

Pastor Dwight Wagner
Garden Heights Baptist Church
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“The Coming of the Holy Spirit”
Acts 2:1-13

The second chapter of Acts marks a major turning point in the history of God’s Kingdom. A new phase of His redemptive plan unfolds as the church is born. The early chapters of this book deal with extraordinary acts of the Holy Spirit of God upon His church. In Acts 2 we have an extraordinary outpouring of the Spirit of God. Pentecost was unique because it was the first such outpouring on the church. At other times throughout the history of His church, God has also poured out His Spirit and we call these times revival, awakening and reformation. And until Jesus comes, I believe we ought to pray, I believe it is our duty to pray, for fresh seasons of the extraordinary work of the Spirit—to awaken and empower the church.

So I come to this text this morning with no mere academic interest in some distant, past event. I come with the persuasion that we have much to gain for our day of widespread deadness and powerlessness from the Spirit’s work at Pentecost.

In chapter 1 we find the disciples waiting for the coming of the Spirit. They are being equipped. They are held back and told to wait for the Spirit. This after Jesus Christ Himself ascended to heaven. In chapter 2 though we see the Spirit coming, the disciples are now empowered. They are being sent forth and the Spirit descends upon them for the task of world evangelization. The promises given are now the promises received.

As John Stott writes, “The early chapters of Acts tell us of the promise, the gift, the baptism, the power, and the fullness of the Spirit in the experience of God’s people.”

Now God’s redemptive plan began to unfold in human history in the Garden of Eden after man’s sin. In Genesis 3:15, he promised a Savior, who would one day redeem the human race from the effects of that sin, namely, separation from God eternally in hell. The unfolding of His plan occurred through the patriarchs, past the giving of the Law by Moses, all the way to small hill outside Jerusalem called Golgotha. After rising from the dead by which he conquered death, he promised He would send them this Spirit and that all who believe on His name and repent of their sin would have eternal life, meaning a personal relationship with God.

Though God has always redeemed people, here in Acts 2 is the start of a special relationship as He establishes His church. The church is called the bride of Christ, the branches of the Vine, the flock of the Good Shepherd, the kingdom of God's dear Son, God's household of His chosen children, a spiritual temple of which Christ is the cornerstone, and the body of Christ.

Jesus Christ has ascended back to heaven. The disciples have returned to Jerusalem as Jesus told them to do. They have been waiting ten days now for the coming of the Spirit. During this time they really believed that He was coming. They didn't doubt. They didn't waver. They were ready to receive the Spirit. And they increasingly recognized their emptiness as they recalled the words of Jesus just weeks before that "apart from him they could do nothing." They have just chosen a new apostle to round out their number to 12 and they had been praying, fellowshiping and studying the Word.

Let's read what happens next

"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. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine." "" (Acts 2:1–13, ESV)

Setting

When?: Verse begins "when the day of Pentecost came!" Pentecost was one of the three major yearly Jewish feasts. It literally means "fiftieth" indicating that it took place 50 days after the first major feast of the year known as Passover. Pentecost was also called the Feast of Weeks because it was celebrated a "week of weeks" after Passover. The other major feast that every adult male was required to come to was the Feast of Tabernacles which took place about four months later. But Pentecost was the best attended feast because it fell in the last week of May or the first week of June normally and travel conditions were at their best. There was never a more cosmopolitan gathering in Jerusalem than at this time. It was a perfect time for the coming of the Spirit and the birth of the church.

Pentecost was also the perfect time because of the symbolism of this feast. Originally regarded as “the feast of firstfruits” or a “feast of harvest”, it was emphasized by the baking of two loaves of bread made from freshly gathered wheat which were designated “firstfruits unto God” And so Pentecost was fitting because there was going to be a great harvest of souls that day--3000--that would be the firstfruits of the church. Pentecost occurred by divine arrangement.

Who?: On that day it says “they all came together” .“They all” refers to the **120** mentioned back in chapter 1. All the believers, the apostles, Jesus’ brothers, His mother, many women and other men were there.

Where?: And verse 1 concludes that they were in “one place” which is later mentioned as the house, a reference I believe to the upper room where they had been meeting, a house no doubt just inside the city wall near the Eastern gate, just minutes from the temple where Peter would preach later in this chapter.

Now what happened when the Holy Spirit came upon this apostolic band? What happens when the Holy Spirit fills us? How can we prepare for it?

What happened to the believers at Pentecost? (vv. 2-4)

A. Experientially

Three things happen in verses 2-4.

1. “Wind”

First, as the group sat there a breeze began to blow across them and then it was more than a breeze. Literally, “an echoing sound as of a mighty wind borne violently” roared through the house like a whirr of a tornado, so that their robes flapped back in forth. The Spirit of God was coming upon them.

Notice they word “suddenly” in verse 2. “Suddenly a sound like. . .” I focus on that word to drive home the point that the Holy Spirit is free and sovereign and not bound to anyone’s timing or technique for how to get His power. The apostles couldn’t make the Spirit come, neither can we. When he comes, He comes suddenly. The Spirit is not a bellhop. He loves and serves, but He keeps his own time frame, just like the Father does when it comes to Christ’s second coming.

