



Acts: The Church Unleashed

The Spirit Comes

Acts 2:1-4, 22-40, 41-47

9.9.18

Introduction

Gifts are powerful things. A gift, given genuinely and lovingly, is a way of making and affirming a bond. Sometimes the trouble with gifts, can be that they are given by anonymous individuals and we can become skeptical. A gift is given without the need for anything in return, without any sense of forced obligation, it's powerful.

When have you received a gift that was unexpected?

What are the pros and cons of an anonymous gift? Of a gift from a known giver?

Unlike anonymous gifts, we don't have to ask who sent the gift of the gospel. The gospel not only comes from God, it's spread by God's own handiwork. While the Book of Acts communicates the spread of the gospel from "Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8) through the apostles and the churches they planted, the primary Actor in the Book of Acts—spreading the gospel, building up the church, and healing the sick—is God Himself, specifically in the person of the Holy Spirit, giving gifts of life and redemption and advancing God's kingdom.

Not only does God reconcile us to Himself in Christ's death and promise us eternal life in His resurrection, He gives us the greatest gift we can imagine in the Holy Spirit—the gift of *Himself*. The Holy Spirit comes to indwell every believer in Christ, to empower the spread of the gospel throughout the world, and to build the community of faith. He has come to point sinners to Christ and to strengthen Christ-followers for Christlike living in the world and to the ends of the earth.

Understanding

1. The Holy Spirit comes to indwell every believer (Acts 2:1-4).

If you've not heard this Bible story before, then no doubt you will be mesmerized by its details, and that's a good thing. If you have heard this story all your life, then you need to try to reimagine it, blow the dust off, and hear it afresh. Remember what had happened in the previous few weeks to the disciples. Not long before, Jesus had arrived in Jerusalem like a king arriving for His coronation. The whole city greeted Him, hailing the new King of the Jews. A few days later, however, He died, hung on a cross with a sign bearing the same title. But three days after that, He rose from the dead.

How bewildering it all must have been as they obeyed Jesus' final words. For the next ten days, the disciples gathered together in an upstairs room in Jerusalem and prayed and waited for the Father's promise to be fulfilled (Acts 1:4-5,12-14). And then, without warning, the Spirit rushed into the world, rushed into the room, and rushed into their hearts as He manifested Himself in what appeared like flickering flames of fire resting on each one of those present in the room.

In the filling and coming of the Spirit, Jesus' promise to be with us always makes sense, as does the prophet Joel's promise that one day God would pour out His Spirit on "all humanity" (Joel 2:28). Likewise, the coming of the Spirit reveals the unique role that Christ's followers will play in the world—not merely as a faithful group that exists to remember what Jesus did but as God's agents for good in the world and as the very vessels God will use to carry out His mission. God's kingdom will continue to advance as God continues His work through His church in His world through His Holy Spirit.

What lessons can we learn about how to deal with doubt from the apostles' example to wait?

What thoughts or expectations do you have regarding the filling of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life?

How should the indwelling of the Spirit change the way believers live?

2. The Holy Spirit comes to empower the spread of the gospel (Acts 2:22-40).

It didn't take long after the arrival of the Holy Spirit for Him to reveal His great passion and purpose. The sound of the rushing wind caught the attention of a great crowd of Jews in Jerusalem who were there for the festival of Pentecost. These Jews from every nation gathered together to investigate and began to hear the good news of Jesus—each in their own language, as the Spirit was enabling the disciples to speak in different languages. Responding to the people's confusion, the apostle Peter, filled with the Spirit, stood before the massive crowd and preached this sermon found in Acts 2:22-40.

Peter quoted from Psalm 16:8-11 (in Acts 2:25-28) and Psalm 110:1 (in Acts 2:34-35). Why do you think he picked these two passages as support for his message?

What are the implications of the resurrection and ascension for Jesus (vv. 24, 30- 31, 33-36)? For the people?

How did many of the people who heard Peter's sermon respond (v. 37)? What might we learn from their response when God's Word convicts our hearts?

How did Peter respond to their question (v. 38)? Compare this with Acts 16:31. Did Peter and Paul prescribe different responses to the gospel?

Group Exercise: Divide these two questions between the group and receive answers back.

How was the gospel of Jesus communicated in this sermon?	What implications should this sermon have on how we share the gospel?
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Peter couldn't contain himself. He nearly exploded with this sermon, urgently pointing to Jesus as the Messiah, the One who came to liberate Israel from the oppressive burdens of sin and death. "Jesus is Lord and Messiah," Peter told them, "and He rose from the dead and now sits at the right hand of the Father." But this wasn't simply Peter talking here, it was Peter *filled with the Spirit*. At the Spirit's urging, the words flowed from Peter's lips. He wove together the story of Jesus with passages from their Scriptures, which we call the Old Testament, and laid out the gospel for all to see.

Jesus, as we've already noted, talked glowingly about the coming of the Spirit and the good that would come with Him. And here, a Spirit-filled Peter preaches rapturously about what Jesus has accomplished and how the Father has honored Him, seating the resurrected Christ at His right hand. When John the apostle tells us that God is love, we don't have to look any further than the relationships within the Trinity to see that love displayed.

Love compels us to speak out. Most of us have had some experience of love that led us to speak out, to overflow with joy and burst out with the words "I love you!" At the very least, we've said something excessively joyful about a great burger or a great slice of pizza. The point is that joy, love, and pleasure lead us to words—they lead us to bear witness to the people around us about what we've experienced.

Knowing this should dramatically shift the way we think about sharing the gospel. If you're like me, you might find yourself struggling at times to speak up, to know when to share your faith, or to initiate conversations about Jesus. Often techniques are suggested for making those conversations easier; in fact, many churches offer whole classes on the subject, and that's not a bad thing at all. But at its most basic level, perhaps the easiest way to be bolder in sharing the gospel is by seeking to be filled with the Spirit (see Eph. 5:18-19; cf. Acts 13:50-52).

