

The Empowering Presence of the Holy Spirit

May-June Sermon Series

Kenwood Baptist Church

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TEXT: Acts 1:1-8



Good morning, Beloved. We begin this morning with a new series that will take us over the next couple of months. As we just heard, in the first book, that is the Gospel of Luke, Luke has told us everything *“that Jesus began to do and teach.”* Now, in the second volume, the book of Acts, he is going to present what Jesus *continues to do and teach* in the world. This morning we turn our attention to the book of Acts, and we’re going to talk about what God is doing in the book of Acts, together with a focus on Jesus' promise that He would send the Holy Spirit. The first act of the exalted Jesus is to pour out the Holy Spirit upon the believing community. The Holy Spirit is God's empowering personal presence. The Holy Spirit is sometimes neglected in our theology. There were two versions of the Nicene Creed. The first one gave the Holy Spirit a short amount of space, and the early church realized we need more on the Holy Spirit. The second version of the Nicene Creed, the one that is recited by most Christians around the world today, has an expanded description of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. So we are not the first to sometimes neglect or overlook the Spirit. We want to focus our attention on the book of Acts this morning. We want then to follow the theme of the Holy Spirit in Paul's letters in the weeks ahead. This is the season in the church year between Easter and Pentecost. Pentecost Sunday is May 23, so we will journey en route to that.

This morning I want us to open the book of Acts together, and I invite you to keep it open in front of you, because we’re going to look thematically across the book of Acts.

In Acts 1:1-8, we read:

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up, after He had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen. He presented Himself alive to them after His suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the Kingdom of God. And while staying with them He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, He said, 'you heard from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' So when they had come together, they asked Him, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'"

Notice in this passage that the Holy Spirit is prominent. Jesus gives commands through the Holy Spirit (verse two). He tells the disciples that John baptized with water, and you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. When they came together, the disciples asked Jesus a question. The question they asked was focused on an ethnocentric view of the kingdom: "Is this the time that You are actually going to do what we thought You would do and restore the national kingdom, as we've envisioned it?" Jesus' response is: "The Father knows what He is doing with the nations. You have a job to do, and that is that you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." Power. When you think of the word "power," is that a positive word or a negative word for you? We use the word "power" in a variety of contexts.

I remember the first time I met my future brother-in-law, Jeff. I was working to try to make our basement brighter. My wife is from the Mediterranean, which means you can't have enough sunlight, so I was installing these high wattage bulbs and floodlights in the basement. Since I like a little bit of mood lighting, I wanted to make sure the lights were dimmable. I hooked up the dimmer to this set of high wattage bulbs. After the first night watching a movie, I went over to the wall, and I realized, "That wall is hot." I wondered if I'd wired the fixture correctly, so I called my future brother-in-law. He was in Michigan, and I was in Ohio. He said, "Tell me what you see," and I described what I saw. He said, "You better write this down," and he guided me through how to connect the wires. When we got to the end, I said, "Jeff, there's one extra wire." He said, "Why don't you just turn it on," so I turned it on, and he said, "What's happening now?" I said, "Well, black smoke is coming out from the light switch box, and none of the lights are on." He paused for a few seconds, and he said, profoundly, "Why don't you go ahead and cut the power." We got it worked out correctly, and it worked well. Cut the power. We think of power with electricity, and it's of benefit to us.

Sometimes when we use the word “power,” we think of power and authority, and we have an ambiguous relationship with that word. When we see power exercised in a godly way, it's beautiful and attractive. Sometimes power can be corrupted, and it's something to be feared. Jesus says that you will receive power or strength when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and the presence of the Holy Spirit will be like energy in your soul, and it will also give you authority. It will embolden you and activate your life in Christ.

The Holy Spirit is Jesus' first act upon His resurrection and ascension. You will receive power. In Acts 1:8, that power means that we will become His witnesses in a global sphere—in Jerusalem and all Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth. The power of God will come upon you. It's the same power that we meet in the opening sentence of the Bible. The Spirit of God is hovering over the waters at creation. It's His presence that sanctifies us, makes us holy. It's His presence that turns us into those who serve Christ in an active and dedicated way. The Holy Spirit moves us from lethargy to action. He moves us from being complacent to being motivated. He moves us from being lukewarm to burning hot. Jesus tells the disciples to wait, to wait in a posture of prayer, and that's what I want for us to do this morning. We're halfway through the time between Passover and Pentecost. As we start this series, we enter into a time of prayerful waiting and expectation. Fifty days after Jesus told the disciples to wait, they were gathered for this festival. In Hebrew, it's called the Feast of Weeks—*Shabuot*. It's also called *Atzeret*, which means the completion of the Passover, because the deliverance from Egypt, being forgiven by the blood of the lamb, leads to Mount Sinai. The goal isn't just to leave Egypt. The goal is to make it to the mountain and have the fiery glory of God come visibly and authorize us as His witnesses in the world.

