

**Pastor Paul Bawden**  
**Grace Evangelical Church**  
**Sunday, December 26, 2010**  
**"The Power We Need"**  
**Acts 4:23-37**

The power in a snow storm is amazing.

As you know, due to the snow storm on Sunday, December 12, we didn't have a Sunday worship service, and other churches in the area cancelled their services as well.

My wife's niece, who was to return to London England on Monday of this past week, could not return to England until Wednesday due to the big snow storm in England as well as the rest of Europe. My wife's sister and brother-in-law were able to return to London on Wednesday as scheduled, so they were able to travel to Ohare together on the bus. The big snow grounded flights around the world, with flights cancelled out of Ohare and other airports.

As we watch the power of God's creation, we are reminded how helpless we are in such situations.

The natural mind calls it mother nature.

The biblical world-view sees what the power of God is like in the world that He created.

**The Psalmist penned, "He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes. He casts forth His ice as fragments; Who can stand before His cold? He sends for His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow" (Psalm 147:16-18).**

**Yes, there is the physical/material power of our God that affects how we function in our world.**

**But there is a greater power of God – His spiritual unlimited power, which doesn't reform people but transforms people from being against God to being for HIM and serving Him in time for eternity.**

That spiritual unlimited power of God is released through the third person of the Trinity, God, the Holy Spirit, who we have been considering for the last couple of months.

**\*\*Yes, the Holy Spirit is God and a person.** He is not an "it," or a "force," or female. Masculine personal pronouns are used to describe the Holy Spirit. "When He the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all Truth" (John 16:13). These are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**\*\*The Holy Spirit of God is opposed to the godless philosophies of this world** seeking to bring conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment in the world (John 16:7-11).

**\*\*The Holy Spirit lives within the believer in Jesus Christ** – Believers in Christ are a temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19-20).

**\*\*The Holy Spirit comes to produce harmony** in the relationships of believers individually, in families, in the church family, and in our other contacts (I Corinthians 12:12ff).

**\*\*The Holy Spirit is God's brand mark on all believers** that they are God's for time and eternity, and will arrive in His presence in His time (Ephesians 1:13-14).

**\*\*The Holy Spirit provides the believer insight** into God's Word for understanding and applying God's Truth to one's individual life and relationships (I Corinthians 2:6-3:9).

**\*\*The Holy Spirit was directly involved in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.** Believers today in Jesus Christ are regenerated, given the life of Christ, by the Holy Spirit so that the believer in Christ can have Christ live out His life through him (Luke 1:26-38; Titus 3:5; I John 2:6).

**Today, as we conclude this mini-series on the Holy Spirit, we discover that the unlimited power of the Holy Spirit is available to the believer in and follower of Jesus Christ.**

**Note with me what's involved in the Holy Spirit's power being activated in our lives.**

Our text in Acts 4:23, and following, takes place in the setting where Peter and John had been ministering in Jerusalem. God used Peter to heal a man who had been lame from the time he was born. Peter and John used that opportunity to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, the death, burial and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the need to accept HIM as personal Savior. The religious leaders authorities had Peter and John arrested put in prison overnight.

The next day they gathered together with Peter and John and asked them by what power they had healed the lame man in chapter 3. Peter was quick to tell them that it was through the power of the risen Christ. The religious leaders decided to tell them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. Peter and John replied that they could not stop speaking what they had seen and heard. The religious leaders threatened them and let them go.

Here is where our text picks up the narrative.

Acts 4:23 tells us that Peter and John went to where other believers were gathered and told them what had happened.

**What did the believers do when they heard about the persecution Peter and John had experienced? Did they complain to God for the suffering they had experienced for Christ?**

**Their Thanksgiving** - Acts 4:24-28 tells just the opposite - they gave thanks to God. They lifted up their voices in thanksgiving to God for His sovereign power over all – He is Lord – the despot – the Master over all. God's plan was fulfilled in Christ being crucified, as people were responsible for their own actions. Here the sovereignty of God and the free will of man come together to accomplish redemption for mankind.

