



The Holy Spirit

What Was Jesus So Excited About? Acts 8, 10, 19

I have a dream!

OPENING DISCUSSION: How do you access the Holy Spirit in your life?

We have been considering how the Holy Spirit was presented to the world and the excitement Jesus expressed when He announced this plan to His disciples. **John 14:12** *I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father.* The disciples were not very excited at this announcement because it meant that Jesus was leaving them. **John 16:6-7** *You grieve because of what I've told you. But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you.* What was Jesus so excited about?

Last week we said that Jesus was excited because He knew that when the Spirit came the Gospel would explode into the world. **That is the Power that the Spirit makes available to you.** This week we are going to consider the second reason Jesus was so excited about the coming of the Holy Spirit: *The Gospel will wipe out the ethnic distinctions and bring incredibly diverse people together into one Church under Christ. That is the relationships that the Spirit restores in your life.*

Suggested Resource: Begin your group time by watching Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech on YouTube. Go to YouTube and type "I have a Dream." You can watch the full version (17 minutes - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbUtL_0vAJk) or the shorter version (2:50 - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUP_ISA030c&feature=related). Not many in the white Church backed Dr. King, but today many would support the segregation of schools and government and even the Church. But this is part of Christ's dream for the Church from the beginning (**John 17** is Jesus' original "I Have a Dream" prayer!)

Conclude this speech by reading **John 17:11, 20-21** *You have heard two "I Have a Dream" speeches. Both are given as prayers for a future for you, for the Church, and for our world transformed by the power of the Gospel. What areas do you still see segregation in our world? (e.g. race...black & white, Hispanics coming to the States, Native Americans in the Reservations, treatment of women at work or by men, religious segregation....)*

God had to force the early Church into desegregation if the Gospel was going to grow and even survive. We are going to discover how God stretched the founders of the Church and will stretch us to accept God's forgiveness for ourselves to give and receive that forgiveness to others.

THE SPIRIT GOES TO SAMARIA: *The Power of Fear!*

READ: Acts 8:1-5, 14-17, 25

The Church was considered a threat to Judaism because they taught that Christ was the Messiah, and that He would destroy the Jewish religious system and leadership. The religious leaders responded by threats and finally by killing one of their leaders, Stephen.



What were the results of the persecution of the Church (8:1-4) *The*

Christians were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (8:1), these believers told everyone they met about the Gospel (8:4).

Until now, the Church was exclusively Jewish, Samaria was populated by what the pure Jews considered “half-breeds,” worse than a Gentile. They justified their racism with God’s call to purity.

Since the first Church would not associate with a foreigner, what are other examples of the Church justifying racism? *E.g. Slavery, segregation, or Churches that program cultural preferences (music, ministries, message themes) that keep other races uncomfortable worshiping together, treatment of American Indians, whether active or passive, not standing up for injustice. Jokes about the addictions that seem to be more common in other cultures.*

READ: Acts 9:10-15

When God called Ananias to minister to Saul (or Paul), what was his argument for not obeying (Acts 9:13-14)?

What does God tell Ananias that He had called Saul to do (Acts 9:15-16)? *God called Saul (or Paul) to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, to Kings, and to Israel, and to suffer for God’s name.*

While Ananias justified his fear of Saul with a very rational argument (Saul was sent to kill the Church), what difference did God make in Saul’s (Paul’s) life?

What happened when Ananias listened to God rather than to his fears (Acts 9:17-19)? *Paul was healed of his blindness, became well, and the Church grew stronger.*

THE SPIRIT GOES TO CAESAREA (MARITIMA) *The Great Gospel Equalizer*

READ: Acts 10:23-33

What was Peter’s justification for separating from Gentiles, even those who feared God (Acts 10:28-29)? *It would be good to point out at this question that while the Old Testament Law forbade the Jews from marrying a non-Jew, God’s original call to Abraham was to be God’s conduit of blessing to the world (Gen. 12:1-3).*

What had God made clear to Peter that made him look past his “convictions” to associate with non-Jews? (Acts 10:28)

What does it mean when Peter says that “I should not call any man impure or unclean?” *No one is impure or unclean simply because of their ethnicity. We are all guilty before God, yet anyone and any sin can be forgiven, therefore, we are all equally sinful before God, and all equally “forgivable” by Christ’s sacrifice.*

While the Jew believed in the Law (specifically Genesis-Deuteronomy), they also believed that the role of the teachers of the Law was to determine how Israel was to obey the Law. The Jewish writings on application of the Law contain a number of provisions for Jewish-Gentile business partnerships and even for Jews’ bathing with Gentiles. However, these kinds of contacts still made a Jew ceremonially unclean, as did other interactions with Gentiles such as entering Gentiles’ buildings or touching their possessions. It was especially forbidden to accept the hospitality of Gentiles and eat with them. The reason for this given was primarily because they did not tithe. But these rules that were supposedly based on the Law of the



Bible also forbade Jews to be guests of a Jewish commoner. So Peter's actions in Acts 10 went against everything he had been raised to believe.

From Expositor's Bible

Commentary Vol. 9

READ: Acts 10:39-48

Compare Acts 10:34 with Acts 10:44-45. Luke says that there were two groups of people at this event, the circumcised Jewish group with Peter and the large gathering of Gentiles with Cornelius. What was the response of the Jewish (circumcised) believers when they saw the Gentiles filled with the Holy Spirit (10:44-45)?

When you became a Christ follower, what kinds of people did you stop connecting with?

What is the danger of stopping your friendship with unbelievers? *If the group has a hard time coming up with a response to this, have them think in terms of a parent's protection of their children from certain kinds of kids who might pull them down to the same lifestyle as theirs. The fear that leads us to spend our time with Christ followers is that we will fall into their lifestyle. But how else will they discover Christ's love for them?*

Cultural differences – that we place on an equal level as our faith.

Different beliefs – About God, lifestyle, language, tastes, pursuits in life

What friendships have you lost or walked away from that may reflect a belief that you are better than they are because of your higher values?

What relationships, cultures or socio-economic differences have you avoided starting because “you just don't feel comfortable around them?”

What ways do you reflect a feeling of superiority of others in your jokes or treatment of others, or even hatred of a person or group of people?

READ: Matthew 6:12-15

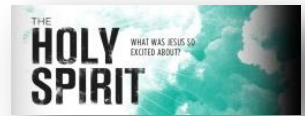
The bottom line issue of racism is unforgiveness. It is the belief that somehow I deserve God's forgiveness while another doesn't or deserves it less than I do. When I accept God's forgiveness of my guilt, but refuse to extend His forgiveness to another, I demonstrate pride and arrogance. While we usually think of racism as an arrogance against another race, the biblical category for it is “unforgiveness.”

What does Jesus say my unforgiveness of another will do to my capacity to receive God's forgiveness in Matthew 6:12-15?

Are you withholding forgiveness to someone who you feel does not deserve it from you?

How can you or your Small Group express forgiveness and God's heart to bring forgiveness to the world this coming week? *Discuss serving an underprivileged group like a single mother, or an unemployed or under-employed family, or going on the EMT ministry at Harvest.*

Pray for your group and for any areas of unforgiveness that may have been uncovered in your discussion.



Other resources:

Vern mentioned the story told in the ESPN series “30 FOR 30” called “Once Brothers.” This is the story of Vlade Divac and Draze Petrovic. You can view the clip online at <http://30for30.espn.com/film/once-brothers.html>. This story tells of a friendship that ended over a cultural mistake or misunderstanding. It is a good illustration of the damage of unforgiveness and of racism.