

The Full Gospel is the Only Gospel Acts 19:1-7

Well, we come to the beginning of chapter 19 and the peculiar meeting of Paul with the disciples of John. Paul made a quick visit to Jerusalem and also his home church in Antioch, and then began his rugged trip back to Ephesus. He took a northern and mountainous route to get back. In Acts 18:20-21 we see the new believers asked him to stay but declined but did promise if the Lord will he would return. There would have been a small group of believers at this time but certainly not the thriving church, that was established a little later in this chapter.

Ephesus was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire and had a population around four hundred thousand. Ephesus also had one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the Temple of Artemus, who was a fertility goddess, also known as the Temple of Dianna. The city also one of the chief banks of the ancient world. People from all of the empire held their money in this safe and secure place. And it was here in this idolatry and materialistic place that the gospel of Christ would be preached turning hearts away from the things of this world to Christ.

And no doubt one of the chief tools God would use in this city would be these twelve disciples of John who are mentioned here in this section along with Paul and the other small band of believers. But it does beg the question of who these men were? They seem to be connected to a synagogue in Ephesus but it does not seem to be the same synagogue that Paul would have gone to initially, nor the one where Priscilla and Aquila were ministering. Look at verse 1, **“And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples.”** Notice he found a group of disciples. Down in verse 7 we find that there were twelve of them. And many have made much of the word “disciples” that these were followers of Christ or Christians because of that word. But this word means followers or learner of a teacher. There were disciples of the Pharisees, disciples of John, and in John 6:66 speaking of those who were following Jesus we read, **“After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.”** The word can be used as descriptive of a person or persons following a specific teacher. Certainly all true believers are disciples or followers of Christ but the term in and of itself does not connote saving faith on its own.

Now this passage is important for a couple of reasons. One is that it really does indicate that saving faith is through the whole gospel, not a partial gospel. It is through belief and trust in what Christ has done for sinners like us. Often you hear a truncated gospel, such as do you want to go to heaven then believe on Jesus. But who is Jesus? Why did he come? What is our problem that we can't go to heaven? How did Jesus pay the penalty for my sin? Jesus has a wonderful plan for your life is not the gospel. How do you know he has a wonderful plan in the positive sense? If I choose to remain in my sins can we say that person's future is bright? There is no saving faith without the full gospel.

The other thing we see in this passage of Scripture is that saving faith or being born again or new life in Christ or becoming a Christian is a spiritual work of the Holy Spirit of God. It is him coming into our lives and causing us to believe and trust in

Jesus. And there is always going to be evidence of his work in our lives. The Holy Spirit in the life of the believer will be seen in every true believer. It will not only turn his world upside down but begin to effect others around him. The light of the gospel will be seen. Every true believer has the presence of none other than God the Spirit dwelling in them to make much of Jesus Christ. How could you not change?

So this passage is one of those hard passages but great passages when we see God gloriously working and his Spirit convicting of sin and bring his called ones to faith in Christ. And the question we could ask of each of us is: is the work of the Spirit seen in your lives? Maybe a better question is how it seen in your life? I want us to work through this passage and I hope it will be a blessing. I hope it will be a challenge to us.

1. We need first of all the problem. Vv2-3.

I can remember talking to a person about faith in Christ. They identified as a Christian and talked about many of the good works he had done, and even how he admired Jesus. And you talk to some and they can use such spiritual language, but there is no faith in Christ. Many of you come from some sort of Christian background. It might have been grounded in ethics or ritualism or whatever. But here is the problem — whatever the background it was faulty because it was either incomplete or a deviation from the true message. And an incomplete gospel will cause you to fill in the blank as far as how one is right with God. It will always lead to faulty and heretical teaching. Many of you can profess that you were amazed when you finally heard that Jesus had paid the whole of your debt and all you had to do was see your need and believe on Christ. You hadn't heard that message before. The Spirit of God always works through a specific message and that specific gospel. You are here because of hearing the full gospel of Christ and the Spirit's work in your life.

Now the question becomes where did these men come from? They are in close proximity of Apollos and we realize he was a powerful and gifted teacher. Did they learn of Apollos before Apollos came to a fuller knowledge of Christ? Were they followers of John the Baptist who somehow settle in this region and never heard of Jesus? Or were they disciples of John the Baptist who were trained under one of the disciples of John? I think we can rule out the connection with Apollos because he seems to have some knowledge of Jesus but it is incomplete knowledge of Jesus. They seem to be Old Testament saints who have never heard of Jesus, his coming, his saving work on the cross or his resurrection. It is incredible because this is about twenty-five years after the time of Christ. But there was so much isolation in the ancient world. Think of a city of four hundred thousand where the name of Jesus has not been mentioned. You just go on with whatever you are believing.

