



## You Become Who You Imitate

Message by Pastor Andrew Kulasingham 17<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Last week we looked at Hebrews chapter 6. I began by looking at verses four and five, where the writer of the book of Hebrews seems to put forward a generally established description of a Christian in the first century who has embraced the full Gospel of Jesus Christ which included these five experiences:

Hebrews 6:4-5 (NKJV)

**For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come.**

The first experience – “being enlightened”. By this we assume enlightened to the Gospel message that Jesus Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection has paved the way for forgiveness of sin and eternal life.

The second experience the Apostle describes as “having tasted the heavenly gift.” – the gift of salvation, being born again and receiving the right to be called a child of God. He goes on to speak of the experience of becoming partakers of the Holy Spirit. A relationship every child of God has been invited to enter into. An intimate relationship with God through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit – living in and through them.

The fourth of the five experiences is tasting or experiencing “the good word of God”. The Christian experiences in the first century didn’t just stop at believing in Jesus Christ, being born again, and being filled with the Holy Spirit. Early Christians took hold of the Word of God, saw it as something good for their lives – the apostle called it the good word of God – they pursued the word till it became experiential in their lives. They didn’t see God’s word merely to be understood intellectually. They saw the good word as something to be experienced.

That was the mindset of the early church and so they lived this lifestyle, perfectly expecting, that they will be saved, they will be born into the family of God, they will be filled with the Holy Spirit and they will experience everything the Word of God says they were to have.

I mentioned last week that we are all familiar with these experiences, have been taught them and have pursued them in our faith journey. It’s deeply embedded in our thinking and our way of life as a disciple of Christ, we accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, we receive the gift of salvation which grants us access to an intimate relationship with God as our Father. We have received the Holy Spirit, who leads us into a life of experiencing the Word of God daily. We accept this, we live this and we teach these four experiences as the full Gospel of Jesus Christ. But that is not the full Gospel. There is more. There is one more experience that we do not include and if it is ever preached it does not take equal status as these other 4 experiences I have just mentioned.

There is one more experience which formed the mindset of the early disciples. They believed that every Christian by virtue of being a disciple of Jesus Christ will experience the powers of the Age To Come. Because in modern day, this sounds so far fetched and out of sync with our current thinking, we have interpreted it and taught that the Age To Come is something we will only experience after

death. One day in the sweet by and by, we will experience the Age To Come. But that is not Biblical. The powers of the age to come is available to every Christian right now.

Commenting on this very passage, G E Ladd put it this way.

“Hebrews 6: 5 speaks of those who “tasted ... the powers of the age to come.” The Age to Come is still future, but we may taste the powers of that Age. Something has happened by virtue of which that which belongs to the future has become present. The powers of The Age to Come have penetrated This Age. While we still live in the present evil Age and while Satan is still the god of This Age, we may taste the powers of The Coming Age. Now a taste is not a seven-course banquet. We still look forward to the glorious consummation and fulfilment of that which we have only tasted. Yet a taste is real. It is more than promise; it is realization; it is experience.”

Let me emphasise those last few words. “A taste is not a seven-course banquet. Yet a taste is real. It is more than a promise. It is realization; it is experience.”

The early church believed, we can truly access and experience as reality right now, what is available in the Age To Come.

Jesus teaching in the Model Prayer is consistent to this idea. “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Jesus wasn’t meaning this eschatologically. Pray this prayer, and one day in the sweet by and by, I will return, and My Kingdom will come and My will will finally be done. Until then, sing Kumbaya and hope you make it till the end.

I know I’m being facetious. But I’m trying to awaken us from this complacency, a mindset that we have lulled ourselves into. A state of mind that says the Christian faith is a teaching about doing good and being good, and hunker down, grit your teeth, bite the bullet, suffer and bear this evil world until we get to heaven. We need to reject that kind of thinking because it isn’t Biblical. Surviving until Jesus returns, was the last thing the Apostles of the New Testament were doing. Their lives reflected the exact opposite. The book of Acts is a testament to their mindset and what they believed.

