Acts “Did You Receive the Holy Spirit?”
Acts 19:1-7

Before I begin my message, please allow me to share a few thoughts about our Stewardship Season here at Colonial. First of all, stewardship is a word that reflects our biblical worldview here at Colonial. In a biblical worldview, everything we have belongs to God. Everything…our time, our talents, our money, our homes and cars and electronics—everything belongs to God. Because everything belongs to God, what we now have in our possession is on loan to us. Which means we are not owners…we are stewards…and in light of the average world citizen, we have been entrusted with much. Let us remember that all which has been entrusted to us is meant to serve the purposes of the Owner…who is God.

Now what I just described to you must sound like foolishness and nonsense to those who live outside of a biblical worldview. So, if what I just said sounds like foolishness to you, please know you are most welcome here, but my appeal is not for you this morning. I would ask that you give nothing in the offering plate. Instead, please take all that is offered of the Gospel as it is proclaimed this morning, that you might be forgiven and transformed by the power of Christ. Your salvation is free; we are saved by grace!

However, for those of you who are saved and live under the Lordship of Christ, the joyful concept of stewardship is a reminder of what you already know: we have been saved and brought into the Kingdom of God, and we are now stewards of what belongs to our King, who is Jesus Christ our Lord. Part of our stewardship as followers of Jesus entails giving our first fruits back to God for the advancement of His Kingdom on earth through the work of the Gospel. Since the Gospel has been entrusted to the local church, it is right that we set aside the first fruits of our labor to be committed to the mission and ministry of the local church. If you call Colonial your church home, I would humbly ask you to set aside the first fruits of your labors so that the ministries of this church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, might prevail against the powers of darkness and bring hope to this weary and broken world. Amen?

At our church, we ask that you indicate your commitment to be faithful stewards by filling out a pledge card, indicating what you intend to give as your spiritual act of worship and stewardship over the next year. Most of you should have received a pledge card in the mail, but you can find extra cards in the welcome books or at the information desks in the lobby. The Elders are asking that you submit your pledge by next Sunday. You are also welcome to submit your pledge online through our website. I want you to know that Christy and I are always leading the way by giving our tithe to Colonial before any other expenditure is made in our family. We give to many other noble ministries and missionaries as well, but our tithe goes to Colonial. If Colonial is your church home, we would humbly ask you to do the same. Let’s pray about that, and we’ll then we’ll jump into Acts 19.
As we continue our journey through Acts, our text this morning is Acts 19:1-7. Please stand for the reading of God’s Word.

As we join Paul on his third missionary journey, we read in 19:1, “And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus.” Ephesus was a very significant city in the ancient world (show map: http://www.culturaltravelguide.com/ephesus-ancient-wonder-travel-part-1#). It was the capital city of the Roman province called “Asia.” The population was close to 250,000 citizens (show pic: http://cdn.touropia.com/gfx/b/2016/08/Ephesus.jpg), making it one of the largest cities in all of the Roman Empire. The city was famous for its temple to Artemis (show pic: http://www.internetmonk.com/wp-content/uploads/ephesus-artemis-temple.jpg) which was considered one of the “Seven wonders of the ancient world.” As such, Artemis worship was a major source of commerce due to the many people who came to visit and worship at the temple.

I'll spend a little more time on the culture and dynamics of life in Ephesus in a few weeks, but let us return to our text, picking up at the end of vs. 1: There Paul found some disciples. And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.”

Here in Acts 19 Luke is recording a story that is quite similar to the story Pastor Greg preached on last week regarding the great orator known as Apollos of Alexandria. Like Apollos, these twelve “disciples” are those who were greatly influenced by John the Baptist, but their understanding of Jesus, the resurrection, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is lacking. Why is that? Well, remember that John the Baptist was beheaded before Jesus was crucified and resurrected on the third day. So those who were taught and baptized by John the Baptist, though being fully repentant and eager for the coming of the Messiah, were unaware of the full Gospel. We should probably assume that these men are either disciples of Apollos (before he was brought up to speed by Priscilla and Aquila as we saw last week), or disciples of John the Baptist himself.

Notice that Paul is not condescending or harsh with the men in any way. Instead, he patiently teaches these men what John the Baptist was pointing to. Look at vs. 4: And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.”

Remember that John the Baptist pointed to the coming Messiah, but in most of his teachings, John was not able to directly identify Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. Only in John’s gospel do we see the Baptizer declare of Jesus in John 1:29, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” Even then, following his imprisonment, we know that John the Baptist had his
doubts about the identity of Jesus as the Messiah when he sends some of his disciples to ask in Luke 7:19, “Are you the One who is to come or shall we look for another?” So John the Baptist pointed to the coming of Christ, but, like John the Baptist, many of his disciples would not have known that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. Now it does appear that Apollos was aware of who Jesus was, so these men also may know of Jesus, though they clearly have not yet connected the dots regarding the relationship of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

So Paul makes clear that John the Baptist was always pointing to Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. Again, that is consistent with what John the Baptist said in Luke 3:16-17: “I baptize you with water, but he, who is mightier than I, is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear the threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Upon learning that Jesus was the Messiah who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire, the twelve men request to be baptized in Jesus’ name. Let’s pick up the story beginning with vs. 5, “On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.”

