

Joining Jesus in the Wilderness

Author: Patrick J. Griffiths ©
 Date: March 26, 2006
 Title: Why the Wilderness? – The Wilderness and the Ministry of the Holy Spirit
 Text: Luke 4:1-15 (Key verses: 1, 2, 13-15)
 Theme: “For forty days, being tempted by the devil” (Luke 4:2)

Review:

- 1st study** - Preparations for entering into the wilderness
 The wilderness does not establish our relationship with Jesus. The wilderness is because of our relationship with Jesus.
- 2nd study** - The wilderness is a place of solitude: listen, slow down, and think.
- 3rd study** - The wilderness is a place of deprivation:
 fasting from the secondary in order to focus on the primary.
- 4th study** - The wilderness is a place of temptation: it is while in the wilderness that we can face our greatest temptations.
- 5th study** - The wilderness and the ministry of the Holy Spirit: there is a necessary connectivity between the wilderness and the ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Introduction:

Our wilderness experience is a time of soul growth. The wilderness we are being invited into is not a consequence of sin, but a desire to reprioritize our daily activity in order that we might focus more intentionally on Him. Sometimes because of the choices we make we place ourselves in the wilderness, but often it is where God would have us to go. Why would God have us in the wilderness? The reason would appear to be evident in the following paragraph.

Is this important enough to teach?

Our understanding of the Holy Spirit’s activity in us and through us is significant. By being blind to it we fail to appreciate all that is going on around us. Our knowledge of it causes us to rejoice in the work of God in and through His people.

It is during this time that we begin to experience the fullness of what is ours because of the cross. There are four thoughts noted in our passage. All of this is already ours, but often left unnoticed because we have drowned out His voice in the sea of excess.

It is an unfortunate situation in which we find ourselves, but we often are missing the mark.

ILLUSTRATION:

Tommy Bolt is in the World Golf Hall of Fame. He is 90 years old and has a reputation of being gruff. The story is told of when he was playing in Los Angeles and had a caddy with a reputation of constant chatter. Before they teed off, Bolt told him, "Don't say a word to me. And if I ask you something, just answer yes or no."

During the round, Bolt found the ball next to a tree, where he had to hit under a branch, over a lake and onto the green. He got down on his knees and looked through the trees and sized up the shot.

"What do you think?" he asked the caddy. "Five-iron?"

"No, Mr. Bolt," the caddy said.

"What do you mean, not a five-iron?" Bolt snorted.

"Watch this shot."

The caddy rolled his eyes. "No-o-o, Mr. Bolt."

But Bolt hit it and the ball stopped about two feet from the hole. He turned to his caddy, handed him the five-iron and said, "Now what do you think about that? You can talk now."

"Mr. Bolt," the caddy said, "that wasn't your ball." Crossroads, Issue No. 7, pp. 15-16

Like Tommy Bolt we often find ourselves swinging at the wrong ball. Friend, we must join Jesus in the wilderness and we must rediscover the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

It was in the wilderness that Jesus proved not only who He is, but how satisfying His relationship to the Father was. There was nothing the devil could do or offer that could be as satisfying as the relationship that existed inside of the Trinity.

As we join Jesus in the wilderness there is an interesting fusion of ideas as it relates to the wilderness and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The question raised is whether or not the ministry of the Holy Spirit was causal to the wilderness or a consequence of the wilderness? As we will see, there would appear to be a blending of the two.

Where are we in the redemptive history?

Although we are considering the ministry of the Holy Spirit as it relates to our Lord Jesus Christ and by principle show its application to us, there is of necessity a distinction needing to be made. Such a distinction is demanded by passages like John 7:37-39 and the upper room discourse found in John 13-16.

John 7:37-39

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Even though I see what happened in the life of our Lord as being representative, I cannot tell if it is indicative for us. The same words are being used to describe the Holy Spirit's activity in the believer I am not sure the meaning is necessarily the same. Thus, in principle I believe we will see our application.

There are four descriptive actions stated in chapters 3 and 4 between our Lord and the Holy Spirit. I do believe a qualifier needs to be made. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is not an area that we can really plant our feet on. The ground is squishy. We will try to understand key ideas and hopefully walk away appreciating what the Holy Spirit is doing in and through His people.

A. Jesus was baptized by the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:21, 22)

I believe the baptism of the Holy Spirit experienced by Jesus refers to His theocratic anointing whereby He is identified as the descendent of David to rule and reign over the nation of Israel. This anointing is also an enablement.

"By 'theocratic anointing' is meant a special temporal ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of God's chosen leader(s) to enable his/her function in a mediatorial capacity as God's representative."

<http://seminary.cbs.edu/content/events/nlc/2003/papers/22-Toward%20on%20OT%20Theology.pdf>

This anointing set Him apart as the appointed Messiah. This same idea is present in Luke 4:18.

