

CHAPTER II: The Promise of the Father

“And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high”

Luke 24:49.

I wonder if you have ever thought of the origin of the phrase Jesus used here. Why did He call it the Father’s promise? He didn’t say “mine.” He said, “The promise of my Father.” This takes us back to Joel 2:28, 29.

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.”

Now, when our Lord Jesus came He authoritatively interpreted this, and tied up His intention for His Church with the ancient promises given by the Father centuries before.

In fulfillment of all this there were three periods discernible in the New Testament: (1) The period of the promise; (2) the period of the preparation, and (3) the period of the realization—all this having to do with the promise of the Father and the intention of the Son toward His people.

The period of the promise extends from John the Baptist, roughly, to the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. The marks of it are these: that there were disciples, and they were commissioned and instructed, and they exercised their commission and the authority granted them by the Lord. They knew the Lord Jesus; they loved Him. They knew Him living, they knew Him and saw Him dead, and they saw Him risen again from the dead. All the time our Lord was with them. *He was busy creating expectation in them.* He was telling His

disciples that in spite of all they had and all the blessing that God the Father had given them, they were still to expect the coming of a new and superior kind of life. He was creating an expectation of an effusion of outpoured energy which they, at their best, did not yet enjoy.

Then our Lord rose from the dead and we have what we call the period of the preparation. That was the short period which intervened between our Lord's resurrection and the downcoming of the Holy Ghost. They had stopped their activity at the specific command of the Lord. He said, "Tarry! You are about to receive that which has been promised. Your expectations are about to be fulfilled, your hopes realized. Therefore, don't do anything until it comes."

I might say here that sometimes you are going farther when you are not going anywhere; you are moving faster when you are not moving at all; you are learning more when you think you have stopped learning. These disciples had reached an impasse. Their Lord had risen, and they had seen Him, and with excitement and joy they knew He had risen from the dead. Now He had gone from them. Where was He? They gathered together, as you and I might have done under like circumstances, waiting, all of one accord. That is more than they had done during the period of the promise. But here were 120 of them, and they had an oneness of accord.

The period of realization came upon them when the Father fulfilled His promise and sent the Spirit. Peter used a phrase to describe it which is one of the fullest, finest phrases I know. He said, "He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear"—the shedding forth was like a mighty downcoming of water. The expectations were more than met—not fully met, but more than met. God always gives us an overplus. They got more than they expected.

Now what happened here? What did they receive that they had not had before? Well, first, they had a new kind of evidence for the reality of their faith. You see, Christ talked about four lines of evidence of His Messiahship.

He said: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." The Scriptures were proof of who Christ was. That is one line of evidence.

Another line is the witness of John the Baptist who pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!"

Jesus gives us another line of evidence. He said, "The Father himself... hath borne witness of me," and there was the third proof of His Messiahship, an authentic proof of it.

He gave a fourth. He said, "The same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." "Believe me for the very works' sake." Have you noticed there is one serious breakdown there, a breakdown which our Lord recognized and which He remedied when the Holy Spirit came? That breakdown lies in the necessary externality of the proof. In every instance the proofs which our Lord adduced to His own Messiahship were external to the individual. They are not inside of the man. He has to open the Book and read. That is external to the man.

When I hear that the Church of Christ has gone throughout the whole world carrying the torch of civilization, healing and giving hope and help, I conclude the Christian Church must be of God because she is acting the way God would act. When I hear that she has founded hospitals and insane asylums, I say surely she must be of God because that is what God would do, being what He is. When I hear that she has emancipated woman and has taken her from being a chattel slave and an object of some old king's lust to being the equal of the man and queen in his home, I say surely that must be of God. You can go down the corridors of history, and you can adduce proof of the divinity of the Church from what the Church has done. You can show how she brought civilization here and she brought help there. She cleaned up saloons in this town, and she delivered this young fellow from drink. We say that must be God. But that is external proof and it depends upon logic.

There is another kind of evidence. *It is the immediate evidence of the inner life.* That is the evidence by which you know you are alive. If I were to prove that you weren't alive, you would chuckle and go home just as alive as you are now and not a bit worried about it, because you have the instant, unmediated evidence of internal life.

Jesus Christ wanted to take religion out of the external and make it internal and put it on the same level as life itself, so that a man knows he knows God the same as he knows he is himself and not somebody else. He knows he knows God the same as he knows he is alive and not dead. Only the Holy Ghost can do that. The Holy Spirit came to carry the evidence of Christianity from the books of apologetics into the human heart, and that is exactly what He does. You can take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the heathen in Borneo, or Africa, people who could never conceive the first premise of your logical arguments, so that it would be totally impossible for them to decide on logical grounds whether Christianity was of God or not. Preach Christ to them and they will believe and be transformed and put away their wickedness and change from evil to righteousness and get happy about it all, learn to read and write and study their Bibles and become leaders and pillars in their church, transformed and made over. How? By the instant witness of the Holy Ghost to their hearts. This is the new thing that came, sir! God took religion from the realm of the external and made it internal.

