WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES

Acts 1:1-14

Key Verse: 1:8

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses…”

Happy New Year! Thank God for giving us this new year set before us. It seems that 2020 was the year of Covid-19, and 2021, the year of vaccines. No ordinary person could foresee these. What kind of year will 2022 be? We don’t know. One thing is clear that the world is heading toward the seconding coming of Christ, closer and closer, year by year. It is likely that as the end of the world is coming, evil power is increasing under the control of the evil one, the devil. How can we prepare ourselves for this? As Paul said in Ephesians 6:12, our battle is not a physical battle but a spiritual one. In this battle, we want to hold to Acts 1:8 once again and receive the power of the Holy Spirit as our Lord Jesus promised so that we may overcome the evil power and be true, faithful and powerful witnesses of Jesus Christ our Lord. May God richly bless this direction of ours this year!

**First, the kingdom of God (1-3).** Verses 1 and 2 say, “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.” Luke’s former book is the gospel of Luke. In that book, what Jesus did and taught was amazing, unprecedented with his power over all diseases, nature, spiritual forces of evil and death. He healed the sick, calmed the storm, walked on the water, fed five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish, drove out evil spirits and raised the dead. He preached the good news of the kingdom of God to many people and raised 12 apostles who would be sent out to the world for the gospel work to save perishing souls. John wrote at the end of his gospel, “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written” (21:25). But what is written in the gospel books is just the beginning of Jesus’ work. In Acts, the work of Jesus continues through apostles until the gospel spread to Rome, where Paul preached the kingdom of God in his rented house (Ac 28:30-31). It is amazing that the gospel of salvation has reached you and me after about 2000 years later through the continuous succession of missionaries, those sent out with the gospel. In Revelation, we see a great multitude who have come out of the Great Tribulation, having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:9, 14). The time period after the day of his ascension until the day of his coming back is considered the last times, the last days or the last hour. Many say that we live in the last minute of the last hour. May we be used by him in this great work of soul salvation in our time.

Then verse 3 says, “After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of over forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.” How great his resurrection is! However, his suffering is always to be remembered. No suffering and death, no resurrection. As we cannot fathom the power of his resurrection, so we canoot the agony and pain of his suffering for us. His resurrection was matchless; so was his suffering. Hebrews 2:10 says, “In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exits, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.”

After his suffering, he showed himself to the apostles and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.” Christ’s resurrection confirms his atoning death for our sins and proves that God is living. It opens the door to the kingdom of God. Without the resurrection of Christ Christianity is unthinkable. As his death on the cross was true, so is his resurrection as a historical fact. Some women saw his tomb empty. Mary Magdalene met the risen Jesus. The risen Christ appeared to the Eleven disciples in a locked room and showed his nailed hands and feet and wounded side and ate before them assuring that he was not a ghost. He appeared to James and on another occasion to five hundred brothers at the same time, and then to Paul on his journey to Damascus. I believe that the risen Christ spoke to you personally at least one time through the words of God, “He has risen; he is not here.” He also spoke to me, “I am the resurrection and the life…Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” That Christ Jesus who suffered and died had risen and is alive is the greatest message in human history mortal ears could ever hear.

Then he appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the main theme of the Bible and the culmination of God’s redemptive history. The foundation of the kingdom of God is Christ’s death and resurrection. We really need to understand the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the domain where God rules. In Revelation chapter 4 ,John saw a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. God on this throne rules the heavens and the earth (4:2). David knew this throne and said in Psalm 103:19, “The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.” The Incarnate God Jesus came into this world and preached the kingdom of God, saying, “The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk 1:15). God’s kingdom comes in the hearts of those who repent and believe the good news of Jesus. Believing Jesus means having Jesus sit on the throne of my heart and so God’s kingdom is established in such a heart and his rule grows in him. This kingdom is an invisible kingdom but real. Jesus said in Luke 17:20-21, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.” The kingdom of God, God’s rule is to grow in one’s heart. It is to be united with Christ in his death and resurrection. And the kingdom of God is to grow in a family and the church and expand in our campus, society and nation and the world. This invisible kingdom of God will be manifested to all people when Christ Jesus comes again and this world will have become the kingdom of Christ (Rev 11:15). We remember the Lord’s prayer, “Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” And then there will be eternal kingdom of God, the New Jerusalem in a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21:1-2). With this hope and prayer, we are to know that a spiritual battle between God’s kingdom and Satan’s kingdom is going on in one’s heart and in this world. We should always check whether God is sitting on my throne or whether myself or something else ison it. We also should be able to check what is sitting on the throne of each of God’s flock of sheep. In another analogy, having God on my throne is letting him sit on the driver’s seat of my life-car, not on the passenger’s seat. However, to many Christians it is the opposite. In God’s ruling, men can be truly free with joy and peace in their hearts.