The Spirit baptism our Lord experienced is theologically different than the Spirit baptism that we encounter as New Testament believers. His functioned in the capacity of a Mediatorial ruler. Our Spirit baptism places us into the actual body of Christ. **The two baptisms are similar in that they both identify and they both enable, but they are theologically distinct.**

1 Corinthians 12:13

for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Galatians 3:27

for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

It is because of the Spirit's baptism in our lives that we can have a wilderness experience with Jesus Christ. Thus this aspect of the Holy Spirit's ministry as it relates to our relationship with God is causal in that it creates the relationship.

All New Testament believers enjoy the Spirit's baptism into the body of Christ.

- 1 Corinthians 12:13 makes no distinctions among believers as to who is or is not baptized by the Spirit.
- It began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5, 11:15, 16).
- Ephesians 4:5 speaks of only one baptism.

As a consequence of our baptism by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ

- We are joined with all New Testament believers into one body (1 Cor. 12:13, Gal. 3:27).
- We are participating in His death, burial, and resurrection and thus are walking in newness of life (Rom. 6:1-10).

“What, therefore, does the baptism in the Holy Spirit accomplish in each believer? *It identifies every believer with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.* Every believer is in Christ, and Christ is in every believer. We are in Him, one in Him, united in Him forever.” (Understanding Christian Theology, Swindoll and Zuck, General Editors, 491).

Thus the baptism by the Holy Spirit allows us to enter into a wilderness experience. The second activity of the Holy Spirit in the Lord Jesus Christ is found in 4:1.

B. Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit (v. 1a)

It is because we are filled that we can enter into a wilderness experience with Jesus Christ.

There is often much confusion as it relates to the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the filling of the Holy Spirit. Are they one-time events? Are they repeatable? Are they conditional or unconditional? Can you lose the baptism and/or the filling of the Holy Spirit? These are good questions and hopefully we will be able to answer them.

The significance of this idea does not lie in the word itself but in what the word communicates. Part of the difficulty with the event is that during this period of time there is a transition taking place as to the nature of the Holy Spirit's ministry. For example, John the Baptist is described as being “Filled with the

Holy Spirit” even from his mother’s womb (Luke 1:15). When his mother Elizabeth met the Virgin Mary she was immediately “Filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41). Elizabeth’s filling and that of her husband Zachariah was in conjunction with the gift of prophecy (Luke 1:67). This same idea is seen in Acts 2:4 on the day of Pentecost. Thus there is a filling of the Holy Spirit that preceded certain expressions of the Holy Spirit’s ministry in and through His people (Acts 4:8, 31). These events were (1) repeatable, (2) without imposing conditions, and (3) “God did this as His sovereign act” (Ryrie, Basic Theology, 376).

C.C. Ryrie notes how temporary indwelling “all [occurred] before the Day of Pentecost. But there are no such examples after the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.” (Basic Theology, 357).

At other times the filling appears to be a constant characteristic of the believer as seen in Acts 6:3, 5, 11:24 and 13:52. Part of our ongoing confusion is whether or not the filling is conditional or unconditional? Is the filling dependent on me or does God simply do this to us?

Ryrie notes the problem of making the filling conditional when he says,

“Though specific conditions are not mentioned in these contexts, the normal requirements for Christian growth would be implied conditions for attaining this kind of [Spirit filled] character (Ryrie, Basic Theology, 376).”

But by making the filling conditional an impossibility is created because the conditions being unidentified become subjective and tentative.

Ryrie notes how “No example of praying for the filling of the Spirit exists in the post-Pentecostal material of the New Testament. So praying, however earnest, is apparently not the way to be filled.” (Ryrie, Basic Theology, 378). Ryrie concludes by saying it is by yielding to Him that produces filling. Personally, I do believing yielding as noted in Romans 6:13 and 12:1, 2 are important but I do not see it as a condition to Spirit filling.

Perhaps the most familiar text as it relates to the filling of the Holy Spirit is found in Ephesians 5:18, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.” This is the only time Paul wrote of filling (Ryrie, Basic Theology, 376). Having only one verse to build a doctrine on should cause us to be cautious. One verse is enough, but the superstructure we build on it should be carefully constructed.

When we make filling conditioned on human activity, we enter into a pattern of living that can become harmful. Listen carefully to the following two statements.

“When a believer is separated from known personal sin and is totally yielded to the indwelling Spirit, he will be filled with the Spirit.” (Understanding Christian Theology, Swindoll and Zuck, General Editors, 494).

The same author concludes with, “Dependence, cleanliness, and yieldedness are necessary to achieve the Spirit-filled life. Such conditions must be met daily. They may be realized for the first time in a post-conversion act of total commitment to the will of God, but they must be reaffirmed daily.” (Understanding Christian Theology, Swindoll and Zuck, General Editors, 504).