On the day of Pentecost – and we know the story very well –

Acts 2:3-4 (NKJV)

**Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.**

The crowds were amazed because these men, all from Galilee, had never left the region let alone the country, were speaking languages from all parts of the world. Peter stands up and tells them that this is the fulfilment of the Prophecy spoken by the prophet Joel. He goes on to quote Joel chapter two:

**‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,  
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;  
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
Your young men shall see visions,  
Your old men shall dream dreams.**

3000 souls were baptised that day. The church was born. The book of Acts goes on to say that many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

Now the very next chapter we see the story of the healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple. We are not told how many days or weeks after the upper room experience. All we know is one afternoon, around 3pm they are headed to the temple to pray. The man is begging at the entrance of the temple. We are told this happens everyday. That’s his spot. That means Peter has seen this man before. He has gone in and out of the Temple many times. But this time, he looks at the man and says, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” And the Bible tells us that Peter took the man by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God.

My question is – what changed? Yes of course we know the Holy Spirit had empowered them but something significant shifted in Peter on the day of Pentecost. Peter stepped out by faith that day, declared that the prophecies of the end times is no longer for the future but for today. He tasted the power of the age to come that day. He realised the future is happening now. His default setting changed. He became the conduit, the bridge between this Present Age and the Age to Come.

He looked at the lame man – said to him, “I don’t have silver or gold”, “I don’t have resources of this age” – “what I do have are resources from the Age to Come. In Jesus name rise up and walk”. Once Peter tasted this, this *dunamis* power of the age to come, there was no holding him back. He and the rest of the apostles were performing miracles on a daily basis.

The Bible says in Acts chapter 5:14-16 (NLT)

**Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women. As a result of the apostles’ work, sick people were brought out into the streets on beds and mats so that Peter’s shadow might fall across some of them as he went by. Crowds came from the villages around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those possessed by evil spirits, and they were all healed.**

Peter is now out of control. He isn’t just happy with one lame beggar getting healed. He’s not satisfied laying hands on a few and seeing them healed. The man leans in, stretches his capacity to believe God for more, to the point that he creates such an atmosphere of faith wherever he went, that people believed, if his shadow fell on the sick they will get healed. I don’t know how this works my friends. All I know is – the Bible says – the sick and the possessed were brought from the villages around Jerusalem and they were all healed.

But it wasn’t just Peter. It wasn’t just the apostles. Signs and wonders had become the norm in the early church. We see Phillip – after the church was scattered because of severe persecution, Phillip ends up in Samaria. The Bible says he preaches Christ to them and in Acts chapter 8,

Acts 8:6-7 (NKJV) ... **hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed.**

So the Apostles were seeing signs and wonders but so were those who believed the Gospel through them. So someone like Phillip, scattered and living away from the apostles, goes on with life, having the same default setting that to be a Christian is to experience the powers of the Age To Come. He preaches the Gospel and signs and wonders follow.

The experiencing of the powers of the Age To Come weren’t just restricted to healing and deliverance. The early church were also experiencing interaction with the angelic host of heaven. The Bible tells us of Phillip,

Acts 8:26 (NKJV) **Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, “Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.”**

He is obedient and finds the Ethiopian eunuch on a chariot. Explains the Scriptures to him about Jesus, The man believes and is baptised by Phillip. Then something incredible happens.

The Bible says in Acts 8:39 (NKJV):

**Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus.**

Phillip was “caught away” – the Greek word used there is *harpazō*. To understand this word I want to show you it’s use in Paul’s letters. In 2 Corinthians 12:2, when Paul was sharing an experience he had, he talks about being “caught up” to the third heaven. He used the word *harpazō* to describe that experience. Again Paul uses the word *harpazō* when he speaks of what will happen to those who remain when Christ returns.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 (NKJV) **Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.**

That word “caught up” is the word *harpazō*. Luke’s use of the word *harpazō* to describe what happened to Phillip, suggests that something supernatural occurred after the eunuch’s baptism. Phillip was picked up by the Holy Spirit, he disappears from sight and reappears in another coastal city Azotus. He was supernaturally transported by the Holy Spirit.

So we see that men like Peter and Phillip lived quite extraordinary lives. Things outside the realm of this present age. They were living in the Kingdom of God and tasting the powers of the age to come.