As a newly married husband, I realized the superiority of my wife's culture quickly. She's from Greece. I realized it was superior because it was older. I realized it was superior because it was based on a language and literary tradition that was millennia old. My culture was just a couple hundred years old. As a new husband, I realized the superiority of Greek culture in this one detail: We had visited some friends, and the meal was fantastic, and they sent us home with a container of food from the meal. I thought, “This is fantastic.” We came home with the dish, and we ate the food the next day. I was thinking two things: First, make sure to return the dish. The second thing I thought was that we should return it clean. It's not really that nice to say, “Thanks for the spaghetti sauce. Here's your dish, and you have to clean it.” So clean it and return it. I was getting ready to return it, and my wife said, “Wait, wait, wait, you can't return it yet.” She said, “You have to return it full.” I had never seen that before. Some of you may be honorary Greeks, but maybe I'm not the only one that grew up without this custom. I was amazed. She filled the dish and then returned it.

You see, Jesus cleanses us, if you will, from our sin in order that we would be filled. His first act, as resurrected Lord, is to pour out the Spirit. In Acts 2:2-6, we read:

“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole 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...we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

People were overwhelmed. Some people misunderstood. They thought they were drunk. It was early in the morning. Peter stood up and interpreted what was happening. In Acts 2:15-18, he says:

“For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on My male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out My Spirit, and they shall prophesy.’”

The first Christian sermon, ever, announces that the pouring out of the Spirit signals that God's latter days, His new creation, has begun. A characteristic of that is the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on everyone who believes—men and women, Israel and the nations, all different places in society—with prophecy, visions, and the dreaming of dreams. The Holy Spirit is God's promise for everyone who believes.

At the end of Peter's sermon, the crowds asked, “What should we do?” In Acts 2:38, he says:

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

That's how we often talk about conversion. Turn away from sin, confess Christ, receive forgiveness. Then, Peter says, *“And you will receive the Holy Spirit.”* Sometimes we stop short of that last piece. He says that the promise is for you and your children and for all who call upon the Lord, all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord calls to Himself. The Holy Spirit, the filling of the Holy Spirit, is not a special dispensation for super dedicated Christians. The presence and filling of the Holy Spirit is for everyone who believes. The presence and power of the Holy Spirit then has an effect upon us. It's God's real and personal presence among us. It's what differentiates us, as a community, from all other communities. As Moses prayed in Exodus:

“Lord, if you don't go with us, there's nothing that separates us from anyone else on the face of the earth.” It's the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

What happens when a community is filled with the Holy Spirit? I want to look at four things that happen, four action verbs. I want to look this morning at how the presence of the Holy Spirit empowers our life together. I don't want you to think of your own individual or personal walk with Christ. I want you to think about what happens to us as a community of believers when we are filled with the Spirit. In the weeks ahead, we will be looking at key passages in Paul's letters that describe the Spirit's work in us individually, but this morning I want us to think of the presence and power of the Spirit with us together:

The first is that ***the Holy Spirit creates our community***. What a powerful word. People long for community. They long to be in a place where they belong and have friendship and support. After the Holy Spirit comes upon the early church, the next paragraph describes a spectacular community that you should all want to be part of. Acts 2:42-47 describes a remarkable change in this group of people who believe and are filled with the Holy Spirit. Look what happens to them:

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

They start devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching. That doesn't happen naturally. They start devoting themselves to fellowship with each other. They start caring about each other. The Holy Spirit creates this community that really gets into Scripture and loving each other. That's amazing, and it doesn't stop there. They break bread, they celebrate communion, and they are devoted to prayer. There are signs and wonders that are done through the believing community. In Acts 2:44, they start to see themselves with a shared identity that even goes so far as their property. They allow one another to use their goods or their homes, and they share things in common. They go so far as to distribute some of their own resources to others in the community that have need. This is an astonishing thing. This happened at Kenwood just last week. We received a Spirit-prompted gift, and we became aware of a Spirit-prompted need. They just matched up. It was a free, coordinated work of the Holy Spirit. One person gave, one

person needed, and God empowered those two to come together. We just sat in awe.

The Holy Spirit creates a community that breaks bread in their homes. It's a community that's characterized by gladness and generosity and an open invitation to add daily those who are being saved. Do you want to be part of a community like that? It's a community that hungers for God's Word, that loves one another, that gives where there are needs, and needs are met. It's a community that is dedicated to prayer and a community that sees God's Word grow and thrive. I want to be part of a community like that. Kenwood is a community like that, and it is growing even more so. The Holy Spirit first creates this community. You can't manufacture that.