If this is true, then “it is possible to be filled with the Spirit on Sunday and not be filled on Monday. Each Christian must ask himself or herself, ‘Am I at this moment spiritually clean and submissive to the leadership of the Spirit?’” (Understanding Christian Theology, Swindoll and Zuck, General Editors, 502).

All of this is built around Ephesians 5:18. But I do not see where such thinking comes from in the New Testament. And I find such thinking unfortunate.

Many would agree that the filling is not between full or empty but rather degree or levels of filling. You are filled with the Spirit. The issue is to what degree are you recognizing that filling? Are you aware of the fact that you are filled? I agree more with this idea as to awareness rather than a contrast between filled or empty. Most of us are not even aware of His filling. We simply live our lives in ignorance of it. But if you are a believer, you are filled. Your awareness of it is the fulfillment of Ephesians 5:18.

This filling is not in opposition to indwelling or His permanent residence in His people, but rather an invitation to be sensitive to His working in and through His people. The filling of the Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit.

There is, I believe, misunderstanding as it relates to the Holy Spirit and His working in and through His people. I do not believe there is a sharp distinction between the various ideas concerning the Holy Spirit and the various activities that are assigned to Him. For example,

- Walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25).
- Led by the Spirit (Gal. 5:18).
- Fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).
- Live by the Spirit (Gal. 5:25).

Could we as easily place Spirit filling in this listing of the Spirit’s activity? What difference would walking in the Spirit and living in the Spirit suggest? What difference would being led by and living in the Spirit imply? What is the fruit of the Spirit if not walking in and living in the Spirit? So, I do not believe

they are saying things that are significantly different. For the most part they are saying the same thing. What then are we to make of all this?

Believers, because of their position in Christ, walk, are led by, bear the fruit of, and live by the Holy Spirit. As a consequence of their position in Christ they manifest in and through their earthen vessels the work of the Holy Spirit. Such as we are woefully ignorant of the cross-work to us so also are we woefully ignorant of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in us and through us to those around us because of the cross-work.

ILLUSTRATION:

The admonition of Paul in Galatians 5 is to live your position. He could just have easily said, "If you are justified, live sanctified." Or "Let the redeemed live like the redeemed."

I would equally argue that filling and indwelling are similar actions. Those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit are filled with the Holy Spirit. This appears to be what is seen in Romans 8:9 and 11. It is also noted in 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 2 Timothy 1:14.

Romans 8:9-11

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

This is what we enjoy because of the cross. Each and every one of His people is filled with the Spirit. This is a result of Spirit baptism.

1 Corinthians 3:16

Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

2 Timothy 1:14

Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.

I do believe during this period of time, however, that being led by the Holy Spirit is a consequence of His filling and the filling is a result of having been baptized by the Holy Spirit. So, in this much, there is a progression of activity.

The wilderness enables us to see more clearly the work of the Holy Spirit in us, through us, and around us. It is as we listen, slow down, and think that we hear more clearly His voice and see more accurately His activity.

Thus the filling by the Holy Spirit allows us to enter into a wilderness experience. The third activity of the Holy Spirit in the Lord Jesus Christ is found in 4:1.

C. Jesus was led about by the Holy Spirit (v. 1b)

You and I are led by the Holy Spirit, but we live our lives as if we have no sense of direction or guidance. The wilderness allows us to regain a sense of His presence in our daily lives.

I believe the condition to being led by the Holy Spirit is Spirit filling and the condition to Spirit filling is Spirit baptism.

I believe we have made the Spirit's leading more mysterious than it actually is. Does He lead and do we "feel" His direction? I would argue yes and it is in and through His Word. What does His leading look like in and through His people?

The Spirit's leading looks like the Spirit's fruit. The Spirit's leading looks like the Spirit's gifting. When we are bearing fruit and exercising our giftedness we are revealing His leading.

The Spirit's leading in and through His people looks like "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22, 23).

The Spirit's leading in and through His people looks like "prophecy, service, teaching; exhortation; giving, leading, and mercy" (Rom. 12:6-8).

Those who are filled with the Spirit as a consequence of being baptized by the Spirit manifest the fruit of the Spirit and this is what it means to be led of the Spirit.

The wilderness is a place where we sensitize ourselves to the Spirit's ministry in us and through us to those around us. Most of us live our lives calloused to the Spirit's work. We ask God to show Himself mighty in our behalf and He does, but we do not recognize it as such.

Thus the leading by the Holy Spirit allows us to enter into a wilderness experience. And it is in the wilderness where we can be opened to recognizing His work in us and through us to those around us. The fourth activity of the Holy Spirit in the Lord Jesus Christ is found in 4:14.

