



The Spirit
Acts 2

The Church at Canyon Creek, Austin, Texas
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THE SPIRIT
2:1-21

“Your glory, God, is what our hearts long for, to be overcome by Your presence, Lord.”¹ Holy Spirit, You are welcome here. We desire Your presence. We bow in Your presence. We do not seek some sensational experience or emotional feeling. We seek You. We acknowledge our total dependence on You to make it through the day. We ask You to forgive us and to cleanse us as You promised. We ask You to fill us with the fresh wind of Your Spirit. To fill our church, and to fill each of our hearts. “Your glory, God, is what our hearts long for, to be overcome by Your presence, Lord.” In the Lord’s name, Amen.

The Bible refers to the Holy Spirit as wind, as fire, as water, and as oil. It’s hard to get a handle on the Holy Spirit. When you think of God, perhaps you imagine Him sitting on His heavenly throne. When you think of Jesus, perhaps you recall a story from the New Testament. But when you think of the Holy Spirit, what do you think of? When it comes to visualizing the Holy Spirit, we struggle. He has no face. He takes up no space. Even His name is not really a name, it’s a title. And yet, He is the member of the Trinity with whom we have the most interaction.

There a lot of invisible realities in our world. We can’t see smell, but we know the difference between fresh baked bread and a dead skunk in the middle of road. We can’t see sound. We can’t see heat. We can’t see the internet. But every day, we experience invisible realities like these. The same can be said of the Holy Spirit. We cannot see Him, but we experience the Holy Spirit in numerous ways every day.

The book of Acts records the birth of the Church and the Holy Spirit is very much a part of the story. The book of Acts records the thirty-year period following the resurrection of Jesus. It is filled with stories of incredible people. So who were these first Christians? What inspired them? And what sparked a movement?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ! They heard His teaching, they witnessed His miracles, and they were there when He was horribly crucified. And amazingly, they saw Him alive again, proving He is the Son of God and proving that everything He said is true. ***They were convinced it was true, they were compelled to talk about it, and they were courageous to a take stand at great risk.*** And these first Christians are our mentors. We need their 1st century passion for our 21st century world. May their passion revive our passion. May their faith revive our faith. May their courage revive our courage.

The story continues, and it’s still about Jesus. The mission continues, and today, in our generation, it’s up to us to take the gospel across the street and around the world.

Acts 1:8 is the theme verse of the book of Acts. “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” (Acts 1:8). After hearing these last words of Jesus, the disciples saw His feet lift from ground and saw Him ascend into heaven. After a very dramatic forty days – witnessing the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension – “they returned to Jerusalem ... When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were

Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. With one mind they were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers” (Acts 1:12-14).

Luke tells us that 120 were gathered in a small room. For ten days, they waited and they prayed. And then this is what happened. “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:1-4, NIV).

I want you to understand not just the significance of what happened, but also the day it happened. “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place” (Acts 2:1, NIV). The Holy Spirit did not just happen to come on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit had to come on the day of Pentecost. *The Jewish feasts are a template of the unfolding of God’s salvation plan through the Messiah, through Jesus Christ, for the world.* Let me show you how.

Passover commemorated the salvation of the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery. When Pharaoh refused to let God’s people go, the Lord pronounced the plague of death on Egypt. Yet, houses sprinkled with the blood of a sacrificial lamb would be saved. So the Hebrews sprinkled blood on the doors of their houses, and that terrible night the Lord passed over their houses and they were saved. Passover was a preview of the *crucifixion*. The New Testament calls Jesus “the Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7, NIV). John introduced Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, NAS). Paul tells us that we are redeemed “by the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:18-19). Passover was a preview of the cross.

The *Feast of First Fruits* was held three days after Passover, celebrating the first harvest. The first cut of wheat was bundled and brought to the temple as an offering, and waved in the air to praise God as provider. The first fruit, the first of the harvest, was the promise of more to come. The Feast of First Fruits was a preview of the *resurrection*. On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead, and He is called the first fruits. “Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20, NAS). Just as the first fruit of the harvest was the promise of more to come, the resurrection of Jesus is the promise of our resurrection.

