

His Pouring Acts 19:1-7

How do we know when the Holy Spirit has been poured into our life? When the Holy Spirit has been poured into your life—the world notices. The sinful world reacts with fear and wonder. Some repent. Some riot. Some rage. Some receive Him.

But all notice.

We don't know exactly how Christianity got to the city named Ephesus just off the Aegean Sea in modern day Turkey. What we do know is that when the faith got there it was missing something or closer to the point it was missing someone, the Holy Spirit. It was an incomplete faith, a weakened faith that was just maintaining rather than growing Jesus' Kingdom. There were a total of twelve Christians in Ephesus, one of the most potent centers for idolatry, paganism and sex-cults in the ancient world. They were just barely hanging on.

A man named Paul arrived there in 52 or 53 AD. When he arrived in Ephesus and met these twelve Christians in this tiny little Church, Paul was shocked. Today, we are used to seeing Churches that are merely maintaining, barely hanging on or even dying. Growth, a dynamic family of faith that is expanding and changing the world, bringing in new believers, seems like a novelty today. But in Paul's day, a time when heroes of the faith were everywhere and Christians were bending the world around them to the shape of the Kingdom of God, that kind of church was shocking.

He asked them a question, **"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (Acts 19:2)** These twelve disciples in this little church at Ephesus looked around at each other cluelessly like Paul had asked "When the aliens took you up to their spaceship did they serve you Tang?" They had no idea what Paul was talking about. So Paul, the astute theologian, asked the next logical question, **"Into what then were you baptized?"** And they replied, **"Into John's baptism."** (Acts 19:3)

You can practically hear Paul slapping his forehead all the way here 2000 years later. These twelve men were not baptized to receive new life through Jesus. They were simply forgiven of their sin and told to mend their ways. They were not given Jesus' promise that through the power of the Holy Spirit **"I am with you always to the end of the age."** (Matthew 28:20) They were not taught Jesus had sent another Helper, the Holy Spirit to be with them forever to dwell with them and be in them and implant deep within the bowels of their soul the unshakeable conviction that God is their Father.

Paul wasted no time. Immediately, he baptized them in the name of Jesus. As Paul laid his hands on these twelve men in baptism that **"The Holy Spirit came on them and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying."** (Acts 19:6)

This is what is known as the filling of the Holy Spirit or the pouring of the Holy Spirit or even the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The act of the Holy Spirit being poured upon a believer and transforming us in a significant way, permeating every fiber of our being and purging us, even if only for a time, of our weaknesses and the fruits of the flesh—impurity, sensuality, idolatry, anger, enmity, envy, strife, addictions is well documented in Scripture and in history.

We know our truest, most real self when the Holy Spirit is poured into us. When the Spirit fills us, we know what the normal life for the Christian is supposed to be. The aberration, the deception is the

sin-sick soul, the man or woman in bondage to lust, anger, greed, envy, despair, fear or strife. If we do not know our Spirit-filled self, we do not know who we really are. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is normative for Christians—meaning that is what God expects, meaning that is how are made.

This pouring is not just something that happens at the Pentecostal Church down the street or for the guy preaching on the street corner and handing out tracts or on the youth group mission trip. It is God's desire for everyone who believes that Jesus is Lord and God raised Him from the dead. It is a phenomenon documented in Acts multiple times. We see it throughout the Old Testament. The elders who stood with Moses at the tent of meeting were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to prophesy. When the tall, good-looking man from Gibeah, Saul, was anointed King, he was filled with the Holy Spirit. The same thing happened with King David. Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson the Bible tells us were all filled with the Holy Spirit. The same is true for Balaam, Ezekiel, Micah, Bezalel and Joseph. And we see, this of course, in the New Testament with even greater frequency. There are these men at Ephesus upon whom the Holy Spirit was poured out. And in Jerusalem on Pentecost of course the Holy Spirit fell on thousands at once. Peter, Stephen, Paul and Barnabas are all described as full of the Spirit—to name a few.

And Jesus of Nazareth, the Bible says, was full of the Holy Spirit. Jesus earthly ministry did not begin until He was 30 years old. It was then that Jesus was baptized by His cousin John in the Jordan River and afterward Jesus' ministry began. He was baptized in the Jordan and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus and the Spirit immediately led Jesus out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. After that temptation, Jesus' earthly ministry of teaching, healing and making disciples began but the Bible is explicit more than once that He didn't do it by His own strength but by the filling of the Holy Spirit.

