THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE GREAT COMMISSION 5

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Category: Mission

In the previous post in this series, we looked at the issues which were highlighted by both Matthew and Luke in their accounts of Jesus' final words to his disciples. Now I'd like to move on and consider those things which were only mentioned by Luke. The list is rather short.

Acts 1:8

> *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhereâ€"in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.â€*

I suggest that there are two substantive issues that we need to highlight with regard to Luke, the first is the presence of the Holy Spirit and the second is the issue of witnessing to Christ. This post will look at the former of these two.

It isn't clear why Matthew doesn't make any overt mention of the Spirit; though the fact that he was writing the closing section of a book where the Spirit did not have a major role, whereas Luke was writing the introduction to a book that is dominated by the work of the Spirit might well explain the differences.

There are four aspects of the work of the Spirit in mission that I would like to highlight.

Signs and Wonders. It is clear from the book of Acts that the Spirit empowered the disciples to perform many signs and wonders. More or less the first manifestation of the Spirit was the miracle of languages at the feast of Pentecost in Acts 2. Numerous other people, not just the Apostles are mentioned as performing miracles, these include Philip at Samaria in the early part of Acts 8.

I don't see any biblical case for inferring that miracles have ceased or that they were only a feature of the Apostolic age. Equally, I can't see a biblical case for insisting that miracles should always accompany the work of the Spirit either. The contrast between Philip's miraculous ministry at the start of Acts 8 to his patient, detailed explanation of Scripture in the second half of the same chapter gives us a picture of a Spirit who is gloriously flexible in the way he reaches out to the world. This leads us into the second theme.

Discernment. Guided by the Spirit Philip used different evangelistic methods in different situations. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to mission; we need discernment from the Spirit to help us know where to go and what to do. Tim Chester has an excellent post on this theme drawn from a study of the book of Acts. It's well worth a read.(If only I could have thought of a title starting with 'S' this could have made a good sermon outline!)

Success. This theme is linked to the previous one as Tim Chester makes clear. It is the Spirit who brings success in mission, not us. God is sovereign and the mission is his, not ours. All of the powers of human technology, persuasiveness and charm can not effect spiritual change in this world, only

God can and he does so by his Spirit. This is not to say that technology, persuasiveness and charm are bad things. God is able to use our talents, our strengths and our weaknesses, but he, not us, is the one who can change the world.

Sanctification. Whatever natural gifts we bring to the missional table, it is clear that we need to be constantly made more like Christ in our attitudes and actions. Once again, this is a work of the Spirit. Very often, one of the profoundest impacts of any mission work is the way in which God uses it to change the missionary.