**Their Request** - In Acts 4:29-30, the people then asked God that in the midst of the threats of the religious leaders, God would grant them confidence to be a witness for HIM.

**God's Answer** - Acts 4:31 gives the answer.

"And then they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness."

Obviously in this account God's unlimited supernatural power was at work in Peter and John and the other believers at that time in history.

**What is the teaching here for us today, since the God, the Holy Spirit is very active in the world today, and lives in each of us who knows Christ as personal Savior? How is the Holy Spirit's power activated in the life of the follower of Jesus Christ?**

**For the Holy Spirit's power to be activated in our lives these elements must be present in our lives.**

**I. An acknowledgement of the sovereignty of God in our lives (Acts 4:24-29a).**

A believer who desires to be empowered by the Holy Spirit acknowledges that God has the last word over the world and over one's personal life.

Note what is involved in acknowledging God's sovereignty in the believer's life.

**1. Accepting God as Creator of world (Acts 4:24).**

Acts 4:24 – With one accord (in unison), they said, "O Lord (Despot -Master), it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them" (Psalm 146:6).

In the midst of their persecution, the people didn't look to man as their source of life. Rather, they looked to God as their source of life, their CREATOR!

Any time someone, even a believer in Christ, thinks that he can accomplish something for God on his own, he has forgotten that God is his sovereign Creator who provides him the very physical life to serve HIM.

Yes, they looked to God as the source of their physical life. He was their Creator. They had His stamp upon their lives. They were created in the image of God.

For the Holy Spirit to be active in the life of the believer, the person must accept God as the Creator as Genesis 1-2 indicates. Of course, that also involves the fall of man and the rescue that God brought in the sacrifice provided in Genesis 3.

In addition, there is . . .

### **(2) Having an understanding of God's plan of redemption for the world (Acts 4:25-28).**

These are not the easiest verses for our finite minds to understand that are even given enlightenment by the Holy Spirit. (Note here, that the people acknowledge that the Holy Spirit was using David in Psalm 2 to talk about the coming opposition to Jesus Christ).

It was God who planned Christ's salvation for us in eternity past, and Christ carried that out that plan through giving His life for us on Calvary's cross, was buried, and conquered the grave. People were involved in making that crucifixion and death happen, using their own wills to carry that out. Still it was God who planned it, permitted it, and let it happen. This plan was really predestined or marked out beforehand by God to happen. You have here the sovereignty of God and the free will of man wrapped up in these verses. Both are taught in the Bible and meet beyond the skies.

A person may not understand completely the predestination of God in providing salvation for the world, and especially for those who believe in Christ, but he knows that God is sovereign and is carrying out His eternal plan for His glory and the good of all who accept Christ as personal Savior.

In all of this, the believer who will experience the power of the Holy Spirit in his life, is the one who acknowledges the sovereignty of God in creation, in redemption, and

### **(3) Knows God is totally aware and in control of what is happening in one's personal life (Acts 4:29a).**

"And now, Lord, take note of their threats."

Don't miss how personal these believers knew God was to them. Yes, He was the Sovereign of Creation and Redemption, but He also was totally aware of what was happening in their lives and in control of the situation in which they found themselves. They were being persecuted for their faith in Christ. They knew God was aware of that, but they were just reminding the Lord of their situation at hand.

To summarize what is happening in these verses.

**The believer who will experience the power of the Holy Spirit in his or her life, will be one who has a biblical world view, who sees all things through the lens of the Creator, Redeemer, and Personal God who is in control of all things.**

**If a believer fails to recognize that sovereignty of God at work in the world and in his life, the power of the Holy Spirit will not be experienced in his life.**

**But there is another ingredient necessary for the believer to have the power of the Holy Spirit at work in his life.**

### **II. Be a person of prayer (Acts 4:29b-30).**

**"And grant that Your bond-servants (doulos – slaves – who are under the despot – the master - 4:24), may speak Your word with all confidence."**

Living under their Master, Jesus Christ, they asked God in prayer that they may continually speak God's Word with confidence, meaning with boldness, with openness, freely.