**Second, the promise of the Holy Spirit (3-8).** In verse 3 Luke wrote, “…He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.” After this, Luke could have written that Jesus was taken up into heaven. However, after speaking about the kingdom of God and before the ascension there is a very significant conversation between Jesus and the apostles in verses 4-8. Jesus says in verses 4 and 5, “On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” When Jesus gave them this command along with the promise, Jesus must have been very serious. But how did they respond? Did they say, “Sure, Lord. We will not leave Jerusalem according to your command. Thank you for the promise of being baptized with the Holy Spirit.” No. Verse 6 says, “So when they met together, they asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” At this point they were not interested in baptism with the Holy Spirit. Rather the kingdom to Israel occupied their hearts. Probably to them the kingdom of God meant the kingdom to Israel. They were interested in the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. Yes, in the Old Testament God promised the restoration of the kingdom of God’s chosen people. For example, Amos 9:11 says, “In that day I will restore David’s fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be.” Yet, Amos says continually in verse 12, “so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name,’ declares the LORD, who will do these things.” The point of this prophecy is that God’s blessing flows to all the nations through his chosen people of Israel. The meaning becomes clearer when we refer to how James quoted these words in Acts 15:16-18 in the Jerusalem Council, “‘After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it that the remnant of men/mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name,’ says the Lord, who does these things that have been known for ages.” Even the Gentiles are blessed along with the Israelites. There is the remnant among the Gentiles as well as the remnant among the Israelites. Paul says in Romans 9:27 says, “Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: ‘Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved.” He also said in Romans 11:25-27, “I do not want you to be ignorant of the mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’” Yes, indeed God restores the kingdom to Israel but this kingdom of Israel is to be fulfilled when the kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of Christ at his returning. It is as God said to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, “…all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” and in Genesis 22:18 “through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

The disciples of Jesus could not see the bigger picture of God’s plan in their narrow-mindedness. Believing is good. But if we stay in self-centredness or family-centredness, it is a big hindrance to God’s kingdom. This is the reason Jesus said, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt 6:33). May we experience the truthfulness of this promise of our Lord Jesus more and more, however difficult our personal life or family life situation will be.

Subsequently Jesus did not say that their hope of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel was wrong. He said to them, “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.” Jesus only dealt with the times or dates concerning Israel’s kingdom restoration. Then Jesus turns their attention from the kingdom to Israel and the kingdom of God to the Holy Spirit again, saying, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” In this promise of Jesus, we can think of the power of the Holy Spirit. In the gospel story Peter could not be Jesus’ witness when he had to be. Rather he denied Jesus three times, even before a slave girl, because he was driven by fear as Jesus was arrested and tried. But in Acts when he was baptized with the Holy Spirit and filled with the Spirit, he became a powerful witness of Jesus. At the day of Pentecost he delivered a message, saying, “Let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). Even before Sanhedrin, the most powerful authority of the nation, he said, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God.” (Acts 4:19).

Indeed, we see that Acts is the record of the powerful work of the gospel servants through the power of the Holy Spirit. The work for the kingdom of God can be done by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the reason Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses…” This is the promise of Jesus for his disciples and kingdom coworkers in the generations to come. Jesus also promised this in Luke 24:49, “I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” And Peter said in Acts 2:38-39, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

Furthermore, in the Old Testament God promised to pour out his Spirit upon all people. Peter quoted the words of Joel 2:38-30 and said at the day of Pentecost, “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.”

For the work of the kingdom of God kingdom workers need the power of the Holy Spirit, above all powers. So God says in Zechariah 4:6, “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit.” A great battle has been going on between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. This battle began since man’s fall and will continue to the end of the age until Jesus comes. Satan’s work or the devil’s work is to destroy God’s work. We see this more and more clearly in our time.

Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” In God’s creation there are two distinctive genders, male and female. But we see clearly the work of breaking this gender distinction even through the law enforcement. And God made man in his image as the crown of his creation to rule over all other created beings and things on the earth (Ge 1:28). But the work of degrading men to the level of animals is going on, treating men and animals equally. On one occasion I heard a lady calling “Romeo” on the street. I looked around and found out that “Romeo” was her dog’s name. “O my God!” I sighed in my heart. “What’s going on?” There seems to be no distinction between the names of people and those of dogs. That a black cat is called “Nero” is understandable. But if a dog is called Abe or Mary, it seems to be going too far. There are clear distinctions in God’s creation, creating things according to their various kinds. And God’s creation order is that God is the first, men, the second, and all other created things, the third on the earth. However, the creation order is upside down in the fallen world and we see this more and more in our time. Created things and materials, are in the place of God. People worship the earth, not God. They rely on money power, not God’s. Genesis 2:24 says, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” In this truth of God, a family is established. But this biblical concept of family has been disappearing in the powerful movement of moral revolution. Behind all these there is the devil or Satan, whose work opposes God’s work, doing things in a completely opposite way.