The *Feast of Weeks* marked the end of the harvest. On the 50th day, the harvest was complete and the Hebrews celebrated their bountiful harvest and praised God. The Feast of Weeks was called *Pentecost* in Greek. The Feast of Weeks was a celebration of the fullness of the harvest, and on the day of Pentecost, the disciples experienced the fullness of the Spirit. “When the day of Pentecost came ... all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:1, 4).

The Holy Spirit did not just happen to come on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit had to come on the day of Pentecost. What happened on the day of Pentecost was the unfolding of God’s salvation plan for the world.

“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:2-4, NIV). ***These phenomenal signs point to a unique event announcing a new movement of God.*** I will share more on tongues later. But this was a unique event in history, announcing a new movement of God.

And here’s what was unique about it. “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4, NIV). ***The Holy Spirit empowers each of us to fulfill our part in the mission.*** In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was “with.” He was an external, temporary source of strength who occasionally anointed certain people. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is “in.” He is an internal, permanent source of strength who personally indwells every believer. That’s why Jesus told the disciples that it was to their advantage that He depart. Better than Jesus walking beside us is having the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. God is not only “with” us, He is also “in” us.² Paul said, “You are a temple of God” and “the Spirit of God dwells in you” (1 Corinthians 3:16).³ Prior to this moment, the Holy Spirit only anointed certain people; but now, “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.”

And the Holy Spirit is a person. A member of the Trinity; Father, Son, Spirit. The Holy Spirit is present in the life of every believer. He is with us and He is in us. And He touches our lives in so many ways. He convicts us of sin, comforts us when we’re hurting, guides us when we are confused, teaches us God’s truth, helps us with our problems, bears the fruit of Christlikeness in our lives, fills us with a desire to live for God, shields us from temptation and spiritual attack, and the Holy Spirit empowers each of us to fulfill our part in the mission.

This is where our confidence and courage come from. Paul told Timothy that “God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7, NIV). That’s true for us too. The same Holy Spirit who was with them in Acts 2 is with us. He is with us at school, at work, in your neighborhood. We are empowered by God, and we should act like it! We should walk with confidence, boldness, and courage because the Holy Spirit empowers each of us to fulfill our part in the mission.

“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4, NIV). ***The phenomenon of tongues was a sign that the gospel is for every person and every nation.***

“Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5, NIV). Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks, was one of the three pilgrimage feasts of the year. Devout Jewish men from all over the world would travel to Jerusalem for this festival. The population of the city would swell by tens of thousands. So the city was filled with Jewish people from different lands, speaking different languages.

“When they heard this sound” – the sound of the disciples speaking in tongues – “a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the

parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!’ Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, ‘What does this mean?’” (Acts 2:6-12, NIV).

These tongues were known languages and dialects, and people were speaking and understanding each other in languages they had never learned. It was to show that the gospel is for all people.

There is confusion today on how to apply this event. Because this phenomena is repeated four times in the book of Acts, some say that we should experience the same thing today. But here’s why that is not the case, and why Pentecost was a unique event in history announcing a new movement of God.

Acts 2 records what happened to Christians one day in Jerusalem. But there were hundreds of Christians in other cities; who became Christians before the cross, before the resurrection, and before Pentecost. That’s why there was a delay in some people receiving the Holy Spirit. The reason this is important is to correct erroneous charismatic theology about a second blessing, the belief that a person can become saved one day and be filled with the Holy Spirit later on and prove it by speaking in tongues.

A map shows what happened. The Holy Spirit fell upon the Christians in Jerusalem first. That’s Acts 2. But Acts 8 tells us that Peter and John traveled to Samaria and found Christians without the Holy Spirit. So Peter and John “laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.”⁴ The same thing happened in Caesarea in Acts 10. When Peter arrived, he found many believers who did not have the Holy Spirit. So these people received the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues. This was to convince Peter that even Gentiles could be saved and receive the Holy Spirit. And beyond this map, the same thing happened in Ephesus in Acts 19. When Paul arrived he asked the believers, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:2, ESV). So Paul laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues, to prove their faith was authentic.