Once again, as was the case with Apollos last week, there is a fundamental transformation that occurs when people are baptized and come under the Lordship of Jesus Christ: they receive the Holy Spirit with power…a power that manifests itself through acts that could not possibly have come about without the supernatural presence of the Holy Spirit. One commentator called this the “third Pentecost” in Acts. The first was the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem among the Jews; the second was the outpouring of the Spirit among the Gentiles at the home of Cornelius, and now the third is this story when the Holy Spirit comes upon twelve Jews from the Dispersion. Now…there is much to learn from this passage. Let us consider the 1) The Question; 2) The Answer; and 3) The Hope of the Gospel.

**The Question:** Let us begin with the piercing question that Paul asks in vs. 2, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

Why did Paul ask that question of these twelve men? I suspect it’s because he had a good reason to ask that question. Clearly there was a lack of power, conviction, and assurance that Paul could easily perceive as he spent time talking with these men from Ephesus. Sure, they were good religious men. They claimed to believe the information they had heard about Jesus. They were eager to be part of the movement that was beginning to grow and take root in the ancient world. But something was clearly missing.
Had I the courage of Paul, I would be tempted to ask this question of many people I encounter every week who tell me they are believers in Jesus Christ!

To the constant complainer, the man who gets so easily irritated and constantly gripes about everything. Sir, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?

To the woman who constantly worries, constantly frets. She has no peace and she has no assurance: Ma’am, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?

To the professor of religion, who plants doubt and disillusionment into the fertile minds of his students: “Professor, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

To the pastor who uses his position to bring glory and honor to himself, I cannot help but ask, “Pastor, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

To the man who can never get enough…who tramples people underfoot to make as much money as possible, yet has no room in his heart for the poor: “Sir, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

To the man who lives a double life, cheating on his wife while playing the role of a church-going husband and father: “Brother, did you receive the Holy spirit when you believed?”

I know a message like this one steps on a lot of toes, but the question is valid. “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

If so, here’s what we can assume to be biblically true: you have received power, you have been reborn…the old is gone, and the new has come. You are being comforted, purified, sanctified, prompted and enlightened by the supernatural presence of the Holy Spirit living in you! You are assured of your salvation because you know that you know that you know…Christ is in you! Your life now increasingly reflects the fruit of the Spirit which Paul describes in Galatians 5 as love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

As Charles Spurgeon once wrote, “…if we have believed in Christ correctly, the Holy Spirit has come upon us to transform us altogether. By divine grace we are not now what we used to be: we have new thoughts, new wishes, new aspirations, new sorrows, new joys, and these are created in us by the Spirit.”

Paul’s question is confrontational, but it is also loving, you see that, right? Why is it loving? Because eternity is at stake. Peace, comfort, strength and assurance are at stake. Sanctification and the liberation of the soul are at stake. As Paul writes in Romans 8:9, “If anyone does not
have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.” The Holy Spirit is the seal of our salvation. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is the evidence of our salvation. The power of the Holy Spirit is the source of our victory and hope in this life and the certainty of our hope for all eternity.

“But how can I know?” you ask. “How can I know if the Holy Spirit lives in me? The tell-tale marker of the presence of the Holy Spirit is this: prayer. One who does not have the Holy Spirit will not pray. Prayer comes about when the Holy Spirit is in us, willing and prompting us to pray. As Paul writes again in Romans 8, “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groaning too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the believers according to the will of God.”

Heartfelt prayer is the marker of those who are filled with the Holy Spirit. They pray because they are prompted, convicted, and empowered to pray. They pray because the Spirit of Christ lives in them, speaks through them, and works to bring glory to the Father and the Son and hope to the world. If everything I’ve said is completely foreign to your experience, again I ask you the confrontational and loving question posed by the Apostle Paul, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

Another marker is this: Does God work powerfully through your life in ways that you could never accomplish on your own? When the Holy Spirit is in us, God will speak through us, God will serve through us, God will prophesy and lead and heal and sing and pray through us with a power that is not of this world. Every person who has the Holy Spirit is gifted to accomplish those things they could never accomplish without the supernatural presence of the Holy Spirit. Do you see His power working in your life? Do others? If not, I ask you the question: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

I suspect there are those here today who have never believed, and thus you have never received the Holy Spirit. There are others who have been good, religious people for a very long time, and yet you are unfamiliar with the Holy Spirit as well. And still others who once knew the power and fire of the Holy Spirit, but now your faith is weak and you question if the Holy Spirit still lives in you.

