



You Have a Gift!

Spiritual Powers to be Witnesses

Acts 1:1-8

October 30, 2005

Some of you know that I am a science fiction fan. I've read Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein. I've enjoyed Star Trek and Babylon 5. But none of that has fascinated and amazed me as much as my journey through the New Testament with you these past few weeks to discover this: God grants to you and me spiritual powers called gifts of the Spirit. That reality is not science, and neither is it fiction. The reality of spiritual gifts from God in you and me is nothing short of a staggering revelation that has changed the way I see everything. Pause for a few moments to marvel with me at the implications:

- The Holy Spirit of God has granted to us, disciples of Christ, basically the same spiritual forces that empowered Jesus of Nazareth. Imagine: we have the power to do more, to BE more, than humanly possible, even to be like Christ!
- And more, the Holy Spirit of God grants a veritable multiplicity of powers. Some of them are named in the Scriptures: the gift of prophecy, the gift of compassion, the gift of helps, the gift of evangelism, and others. But those listed in the New Testament are but examples of the great variety of the gifts of the Spirit.
- And more, would you believe that each one of us followers of Christ has been given at least one spiritual gift? Not one of us has been left out of the spiritual powers of God.
- Further, God expects each one of us to find out what gift or gifts we have been given, and then to put those gifts to work.
- And furthermore, we are to put those gifts to work not for ourselves, but for others for God's sake, and for the up-building of God's Kingdom.
- And one more amazing thing, when we put those gifts to work in love for others, the result will unleash love and joy and patience and kindness throughout the Church.

This coming Wednesday night, I will spend time with any of you who would like help in learning what your spiritual gifts are. We will take a simple inventory that will give you important clues about your gifts. That will help you be ready for an offering of gifts of the Spirit during the Loyalty dinner.

But today I get to add one great P.S. to all these wondrous discoveries:

*The number one reason and purpose behind God's gifts of the Spirit is this –
to give us the power to be Jesus' witnesses,
power to continue His work in word and deed.*

Listen to the beginning of Luke's second book, Acts, as Luke describes the amazing acts of the apostles, Acts 1:1-8. (Read) The Risen Jesus, confirmed by God's resurrection to be Lord and Christ, makes two astounding promises to his disciples before he ascends to be with the Father. First: *...you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now ...* (Acts 1:5) And second:

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

(Acts 1:8)

Since Jesus had must risen from the dead, the disciples were in no mood to argue. They did exactly as they were told, and waited for the Holy Spirit to come, and they were not disappointed. On Pentecost God's Spirit came like a mighty rushing wind, and all of the disciples there received amazing spiritual powers. On that day in Jerusalem, they had power to be Jesus' witnesses, and thousands accepted Jesus that day. In them was the power to leap every barrier of culture and race and language so that all could hear the gospel and respond. Ever since then, to every generation of Christians and even to us, God has been granting spiritual powers to spread the gospel to every corner of the earth.

Let me pause here to make sure you do not misunderstand what these spiritual powers and gifts are for. They are not for our own happiness and fulfillment, although it is true that, when we put those gifts to work, a frequent side effect is the greatest fulfillment and joy one has ever known.

No, these powers, these gifts, are not for us. They are to give us the ability to perform the mission Jesus Christ has passed on to us. The gifts of the Spirit give us the power to be Jesus' witnesses, to be his hands and feet and voice in the world.

Let me also clear up another misunderstanding, about what it means to be Jesus' witnesses. Usually when one thinks of the word "witness," one thinks of someone who sits down with people to tell them the gospel and invite them to believe. One usually thinks a witness is someone who has the gift of evangelism, the knack of knowing when someone is ready to accept the forgiveness and leadership of Jesus. But as good as that is, the word "witness" is greater than that.

Someone who is NOT gifted in evangelism can be a witness. When you are putting the gift of compassion to work, you are being Jesus' witness. When you put the gift of administration to work, you are being Jesus' witness. When you put the gift of

discernment to work, you are being Jesus' witness. EVERY gift of the Spirit helps make Jesus real to the world. When you put your gift of the Spirit to work, whatever it is, you making a witness on behalf of your Lord. You are continuing the work of Jesus in word and in deed. Whenever you deliberately and carefully try to be open to the direction of God's Spirit and sensitive to the needs of others, you are making a witness. Charles Bryant wrote, "The essence of witnessing is love, and love is always something one does, whether in word or in work, for others."

Let me say it again: it is not just those who are gifted with evangelism who are witnesses. The use of ANY gift is a powerful witness for Jesus Christ. In other words:

*ALL saints
are stewards of ALL the gifts
to be witnesses to ALL the world!*

We ALL are Christ's witnesses. We all continue His work in word and proclaim that God's reign is near. And to SHOW that God is near, we all continue Christ's work with deeds beyond ordinary human powers.

In the world today, there are some saints who are known the world over for how they have used their gifts to make a witness for Christ.

Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter have employed their gift for administration and their gift of discernment to establish their Atlanta center for world peace. Across the years they have been invited by nation after nation to oversee elections and to usher in democracy around the world. Everyone knows that they do all this as a witness to the love of Christ for all nations.

Mother Teresa is a saint because of how she used the gift of compassion, but she also had a gift of administration in the way that she drew to her people who could do the kind of work she could not do by herself. All of that enabled her to continue to focus on the sick and forgotten and the dying in Calcutta. The world watched her, and saw Jesus Christ in her witness.

I count Fred Rogers as a saint. In fact, I call him one of the greatest evangelists of the twentieth century. He was NOT gifted as an evangelist as we usually think of an evangelist. But the way he employed his spiritual power of creativity in television with his gift of compassion was a powerful witness to the love of Jesus Christ to generations of children.

In Wilson today, in this very group of saints called First Baptist Church, it is a joy to see how you saints employ your gifts of the Spirit to make a witness for Christ.

Further, it is simply amazing how that witness is spreading around the globe from this one church...

...a single mother visits here and tells me, "I came because First Baptist Church has a good name in the community. She had heard that good news has come from this people.

...a Christian fellowship in a Muslim country in the Middle East enjoys a facility that was improved by the work of an electrician from our church. His use of his gift there will remain as a witness to his Lord.

...yet another team of men and women from First Baptist is driving southward to aid in the aftermath of a hurricane. They will use their gifts to be a witness, and Jesus will continue His loving ministry through them.

...somewhere on the Indian Ocean, a fishing boat providing income for 4-5 families. On the prow of that boat are the words "Wilson Baptist." It is a witness to the love of the living Christ.

...and in Wilson yesterday, teenagers and Baptist Men fanned out in the community to help wherever a helping hand was needed for an odd job. Throughout the town they were the hands and feet of Jesus. The work and the word of Jesus continued through them.

...and somewhere in Wilson recently, some of you seized the moment to say to a friend, "This is how the forgiveness and the leadership of Christ have changed my life. Come and experience it for yourself.

May each and every one of you know the joy and the purpose of discovering your spiritual power and gift, and then putting it to work to continue the work of the Risen Lord. That indeed is what happens when...

*ALL saints
are stewards of ALL the gifts
to be witnesses to ALL the world!*

-- Douglas E. Murray