What about the Apostle Paul. God was already doing some amazing miracles through the hands of Paul while he was preaching the Gospel to the Gentile world. He gets to Ephesus and the Bible tells us that he began preaching on the things of the kingdom of God. He stays in Ephesus for two years. During that time we read this in Acts 19:11-12 (NKJV)

**Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.**

As you read the book of Acts – you can get the sense that the Gospel of the Kingdom was being spread across the world, believers were growing exponentially, but also miracles were occurring regularly and increasing in power. Begins by praying for individuals, then you see crowds getting healed. Peter’s shadow, Phillip being transported, Paul with handkerchiefs and aprons. Believers were pushing the boundaries of the now, believing God for more intervention from the Heavenly and seeing what Luke called “unusual miracles”.

They grew in faith and their ability to believe beyond this present age, beyond their present resources, to lean in, and tap on the resources of the Kingdom of God. They believed this was made available to every believer, and they saw the Kingdom of God established in their communities. The effects of such faith is described in such a tangible way in Acts 4:33-35 - And this is what it looked like:

Acts 4:33-35 (NLT)

**The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God’s great blessing was upon them all. There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need.**

The community was so blessed by God, not just in the area of healing and deliverance, but individuals in the community became so blessed with financial resources that through the giving of the church, they were able to break the tyranny of poverty in their midst.

Look I know these sound like fictional stories and myths. Shadows healing the sick, men getting teleported, handkerchiefs placed on the sick and they recover. In fact liberal theologians have tried for centuries to down play the supernatural – they called on preachers to demythologise the New Testament. Maybe if we are honest with ourselves, at the back of our minds we have bought into this idea that the modern Christian cannot be expected to take this “mythical world of the New Testament” seriously.

Malcolm Muggeridge didn’t mince his words when he said this about the so called modern world, with all our science and our learning.

“having educated himself into imbecility, and polluted and drugged himself into stupefaction, he keeled over – a weary, battered old brontosaurus – and became extinct.”

If we do not go back to the old religion, the way the early church took God at His word, refusing to limit the Word of God based on human ability to rationalise His nature and His deeds. If we don’t find our way back to the book of Acts, I truly fear we the church won’t just be non essential as we have been classified during this pandemic. But we may indeed become a weary, battered old brontosaurus – and become extinct.

If ever there was a time for the church to wake up and return back to the original Gospel, it is now! The Gospel of the Kingdom. The Gospel that has the power to save. The Gospel that empowers men and women to say to their situations and circumstances – Kingdom of God come. Will of God be

done. The Gospel that is unashamed to say we believe that God has given us access to the power of the Age to Come – so that when the world around us seem hopeless and helpless – we will have the answer. We will be truly relevant to their felt needs. We will truly be essential to the humanitarian crisis that is unfolding all around us.

Let me close with the passage last week in Hebrews 6:11-12 (NKJV)

**And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**

This is not the time to be sluggish. It's the time to have the same diligence, the same hope the early church displayed. In fact the Apostle instructs us to imitate those who have inherited the promises. Who are we imitating? Remember, you become who you imitate.

If you want to see the things Peter saw. If you want to experience what Phillip experienced, If you want to impact the world the way Paul did. Then we need to imitate them. If we want to see the church of this generation transform the world we live in the way the early church turned their world around – then we need to imitate them. How did they do it? – The Apostle to the Hebrews gives us the key to how they obtained the promises – through faith and patience.

Next week I want to talk about this combination – faith and patience. Knowing how to keep these two things intact is the key to obtaining our promises. Some people have all the faith but no patience and so give up before they obtain their promises. Some people have so much patience and do nothing to step out in faith. They end up stuck in the same old same old.

So next week, I want to talk about these two things – faith and patience.

Today I have tried to stir us, maybe challenge some unhelpful ideas, maybe even dust off some cobwebs of early years fervour for the things of God. It is truly time to take God at his Word. It is time to press in for more – to press in to taste the powers of the age to come. Not one day when Christ returns, but experiencing the Kingdom today. Time to look back, imitate our fathers and mothers of the faith, in order to move forward.

Let us pray.