Second, ***the Holy Spirit emboldens our witness***. In Acts 4:1-7, we read:

“And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, ‘By what power or by what name did you do this?’”

Peter was taken into custody and charged and accused with speaking in the name of Jesus. God had used him to heal a man. He was brought back to the high priest's courtyard, the very place where he had denied Jesus during Jesus' late-night trial. God brought him back to that same location. We read in Acts 4:8-10:

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead – by Him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the Stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the Cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.’”

Peter said that *“Jesus, the Stone that was rejected, has become the Cornerstone.”* Then, emboldened by the Holy Spirit, Peter declared: *“There is salvation in no one else; there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.”* Right back in the place where he had denied knowing Jesus three times, the Holy Spirit fills him and emboldens him, and he proclaims Jesus three times in that same spot. When the Holy Spirit fills you up, He will bring you back to a place where you failed, and He will embolden you. In Acts 4:13, we read:

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.”

They saw the boldness of Peter and John, and they saw that they were uneducated, common men. They were astonished and recognized that they had been with Jesus. That's the difference maker. The Holy Spirit emboldens our witness.

Third, ***the Holy Spirit increases our family***. A church that is filled with the Spirit is growing. It's growing by discovering new family members, and this is the theme that unfolds throughout the book of Acts. New family members are brought in by individuals. They are brought in by ethnic groups. They are even brought in by traditional enemies being reconciled. In Acts 8:14-17, we read:

“Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for He had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.”

The Samaritans received the Word of the gospel, and the Holy Spirit comes upon them, just like us. In Acts 9:31, we read:

“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.”

In the comfort, or the encouragement, of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. The Holy Spirit among us is a dynamic, living presence of God—God's personal presence, creating a community, emboldening witness, and causing the church to grow. The church grows primarily through this emboldened witness to become part of this holy community.

The fourth and final work of the Holy Spirit among us that I want us to see in Acts, and to give just a little more time to this morning, is how ***the Holy Spirit guides our every step***. God's intention is that we be filled with His presence, that we would be like living stones, built into a living temple of the living God, filled with His presence. That holy, divine presence among us is leading and guiding every step, just as God's pillar of cloud and fire guided our ancestors through the wilderness. Let's look at a few examples.

The Holy Spirit guides our steps by coordinating our dreams. In Acts 10, a God-fearing Roman centurion, Cornelius, has a dream from the Lord, and in the dream he is told to send for a man

named Peter. While he has this dream, the Lord gives a complementary dream to Peter, telling him that all foods are clean. These two men have never met. Not only have they never met, they are not even allowed culturally to eat together. And the Lord gives them each a dream. In response, Peter, wondering about his dream and the meaning, the Lord tell him that all foods are clean. In Acts 10:19, Peter was pondering the vision, and the Spirit—there is the Spirit—said to him:

“Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.”

The Holy Spirit does this: gives a dream to one person and a complementary dream to another, or gives a word of instruction to someone and a complementary word that another person is supposed to fulfill. That brings the two together, and both parties marvel. It's exciting; it's interesting. It's so much more interesting than anything you watch on TV. It's real; it's dynamic. It's God working and leading and guiding His kingdom. Peter accepts the invitation. He goes to Cornelius' house, and when he gets there, he walks in. Cornelius and his whole extended family are there, and they say, “Here we are. What do you have to tell us?” Peter opens his mouth, filled with the Spirit, and tells them about Jesus. He doesn't even finish the sermon and the Holy Spirit comes down and fills Cornelius and his whole family. They haven't been baptized yet, and they are filled with the Spirit.

The Lord coordinates these dreams. He does this not only in the book of Acts; He does it today. I mentioned last week Nabeel Qureshi's book, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*. A critical element in his story is a dream the Lord gave him. I want to share a dream that's recorded in Tom Doyle's book, *Dreams and Visions: Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?* Thousands of people in the Muslim world are seeing Jesus in dreams—thousands. I want to share a dream from a woman named Noor from Egypt. In her dream, she says:

“Jesus walked with me alongside a lake and He told me how much He loves me. The love I felt in the dream was different than anything I've ever experienced. I've never felt so much peace in my heart. I didn't want Him to leave. I asked Jesus, ‘Why are you visiting me, a poor Muslim mother with eight children?’ And all He said was, ‘I love you, Noor. I have given everything for you. I died for you.’ As He turned to leave, the last thing He said to me was, ‘Ask my friend tomorrow about Me. He will tell you all you need in order to understand why I visited you.’ ‘But, Jesus, who is Your friend?’ ‘Here is my friend.’ Jesus pointed behind us. ‘He has been walking with us the whole time we have been together.’”