They heard this sound, one of many accompanying signs of the Spirit’s presence throughout Scripture. They couldn’t see this, but they could hear it. And it indicated to them the Spirit’s presence.

This is very interesting for the word Spirit means the same thing in the Hebrew and the Greek. The Hebrew term is *ruach* and the Greek word *pnuema*. They can be translated either “wind” or “spirit.” The words even sound like wind when

you say them. The Spirit is connected with wind or breath in Genesis 1 and in Genesis 2.

Ezekiel used “ruah” to describe the Spirit of God moving over the valley of dry bones (representing the spiritually dead Jewish nation), so that there was thunder and the clattering of bones as they came together “bone to bone.” Then came the wonderfully macabre spectacle of growing flesh and sinews, and finally skin and then Ezekiel’s words at God’s command:

“Come, from the winds, O breath, and into these slain, that they may live. . .they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army. (37:9-10)

After telling Nicodemus he must be born again, that is he must be born again from above just like the first time, Jesus says, “The wind (pneuma) blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit (pneuma).”

This wind, it says, came down “from heaven”, signifying that this was a supernatural phenomenon. And so it was on this day at Pentecost, that the reviving winds of the Spirit came upon the apostles with incredible life and power.

2. “Fire”

Next, there was fire. “They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.” Each one present had a distinctive fire burning above their heads. Here they saw something with their eyes. Whereas wind symbolizes God’s power, fire symbolizes God’s presence. Throughout the Bible fire symbolizes God’s presence

- God’s covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15
- Burning bush
- Pillar of fire by night in the wilderness
- Consuming fire at Sinai
- Fire hovered over the Tabernacle
- Fire destroyed Elijah’s offering on Carmel
- A chariot of fire took Elijah to heaven without dying.
- John the Baptist said that Christ would baptize us with fire
- Our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29)

Fire symbolizes in the Scripture God’s presence in regard to His holiness, judgment and grace.

Perhaps no one has captured the spiritual meaning of heavenly fire so effectively as Charles Wesley in this hymn:

O Thou who camest from above
The pure celestial fire to impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of my heart!

There let it for Thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze
And trembling to its source return
In humble prayer and fervent praise.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
To work, and speak, and think for Thee
Still let me guard the holy fire,
And still stir up Thy gift in me.

The fire of the Spirit burns away our dross, flames forth from our inner being, and brings us a sense of God's power and presence.

3. "Tongues"

First, wind, then fire. And finally "they began to speak in tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (verse 4). Tongues had to do with proclamation as they spoke authoritatively and clearly about the mighty wonders of God (v. 11). The coming of the Holy Spirit impacted their mouths and their speech!

Sadly, when most people come to this text they come to it with a preoccupation about tongues and so they get off track as to what really happens at Pentecost. I don't think the main point of Acts 2 is that the apostles spoke in tongues. It was that they were baptized with the Spirit and that they were filled with the Spirit. And yes, they spoke in tongues. But at other times, people were baptized with the Spirit or they were filled with the Spirit, but they didn't speak in tongues. So speaking in tongues is not the issue. The issue is being baptized with the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit and then proclaiming the Word of God.

Now, having said that, let me give a few short thoughts about "tongues" in the Bible and then on Wednesday night I am going to present a lesson on NT "tongues" because it is a concern of many and we want to be able to know what the Bible says. But let me just cover a few points here.

- "Tongues" both in Acts and in Corinthians are foreign languages which the speakers had not previously learned but were perfectly understood by the hearers. They are not Holy Spirit, ecstatic utterances. (This is clear from Acts 2:6, 8, 11)
 - "each one heard them speaking in their own language"
 - "How is it that each one hears them in his own native language?"
 - "declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues"

- Tongues is never associated with the baptism of the Spirit, but here with the filling of the Spirit. And yet speaking in tongues is not the normal response to being filled with the Spirit.
- The purpose of tongues was to be a sign of judgment to unbelieving Israel
- Tongues was a miraculous gift whose purpose has been fulfilled
- The apostles could only speak in tongues as the Spirit enabled them to do so.
- Although Paul doesn't deny the gift of tongues, he sure does deprecate its importance that some Christians have attached to it.

B. Theologically

Now that is what happened to them that day. That is what they saw, they heard, and they spoke. But let's look at it from one other angle: theologically. What was happening internally. I believe verses 2-3 teach us they experienced the baptism of the Spirit and verse 4 explicitly states they also were filled with the Spirit. Now what do those two phrases mean.