The explanation of the delay we see in the book of Acts, a separation of believing in Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit, is geographical, not theological. In Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit fell on those who were in Jerusalem. But there were hundreds of believers who were not in Jerusalem. This delay was during an historic transition from the old covenant to the new covenant.⁵ Pentecost was a once-in-history event, not to be repeated and not be considered normative. There are no other accounts of this delay after Acts 19. Therefore, there is no second blessing subsequent to salvation, and there is no mandate of speaking in tongues to prove that you are a Christian.

The New Testament is very clear. At the moment of belief, at the moment of salvation, a person immediately receives the Holy Spirit. “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you ... so is the Spirit” (Romans 8:9). If you’ve got Jesus, you’ve got the Holy Spirit!

So, what was the purpose of tongues on the day of Pentecost? A sign that the gospel is for every person and every nation.

“Some, however, made fun of them and said, ‘They have had too much wine.’ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: ‘Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning!’” (Acts 2:13-15, NIV).

The arrival of the Holy Spirit was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel, and an urgent call to share the gospel before Jesus returns. “No,” Peter said, “this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will 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. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” (Acts 2:16-21, NIV).

The phenomena at Pentecost was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel, the promise that God would pour out His Spirit, and that’s exactly what happened.

“In the last days.” The day of Pentecost was the beginning of the end. The “last days” has already started. The clock is ticking. And between the day of Pentecost and the day Jesus returns, the church has the opportunity to prophesy, to preach, to proclaim the gospel to as many people as possible. And the day He returns, the “day of the Lord,” will be a day of rejoicing for those who believe and a day for judgment for those who do not. So, the urgent call on our lives to declare that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21).⁶

CONCLUSION

Those who were there were eyewitnesses. ***They were convinced it was true, they were compelled to talk about it, and they were courageous to take a stand at great risk.*** And these first Christians are our mentors. We need their 1st century passion for our 21st century world. May their passion revive our passion. May their faith revive our faith. May their courage revive our courage. The book of Acts continues to be written; each generation adds their chapter to the book. We are living and writing our chapter. ***The story continues, and it’s still about Jesus. The mission continues, and today, in our generation, it’s up to us to take the gospel across the street and around the world.***

If we have any optimism, it is because of this. Jesus is alive. And He left the Holy Spirit with us. The Holy Spirit is real. He is a person. He is present in our church and in each of our lives. And He is powerful and wants to work powerfully in our church and in each of our lives. The Holy Spirit is equally empowering us as He empowered the first Christians in Acts 2. The mission is the same. The message is the same. The Spirit is the same.

And I want our church to experience the same things we read about in Acts 2, not phenomenal signs, but something better. I want our church to experience the same joy and

excitement, the same passion and courage, the same changed lives of our friends and family and neighbors coming to Jesus. I want to see God results, not our results.

So, this morning, I want to ask you to have the courage to pray bold, impossible prayers. And believe that God will answer our bold, impossible prayers. Before the day of Pentecost, for ten days, 120 believers gathered in a small room. They waited and they prayed. Acts 1 says “with one mind they were continually devoting themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14, NAS). “With one mind,” praying the same thing, seeking the same thing. And what do we seek?

“Your glory, God, is what our hearts long for, to be overcome by Your presence, Lord.” Holy Spirit, You are welcome here. We desire Your presence. We bow in Your presence. We do not seek some sensational experience or emotional feeling. We seek You. We acknowledge our total dependence on You to make it through the day. We ask You to forgive us and to cleanse us as You promised. We ask You to fill us with the fresh wind of Your Spirit. To fill our church, and to fill each of our hearts. “Your glory, God, is what our hearts long for, to be overcome by Your presence, Lord.” In the Lord’s name, Amen.

NOTES

¹ Lyric from “Holy Spirit,” written by Bryan and Katie Torwalt.

² See John 16:7.

³ See also 1 Corinthians 6:19.

⁴ See Acts 8:14-17.

⁵ See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), Chapter 39, “Baptism in and Filling with the Holy Spirit,” pages 763-784.

⁶ See Romans 10:13.