In the dream, she saw a middle-aged man with modest clothes and glasses. The next day she came to the marketplace and saw a man dressed in this way, wearing the same glasses. She approached him and said, “My name is Noor,” and he said, “My name is Kamal, and I am a follower of Jesus. I've loved Him for ten years now, and I'm honored to have been in your

dream.” Kamal led her to faith in Christ. That's the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit not only coordinates our dreams, but when we gather together, He calls people to ministry. In Acts 13:1-3, we read:

“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.”

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke, so we should expect that when we gather together, the Holy Spirit, in the context of worship, will speak. The Holy Spirit spoke and said, *“Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I've called them.”* Right in the middle of the gathering of worship there was a call to ministry.

This happened to me when I was a senior in college. The first call to ministry in my life happened when I was a senior in high school. The second call was when I was a freshman in college, but the third call happened right in the middle of a worship service. I was finishing my senior year of college at an internship in Washington, DC. I was an intern, surrounded by really smart, gifted, godly people in a think tank. If you ever wondered what a think tank is, it's just taking a large group of really intelligent people and putting them in a tank, and they think deep thoughts and write articles, then, college students like me do research for them so their thoughts can be deeper. My boss was a godly man, and I went to church with him while I was at that internship. We went to the Falls Church in Virginia, and near the end of the service, we came to receive communion. I was in a line of people about to receive communion, and when I was just two people back in the line, the Lord spoke to me audibly. I hadn't had an hour and half of devotions that morning. I hadn't been fasting. I just heard God speak through the Holy Spirit, audibly. Right as I was about to receive communion, the Lord said to me, “David, I would like you to serve communion someday.” That was it, and it just happened in the context of a worship service. The Holy Spirit speaks.

When we gather together, He coordinates our dreams, He calls to ministry, and He even resolves conflict with generosity. This is a work of the Spirit. In Acts 15, there is a developing conflict about how to receive nations into the community. Are they equal or not? Is there a second class? Are there bleacher seats for the Kingdom of God or not? That's the question, and the resolution of that question is in Acts 15:28 where James said:

“For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from

blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."

James says, *"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit."* Isn't that a great line? *"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements,"* and the Holy Spirit guides a path of generous compromise and an equality of status. This is the work of the Spirit. We will rub edges with each other in our life together, and the Holy Spirit will work in those to make us more like Christ.

Finally, the Holy Spirit guides us by telling us when to stop and when to go. Do you need that? I need that. God made me in such a way that my default setting is "go," so I'm usually ready to go. That's what I always think: "Go, and we will figure it out when we get there." Yet, the Lord sometimes wisely tells us to stop, and we need the Lord to tell us to stop. But He also tells us to go. Some of you may need Him to tell you to go more often. Look at what happens in Acts 16, as Paul and his missionary companions are journeying throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia. We read that they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the Word in Asia. This is the province of Asia, not the continent of Asia. It's the small southwest corner of Asia Minor. For whatever reason, not clear to them at the time, the Holy Spirit tells them not to go there. This is where Ephesus is, and Paul is wanting to go there. The Holy Spirit says, "No," and they keep going. They try to go north. They end up at the edge of the coast, near the location of ancient Troy. The Holy Spirit stopped them, and in Acts 16:9, we read:

"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'"

In Acts 16:10, the story continues:

"And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."

This is a momentous "go." This is how the gospel crosses from Asia into Europe, and this is where Luke himself enters the narrative of the book of Acts. It happens as a result of heeding the Holy Spirit's instruction to stay or stop, and then to go.

Beloved, if you are open to the Spirit's directions, He will give you these kinds of directions. Whenever the Holy Spirit says "stop" or "be quiet," just do that and wait. Whenever He says "speak" or "go," then go. The Spirit among us is God's personal presence, filling us. He creates our community. He emboldens our witness. He increases our family, and He guides our every step. This morning, I want to ask you if you would enter into a season, starting today, and over the next few weeks, to join me in a daily prayer for filling of the Spirit among us here: more of the Holy Spirit in our lives, more of the Holy Spirit in our life together, God's personal

empowering presence in our community. I believe that God has very exciting things for Kenwood in this next season. Pentecost Sunday is the Sunday of our groundbreaking, and I don't think that's coincidental. Pentecost Sunday, May 23, is the Sunday that we will have a picnic and fellowship. We will throw some dirt, but we will officially step forward towards our community to say, "Here we are. We're making space for you." We want to do that, not in our own strength, but with the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit among us.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.