To all who find themselves in one of those three groups of people, the appropriate question is this: how do we receive the Holy Spirit? How might we once again be filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit? Is it through baptism? Does somebody have to lay hands on us? Do we need to be particularly good or moral to receive the Holy Spirit? No, no, and no.
**The Answer:** Let us look to the answer that Paul provides in the text. You should absolutely receive the Holy Spirit when you believe. Believe what? Believe Jesus. When we surrender ourselves to the Lordship of Jesus...when we believe upon Jesus as the one who died in our place...when we call upon the name of Jesus with faith, broken in our repentance and yet confident in His grace...then and only then does the Holy Spirit take pleasure in taking up residence in our lives.

Now, many of you remember saying a prayer of faith many years ago, and yet you cannot say with confidence that you have the Holy Spirit living in you. Why is that? It’s because the Holy Spirit does not reside within us because we once believed...the Holy Spirit resides within us whenever we have faith and demonstrate our belief in Jesus. If you no longer feel the power of the Holy Spirit living in you, it is most likely because you are not believing Jesus. You are not living in faith such that you actually trust Him with your life and your circumstances. Remember the great quote from Dallas Willard, “To believe that something is true is to act as though it is so.” Do you long for the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit? Then believe in Jesus and act as though He is your Lord...trust Him with your life.

Now I must address this question: Do you long for the power, assurance, comfort, and gifting of the Holy Spirit in your life? I hope you do. I hope you are not one of those souls who wants just enough faith to make into heaven...just enough Jesus to avoid hell...just enough Jesus to get by.

Spurgeon writes, “A little religion is a miserable thing. He who has just enough to save him at last, may not have enough to comfort him for the present. He who has much grace, and is filled with the Spirit of God, shall have two heavens, a heaven here and a heaven hereafter.”

**The Hope of the Gospel**

Let us turn our attention now to the hope that is for all of us. The hope of the Gospel is that there is MORE that God would have for all of us. Even the most spirit-filled believer among us is one who has yet to fully surrender to Jesus and the work of His Holy Spirit...there is yet ground to be tilled, rocks to be broken, and territory to be yielded. So no matter if you are yet to call upon the name of Jesus, or you have a been a Christian all of your life, there is more that God has for you...more than you could ever hope or imagine, but God’s blessings come with His Holy Spirit. Listen: there are many stories of people who were students of Jesus, teachers of the Bible, and even missionaries who spent many long years toiling apart from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. That story is more common than you think.

The Christian writer and commentator, Dr. Kent Hughes, highlights the story of John Wesley as one such example. As the son of a clergyman and a very devout Christian mother, John Wesley had a privileged upbringing. He attended Charterhouse and Oxford and became a double professor of Greek and Logic at Lincoln College. He also served as his father’s assistant and was
ordained by the church. While at Oxford he was a member of the “Holy Club,” a group so nicknamed by the other students because they seriously attempted to cultivate their spiritual lives. Finally he accepted an invitation from the Society of Propagation of the Gospel to become a missionary to the American Indians in Georgia, where he utterly failed! Forced to return to England he wrote, “I went to America to convert the Indians; but, oh, who shall convert me?”

Not all was lost, however, because in his earlier travels to America he had encountered Moravians whose living faith deeply impressed him. So upon his return to London he sought out one of the leaders and, to use Wesley’s words, was “clearly convinced of unbelief, of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved.” This after being raised in the faith his entire life! Yet on the evening of May 24, 1738, Wesley wrote in his journal:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society on Aldersgate Street where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle in Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

Did you see what happened in Wesley’s life? He went from knowing about Jesus to knowing Jesus. He went from believing in Christianity to believing Jesus. And when that relationship became brutally honest and deeply personal, the Holy Spirit entered into his life, and he was forever changed. John Wesley’s conversion began a movement that historians rank with the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution as one of the great historical phenomena of the nineteenth century (see Kent Huges, Acts; pp 245-249). We will never comprehend the power of one life fully surrendered to Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

My own testimony is not so different from that of John Wesley, though my conversion will likely not be equated with the Industrial Revolution! Nevertheless, I was a believer and a church-going Christian for many years before that day in 1995, in the Princeton Seminary chapel, when I fully surrendered my life to Jesus and experienced the profound power and assurance of the Holy Spirit. It came about when I was at the end of my rope, broken and desperate before God. That experience was unlike anything I had ever experienced. It was the most real experience I have ever known, and it was the beginning of a new life that is still being worked out with each passing day.

Friends, do not be satisfied with the lies of our culture, that there is no God, no power, and no hope. Do not be satisfied with cold, sterile religion. And do not despair if you are still longing for more of the Holy Spirit in your life as a Christian. Believe upon the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, take Him at His word and surrender your life to Jesus, trust Him with your life, and you WILL receive the Holy Spirit with power and fire…you will be born again!
Will you pray with me?