Our trouble is that we are trying to confirm the truth of Christianity by an appeal to external evidence. We are saying, "Well, look at this fellow. He can throw a baseball farther than anybody else and he is a Christian, therefore Christianity must be true." "Here is a great statesman who believes the Bible. Therefore, the Bible must be true." We quote Daniel Webster, or Roger Bacon. We write books to show that some scientist believed in Christianity: therefore, Christianity must be true. We are all the way out on the wrong track, brother! That is not New Testament Christianity at all. That is a pitiful, whimpering, drooling appeal to the flesh. That never was the

testimony of the New Testament, never the way God did things—never! You might satisfy the intellects of men by external evidences, and Christ did, I say, point to external evidence when He was here on the earth. But He said, “I am sending you something better. I am taking Christian apologetics out of the realm of logic and putting it into the realm of life. I am proving My deity, and My proof will not be an appeal to a general or a prime minister. The proof lies in an invisible, unseen but powerful energy that visits the human soul when the gospel is preached—the Holy Ghost!” The Spirit of the living God brought an evidence that needed no logic; it went straight to the soul like a flash of silver light, like the direct plunge of a sharp spear into the heart. Those are the very words that the Scriptures use when it says “pierced (pricked) to the heart.” One translator points out that that word “pricked” is a word that means that it goes in deeper than the spear that pierced Jesus’ side!

That is the way God does. There is an immediate witness, an unmediated push of the Spirit of God upon the spirit of man. There is a filtering down, a getting down into the very cells of the human soul and the impression on that soul by the Holy Ghost that this is true. That is what those disciples had never had before, and that is exactly what the Church does not have now. That is what we fundamentalist preachers wish we had and don’t have, and that is why we are going so far astray to prove things. That, incidentally, is why this humble pulpit is never open to a man who wants to prove Christianity by means of appeal to external evidence. You can’t do it to begin with, and I wouldn’t do it to end with. We have something better.

Then, also, the Spirit gave a bright, emotional quality to their religion, and I grieve before my God over the lack of this in our day. The emotional quality isn’t there. There is a sickliness about us all; we pump so hard trying to get a little drop of delight out of our old rusty well, and we write innumerable bouncy choruses, and we pump and pump until you can hear the old rusty thing squeak across forty acres. But it doesn’t work.

Then He gave them direct spiritual authority. By that I mean He removed their fears, their questions, their apologies, and their doubts, and they had an authority that was founded upon life.

There is a great modern error which I want to mention: it is that the coming of the Spirit happened once for all, that the individual Christian is not affected by it. It is like the birth of Christ which happened once for all and the most excellent sermon on the birth of Christ would never have that birth repeated, and all the prayers in the wide world would never have Christ born again of the Virgin Mary. It is, they say, like the death and resurrection of Christ—never to be repeated. This error asserts that the coming of the Holy Spirit is an historic thing, an advance in the dispensational workings of God; but that it is all settled now and we need give no further thought to it. It is all here and we have it all, and if we believe in Christ that is it and there isn't anything more.

All right. Now everybody has a right to his or her view, if he thinks it is scriptural; but I would just like to ask some questions. I won't answer them; I'll just ask them, and you preach your own sermon.

Is the promise of the Father, with all its attendant riches of spiritual grace and power, intended to be for first-century Christians only? Does the new birth, which the first-century Christians had to have, suffice for all other Christians, or is the new birth which they had to have that which we have to have? Does the new birth have to be repeated in each Christian before it is valid, or did that first church get born again for us? Can you get born again by proxy? The fact that those first 120 were born again, does that mean that we don't have to be? Now you answer me.

You say, "No, certainly we agree that everybody has to have the new birth for himself, individually." All right, if that is true (and it is), is the fullness of the Spirit which those first Christians received enough? Does that work for you and me? They had the fullness; now they are dead. Does the fact that they were filled avail for me? You answer that question.

Again, I want to ask you, would a meal eaten by Saint Peter in the year 33 A. D. nourish me today? Would a good meal of barley cakes and milk, and honey spread on the barley cake—a good meal for a good Jew in Peter’s day—nourish me today? No, Peter is dead, and I can’t be nourished by what Peter ate.

Would the fullness of the Holy Ghost that Peter got in the upper chamber do for me today, or must I receive individually what Peter received?

What value would the fullness of the Spirit in the church in Jerusalem have for us today if it was done over there once for all and we can’t have the same thing here? We are separated by 5,000 miles of water and by 1,900 years of time. Now what, that happened to them, can possibly avail for us?

I want to ask you some more questions: Do you see any similarity between the average one of us Christians buzzing around Chicago and those apostles? Are you ready to believe that we have just what they had, and that every believer in Chicago who accepts the Bible and is converted immediately enters into and now enjoys and possesses exactly what they did back there? Surely you know better than that!

This modern fundamentalism as we know it and of which we are a part—is it a satisfactory fulfillment of the expectations raised by the Father and Christ? Our Father who is in heaven raised certain high expectations of what He was going to do for His redeemed people. When His Son came to redeem those people, He heightened those expectations, raised them, clarified them, extended them, enlarged them, and emphasized them. He raised an expectation that was simply beyond words, too wonderful and beautiful and thrilling to imagine. I want to ask you: Is this level of Christianity which we fundamentalists in this city now enjoy what He meant by what He said?

Listen, brother. Our Lord Jesus Christ advertised that He was going away to the Father and He was going to send back for His people a wonderful gift, and He said, “Stay right here

until it comes, because it will be the difference between failure and success to you.”

Then the Spirit came. Was He equal to the advertising? Did they say, “*Is this* all He meant! Oh, it is disappointing!” No. The Scripture says they wondered. The word “wonder” is in their mouths and hearts. He gave so much more than He promised, because words were the promise and the Holy Ghost was the fulfillment.

The simple fact is that we believers are not up to what He gave us reason to expect. The only honest thing to do is admit this and do something about it. There certainly has been a vast breakdown somewhere between promise and fulfillment. That breakdown is not with our heavenly Father, for He always gives more than He promises.

Now I am going to ask that you reverently ponder this and set aside time and search the Scriptures, pray and yield, obey and believe, and see whether that which our Lord gave us reason to think could be the possession of the Church may not be ours in actual fulfillment and realization.