

This morning, I am taking a break from my sermon series through 1 Peter to look at Acts 2 and what is known as the Day of Pentecost, a holiday we celebrate today. In Acts 1, we read about how Jesus, after rising from the dead, spent 40 days in Jerusalem teaching his disciples about the kingdom of God before He ascended to heaven. Because Jesus ascended he is sovereign over this world, prays for us to the Father, and, as we will look at today, has sent His Holy Spirit to live inside of every believer, so that we can have God living in us at all times. As Jesus said in **John 14:16-17** - *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you*

As Acts 1 ends, the disciples are in Jerusalem praying and waiting for God to send the Holy Spirit. Let's read Acts 2:1-13:

Acts 2:1-13 - *When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. ⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking **in his own language**. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs-- we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."*

Acts 2 is a pivotal moment in world history. Christmas is big, when the eternal Son of God took on flesh. Easter is bigger, when Jesus rose from the dead after dying for our sins. Pentecost has to be up there with those two. This morning, I want to look at the significance of Pentecost and the giving of the Holy Spirit. In v. 12, the crowd asks "What does this mean?" I want to answer that question this morning.

First of all, you can't understand the purpose of the giving of the Holy Spirit without understanding Pentecost, the day on which God gave His Holy Spirit. Pentecost was a Jewish festival, also called the Feast of Weeks –

Exodus 34:22 - Celebrate the Feast of Weeks with the firstfruits of the wheat harvest

The Feast of Weeks, Pentecost, was the 50th day after Passover. It was a one-day agricultural festival, where farmers brought the first sheaf of wheat from the crop and offered it to God, partly as a sign of gratitude, and partly as a prayer that all the rest of the crop would be safely gathered in. Pentecost was the celebration of the firstfruits of the wheat harvest.

Pentecost was also a reminder of the giving of the Law, which happened at Mt. Sinai, 50 days after the first Passover. At Mt. Sinai, God gave Moses the law, giving his redeemed people the way of life by which they must now carry out his purposes.

So because Pentecost was an agricultural festival, pilgrims from many nations had gathered in Jerusalem for the first time since the Passover, when Jesus was crucified. As the crowd is gathered, 120 of Jesus' disciples are together praying. *Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.* ³ *They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.* ⁴ *All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.* The Spirit comes in wind and tongues of fire, and the people who have come from all over hear the gospel preached in their own language. So what is Luke telling us about the coming of the Spirit and the meaning of Pentecost?

1) The Holy Spirit is the firstfruits of the harvest

Romans 8:22-23 - We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ *Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

Paul tells us that we have the firstfruits of the Spirit. We have the first sheaf of wheat. We have the first taste of what it will be like to know God, to live intimately with Him, to know His love, to have His power. In other places, Paul refers to the Spirit as a deposit, a down payment guaranteeing our inheritance. But

notice that it is only the first fruits, not the entire harvest. Just as it would be silly to look at the first sheaf of wheat and think that it was the entire harvest, we are mistaken if we think that our experience of God's Spirit here and now can hold a candle to what we will experience when we are finally with Him.

2) The Holy Spirit writes God's law on our hearts

At Mt. Sinai, Moses goes up the mountain and comes down with God's law, so that the Israelites would know what it means to know and follow God and to be His people. And now, Jesus goes up to heaven, and the Spirit comes down to write God's law not on tablets of stones, but on the hearts of His people. The giving of the Spirit fulfills the prophecies about the new covenant, the new spirit that God will give:

Jeremiah 31:31-33 - "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. ³³ "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 - I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

So on Pentecost, the people of God are given the Spirit of God as the firstfruits of the harvest that is to come, a foretaste of the relationship we will have with God for eternity; and as a new law, written on their hearts, as the Spirit comes to live inside of those who know Jesus, enabling them to know and follow God.

