

## **The Future's Evidence and Guarantee** **February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

Last week we said that the prophetic Jewish scriptures pointed to two things that would signify the coming of the kingdom of God, in other words the arrival of the age to come. Those two things were: 1) the resurrection of the dead, and 2) the return of God's personal presence to His people.

The early church recognized that the resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost fulfilled those expectations. And therefore the long awaited age to come had in fact arrived. And yet those events, as great as they were, did not completely fulfill the expectation of the Old Testament prophecies. So the church came to see themselves in the world as forerunners, people of the age to come, yet in the midst of the still existent present evil age. Their reality and ours to this day came to be known as the "already, but not yet." Already the age to come and its powers have dawned on the earth, and that age is yet to be consummated in the second coming of the Lord.

We can see this perspective as the framework for the entire New Testament message in general and the writings of Paul in particular.

Last week we looked at scriptures which showed how the various essential aspects of the faith were written about in this "already but not yet" fashion. Salvation, redemption, adoption, and justification all are presented to us as what God has done for us in Christ that we presently experience, yet each have a consummation for which we are still waiting. So we are, as individuals, people who have experienced the coming of the age to come upon us and yet we await our consummation as well.

This already but not yet framework likewise causes Paul to see the church as an *end-time community*. Do we really think of the church that way? That's how the early church saw themselves, and that's life as the Bible presents it to us. We live in the present yet we are stamped with eternity. That's why we live as strangers on earth.

### **Phil 3:20**

**20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**NKJV**

So for us, ethical living does not consist of a set of rules to follow. Rather we now, empowered by the Holy Spirit, live the life of the future, the life of heaven, in the present age. That life has the characteristics of God Himself since we live by His life in us.

### **Gal 2:20**

**20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.**

## NKJV

We truly are end time people living a life on this earth that, while natural, is also supernatural and not of this earth. We, the people of Jesus, really are different from others. We are a radical new race of beings. It's tragic when Christians see ourselves as being basically similar to people of other faith systems. Nothing could be further from the truth. Believing that reduces our faith to a set of ethics to live by and diminishes the power of our testimony on the earth. Paul's message to his churches was that they were radically different than the people around them. What made them different? They were an end time people! They were the people of God's presence!

That's why Paul appealed to end time realities when encouraging the believers to live differently than the rest of the world. Let's look at an example.

### 1 Cor 6:1-3

**Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? 2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 3 Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?**

## NKJV

Our heavenly citizenship trivializes earthly grievances. We should never be put in the position where we are looking for a ruling among ourselves from the very people who we will ultimately judge.

Here's the point. We, those who are in Christ, are partakers of the life to come. We have tasted of the powers of the age to come. Our future in God is so certain, the Holy Spirit's presence in us so manifest, that we truly are recreated and called to be heaven's radical people on the earth as we too live in this already but not yet existence.

That's possible because Christ has ushered in the age to come. It's experienced because the Holy Spirit is God's empowering presence in and among us. The greatest tragedy in the experience of Christian life today is that so many live as if we are waiting on the promises of the future to come - living as a *not yet* people instead of as an *already* people. We're both. The early church knew this truth and lived it out by the power of the Holy Spirit. That's precisely why they had such an impact on their cultures.

Why was this so important to Paul, and why did this framework so characterize his teaching and ministry? As a good Jew, he was waiting for the dawning of the age to come. Again, what were the two signs that it had arrived? They were resurrection and the return of God's presence. Paul personally and radically experienced those two events. When did he realize that resurrection had occurred? He did so on the road to Damascus. He *saw* the resurrected Lord Jesus. He didn't have a dream about Jesus. He didn't have a vision of Jesus. Paul had a visitation from the risen Lord.

For Paul, the resurrection of the dead was an unmistakable sign that the end had come. He later understood that Christ's resurrection was the firstfruits of a general resurrection to come. But the fact that God had raised Christ meant death itself had been judged and resurrection to eternal life was now guaranteed for all who are in Christ.

### **1 Cor 15:20-28**

**But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. 27 For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. 28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.**

**NKJV**

We then, as those in Christ, are living on the earth in the time between the two resurrections. We have already been raised with Christ and that guarantees our own future bodily resurrection.

### **Col 3:1**

**If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.**

**NKJV**

### **Rom 6:4-5**

**4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection**

**NKJV**

Paul personally experienced the second sign that the age to come had arrived when he went blinded into Damascus where Ananias prayed for him. The scales fell off of his eyes and Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit. When that happened, Paul knew without a doubt that the long awaited age to come had arrived.

