



The Spirit ... A Powerful Movement

Acts 2:1-21

Lake Arrowhead Church, Waleska, Georgia
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May the Holy Spirit fill us with the fresh wind of His Spirit. May He fill our church and fill our hearts with His presence and His power. May what happened to the first Christians in Acts 2 happen in us. May we “be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

The Bible refers to the Holy Spirit as wind, as fire, as water, and as oil.¹ With those metaphors, it’s hard to get a handle on the Holy Spirit. When we think of God, we can imagine Him sitting on His heavenly throne. When we think of Jesus, we can recall a story from the New Testament. But when we think of the Holy Spirit, it’s hard to visualize Him. 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.

The Holy Spirit is invisible to us. There are 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 air. We can’t see heat. But every day, we experience invisible realities like these. The same is true of the Holy Spirit. We cannot see Him, but we experience the Holy Spirit in numerous ways every day. And the book of Acts records how the early Christians experienced Him.

The book of Acts records the birth of the Church and the thirty-year period following the resurrection of Jesus. The book is filled with dramatic events and incredible stories of faith. Who were these people? What inspired them? And what sparked a movement? They heard His teaching and witnessed His miracles. They saw Him die and they saw Him alive again. They believed He was the Son of God and that everything He said was true. They were convinced it was true. They were compelled to talk about it. And they were courageous to take a stand.

Studying the book of Acts is like holding up a mirror and comparing ourselves to the first Christians, and honestly asking ourselves, “Do we live like they lived? Do we do what they did? Does our church look anything like their church?”² As we read the book of Acts, on the one hand, the way they lived rebukes us and humbles us. On the other hand, the way they lived should challenge us and inspire us. These first Christians are our mentors, and we need their 1st century passion for our 21st century world. The book of Acts says, “They turned the world upside down.”³ How? Because they saw Jesus alive again and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

The challenge of this series is to be the church Jesus wants us to be rather than the church we want to be. Our prayer should be that their faith would stir our faith, that their passion would stir our passion, that their courage would stir our courage. The book of Acts continues to be written, and every generation adds their chapter. We are living and writing our chapter. ***The story continues, the mission continues, and it’s still about Jesus.***

Acts 1:8 records the last words of Jesus before He ascended into heaven. This is the theme verse of Acts. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you,” Jesus said, “and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NIV).

After hearing these last words of Jesus, the disciples saw His feet lift from ground and saw Him ascend into heaven. After a dramatic forty days – witnessing the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension – “the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, a distance of half a mile. They went to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying ... They all met together and were constantly united in prayer ... about 120 believers were together in one place” (Acts 1:12, 14-15, NLT).

Jesus left the Gospel in the hands of 120 faithful few. For ten days, they prayed and they waited. 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 (languages) as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:1-4, 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. “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place ... and were filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:1, 4, NIV). ***The Jewish feasts were a preview of the unfolding of God’s plan of salvation through the Messiah, Jesus Christ, for the world.*** The Old Testament is a preview of the New Testament. The Old Testament feasts were a preview of what happened in the life of Jesus.

Passover commemorated the salvation of the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery.⁴ 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” (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, NIV). Passover was a preview of the cross.

The Feast of First Fruits was held three days after Passover, celebrating the first harvest.⁵ 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 cut of the harvest, the first fruit, 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 and praised God.⁶ 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 plan of salvation 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 (languages) as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:2-4, NIV).⁷ The Holy Spirit manifested Himself as wind and fire, but what does it mean? ***These phenomenal signs point to a unique event announcing a new movement of God.***

Here's why it was unique. “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4, NIV). In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was “with.” He was an external, temporary source of strength who occasionally anointed certain people at certain times. 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 it was to their advantage that He depart. What could be better than Jesus walking with us? The Holy Spirit dwelling in us. God is not only “with” us, He is also “in” us. The Bible says, “You are a temple of God” and “the Spirit of God dwells in you” (1 Corinthians 3:16). Prior to this moment, the Holy Spirit only anointed certain people at certain times, but now, “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.”