Paul no doubt converses with them, and no doubt sees they are very sincere as far as worshiping God, but he diagnoses the problem really quickly. Look at the question he asks in verse 2, **“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.’”** Now the answer here is significant because this is one of the main passages that is many times turned to in order to prove a two stage Christianity. There is stage one where you ask Jesus into your heart but sometime after that asking of Jesus for some believers not all you can experience what was known as a second blessing. I can remember being in church hearing about this second blessing as a new

convert, and thinking is there something left undone? Is there more of God to be given? I was so alive to Christ and wanted to serve him. But here at the second blessing the Spirit comes and energizes the believer to really live a holy and consecrated life. Areas that you used to struggle with you no longer struggle with anymore. You now have the fullness of the Spirit in your life. This explains someone who has made a profession of faith, said a prayer or asked Jesus into their heart but never has anything to do with Christ nor ever follows him. They are in stage one — the initial blessing, but they do not have God's best.

Those who articulate that teaching point to this passage, also the Day of Pentecost where the disciples were waiting for the coming of the Spirit but were already believers. They point to the Samaritans who already believed but it was not until the coming of the disciples and the laying on of hands until they received the Spirit. So is there a two-pronged work of salvation — one in believing Christ and the other the power to live for him subsequent to that initial belief with the giving of the Spirit? The problem with that interpretation is two-fold. One is that it really misses the transitional nature of the Book of Acts. This is all new taking us from one era to another. We see the experiences and signs and wonders of that age are not something we see today. Many of the things that are going on are not normal but bringing us into what is known as the Christian age or the age of the church. And we will talk more about this in a moment, but it is amazing to see how the Holy Spirit opens up the door to all people everywhere, and that door is open by his Spirit to believe on Christ and is validated by certain signs.

The second problem is the rest of Scripture. You are not a part of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ unless you have received the Holy Spirit of God. It is him who causes us to believe and focus on Christ. Believing Christ, receiving the Spirit and being baptized into the body of Christ all are instant and happen at the same time. In other words, you do not have a believer who has not trusted Christ, or one who does not have the Spirit or one who is not part of the church. Paul writes to that church with so much controversy and infighting, and if you think if any church would have people in that first category it would be this church but he says in 1 Corinthians 12:13, **“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”** Notice that little word “all.” All were baptized in. Listen as Paul writes back to this very church in Ephesus in Ephesians 1:13, **“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.”** We are sealed and indwelt with none other than the Third Person of the Trinity. It is his mark that we are Christ's! And this is what separates those who are his from the unbelieving world. Romans 8:9, **“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.”** If you do not have the Spirit you are not a believer. You are not a Christian. So there is no two-stage Christianity taught in the New Testament. The Book of Acts is transitional in nature.

So look how Paul continues here, in verse 3, **“And he said, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ They said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’”** The disciples must have been talking about baptism so Paul asked the question for clarification. They say the

only baptism they know is the one of John's which indicates they are disciples of John whether directly through John's ministry or indirectly through another of his disciples that came to this area. They knew the Messiah was coming, and they sought to make their life ready. But according to what they said to Paul these individuals were not Christian. How do we know? They had not received the Spirit who witnesses with our Spirit that we are none other than the people of God. We are none other than those who have believed on Christ and are purchased with his blood.

Folks, this is such a great reminder of the power and glory of the gospel. We have such a weak gospel today. One where people can just cover all the bases. One is by asking Jesus into your heart and then going living like and for the devil. When someone dies we might hear, I know so and so never cared for Jesus or the church and lived a life focused on personal pleasure and the world, but he did ask Jesus into his heart when he was a boy! Asking Jesus into your heart has dampened so many individuals. It is a partial gospel that does not give life. Salvation is no more than an insurance policy. You never worship an insurance policy. You put it away until you need it one day and go live your life with that assurance in the back ground. Salvation is not only the deliverance from the penalty but deliverance from the control of sin. It is not only justification but sanctification. A half gospel or a truncated gospel is no gospel.

2. We see the remedy is the full gospel. Vv. 4-7.

I love this passage because there is so much talk about the Spirit of God in this passage, but Paul after he diagnosed the problems doesn't give a long teaching on the Spirit of God and his ministry in our lives. But what he does is focus on Jesus Christ. Because you can always see the ministry of the Spirit in the lives of those who are believers because of our trust and confidence and joy and assurance is found in the Person the Spirit directs us to — none other than Jesus. And let me ask you — where is your confidence in salvation? Is it in your baptism or your church membership or your good works or some sort of inward feeling or experience? The Holy Spirit directs our hearts and minds to all that Jesus has accomplished for us. It is all about Christ!

With this in mind look at how Paul transitions here in verse 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.’”** He transitions because this is the main problem and the solution — they do not know about Jesus. It is not that they do not know about the Spirit but they don't know about Jesus. John baptized you for repentance to make prepare your hearts and lives for the coming of the Messiah. Well this one who was to come did and his name is Jesus. He lived that perfect life, and he died that substitutionary death, and rose from the grave proving for once and for all that the penalty of sin could not hold him. The debt has been paid not in part but the whole, and I own it no more praise the Lord, praise the Lord oh my soul.