Persecution did not deter the New Testament believers. Actually, it spurred them on to ask God for more confidence and boldness to share the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Don't miss as well that the believers were specific in their praying, in their request to God. They prayed that God would grant them boldness for the situation at hand.**

Lord, do this now, not sometime in the future. But, Lord do this now!!! For now is the day of salvation!! Then something else occurred in this setting.

### **III. Expect God to answer your prayer (Acts 4:31a-b) – Expect God to act.**

God heard their prayer and answered.

The place was shaken.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit.

### **IV. Step out by faith for and with the Lord (4:31:c) – The People's obedience.**

They spoke the word of God with boldness (the same word that is used in Acts 4:24 – confidence, with openness, and freely).

But the empowerment for the New Testament believers came as they prayed for boldness, and the Holy Spirit filled them for ongoing ministry.

What's involved in that filling of the Holy Spirit, for that along with prayer is what gave them the power to be a witness for the Lord?

#### **(1) The negative**

##### **\*\*Not undisciplined Freedom.**

The filling of the Holy Spirit is not license –which is an excessive or undisciplined freedom constituting the abuse of a privilege.

That's why Paul told the Galatians that "You were called to freedom, brethren, only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13).

Certainly, the Lord wants us to live free in Him to do His will by living a disciplined life.

There's always a price to pay for license.

Neil Anderson has said that "True freedom doesn't lie in the exercise of choices, but in the consequences of the choices made." One can reserve the right to lie, but one will be in bondage to it because the person will have to remember the nature of the lie and to whom one told it. A person may choose to rob a bank, but he will always be looking over his shoulder, fearing he may be caught. That is bondage. He who chooses to live by the lusts of the flesh, which are described in part in Galatians 5:19-21 - - - immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy outburst of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing and things like these, will have to be responsible for the consequences of his choices.

If we are living in the power of the Holy Spirit, God says He assumes responsibility for the consequences.

Being filled by the Spirit is also. . . .

##### **\*\*Not Legalism.**

Legalism is basically how one responds to God's law or His directions . For Paul said that the Law was holy, just, and good. The law did not save, it only pointed out that one needed a Savior, for no one can completely fulfill the law of God. Only ONE has done that, namely Jesus Christ in His life, fulfilled all of the law of God. That is why He could pay for our breaking God's law which is death, by dying in our place on the cross, being buried, and rising again from the dead.

That's why Paul said that if you are led by the Spirit of God you are not under the law (Galatians 5:16).

Believers in Christ today are not under the Old Testament law system. That has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and there is a new covenant by which to live, the law of Jesus Christ. It has many commands and directions for the follower of Jesus Christ.

**The challenge for the follower of Christ is to respond in obedient receptivity and act on what God is saying in His Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.**

Take the direction in the Word of God that we are to forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32). Now I can forgive someone who offends me as I obey the Holy Spirit who lives within me. But if I offer someone forgiveness who has offended me in an attitude of pride, or thinking I am pretty spiritual to do that, I have become a legalist, and have sinned against the Lord, and I need to ask His forgiveness.

I also grew up in an environment where there were a lot of so-called "rules" added unto the Christian life. Some of them were good and helpful "rules," while others had no Scriptural basis. Some really rebelled against them. They did what they wanted to do, and the consequences of their actions were not pleasing to God. Others kept the so-called "rules" thinking that would make them more acceptable and spiritual before God. Such developed an attitude of pride and God was also displeased.

If a believer keeps any direction in the Word of God, thinking that will cause one to be more spiritual or accepted before God, that person has slipped into legalism, and is not living in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And finally being filled with the Holy Spirit is . . .

**\*Not being a slave to sin.**

John tells us in I John 3:9 – "No one who is born of God practices (continually practices ) sin, because His seed abides in him, and he cannot sin (continually sin), because he is born of God."

