

Summary of last week:

Last week I suggested that the “meta-narrative” of the Bible is the presence of God in the world. The narrative arc begins with the Spirit hovering (like a mother hen) over the formless void of the yet-to-be created world as we know it (Genesis 1) and ends with a new heaven, a new earth and a new Holy City, in which God dwells with the people (Revelation 21).

Adam and Eve enjoyed the presence of God in the Garden of Eden before they disobeyed God and were expelled. God's presence was evident in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph at key points but it is not until Moses that we observe a more regular divine presence, beginning with his “burning bush encounter”, through to his divinely led confrontation with Pharaoh, spawning his leadership of the Hebrew people in a miraculous escape from Egyptian slavery. Then, during the wilderness journey, God provides the Ten Commandments and implements the tabernacle sacrificial system as the centre-point of the divine presence, which culminates a dozen generations later in His glory filling Solomon's Temple. Throughout the entire story, the prophets continue to proclaim that one day God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh.

The Gospel writers continue the theme. Matthew begins with the birth of Immanuel (God with us) and ends with the Risen Lord promising the presence of God to the very end of the age; Mark demonstrates, through the life and teachings of Jesus, the power of God's Spirit to overcome every dominant power; Luke records Jesus' promise of the empowerment of God's Spirit for every believer; and John highlights Jesus' promise of another Advocate/Helper, the Spirit of Truth.

This week we reflect upon Paul's understanding of the Spirit in the context of the newly formed Christian community trying to find its fulfilment and identity, independent of its Jewish roots.

Please read the following passage from Paul's letter to the Galatian Churches:**Galatians 3:1-5 (ERV)**

¹ You people in Galatia are so foolish! Why do I say this? Because I told you very clearly about the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. But now it seems as though you have let someone use their magical powers to make you forget. ² Tell me this one thing: How did you receive the Spirit? Did you receive the Spirit by following the law? No, you received the Spirit because you heard the message about Jesus and believed it. ³ You began your life in Christ with the Spirit. Now do you try to complete it by your own power? That is foolish. ⁴ You have experienced many things. Were all those experiences wasted? I hope they were not wasted! ⁵ Does God give you the Spirit because you follow the law? Does God work miracles among you because you follow the law? No, God gives you his Spirit and works miracles among you because you heard the message about Jesus and believed it.

Questions to guide your reflections:

1. What mood does Paul convey in the passage and why?
2. How many times does Paul use the word “Spirit”? What does this tell us?
3. To what is Paul contrasting the Spirit?
4. Summarize Paul's main point in one sentence.
5. How would you apply Paul's main point to your life this week?