1. The **baptism of the Spirit**

- a. An **act of Christ** by which he places believers into His Body (Romans 6:4-6; 1 Corinthians 12::13; Galatians 3:27)
- b. **No command** to seek it (This is in contrast to much teaching about the baptism of the Holy Spirit being a second work of grace. It is not an initiation rite into the ranks of the elite)
- c. A **sovereign, single, unrepeatable act** of God

“Spirit baptism is never mentioned in Scripture as occurring to the same persons more than once, for it is a spiritual work of God whereby one is made part of the body of Christ, an act needing no repetition.” —Kent

- d. **Unites**, not divides believers (we are all baptized into one body)
- e. **Not an “experience”** (It is no more an experience than are its companions justification and adoption)

2. The **filling of the Spirit**

- a. A **continuous, repeatable** experience (Acts 4:8; 4:31; 6:5; 7:55; 9:17; 13:9) (Peter, Stephen, and Paul)
- b. Believers are **commanded to seek** it (Ephesians 5:18)
The grammar of the passage suggests that believers are to be continuously being filled with the Spirit
- c. Involves **confession of sin** and **dying to self**
You must first empty yourself before you can be filled with the Spirit
- d. Practice the presence of Christ
- e. Be **saturated with the Word of God (Colossians 3:16)**

Now what happens when one is filled with the Spirit (v. 4). Well, you get some idea from this text as well as Ephesians 5 and 6.

What happened in the believers at Pentecost?

A. A worshipping spirit

We glean this from verse 11, where they were “declaring the wonders of God.” At this point (up through v. 13), the apostles were not preaching the gospel. They were not calling men to repentance. They were praising God in worship. They were talking about his “megaleia”, his magnificent, awesome wonders. They were overwhelmed with the greatness(es) of God. Being filled with the Spirit will do that. You will speak of the greatness of God. They were experiencing His greatness and it was spilling over into courageous, passionate praise to representatives of at least 15 countries all at once. There were Iranians, Iraqis, Greeks, Turks, Egyptians, Romans, Cretans, and Arabs.

11 “Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you— majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? Exodus 15:11

5 Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare. Psalm 40:5

11 I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. 12 I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds. 13 Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God? 14 You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples. Psalm 77:11-14

B. A joyful spirit

One of the results of being filled with Spirit in Ephesians 5:19 is that we will “sing and make melody in our hearts to the Lord!”

C. A thankful spirit

Another is that we would be “**always giving thanks to God the Father for everything.**”

D. A serving spirit

We will also be “**submitting to one another out of reverence for God.**” This certainly changed things for the apostles who before being filled with the Spirit were fighting over who would sit where as they reigned and their refusal to wash each other’s feet which resulted in their Master having to do it.

E. A loving spirit

When we are filled with the Spirit, husband will **love** their wives and wives will **submit** to their husbands. Parents will love their children and children will obey their parents.

F. A obedient spirit

G. A witnessing spirit

We will not be afraid to proclaim Christ even as we will see Peter doing next week when we are filled with the Spirit. There are 14 references to “filled with the Spirit” in the NT. 4 of these are before Pentecost so are more in the OT economy of thinking. It is mentioned once in Ephesians, with the remaining 9 being in Acts. Every time someone was filled with the Spirit in Acts, they began to immediately to testify forcefully and frequently of Christ. So a test of whether you are full of the Spirit is “do you frequently and effectively talk of Jesus?”

What happened through the believers at Pentecost?

What happened as a result of these believer being filled with the Spirit and baptized with the Spirit? Well, in verses 5-13, we learn that the sound of the rushing wind brought the crowds out into the streets and eventually they gathered at the temple. The apostles stepped forth testifying and the hearer were bewildered (6), amazed (12) and perplexed (12). Why? Because somehow those who spoke were from Galilee. They were country bumpkins who were culturally backward and who had difficulty pronouncing Greek and Hebrew. They couldn't pronounce the guttural sounds and had a habit of swallowing their syllables. They were like Nathanael who exclaimed, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?”

So, you have two responses. Some asked (v. 12), “What does this mean?” They asked this because they were literally distraught and utterly at a loss to explain it. They honestly sought answers to this phenomenon and were part of the 3000 who received eternal life that day!

The other response was mockery. “They have had too much sweet wine (gleukos).” They were making fun of the apostles. They made the fatal error of trying to attribute a natural explanation for a supernatural event. Much like people do today. Spiritually indifferent, they made light of the serious, yet their comment was the springboard for Peter's message in the rest of the chapter.

Conclusion

1. What does this mean?

- It means that the **Holy Spirit brings new** life to those who believe in Jesus Christ and with that life comes a **continuing power** to those who are continually filled.
- It means **fire** in our lives individually burning away the chaff.
- It means the **truth of God going** forth from us in a way that we would never have dreamed of.
- It means **worship, joy, thankfulness, love, obedience**

2. What does this require?

- It requires **emptiness**, and acknowledgment that we need Christ
- It requires **faith** that God gives us to become Christians and receive the Spirit baptism and the fullness of the Spirit
- As we become Christians, God liberates us from the idea that we can live the Christian life on our own.
- Each time we admit our weakness and **inadequacy**, God fills us with more of His Spirit to empower us to do His work
- **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst** (who are empty) for God's righteousness, for they will be filled!