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

Luke 4:14-15

Even Jesus, God in the flesh, allowed Himself to be poured out, becoming like us, and He lived by the power of the Holy Spirit. The privilege of His Divinity was poured out so the Holy Spirit could be poured in. The pastor A.W. Tozer put it like this:

I am persuaded that our Lord Jesus, while He was on earth Jesus operated in the strength and authority of His Spirit-anointed humanity...I hold it true that Jesus Christ, in the power and authority of His-spirit anointed humanity, stilled the waves, quieted the winds, healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, exercised complete authority over demons and raised the dead. He moved to among men not as God...but as a Spirit-anointed man.

So, if even Jesus, who was sinless and perfect, lived by the power of the Holy Spirit, if even Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit, if even Jesus' ministry was an outpouring of Spirit abundance, don't you think you and I need the fullness of the Holy Spirit?

We certainly do.

You see the point of the Christian life is not merely forgiveness of sin. It is freedom. The aim of the Christian life is not simply repentance. It is a relationship with the Living God. The goal of the Christian

life is not just mending our ways. It is mending and tending this sinful and broken world. And that only happens through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

There is a story from the life of Martin Luther King Jr. At the beginning of the Montgomery Bus Boycott late one night, January 27, 1956. Sitting in his kitchen over a cup of coffee, King stewed in fear brought on by a threatening phone call that had jarred him from sleep. He prayed out loud that night and the Holy Spirit showed up. “Lord, I’m down here trying to do what is right. I think I’m right. I think the cause we represent is right. But Lord, I must confess that I’m weak now. I’m faltering. I’m losing my courage...” And it seemed at that moment that I could hear an inner voice saying to me, “Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo, I will be with you, even until the end of the world.”¹

I can see a few skeptical faces out there--some furrowed brows. You are going to make me play my Presbyterian trump card. John Calvin, the standard-bearer for Presbyterians and all right-thinking and faithful Christians everywhere, had an experience of the Spirit being poured out in his life.

John Calvin was studying to be a priest in the Roman Catholic Church. His faith in Jesus languished. He was stuck in what he called “an abyss of mire.” One day as he described it, “God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame...I was immediately inflamed with an intense desire” to serve God and know Him better. It was the turning point of his life.

“Pastor Eric,” you may be asking, “What about you? Have you ever had an experience of the Holy Spirit being poured out in your life? You seem so...normal. Well, maybe not normal, strictly speaking, but a regular guy. You like sports and barbecue and movies and stuff.” The answer is many times — including more times here at First Pres than I can count.

But one experience stands out.

When I was 25 I got into a confrontation with another seminary student. It is difficult to say this about anyone, particularly from the pulpit I am especially accountable for the words I say, but this individual was a bad man. He was well known around campus for bullying students, yelling at them, cursing them, using his six-foot eight-inch height to intimidate and threaten other students—sometimes even women. I watched more than once brings an adult student to tears. I know he personally caused at least two people to leave seminary. One morning, in the cafeteria, as I was getting breakfast to go, he found me. He was began to accost me about something I had written for a seminary journal. As he accused me of being racist, as he accused me of being dishonest and being a manipulative person who cared only about power and glory for myself, I prayed. I asked the Lord for help. I cannot even remember my responses. And his verbal lashing lasted several minutes as I made my way through the breakfast line. But I did not lose control. I did not respond in anger. I merely kept smiling and, soon, I he could tell he was going to explode. In the middle of the cafeteria he lost control of himself and threw down his breakfast tray on the floor in a furious rage, rising to the top of his six-foot eight-inch frame and yelled at the top of his lungs for everyone within earshot to hear something I cannot repeat. He then ran out the door.

I bent down, picked up his tray off the floor, took my breakfast to go, went to my dorm room, and collapsed on the couch—exhausted—totally exhausted. But there was something different about me as well. I was filled with an intimacy with the Lord, like I had rarely experienced. My heart was joyful, I had love and compassion, peace. I felt like I had been at a Baptist revival for a month. God was so close—as

near as I can ever recall Him being.