How does the filling of the Holy Spirit overcome these struggles and empower our evangelism?

What can we learn from the way Peter preached the gospel? Why is it important that we challenge people to repent and believe in Jesus when we share the gospel?

How do we know that Jesus is both "Lord and Messiah"? What implications does that have for you and me?

How can we as a group help one another acknowledge the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

3. The Holy Spirit comes to build the community of faith (Acts 2:41-47).

When the Spirit comes, He brings life and growth, and this growth resembles that of a tree with its branches and roots. On one hand, the kingdom spreads into the world in visible, extensive ways characteristic of the church's mission. The momentum of this growth is overflowing and outward. But the kingdom also grows in often unseen ways with an inward momentum resulting in depth, stability, and holy relationships.

When the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts, we begin to overflow with love for God and love for our neighbors, especially those who share our faith. These twin loves for God and others fuel the whole of the Christian life. It is love of God that leads us to bear witness to the gospel around the world, and it is love of our brothers and sisters that leads us to develop rich, deeply committed relationships with God's people.

Too often we emphasize one love over the other. When we focus only on the community of faith, we can lose touch with the wonder of God—sharing the gospel keeps that wonder fresh and alive in our hearts. Likewise, when we focus only on bearing witness to Jesus without developing any real relationships with other Christians, we find ourselves without accountability and often lacking the humility and gentleness that come as a result of being deeply known and deeply loved by the people around us.

In any case, what's displayed in Acts 2 comes as a result of the gift of God's Spirit. It cannot be controlled or manipulated or manufactured. It only comes when open hearts, stirred to faith by the gospel, receive this gift from the Father and the Son and are filled by Him. And so, we seek this Spirit-transformed life not merely by imitating these behaviors but by seeking God's presence, by asking Him to fill us with His Spirit and renew our love for Him, His Word, and His gospel.

How have you experienced the deep community of faith in the name of Jesus and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?

Application

Community is a place where people care for you. Who would you say cares about you? What do you most appreciate about those people?

Community is a place where you can support and be supported. Whom can you call when you need someone? How has having that person in your life positively affected your walk with Christ? How could you have a similar effect on others?

Community is a place where you belong. Do you feel like you belong, not just at our church, but in this group? What is one thing we can do as a group to help you?

Commentary

Acts 2:1-4

“The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was of utmost significance both theologically and practically for the early church...[W]hat Luke seems to be stressing in reporting that the tongues of fire separated and came to rest on each believer individually, is (1) that the relationship of the Spirit to the members of the body of Christ became much more intimate and personal at Pentecost, in fulfillment of Jesus' promise (later recorded in John 14:17) that the Spirit who 'lives with you'... 'will be in you'..., and (2) that at Pentecost a new model of divine redemption was established as characteristic for life in the new covenant—one that, while incorporating both individual and corporate redemption, begins with the former in order to include the latter.”²

–Richard N. Longenecker

Acts 2:22-40

“[Peter’s sermon] shows God’s vindication of Jesus as Lord and Christ, making evident his position by this resurrection. Here is a fundamental Christological claim of the church: God raised Jesus to the right hand, where he now is the mediator of God’s promised blessing of salvation and the Spirit. A key significance of the resurrection-ascension concerns God’s validation of Jesus and the furthering of God’s saving work as evidenced by Jesus’s mediating of God’s Spirit. All of this is rooted in a work that entailed Jesus’s death but that death could not contain him. The ascension reveals who Jesus truly is.”⁶

–Darrell L. Bock

“[T]he Day of Pentecost was to be a sacred assembly on which no one was to do any work. According to Leviticus 23:14, the people were not to eat bread or grain until after they brought the offerings to the Lord at the tabernacle, at which time the feast concluded with a shared meal. The joyous celebration of God’s provision was not limited only to those who could physically be present at the feast. Deuteronomy 16:11-12 provides an expansive list of those who were to rejoice at this occasion: ‘you, your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite within your gates, as well as the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow among you.’ Directly following this statement is a reminder from the Lord that the Jews had been slaves in Egypt; the Jews thus incorporated their redemption as another reason for celebration. Finally, Leviticus 23:22 documents that the people were not to harvest the fringes of their fields; they were to leave this portion for the poor and the alien. Pentecost, therefore, was not simply a time for remembering God’s harvest blessings, it was also a concrete illustration of God’s ongoing provision for those who had nothing.”⁷

–Justin Langford, *Biblical Illustrator*

Acts 2:41-47

“In v. 42 the believers are said to have ‘devoted themselves’ to four practices in their new life together. First was the teaching of the apostles. Just as the apostles had been instructed by Jesus, so they passed along that instruction to the new Christians...This would have included such subjects as his resurrection, the Old Testament Scriptures, the Christian witness, and surely their own reminiscences of Jesus’ earthly ministry and teachings. The second activity to which they devoted themselves was ‘the fellowship.’...Its basic meaning is ‘association, communion, fellowship, close relationship.’...The key may be to see the terms ‘breaking of bread’ and ‘prayer’ in apposition to ‘fellowship.’ The meaning would then be that they devoted themselves to a fellowship that was expressed in their mutual meals and in their prayer life together. If this is so, then the meaning of the third element, ‘the breaking of bread,’ would be further clarified. Joined with fellowship, it would likely carry the cultic sense of sharing a meal with the Lord, participating in the Lord’s Supper. The fourth and final element of their life together, another expression of their fellowship, was ‘the prayers’...The reference, however, is probably much broader and involves primarily their sharing in prayer together in their private house worship.”¹⁰

–John B. Polhill