John is telling us that person who knows Jesus Christ as personal Savior will not be living in sin – sin will be the exception rather than the rule in the believer's life.

That's why Paul penned, "Knowing this that our old self was (past tense) crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with that we should no longer be slaves to sin."

The believer in Christ is to consider himself dead to sin and alive in Jesus Christ. He is no longer a sinner, but a saint, set apart to God to think and act like Him.

Will there be temptations? Yes. Will there be times when the believer disobeys the Lord? Yes. Read Romans 7. The apostle Paul had those struggles, and sinned against the Lord. But he found forgiveness in the Lord, and victory over sin by obeying the Holy Spirit who lived within him. When the believer sins, he is to confess his sin to the Lord, and go forth to serve Him in the Holy Spirit's power. If he needs to talk to someone he has offended, he should do that first, asking God's forgiveness, and then ask God's forgiveness.

The believer needs to major on what he has in Christ – accepted by God's grace – standing in that grace, and going forward in the power of the Holy Spirit.

God wants us to enjoy living in Christ's freedom between the two extremes of license and legalism.

But there is the positive here.

**(2) The positive.**

**To consider this area, let's ask some questions.**

**1. What is the filling of the Holy Spirit?**

It is really letting the Holy Spirit have control of your thoughts, attitudes, and actions, and depending on Him for what you are doing for the Lord. The Holy Spirit always lives in the believer. **The believer has all of the Holy Spirit the believer will ever get in this life. The challenge for the believer is to let the Holy Spirit continually take control of more of his thoughts, attitudes, and actions.**

Someone has likened the believer's life to different rooms in the house. The **kitchen**, one's eating habits, are they glorifying to God?; The **living area** – one's relationships – are they pleasing to the Lord?; The **bathroom** – keeping one's life clean in thought, attitude and action before the Lord; **The closet** – do we have a place where we wouldn't want anyone to know what is going on in our lives. Then the **bedroom** – are we taking the proper care of our physical lives – getting rest and relaxation?; The **basement** – where there is room for storage – do we have a lot of clutter in our spiritual lives that needs to be discarded – to live more simply?; The **foundation** of our lives – are we keeping to basics of life so we can continue strong in Christ – daily prayer and bible reading/study, praying for those who need to know Christ, praying for missionaries, being a witness for Christ as He gives us opportunity. Using the monies God provides to further His church.

## 2. How is the filling of the Holy Spirit activated in the believer's life?

What did the people in Acts 4 do after they prayed. They went forward in the filling of the Holy Spirit.

**Obedience is the key that unlocks the door for the Holy Spirit to release His supernatural power in the believer.**

We can sit around and pray that God would send someone to minister to a person that we know we can help. What we need to do is get up go in the power of the Holy Spirit to touch that person in need. The Holy Spirit is a person of action who touches others in need through you and me!!

**Read the rest of the chapter of Acts in our text, Acts 4:32-37**, and see how the people filled the Holy Spirit ministered to those who had different physical and spiritual needs. A person who is filled with the Holy Spirit will be a person who loves to serve the Lord and in so doing loves to serve others.

## 3. Is the believer always filled with the Holy Spirit?

In Acts 2:4, 4:8, then our text Acts 4:31, also Acts 6:3, 5; 7:55; 9:17; 13:9, 52, refers to the filling the Holy Spirit or full of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:18 also teaches about the filling of the Holy Spirit.

**\*\*From these different texts in Acts**, it appears that God's Spirit filled people (empowered and controlled people) more than once for special activity, in the case of Pentecost, Peter and John ministering in Acts 4:8, and the people in Acts 4:31, along with Paul in Acts 9:17; 13:9. The filling of the Holy Spirit here is more an event for a specific purpose. God sovereignly filled their lives to minister at that time.

**\*\*Then there is the extended influence**, yes power, of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer that is activated in that person's life when he or she obeys the Holy Spirit through prayer and the Word of God.

