

David Meiklejohn

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Vital Signs

Acts 2:1-13

Introduction

In the medical literature there are a number of simple tests that can be done on someone to determine their status. They're called vital signs, or signs of life, and they can show if someone is in a serious state, in danger of their life, or even if the patient is alive at all. There are various tests but the main ones are:

- Respiration
- Pulse
- Blood Pressure
- Body Temperature

If you came across someone lying on the ground, not moving, you could check to see if they're breathing by holding a mirror up to their mouth, you could hold your fingers on a pulse point to feel if their heart is still beating, and so on...

Signs of Life

In Jesus

We've been thinking about the passion week. Specifically on Friday we thought about the crucifixion. Jesus died. Some have suggested in the past that he didn't die, but merely swooned, and revived in the cool tomb. There are a few problems with this:

- The Romans were very familiar with execution and death. They knew when someone was dead.
- The Jewish leaders were paranoid about Jesus' statement he would rise after 3 days. They would surely have made sure Jesus was really dead.
- The physical evidence when the soldier pierced his side, and blood and water flowed out, indicates blood had pooled in his body and had separated since it was no longer circulating.

And then on the morning of the first day of the week, he rose. He was alive again. All the signs were there. He spoke, he ate, they touched him. For 40 days he appeared to them before ascending to heaven.

In the Disciples

But what about the disciples? They had seen Jesus die and rise again. He had gone into heaven, and they were left. Was anything different or were they back to square one? Jesus had promised new life to those who believed in him. They knew that this was a spiritual life, so

how could they be sure that they had this life? Well, the Spirit was going to testify. Jesus had promised them before he left that he would send the Spirit:

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” [Acts 1 v 4-5]

And now we find that just a week after he left them, they are visited by the Spirit of God:

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. [Acts 2 v 1-4]

The Spirit at work in the disciples was proof of the new life. We find him described as:

- A rushing wind
- Tongues of flame
- Empowering them to speak in many languages

It must have made quite a noise, because we’re told *at this sound the multitude came together [Acts 2 v 6]* and it was only when they got close that they heard each in their own language. This miracle confirmed it: the Spirit had come upon them, the new life in Christ was real.

In Us

But what about us? This special display was reserved for the disciples at Pentecost. We don’t see the same thing happen today for each person that believes. So what assurance do we have? How do we know that we have this same new life? Look at verses 36-41:

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptised 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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptised, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. [Acts 2 v 36-41]

Apart from the apostles there were many who believed and followed Jesus. What signs of the new life were they given? They didn’t get the tongues of flame, or the rushing wind. They didn’t get the miracles of languages. So how could they be sure?

Firstly they were promised. Jesus had promised, and Peter had promised. They trusted that these promises were from God.

Secondly they would see the prompting of the Spirit in their lives. As Walter said last week, the Spirit may prompt us with a song, or a word of scripture, with the desire to reach out to a friend. In many ways he guides and prompts us.

Thirdly, they would display one of the most convincing signs of a healthy person - an appetite. Look at verse 42:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [Acts 2 v 42]

The Spirit was giving them an appetite for the things of God. They had a desire

- For God's Word
- To love God's people
- To serve

These are the best signs that we have new life, and that the Spirit is living in each one of us who knows the Lord as Saviour. We should be seeing them in our daily lives.

Signs of Progress

But there's more...

Last week we went on a week's holiday down in Yorkshire. We stayed in a cottage out in the countryside, on a farm just outside a small village. The village was so small that it wasn't until we were a couple of miles away that there were any signs for it.

All through the week we went on excursions around the Yorkshire Dales and into the city of York. And every day I had to rely on the SatNav to find my way back home. Normally I get my bearings after a few days, but this time there were just too many country lanes and too many small villages. A couple of times I got a bit confident and decided I knew the way, but it wasn't long before the SatNav was back on and I was retracing my steps.

It was brilliant though. It worked out the whole complicated route, and took me through it step by step, only revealing the next turn after I'd taken the current one. And I knew we were making progress because the time to our destination kept going down.

The mistake many make about the Christian life is that the end is salvation. Salvation is just the start. There's a whole journey to go through, with a destination that is secure, and the Holy Spirit is our guide to take us step by step through it. We need purpose in our life. You must have heard of people who looked forward to retirement for years, and then when it came they found that they were lacking something: a drive, a motivation, a purpose.

- With life comes movement.
- But with a purpose comes direction.

We can see this when we look at the lives of the apostles. They had been waiting in Jerusalem, for the gift of the Spirit. And then the Spirit had come upon them in power. They spoke in many tongues. And that message to the Jews in Jerusalem for the feast was the start of a great

mission to spread the good news of Jesus to everyone they could, starting in Jerusalem and working out from there. That's why this book is called the Acts of the Apostles.

Before, they had been cowering in fear, but now they spoke with boldness. Look at chapter 4 of Acts:

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. [Acts 4 v 1-4]

They had been preaching to the people and it was having a great effect. 5000 men had believed the gospel. But Peter and John were arrested. How would they respond to this setback? Remember Peter had denied Jesus when challenged outside the trial.

And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that, by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. [Acts 4 v 7-10]

Notice a couple of things here. Firstly, it was the Holy Spirit that led them to speak. They weren't relying on their own wits, he was guiding them. Secondly, see the change that has been made in them: there is progress in their walk with God. Even their accusers could see it:

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognised that they had been with Jesus. [Acts 4 v 13]

When they were released they rejoined the other believers, and they prayed together for boldness to speak the word even in times of danger. And it worked:

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. [Acts 4 v 31]

We can continue to read the book of Acts, and find the apostles, and other followers of Christ, reaching out and preaching boldly to more and more people. Even facing persecution, and being scattered, they used that as a chance to preach the gospel even wider than before.

And so it is with us. We need a purpose in our lives, and we should see progress as we walk with God. What is our purpose in this day and age?

- To glorify God, and Jesus his son
- To serve him with our lives
- To love the saints, to be a help and encouragement to other believers
- And to be a witness for the gospel

The Holy Spirit should be our guide in all this, leading us to where he wants us, prompting us to act, and giving us words to say.

And we should see progress. When you look back on your life, can you see growth? Can you see times when the Spirit has guided you? Can you see occasions when God had used you to reach out to someone?

But what about when we make mistakes? Surely that knocks us off the path God has planned for us?

Well I made a few mistakes when we drove about Yorkshire, looking for interesting landmarks. But when I took a wrong turn, or followed the wrong road, the SatNav would just reroute: it would give me a new route to follow, which might not get me there as quickly as the old one, but it would get me there.

God is not surprised when we fail him. And he isn't angry with us either. He picks us up, puts us back on the path, and points us in the right direction.

Summary

So let's consider as we leave this evening. We have thought on Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. We have thought about the new life that is ours through him. And we have thought of the new purpose that we have as children of God.

When we look at ourselves do we see the signs of life?

When we look back can we see the signs of progress?

Now let's look ahead and let the Spirit guide our next step.