Rich, this is a call I never wanted to make. Paula, [who has been my dad’s wife for the last 30 years] is dying. I don’t know what’s wrong. Rich, I just can’t go.” I listened to my dad just bawling on the phone. He said, “I love her so much. She made me the man I am.”

My dad was a roofer and a homebuilder. I don’t know that I have ever seen or heard him cry. He said, “I’m so disappointed. I got my passport to go with you. I got new walking shoes. I was really looking forward to this. But I just can’t leave her.”

I said, “Dad, it’s OK. You take care of Paula. We’ll go some other time. It’s OK. I will pray for you and her.”

I got off the phone and I just broke down and cried. I felt so sad for my dad, who is losing someone he loves. I felt sad for me because I was really looking forward to doing this with my dad. He’s 81 years old. He’s not in Christ. I was very much looking forward to the trip and the opportunity to talk with him and be with him for a week.

I came to church a few hours after this incident. I have a responsibility here. My responsibility week by week is to encourage you and to equip you. I wasn’t feeling very good. During communion, right before I was going to get up to deliver the message, the Lord spoke to me. As I watched 1500 of you taking the bread and the cup, the Lord spoke to me and he said, “Son, you are part of something so much bigger than you and your individual circumstances. You are part of my church and my church is winning.”

You see it is not a matter of your or my individual achievement, or your or my circumstances. The church is winning.

I don't know where you're at today. Maybe you are in pain like I was last weekend. Maybe you are living with bad news, the bad news of a child whose in rebellion, or the bad news of a very painful marriage, or the bad news of being out of work, or the bad news of a broken relationship, or breaking up with your boyfriend, losing a loved one, being ill. Let me give you some good news. Let me give you some good news today. Have you ever thought to yourself: wouldn't it be great if you could see a Pentecost, 3000 people saved in one day? Wouldn't it be great if you got to witness a Pentecost like 2000 years ago? Are we ever going to see a Pentecost again?

Listen, here's some good news!

- Every day in China 28,000 people come to Christ. Now I want you to think about this mind-blowing statistic. Every day of every week of every year there are more than nine Pentecosts in China. 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year, year in and year out, the nation of China is experiencing more the 9 Pentecosts a day.
- In Africa, there are over 7 Pentecosts a day. More than 20,000 people come to Christ every day of every week of every year in Africa.
- Do you know that more Muslims have come to Christ in Iran since 1980 after the Islamic Revolution under the Ayatollah than in the 1000 years previous to that in Iran?
- I could go on and on. If you add up the statistics of people coming to Christ there is more than one Pentecost, there are more than 3000 people being saved every hour of every hour of every day of every week.

The point is our team is winning! Sometimes we just need a bigger perspective than our own individual circumstances.

You know, if you hit the beach in Normandy on D-Day, you would witness the same scene as depicted in the movie "Saving Private Ryan." You would have watched guys all around you being shot. From the perspective of a soldier hitting the beach, it might have looked like the troops were going to be thrown back into the water. Things seemed really bleak. But from the perspective of fliers flying overhead, they said later that they could see the German lines being punched through and advances being made, German positions being over-taken. From the perspective of fliers overhead, it was really clear we were winning.

And we are winning in the world. And the reason why the church is winning is not because we are so great, or so holy, filled with great plans. The reason why we are winning is because of this great gift of the baptism in the Holy Spirit that empowers us to our final victory. Whatever your individual circumstances, this baptism plunges you into

a bigger reality, the reality of the church worldwide, and you get to share its achievements.

The Holy Spirit baptizing Christianity is the biggest religious story of the last story. Don't you want to share in that story? Let's pray.

What is the Baptism in the Holy Spirit All About?

Rich Nathan

April 24-25, 3004

The Holy Spirit: Learning to Ride the Wave of God's Spirit

Acts 1:6-8; 2:1-21

I. The End Time Gift (Acts 1:1-8; 2:17-21)

II. The Empowering Gift (Acts 1:8)

III. The Experienced Gift (Acts 2:1-4)

IV. The Missional Gift (Acts 2:5-12)

V. The Unifying Gift (Acts 2:5-12)