About a week later I was walking through the cafeteria again and a friend called me over and said, “Eric what happened to you last week? Everyone is talking about it.” He was sitting with a friend and I sat down and told them the entire story—the attack from the other student, my prayer during everything that happened, this student’s loss of control and exit, and then my sudden overwhelming intimacy with God. And those two students looked at each other, and one said to the other, “I told you. I told you so.” And then asked, “Told him what?” And one of them looked at me and said, “For a long time a few of us have believed that student was demonic, demon-possessed. That demon tried to attack you and the Holy Spirit filled you to defend you and defeat that demon.”

And in the years since that happened, I have never heard a better diagnosis or those events. And I believe that is exactly what happened. The Holy Spirit was poured out to protect me against the powers of Hell and the Spirit’s fullness lingered long after doing what He came to do.

Now, it is important to say that if we believe in Jesus, if we are His disciple, His follower, the Holy Spirit already lives in us. We are already a vessel for the Spirit of the Living God. We are a temple for the Holy Spirit as Paul told the Christians at Corinth many times. If you have confessed Christ, the Holy Spirit already lives in you.

But there is a difference between being someone in whom the Holy Spirit is present and someone into whom the Holy Spirit is poured.

Despite their faulty baptism, we know the Holy Spirit was present in those 12 believers in Ephesus because they confessed Jesus as Lord. They believed that God raised Him from the dead and you cannot do that without the Holy Spirit in you. It’s impossible.

The Holy Spirit was present in those believers in Ephesus—just like He is in so many Christians, church-goers, people who live lives that look a lot like the lives of every around them, the 3/5 of Christians who don’t believe the Holy Spirit is truly, fully God—but merely God’s power, God’s laser beam.

And so because they are living by their own power, their own strength, their own capacity with the Holy Spirit merely present rather than poured, life looks a lot like it does for people who know nothing about Jesus at all. Because it is not by our strength or our power, says the Word, but by my Spirit says the Lord.

And when the 12 members of the lackluster church at Ephesus opened themselves up to the Spirit’s pouring when they were baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—things began to happen, all heaven broke loose, in the pagan hellscape, demon-infested city that was Ephesus.

Paul began to share the Gospel in the Jewish synagogue with power and authority. This went on for two years and Jews and Greeks throughout Asia heard about Jesus. And Acts tells us that extraordinary works were being done through the Spirit’s power—the sick were healed, demons were cast out, people confessed to the sins of witchcraft and burned books worth about \$9 million in today’s dollars. It got so bad, or should we say it got so good, that the idol-makers eventually rioted and tried to harm Paul and some of his companions because no one wanted any more idols made.

Acts 19:20 contains this little line describing everything going on:

So the Word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

How do we know when the Holy Spirit has been poured into our life? When the Holy Spirit has been poured into your life—the world notices. The sinful world reacts with fear and wonder. Some repent. Some riot. Some rage. Some receive Him.

But all notice.

Now you may be wondering, how is the Holy Spirit poured into us? How do we receive His fullness, His abundance, the totality of His person in us? Keep in mind that the Spirit has a mind of His own. He goes wherever He determines to go. We cannot manipulate the Holy Spirit any more than we can manipulate God the Father or Jesus the Son.

But the Bible tells us we can do two things.

First, we **seek** the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Himself made this promise:

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Luke 11:13

Here is God's promise to you and me—if we ask for the Holy Spirit, He will not deny us. God wants good things for us. He wants to be with us. If my kids ask me for something that is good for them or something that causes us to spend time together, if I can possibly afford it, I am going to give it to them.

And its no different with God. He wants us to have the Holy Spirit. Jesus went to the cross to loose the Spirit upon the world. And the prayer "Lord, fill me with the Holy Spirit," delights Him like none other.

Second, we **submit** to the Holy Spirit. We heed God's command, we obey His will, we pursue righteousness and He gives the Spirit to encourage us, to move us, to give us peace and joy so that our yoke is easy and our burden is light. The Holy Spirit moves in when our will gets out of the way. We must decrease for the Spirit to increase and His fullness dwell in us. We allow Him to reign and rule in our life and as we do, the intimacy we have with the Lord increases and from that intimacy flows every benefit of the Christian life—peace, power, purity, love, authority, joy, healing, goodness, clarity, kindness, courage, patience, justice, faithfulness, generosity, gentleness, mercy, meekness, self-control, integrity, humility.

Seek the Spirit. Submit to the Holy Spirit. Be filled with the Holy Spirit.

And the world around us takes notice—not of us, but of the God who lives in us. Some will rage, some will riot, some will repent, some will receive Him.

But all take notice.

Amen.