Now you can see the ministry of the Spirit in their lives, at least his initial ministry through what happens next — they believe. They trust Christ. How do we know? Well look at verse 5, **“On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”** On hearing what? That Jesus is the Christ. He was the One that John pointed to. He is our hope. And I love this because right away they want to be identified with Christ. They want to be identified with his people. They want to say to one another and

anyone else who would have been present that my hope to be found with God in glory is through Christ and him alone. That is what true believers do. They follow Christ. They want to obey and make much of him. It is unthinkable for believers all the way through the Book of Acts not to want to get baptized. They trust Christ. They love Christ.

And we could do a whole sermon on verse 5, but I want us to see what happens next. Look at verse 6, **“And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.”** Now what is up with all of the things we see here from the laying on of hands to speaking in tongues to prophesying? Why all of this? There might have been others who were present but why the speaking in these foreign languages? There certainly was not a number of people from different nations like we find in book of Acts. Let me handle the question of the laying on of hands and the receiving of the Spirit because we see something like this in Acts 8. Philip preaches Christ to the Samaritans. This is the gospel extending out past Jerusalem and also to those who were not full blooded Jews. The Samaritans believed and were baptized in the name of Christ. But had not received the Spirit. Peter and John come from Jerusalem, and we read in Acts 8:17, **“Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.”** We also read when Peter was preaching the gospel to Gentiles in Cornelius’ house, Acts 10:44, **“While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.”**

So think of it along with the signs of prophecy and tongues. You have the coming of the Spirit emphasized four different times in the Book of Acts, once at Pentecost where the one hundred twenty spoke in tongues and prophesy. You have it at Samaria, although we are not told they spoke in tongues we can surmise that there were signs and some kind of confirmation that they receive the Spirit. Then at Cornelius house where they did speak in tongues, and now here. Those are the only places where tongues are spoken in the book of Acts, which is amazing because if you listen to some people it is on every page. Only three mentions with a possible fourth in Samaria. And here is the commonality. There are two. One is there is always an apostle present. This is an official representative of God, chosen to lay the foundation of the church of Christ. And the second is that it is always a new group or a new aspect of humanity. We have the unbelieving Jews in Acts 2, we have the Samaritans in Acts 8, we have the Gentiles in Acts 10, and here we have the Old Testament saints who truly are waiting for the coming of Christ. Paul laying his hands on them is just validation that they are none other than believers in Christ.

And why the sign gifts? It is confirmation that this salvation is open to any and all and even this new aspect of humanity that has not believed and trusted Christ. This is the last group that is gather into the church of Christ. When Peter reported back to church at Jerusalem about the events at Cornelius’ house he says in Acts 11:17-18, **“If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?”** When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, **“Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”** These were validating miracles and signs that validated the acceptance of these various groups through those who were chosen to lay the foundation of the church of Christ. You see the sameness in all

four of these instances. Listen to what John MacArthur writes about this, **“So all the groups were gathered in. And in each case apostles were present to verify that all received the same Holy Spirit in the same way. That having been completed, Paul could write to the Ephesians, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph. 4:4–5). From then on, the Holy Spirit would come to every heart at salvation, as the epistles teach.”**

So there was no doubt they had received the Spirit of God through these authenticating signs. But how do we know that we have received the Holy Spirit? It is a great question because there is such a fascination on and renewed interest on the Spirit's ministry. People pray to the Spirit, look to Spirit, continually praise the Spirit. But with all this talk how do we know if we have the Spirit? People often ask today, “Do you have the Spirit?” And really it is the wrong question. These historical situations like this are really unrepeatable. The question should be: do you have Jesus? Because how you answer that question will really answer if you have the Spirit. The Holy Spirit's delight is not to point to himself but to point to Jesus. Listen to why the Spirit comes. Jesus says in John 15:26, **“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.”** With all this emphasis on the Spirit, it misses the whole point of how we know he is active in our lives. He bears or shine all the light and emphasis on Jesus Christ.

The Peace Fountain is beautiful at night. There are spotlights that shine the light on the fountain, without which you could not see the beauty and significance of the fountain. People who look at it, never say look at those spotlights! No, they say look at the fountain! That is the ministry of the Spirit. You see that in Paul's emphasis. He preaches not the Spirit but the message that the Spirit uses. Are you amazed at his ministry in our lives, because it really has not changed? And it indicates to us, that the more we seek to see our Jesus through the Scriptures the more he is active in our lives. Don't be duped by counterfeits. They always lead us astray. Be thankful every time you hear Christ exalted. It is the ministry of the Spirit to shine all the light and worship and delight and confidence on him. Praise God, this is his work.