

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Take the Holy Spirit!

by Dan Trygg

"In the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were gathered together with the doors locked because of their fear of the Jews. Then Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, 'Peace to you!' ²⁰ Having said this, He showed them His hands and His side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' ²² After saying this, He breathed on them and said, 'Receive (take) the Holy Spirit.'" John 20:19-22

"And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive (take-for-yourselves) the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Acts 2:38

"The purpose was that the blessing of Abraham would come to the nations in Christ Jesus, so that we could receive (take, seize, lay hold of) the promise of the Spirit by means of faith." Galatians 3:14

"But you will receive (take, seize, lay hold of) power when the Holy Spirit has come 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

That Resurrection Day evening was a time of mind-blowing revelation! As the disciples gathered together behind locked doors (because they were afraid of the religious leaders who had arrested Jesus, and arranged to have Him killed), suddenly **Jesus Himself stood in their midst!** They were startled, shocked and amazed, as He said, "Peace to you!" He proceeded to show them His hands, feet and side, and encouraged them to touch Him, so that they would know that it was really Him, ...not some apparition or spirit. It was truly Jesus, ...in the flesh, ...in *risen* flesh, but flesh and bone, nevertheless. He asked if they had something to eat, and they brought Him a piece of broiled fish, which He ate in their sight. **This was really Him!**

He went on to explain to them how the events of His suffering, crucifixion and resurrection had fulfilled what the scriptures had prophesied centuries before. He *was* the Messiah, the Suffering Servant who took their sins upon Himself, was pierced for their transgressions, crushed for their iniquities, and the punishment for their peace was borne by Him (Isa. 53:5). This Bible review went on for some time, as He opened up for them the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms to explain the fulfillment of prophetic passages throughout. "He also said to them, '**This is what is written: the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day,** ⁴⁷ **and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations,** beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And look, I am sending you what My Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high'" (Lk. 24:46-49).

As He was drawing these thoughts to a close, and preparing to commission them, **He blew on them,** and said, "Take/receive Holy Breath/Spirit" (Jn. 20:22). The symbolism would have been quite clear to the disciples. Their minds would have gone back to **Genesis 2:7**, where God blew into the face of the man of clay and he became a living person, ...or, to **Ezekiel 37:9**, where Ezekiel was instructed by God to call upon the Spirit to blow upon the lifeless bodies of the reconstituted skeletons that had once only been dry bones, and they, too, came to life and stood on their feet. In the Greek Septuagint translation of **1 Kings 17:21**, Elijah blew in the face of the dead boy three times, and called out to the Lord, and the child's life returned. **In each of these examples, the exact same Greek word was used as John employed to describe Jesus' action here in the upper room (*emphusaō*).** The disciples, too, were spiritually lifeless, powerless, unless they were infused with the life of the Spirit, the animating and quickening breath of God. **It was a powerful, vivid word picture of new creation, and resurrection life.** No wonder that Jesus then instructed them to wait for the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, ...so that they would be "clothed with power from on high" (Lk. 24:49).

Some people misunderstand John 20:22. They think that when Jesus breathed on them they *did* receive the Holy Spirit. But, clearly that is *not* the case. Why else would He instruct them to wait for the Spirit? Later, when Peter saw the Spirit fall upon Cornelius and the Gentiles at his home, and heard them speaking in tongues (Acts 10:44-47; cf. 11:15), he declared, "Can anyone withhold water and prevent these from being baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit *just as we have*?" He was obviously referring to the experience that they all had at Pentecost, where they too had spoken in tongues when the Spirit was poured out on them (Acts 2). In his mind, **they received the Spirit at Pentecost, not in the upper room on Resurrection Sunday.**

What was the significance of what Jesus did that night? **Why did He do it? This was a prophetic act,** ...a dramatic symbol that expressed both the identification of Jesus with the breath of God's Spirit, as well as the need of the disciples for an infusion of life and empowerment from God, as mentioned above. But more than that, I believe that **Jesus was also giving the disciples practical counsel that we all need to hear and implement.** The dramatic

prophetic act, as pregnant with meaning as it was, was not enough. **Jesus not only blew on them, He also gave them a command. The command was “Take the Holy Spirit.”**