Have you ever seen the picture of a lion with the eagle’s wings? I was surprised to see that this is a UN sculpture erected recently. Why such a sculpture? Where do the people get such idea? Out of their own minds? What is their aim? As we heard S. Ian’s message, in the Bible worldly kings are depicted as beasts, ferocious animals, while the king of the Jews, as a lamb. In Daniel chapter 7, Daniel saw four great beasts, a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a horrifying and frightening and very powerful one. 7:4 says, “The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle.” In the book of Daniel, the lion refers to Babylonian kingdom. And in Revelation we see that the Babylonian kingdom is restored with the depiction of Antichrist that had the combined image of lion and bear and leopard (Rev 13:2), which is the combination of the kingdom of Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece, and this Babylonian kingdom is finally destroyed. The people of the world seem to have much interest in such things. As far as we know, the UN is to be a symbol of world peace. So a statue with a dove could make more sense, though not a lion with the wings of an eagle. It seems that the leaders of the world unwittingly fulfill God’s prophecies, as the decree of Caesar Augustus fulfilled the prophecy of Micah 5:2 that the birthplace of Christ the Son of God would be Bethlehem, for because of the decree Joseph and Mary had to move from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea. John says in Revelation 6:1-2, “I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, ‘Come!’ I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.” As we studied it is the description of the conquest of disguised false peace as the end time is coming close.

Another thing that surprised me is about metaverse. Probably some of you also heard of this word, “metaverse”, meta meaning “beyond” and verse, “universe.” This is a world beyond this real world. According to one definition, it is a virtual-reality space in which users can interact with a computer-generated environment and other users. In metaverse, people can transact even buying and selling lands, and even people go to churches. It seems to satisfy people’s desires in that digital virtual world, escaping the real world. This satisfaction is achieved without repentance of their sins. It could be to establish pseudo utopia, as the counterfeit of the kingdom of God. Some servants of God see that the future world may not be ruled by superpower nations, but the one who occupies and controls people’s minds using metaverse. So big digital companies have a fierce battle to monopolize this kind of world. Facebook rebrands to Meta.

My point is that Satan’s work is the counterfeit of God’s work. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10, “The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.” And Paul had said in the previous verse, “…the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.” When Jesus comes again, all such Satan’s work will be destroyed with Satan himself thrown in the lake of fire.

But as for us we are to do the kingdom work to save souls to the end until our Lord comes. It is to fight against the power of the devil and evil spirits and this battle is beyond human power. This is the reason Jesus promised the Holy Spirit with the power of the Spirit for us to be his witnesses. God wants us to be filled with the Holy Spirit and have the power of the Spirit as kingdom workers. Paul also sad in Ephesians 5:18, “…be filled with the Spirit.” Jesus said in Luke 11:13, “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” Our Lord Jesus wants us to pray until we are filled with the Holy Spirit and clothed with power from on high. Also, we need to repent of our sins, particularly our lukewarm attitude and mediocre spirit, doing things as much as we can, living in a comfort zone. We pray that being filled with the Spirit we may be powerful witnesses of Jesus in the power of the Spirit, particularly engaging in 1:1. Each one’s life of faith be powerful, prayer life be powerful, Bible study be powerful, 1:1 Bible teaching and ministry be powerful in the power of the Spirit, and our worship service be Spirit-filled.

**Third, the ascension of Jesus (9-14).** Verse 9 says, “After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.” This is a simple description of his ascension. His returning to his heavenly kingdom could be glorious, but it was not. When he came into the world, the world did not welcome him. Also when he went back to his kingdom in heaven, the world was ignorant. Only before the eyes of his disciples, he was taken up and a cloud his him from their sight. In verses 10 and 11, Luke wrote, “They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking to the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” Christ’s coming back will be the same way he was taken up to heaven. The way of his going up and coming down will be the same.

However, his coming back will be glorious beyond human imagination. Jesus said in Matthew 24: 30, “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.” However, the world would not know about this terrifying yet glorious event at all right before the very day of his coming. Jesus continued to say in Matthew 24:37-39, “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.”

Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem and went to upstairs to their room where they were staying and all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” May we all the more be united in prayer this year! May each family pray together each day, and may we gather together and pray each Friday evening.

Thank God for the suffering of our Lord Christ Jesus and his resurrection. Thank God for the kingdom of God within us and to be manifested in this world. Thank God of our Lord Jesus’ promise, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses…” May this promise of Jesus, Acts 1:8, be fulfilled in us and in God’s ministry in 2022! As we keep his kingdom in our hearts and lives and strive to expand the kingdom of God in the hope of the glorious coming of our Lord Christ Jesus.