**This filling of the Holy Spirit, or control of the Holy Spirit not only provides boldness for witnessing for Christ, but produces the very character of Christ in the believer as he or she obeys the Lord.**

**That's where Galatians 5:22-23 describes what kind of character is evident in the believer who is empowered by the Holy Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.**

**The extended influence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is only considered in Ephesians 5:18ff.** The evidence of the Holy Spirit's power at work in the life of the believer produces praise and thanksgiving to God, submission to Christ and others, harmony in the family relationship, and harmony in the work-a-day world.

As the believer obeys the promptings of the Holy Spirit as directed by the Word of God, He will be empowered to do God's will. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit.

## 4. Is there any hindrance to keeping the believer from being filled with the Holy Spirit?

Certainly that moment by moment conscious awareness, fellowship with God, keeps the believer empowered by the Holy Spirit to do God's will. What happens when a person has a bad thought or attitude, or says a derogatory word to someone? Obviously, fellowship is broken with the Lord, and the person needs to confess his sin, and return to fellowship with his Lord.

Sin in the believer's life hinders the Holy Spirit from empowering the believer to live for the Lord. If sin is not dealt with immediately, the believer can become calloused and start living in the flesh rather than in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Keep short accounts with the Lord is the word we need to hear and sensitive to the indwelling Holy Spirit.

### 5. Are you, am I, filled with the Holy Spirit?

I know that is a personal question.

But think about it with me.

Do you and I believe in the sovereignty of God in creation and redemption, and being our personal God through faith in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior? I know I do. You know if you have excepted Christ as your personal Savior.

Do we have any known sin in our lives? We now our own lives before the Lord.

Are we people of prayer asking God to give us power to live for Him?

Do we expect God to work in and through us?

Are we ready to step out for God and do His will, regardless of the task.

If we answered those questions with the proper answers, we are filled with the Holy Spirit!!

I was in a meeting where Dr. Bill Bright, the former President of Campus Crusade, was speaking. He spoke about the Holy Spirit. At the end of his time, he had us bow before the Lord where we were sitting. He asked us in prayer to talk to the Lord, and confess any known sin that might be in our lives. Then, by faith, he had us believe the Lord that we were at that time filled with the Holy Spirit. After a time a prayer, Dr. Bright told us that we were now filled with the Holy Spirit.

We are not talking here about some nebulous idea that cannot be grasped and experienced.

**We are talking about you and me being willing to do what God tells us to do in His word, not in our own strength for our own glory, but to just obey the Lord where he puts us, even giving a cup of cold water in His name in the power of the Holy Spirit.**

Without the Holy Spirit's power activated in our lives, we just float in life as a follower of Christ. We never step out for Him. We never witness. We never take risks. We just go along without anything exciting happening in our walk with the Lord. Perhaps, this is why some leave the church, or find another life-style.

Let's live in the power of the Holy Spirit today, this week, and in the New Year!!

**Yes, let's serve the Lord with gladness in the power of the Holy Spirit. Richard Foster has some things to say about service. I have made some changes to fit in with our emphasis today.**

Self-righteous service comes through human effort. Holy Spirit service comes from a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ.

Self-righteous service is impressed with the "big deal." Holy Spirit service finds it almost impossible to distinguish the small from the large service.

Self-righteous service requires external rewards. Holy Spirit service rests contented in hiddenness.

Self-righteous service is highly concerned about results. Holy Spirit service is free of the need to calculate results.

Self-righteous service picks and chooses whom to serve. Holy Spirit service is indiscriminate in its ministry.

Self-righteous service is affected by moods and whims. Holy Spirit service ministers simply and faithfully because there is a need.

Self-righteous service is temporary. Holy Spirit service is a life-style.

Self-righteous service is without sensitivity. It insists on meeting the need even when to do so would be destructive. Holy Spirit service can withhold the service as freely as perform it.

Self-righteous service fractures community. Holy Spirit service, on the other hand, builds community.

Let's pray!!