The Holy Spirit is a person. A member of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Spirit. And He touches our lives in so many ways. He comforts us when we're hurting, guides us when we're confused, convicts us of sin, teaches us the truth, helps us with our problems, bears the fruit of Christlikeness, purifies our character, shields us from temptation and spiritual attack, and ***the Holy Spirit empowers each of us to fulfill our part in the mission.***

Our confidence and courage come from the Holy Spirit. Paul told Timothy that “God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power” (2 Timothy 1:7, NIV). That's true for us as too. The same Holy Spirit who was with them in Acts 2 is with us. And the result? Acts 4 says, “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31, NAS).⁸ We can walk with confidence and 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). So what does that mean? ***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 three pilgrimage feasts of the year. Devout Jews from all over the world traveled to Jerusalem for this festival. The population of the city swelled 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 our 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.⁹

There is confusion today about how to apply this event. Because this phenomenon was repeated four times in the book of Acts, some say 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 on 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.” The same thing happened in Caesarea in Acts 10. When Peter arrived, he found many believers who did not have the Holy Spirit. So they received the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues. This was to convince Peter that Gentiles could be saved and receive the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ 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 an issue of timing. 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 the Holy Spirit catching up to those who became Christians before the cross, before the resurrection, and before Pentecost. The delay was also during an historic transition from the old covenant to the new covenant. 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 requirement for speaking in tongues to prove that someone is a Christian.

The New Testament is 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!¹¹

So, what was the purpose of tongues (languages) on the day of Pentecost? To be 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).

“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 ... I will pour out my Spirit in those days ... And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” (Acts 2:16-18, 21, NIV). *The arrival of the Holy Spirit was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel, and an urgent call to share the Gospel before Jesus returns.*¹²

The wonders at Pentecost were the fulfillment of 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” have already started. The clock is ticking. Between the day of Pentecost and the day Jesus returns the church has the responsibility to preach and 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 calling on our lives is to declare that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21, NAS).

CONCLUSION

The Holy Spirit is real. He is present in our church, and He is present in each of us. And He is empowering us as He empowered those in Acts 2. The Spirit is the same, the message is the same, and the mission is the same.

Jesus said, “You shall be My witnesses” (Acts 1:8). That’s the mission Jesus is calling us to. “I’m asking you to follow Me. I’m asking you to represent Me. I’m asking you care about people who do not know Me. I’m asking you to tell your friends and family and neighbors about Me. *Will you do that?* ... And if you will, I promise the Holy Spirit will help you and give you the words to say. And the Holy Spirit will touch people’s hearts and convince them to believe in Me ... Will you do that?”

[Prayer] *Holy Spirit, we long for Your presence. We long for your power. We ask You to fill us with the fresh wind of Your Spirit. Fill our church and fill our hearts. May it happen to us as it happened to those in Acts 2. May we “be filled with the Spirit.” Give us the boldness and love to tell our friends and family and neighbors about You, about Your grace, and how they can be saved. In the Lord’s name, Amen.*

NOTES

¹ See Acts 2:2, Acts 2:3, John 7:38, and Luke 4:18.

² This theme is found in Francis Chan's book *Letters to the Church* and in Michael Green's book *Thirty Years that Changed the World*. In his book on the Holy Spirit, *Forgotten God*, Francis Chan writes, "There is a big gap between what we read in Scripture about the Holy Spirit and how most believers and churches operate today ... I believe that this missing *something* is actually a missing *Someone* – namely, the Holy Spirit ... I am tired of merely talking about God. I want to see God move through me and through the worldwide body of Christ. I know there's more. We all know there's more." [Francis Chan, *Forgotten Go* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), pages 16, 22]

³ See Acts 17:6.

⁴ See Exodus 12 and Leviticus 23.

⁵ See Leviticus 23.

⁶ See Leviticus 23.

⁷ See Matthew 3:11, in which John said of Jesus, "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11, ESV).

⁸ Addressing the religious leaders, Acts 4:8 says, "Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said ..." Explaining the authority and power of his preaching, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2, "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5, NIV).

⁹ "It was Babel in reverse," writes J. I. Packer. [J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984, 2005), page 210]

¹⁰ See Acts 11:15-18.

¹¹ Ephesians 1:13 mentions the "seal" of the Holy Spirit. Meaning, receiving the Holy Spirit confirms the authenticity of our faith.

¹² See Joel 2:16-21.