But there is one other thing going on here at Pentecost. Remember that people from all nations came to Jerusalem for the festival. Notice the list of nations – it seems awkward in the passage. Why is that there? The last listing of the nations was in Genesis 10. In chapter 11, at Babel, the nations wanted to build a tower to heaven and be like God, but because of their pride, ended up creating disunity, as they were scattered over the earth and given different languages. Immediately after Babel comes the promise from God to Abram that the curse will one day be reversed: *Genesis 12:1-3* - The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country,

your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ² "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." And now, in Acts 2, we have the dispersion and disunity of Babel reversed by the Holy Spirit.

3) The Spirit unites people across all barriers into the family of God

The nations are united by the Spirit, who cuts across all cultural and linguistic barriers to unite a new people of God in the Holy Spirit. In doing so, we see the first fruits of that final gathering of all nations in **Revelation 7:9-10** - *After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."*

Christianity is not a white man's religion. Far from it! It began in the Middle East, and is most prominent in Africa and South America. It is growing rapidly in South Korea and China. We are part of a worldwide family of God, united by the Holy Spirit.

So why does it matter that the Spirit was given on Pentecost? The Spirit is the first fruits of the Harvest, only the down payment on the joyous intimacy we will have with God for eternity. It is the new law of God, written on their hearts, so that we have His truth and leading inside of us. And it unites a new people of God across all barriers, creating a multicultural family of God known as the church.

Now, all of that may be fascinating to you. **But the coming of the Holy Spirit is so much more than that.** Look at the imagery here. Violent wind, tongues of fire, speaking in other languages. The Spirit is the sound of a violent wind, symbolizing the **empowering** work of God. The Spirit is tongues of fire, symbolizing the **purifying** work of God. The Spirit empowers and purifies at the same time. There are many other things the Spirit does, but on Pentecost Sunday, those two ministries are highlighted: the Spirit empowers and the Spirit purifies. The Spirit transforms someone from a lifeless believer into someone whose heart is on fire with the love of God, empowered to do things of eternal significance.

Here's the thing: there is a limit to what I can do. I can teach you what Pentecost means, but I can't teach you what Pentecost means. I can teach you about the Holy Spirit, but I can't teach you about the Holy Spirit. He needs to do that. He is looking for men and women who want to know Him, who desire His power and purity in their lives. God wants to pour out His Spirit in greater abundance in your life and on this church. He is looking for a people who will go after him, who will submit themselves to him, who want to be holy, who want to be used for service. And He will respond to those who pray, fast, and ask Him to pour out His Spirit. So let us look at how the Spirit empower and purifies.

The Spirit empowers. Remember Acts 1:8 - *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."*

What would have happened if the disciples had gone ahead to preach without waiting? If they had gone ahead without waiting, they would have been able to do nothing of eternal significance. **You may think it's different today, but truly it is not.** If the enemy can keep you busy believing that the answer to your problems is found in trying harder, and not in accessing the power of the Holy Spirit, he's won. If the enemy can get us believing as a church that the way to reach the world is through better programs and plans and not through prayerfully depending on the Spirit and walking according to the Spirit, we're sunk. Our power comes from the Spirit:

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 - When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

Or consider **Acts 4:13** - *When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.*

Part of the empowering of the Spirit is that He gives us gifts with spiritual power to transform lives. Here is just one example:

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 - There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. ⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good... All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Why do you want the power of the Spirit? Why do you want spiritual gifts? Not so that you can be like some kind of superhero; God empowers His people for the common good, so that you can make an actual eternal difference in the lives of other people. The Spirit gives a supernatural gifting that is beyond any physical gifts. One great modern example is of DL Moody:

In the summer of 1871 two women of Dwight L. Moody's congregation felt an unusual burden to pray for Moody "that the Lord would give him the baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire." Moody would see them praying in the front row of his church and he was irritated. But soon he gave in and in September began to pray with them every Friday afternoon. He felt like his ministry was becoming a sounding brass with little power. On November 24, 1871, Moody's church building was destroyed in the great Chicago fire. He went to New York to seek financial help. Day and night he would walk the streets desperate for the touch of God's power in his life. Then suddenly,

*One day, in the city of New York—oh, what a day!—I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it; it is almost too sacred an experience to name . . . I can only say that God revealed himself to me, and I had such an experience of his love that I had to ask him to stay his hand. I went to preaching again. The sermons were not different; I did not present any new truths, and yet hundreds were converted. I would not now be placed back where I was before that blessed experience if you should give me all the world—it would be small dust in the balance. (W. R. Moody, *The Life of D. L. Moody*, New York: 1900, p. 149)*

The Spirit empowers for ministry. He gives gifts for the edification of the body. Should we not look different with the power of God within us? Pray and beg God for greater power for service. With the Holy Spirit empowering you, your life should look different, unexplainable apart from the power of God.