Paul understood that the coming of the Holy Spirit was an essential component of the New Covenant as prophesied by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Joel later expanded on those

prophesies by declaring that God would pour out His Spirit on all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. Paul experienced the Holy Spirit fill him. He saw the Holy Spirit fill his fellow Jews. And amazingly he saw the Holy Spirit fill even the heathen gentiles. God was doing something radically different. And yet it's exactly what He had promised to do.

That's why the Holy Spirit is so crucial to Paul's understanding of the Christian life and witness. The gift of the outpoured Spirit meant that the Messianic age had arrived. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was both the certain evidence that the age to come had dawned, and He was the absolute guarantee of that age's final consummation.

So Paul's writings then reflect this twofold aspect of the Spirit's role as both evidence and guarantee. Nowhere is this more apparent than in three metaphors that Paul uses of the Spirit. They are down payment, firstfruits, and seal. Let's look at each.

### **Down Payment (pledge, deposit, guarantee):**

#### **2 Cor 1:21-22**

**21 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, 22 who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.**

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#### **2 Cor 5:5**

**5 Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.**

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#### **Eph 1:13-14**

**13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.**

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The word "pledge" in these verses means "down payment." In other words, it is the first installment on a total amount due. As such, it establishes a contractual obligation and guarantees its fulfillment. We can see in each of these passages that it emphasizes both the already and not yet of our present existence. The Holy Spirit is both the fulfillment of God's promise and the down payment on our inheritance. The Spirit is God's down payment on our present lives. He is the certain evidence that the future has come into the present. And He is the guarantee that the future will one day be realized in full measure.

### **Firstfruits:**

#### **Rom 8:23**

**23 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.**

**NKJV**

In this section of Romans 8, the whole context is the tension between our present position as children of God who are joint heirs with Christ and the opposition we experience in this time of overlap as we await the glory to come. Paul explains that by the Holy Spirit we have received our adoption as God's children, but what is already is also not yet. Therefore, the Spirit serves for us as firstfruits as we await our final adoption, which is the redemption of our bodies.

In the Old Testament, the first fruit was sign that the harvest had started and that full harvest would be brought in. The Jews were commanded to bring the firstfruits of the harvest as an offering to the Lord. In fact, this was one of the commanded feast days, the feast of firstfruits. It was also called the feast of weeks because it came seven weeks after Passover. Does anyone know another name for it? It was also called Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit is our firstfruit offering from God. He is the evidence that the age to come has begun. And He is the guarantee that the fullness of the harvest, the consummation of that age is yet to be.

**Seal:**

**2 Cor 1:21-22**

**21 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, 22 who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.**

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**Eph 1:13**

**13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,**

**Eph 4:30**

**30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.**

**NKJV**

Literally, a "seal" referred to a stamp impression that was made in wax or clay, and it signaled ownership or authenticity. When something was sealed it carried with it the protection of the owner. God has sealed, He has *marked*, believers and claimed them as His own. And, according to these verses, what is the seal with which we have been marked? It is the Holy Spirit. He is God's stamp that sets us apart as His own precious possession. So already we have been stamped as God's own. And yet we have been sealed for a future event as well, the coming day of redemption.

What are the reapers going to be looking for on the day of redemption? They are going to be looking for God's seal of ownership. How important is the Holy Spirit?

So, the Holy Spirit is the evidence that the age to come has dawned upon us. At the same time He is God's personal presence among us. He not only enables us to endure the present evil age as we await the consummation of the kingdom, but He empowers us to live victoriously as we aggressively advance God's dominion on the earth.

I hope this is becoming clear, that the Holy Spirit was to Paul and the churches he planted the key to both their present life and their hope for the future. He should be ours as well.

By the Holy Spirit, we have tasted the powers of the age to come and we are now oriented as the people of that age even as we await its consummation. We are saved in this hope, and by the power of the Holy Spirit we abound in that hope. Hope for us is not wishful thinking. It is that absolute certainty that what God has started, He will complete. What guarantee do we have? We have the very presence of God, the Holy Spirit. He is both the *evidence* for us of what God has done and He is our *guarantee* of what God is going to do.

It seems that we as believers today are way too geared toward what we are guaranteed in the future at the expense of what's available to us today. How great of a down payment is the Holy Spirit? He is God present in us and with us.

While Paul pointed to what the future holds, He never did so at the expense of what is available to us now. The Holy Spirit is God's evidence to us that the future has been set into motion. At the heart of Paul's message to the churches and to us is that God has called us out of the world. He has set us apart and sealed us as His special possession on the earth. He has poured out His own Holy Spirit on us in the fulfillment of Christ's promise. We've been given a life to live that's not of this world and a power to live that life which is uncreated.

That's good news!