

THE FAITH OF THE DISCIPLES

Acts 11:15-17 ... “And as I [Peter] began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If therefore God gave them the same gift as he gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?”

When you think of Christ’s disciples – Matthew, John, James, Peter, and more – you might think of them as saints, or as the authors of much of the New Testament. They certainly played very important roles among the characters in the Bible. They left their families, jobs, homes, friends – literally everything – to adopt lifestyles of poverty and to follow Jesus for three years. They were loyal helpers, trusted confidants, and reliable writers of what they heard and saw. And, most of them died horrible deaths in service to God. But, what about their faith?

Peter confesses in today’s Scripture passage, that he and his fellow disciples did not fully comprehend that Jesus was God until they were filled with the Holy Spirit AFTER Jesus returned to Heaven. It reads: “...the same gift as he gave us when we believed...” which speaks of when they received the Holy Spirit. They had personally seen Jesus heal the sick, make blind people see and cripples walk, and raise the dead. They witnessed Jesus miraculously feed thousands of people with a handful of fish and bread. They saw Jesus walk on top of a stormy lake, and meet with Moses and Elijah, who had both been dead for hundreds of years. They were loyal followers of Jesus for three years, but were not fully convinced that Jesus was the Messiah until after Jesus returned to heaven and they were given the Holy Spirit.

Today, we have the advantage of having a Bible to read. It contains both the prophecies concerning Jesus, as well as the evidence of his existence and his fantastic accomplishments. It is hard to argue with history and eye-witness accounts. It is relatively easy to trust God’s Word and believe everything that it contains, because it lays out the history of the world from creation to the coming end of the world in a nice, orderly, and accurate account. But, in Jesus’ day, the New Testament had not yet been written, because the disciples had yet to see and record the fulfillment of the Old Testament’s prophecies. And, even the Old Testament was not readily available to every person, because it was contained on animal skins and parchments that were held only in Jewish synagogues, usually in fragmented portions. One synagogue might have the books of Moses, while another synagogue might only have part of the book of Isaiah, or a few words from Jeremiah.

Even though the disciples followed Jesus loyally and witnessed everything he said and did, much of it was a mystery for them until he sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in them. It was the Holy Spirit who spoke to their hearts and minds, and explained the mysteries they had heard and seen. It was only then that they knew without any doubt, that Jesus is the Son of God who washes away our sins and sits today at the right of God, preparing our future in heaven and the restored earth. If you will exercise just a little faith and ask Jesus to live in your heart and become your Lord and Savior, you will receive the Holy Spirit who will open the Word of God to your mind and explain what it means. It worked for Peter and John. It will work for you.

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