The Spirit also purifies, like fire burning away the dross and leaving pure gold. The Spirit convicts you of your sin and lifts up Jesus so that you will desire Him more and become more like Him. Remember what Jesus said about the importance of purity:

Matthew 5:8 - *Blessed are the **pure in heart**, for they will see God.*

Purity of heart is to desire one thing. The Holy Spirit purifies us so that we would desire Jesus above all other things, that we would not be captivated by those things which can never satisfy us. Jesus, I want to know you, follow you, be like you, and bring you glory – that is the cry of the heart that is pure. The pure in heart bear the fruit of the Spirit:

Galatians 5:22-25 - *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

To be pure is not to become some self-righteous, uptight person. No – it is becoming a person of Love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness. Self-control. That should get you on your knees asking for more of the Spirit. That is what someone purified by the Spirit looks like.

2 Timothy 2:20-21 - *In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. ²¹ If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an **instrument** for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.*

The Spirit purifies you so that you might be an instrument for noble purposes, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. He wants to make you a vessel that He can use, an instrument for his purpose. He has good works for you to do, and do that, you need both the empowering and the purifying ministry of the Holy Spirit.

We need both purity and power in our lives and in our church. Churches and believers often emphasize one or the other, whether or not they realize it. It can be helpful to think of a continuum between those who emphasize the purifying work of the Holy Spirit and those who emphasize the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. On one end, you have those who emphasize Christlikeness, knowledge and character. They tend to be strong in knowledge and character, but can sometimes quench the outward work of the Holy Spirit and can fail to see many examples of the Spirit transforming lives because their fear of the excesses they see causes them to resist the Spirit. On the other end of the continuum, you have those who

emphasize the empowering work of the Holy Spirit, who may experience greater joy and enthusiasm in worship and life, with a greater boldness in evangelism. But their emphasis on the power of the Spirit can sometimes lead them to be shallow in knowledge and character and vulnerable to deception and emotional manipulation as they think anything spiritual and emotionally moving is from the Holy Spirit.

Think of the example of speaking in tongues here. In the New Testament, there is both speaking in other languages which must be interpreted, and tongues as a private prayer language between the believer and God. With regards to the continuum, some resist the gift of tongues and see it as no longer in operation. Others overemphasize it, claiming that every believer should speak in tongues or holding church services where hundreds of people are praying in tongues at once. Paul strikes a healthy balance in 1 Corinthians 14, where he talks about there being a place for speaking in tongues when the church gathers, but only if there is an interpretation. He concludes by saying this:

1 Corinthians 14:39-40 - Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰ But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

Our goal is to have both the purifying and empowering work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our church. To be open to the surprising work of the Holy Spirit while also maintaining Biblical discernment and testing everything. As Paul put it:

*1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 - Do not put out the Spirit's fire; ²⁰ do not treat prophecies with contempt. ²¹ **Test everything.** Hold on to the good. ²² Avoid every kind of evil.*

As a church, we tend to emphasize the purifying work, but we may be guilty of neglecting the empowering work of the Spirit. Open yourself up this morning to the empowering and purifying work of the Holy Spirit. Listen to Paul's words in **Romans 12:1-2** - *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Offer yourselves to him as living sacrifices, pure vessels to be used. Admit your need, confess your sin, sanctify your desire, and open yourself up to the Holy Spirit

today. Let His Holy Spirit purify and empower you as you give yourself to Him. Pray that He would empower you and our church today.