D. Jesus was ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 14)

Here is where we see the union of these two ideas of joining Jesus in the wilderness and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The two are not in opposition

but rather the two are one and the same; their inter-connectedness is unavoidable.

Trying to separate the wilderness experience from the power of the Holy Spirit is like trying to separate prayer from fasting.

Jesus ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit. Was this something unique to Him or is this something we the people of God can have? What exactly is meant when it says that “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit?”

Jesus comes out of the wilderness and ministers in the power of the Spirit. This word “power” used in 4:14 is used elsewhere in Luke’s Gospel 15 times. It is used to describe the nature of John’s preparatory ministry to the coming Messiah (1:17). It is used of the power necessary for the virgin birth (1:35). It identified the authority in which our Lord spoke to the demonic realm (4:36). It is used to describe the power that was present in the healing of the sick (5:17). It is used to speak of the power that our Lord exuded when people touched Him for healing (6:19, 8:46). It is the same power that He gave to His disciples to exercise when they ministered in His behalf (9:1, 10:19). Our Lord was characterized by the powerful works that He did (19:37). Our Lord’s coming will be marked by power (21:27). He will reign from power (22:69).

He promises to His disciples a power for ministry that will come after His ascension from heaven and with the coming of the Holy Spirit (24:49).

A sister word to “power” is used in 25 verses in Luke’s Gospel. This word comes from the same “word family” and is often translated by the idea of ability or able-ness.

When Zachariah did not have the ability to speak, he was “powerless” (1:20, 22). God is described as having the ability to raise children for Abraham from stones (3:8). That’s power. Lepers came to Jesus believing He had the ability to heal them of their disease (5:12). The religious leaders challenged our Lord’s power or ability to forgive sins (5:21). Jesus claimed to be able to forgive sins. The disciples were unable to cast out a demon (9:40). No one through worry has the power to add a single hour to his life (12:25, 26).

When the woman came with a spirit of infirmity she had no power to lift herself up. Jesus had power and with His power raised her up from her body of affliction (13:10-13).

When Jesus spoke with the rich young ruler the dialogue left His disciples perplexed and their question of anguish followed, “Who then can be saved (18:26)?” Our Lord’s response shows how only He has the power to save sinners for “With God all things are possible” (18:27).

Perhaps we scoff as believing such power exists, but it does and it is ours. We have allowed ourselves to believe real power is not present and that somehow we are simply to exist in a vacuum of powerless Christianity. But this was not the testimony of the early church.

Consider the documentation provided by the book of Acts.

The early church was promised an endowment of power (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:8) that would enable them for Christ-exalting, Holy Spirit-empowered ministry. The early church was the means through which the power of God was displayed (3:12). The power was so evident that the religious leaders challenged its source (Acts 4:7, 16). Their witness was done with great power (4:33) and the people testified to it (6:8, 8:10, 13). The apostle Paul was also used by God as an instrument through whom special miracles were worked (19:11).

This is the power that is present in our midst. This is the power that is pulling down strongholds. This is the power that breaks the chains of cancelled sin and sets the captive free. This is the power that heals the sick, raises the dead, and brings sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. This is the power that restores relationships and brings light to the depressed. This is the power that silences the voices that haunt us. This is the power that delivers us from the cares of this world. Oh God cause us to see the power that is present in our midst right now. It is the power that pushes aside the trivial and catapults the eternal. It is the power that cannot be overthrown (5:39). It is through the Word of His grace through which this power flows (20:32).

We have the power, but we do not affirm it or expect it to manifest itself. He is here in our midst. What can I expect Him to do?

- Restore the prodigal.
- Reconcile the alienated.
- Heal the broken.
- Redeem the enslaved.
- Liberate the captive.
- Cleanse the defiled.

It is the Holy Spirit who works the hope, healing, and wholeness of God in and through His people.

What are the dangers of neglecting this area?

We do not live in hope. We do not live with the element of anticipation. This is the truth that liberates us from the chains of despair.

Not only can He do this for the unbelieving, but for the believing as well. God is visiting us with power. Are you ready to affirm it?

The wilderness experience speaks of our relationship with God. The entire Trinity is involved in who we are before Him. This relationship is so satisfying and so sufficient that nothing we have that is created can compare to Him.

APPLICATION: (Where do we go from here?)

Application for . . . the wilderness and the ministry of the Holy Spirit

How to have 7 Sundays by asking 7 questions

Monday Am I affirming His baptism of me into the body of Christ?

Tuesday Am I affirming His filling/controlling of me today?

Wednesday Am I walking in the Spirit?

Thursday Do I appreciate His fruit in me and through me to those around me?

Friday Am I exercising His gifting in me and through me to those around me? Do I affirm His working in and through others?

Saturday Am I affirming His power on a regular basis?