I have been studying NT Greek for over 50 years, now. I typically read through a chapter in the Greek NT every day, and I have taught Greek classes to others, as well. One of the things I have noticed is that **there is a tendency to translate the Greek NT in a somewhat stifled, softened or passive way.** I think by doing this, translators have unwittingly obscured some important principles. **We tend to present the dynamics of the spiritual walk in a way that seems to indicate it will just “happen to us”, ...when the original language is communicating something that requires active, conscious and determined choice on our part.** In this passage, the word translated as “receive” the Spirit generally describes a more active type of action. Here is a partial list of the main usages for this word suggested in the lexicons: **“take, take hold of, grasp, seize, catch, to take by violence, to acquire, to get, or to receive”.** As you look at these options, you can easily see that most of them describe conscious, active choice. **Only “receive” could be construed as passive in meaning. But the form of the Greek word is not passive, at all!** Could it be that by translating it passively that we are missing out on what Jesus was trying to communicate? **Remember, this is a command that Jesus gave them. Could it be that He was commanding them to “take hold of the Spirit”? Could this be a command that is telling us to “actively respond to the Spirit”, instead of just telling us to “accept the Spirit”? Are we to be laying hold of what the Spirit is doing, and move with Him, ...or is this only about “getting the Spirit”?**

Certainly, Jesus was counseling them to wait for the promised Holy Spirit. He told them to stay in the city until they were empowered by the Spirit, **but look at the larger context. Why did they need the Spirit? Because they had a larger mission to fulfill.** They were to proclaim the message of Jesus, what He did, and the offer of forgiveness to those who will repent and embrace Him as their Savior and Messianic King. **The coming of the Spirit was to give them the power to do the work of ministry He had for them to accomplish,** starting in Jerusalem and extending to the ends of the earth.

Look at Acts 1:8, another example of a passive rendering of the same word: “And you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses...” **A more accurate translation would be, “But you will (for yourselves) take power (when the) coming-upon of the Holy Spirit upon you, and you will be my witnesses...”** The first rendering seems to indicate that the power will simply accompany the coming of the Holy Spirit. **The second rendering implies that the power is available, but you need to “take it, seize it, grasp it” when the Spirit is present. You need to grab hold of, or embrace, the power of the Spirit and put it into action as a coworker.** You need to “take the Holy Spirit”. It is not enough that He is present. There is more to it than that. You need to lay hold of His infusion of life by stepping into what He is prompting.

So many of the discussions we have about the Holy Spirit are about whether we have Him, or we don’t. Maybe we should be focused less on that, and concentrate on learning to “lay hold of” the Spirit, when He is working in our lives. We need to “take the Spirit”, “...lay hold of the Spirit”, or, “...embrace the Spirit”. If we take Jesus’ command as present, practical counsel for learning how to work with the Spirit, ...instead of seeing it as referring to a past event..., maybe we will begin to experience the empowerment in practical ways.

Why do we not experience more of the Holy Spirit? We should be, right? What may be hindering us?

(1.) We may be ignorant or unacquainted with what the Spirit could or would do, and how to respond. The “disciples” that Paul met at Ephesus in Acts 19 were like this. When Paul asked if they had taken or received the Spirit when they believed, they responded, “No, we haven’t even heard if there is a Holy Spirit.” **How many of us came to Christ, but were not made aware of the reality of the Holy Spirit?**

(2.) We may not have been instructed to look for and recognize the Spirit. In John 14:16,17, when Jesus talked about sending the Spirit, He said that the world is not able to lay hold of Him, because it does not behold Him or experientially-know Him. We however have that capacity, because God has given us the Spirit to reveal the things granted to us by Him, including the things of the Spirit. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. **Note that Jesus said that the world did not see or recognize these things. Just as Jesus watched for the Father (Jn. 5:19), we are to be watching for what the Spirit is doing.**

(3.) We need to actively pursue spiritual discernment. A worldly person is unequipped to recognize or discern the things of the Spirit, ...and fleshly Christians are limited in their ability. **Those who actively train to develop discernment become mature** (1 Cor. 2:10-3:3; Heb. 5:11-14).

(4.) When we recognize what the Spirit is doing, we need to “lay hold of that”. We need to accept that this is what God is doing, and embrace it. **If we can “behold” and “recognize” the Spirit at work, we need to respond to His activity.** We are to partner with the Spirit, by moving toward His activity and following it up. Some examples of things that the Spirit may cause are: ...tears, a glow or glistening-sweat breaking out on someone’s face, deeper breathing than what is normal, shaking, weakness, a curiosity or questions about spiritual things, a conviction of sin, an expression of a spiritual gift, an inner impression or leading inside of you to do or say something that you know is not from yourself. **We “lay hold of the Spirit” by facilitating and cooperating with what He is initiating. We follow up with appropriate questions, sharing, or actions that correspond to His actions.**