

Following Jesus
Why We Need the Holy Spirit
Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series
Pastor David Palmer
June 8, 2025

TEXT: Acts 2:1-4, 22-47



Good morning, Beloved. Happy Pentecost Sunday. Pentecost Sunday occurs fifty days after Easter. During this time, the disciples witnessed Jesus bodily alive. He ate with them. He talked with them about the Kingdom of God. He told them to wait in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high.

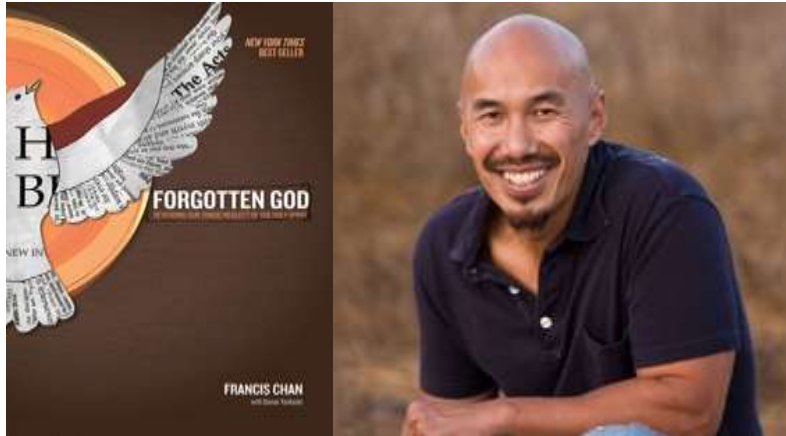
God built into the festival calendar of His people this rhythm of three big celebrations:

- Passover: the celebration of being rescued, our sins covered by the blood of the Lamb.
- Pentecost: making it out of Egypt, coming to the base of Mount Sinai, seeing God's fiery glory, and God commissioning us as His representatives and witnesses in the world.
- Feast of Tabernacles: the last great festival which is in the fall and is a festival that celebrates the gathering in of the harvest.

For Christians, we celebrate Christ, our Passover Lamb who has been sacrificed.

This morning, we celebrate Pentecost Sunday. In one sense, we live in the interval between Pentecost and Tabernacles. We live in that time when the nations of the world are being harvested. One day we will have a glorious, final celebration when the nations will be fully gathered. *Pentekoste* means "fifty" in Greek. It is a celebration of the fiftieth day, this fiftieth day that marks arriving at Mount Sinai, and in the New Testament, it marks the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

We have been learning about the Holy Spirit the last several weeks. The Lord has taught us much together. We have learned that the Holy Spirit is for all Christians, not just for some. We have learned that the Holy Spirit is God's end-time promise fulfilled; that the Holy Spirit creates new spiritual life in us, an appetite and desire for holiness; that the Holy Spirit gives gifts that are to be used to strengthen the body of Christ. We have been following Francis Chan's book



The Forgotten God. Francis says himself of one section of the book, "This is my favorite section of the book." I love it because his favorite section of the book is a description of Bible promises and meditating on those promises that relate to the Holy Spirit and how they are true in the life of a believer. It shows a lot about him

that his favorite part of the book is a part of the book that meditates on the Scripture. In that section, in his first sentence he says:

"If the Holy Spirit dwells within you, a number of things should be part of your life."

The first thing on that list is this: "The Spirit helps us speak..."

The Holy Spirit helps us speak. This is not just the phenomenon of children learning to verbalize, or articulate speech. That is not the power of the Holy Spirit that we are talking about this morning. In Acts 1:8, Christ tells His disciples:

"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."

The power of the Holy Spirit is God's living presence in you that enables you and empowers you to verbalize God's saving action in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit allows you, or helps you, to speak in the specific way of bearing witness to what God has done in Christ. Sometimes we talk about "sharing Christ," that we should "share Christ." Sometimes people feel guilty about that, or they feel afraid of that. Or they are confused, and think, "I just don't know enough," as though you have to have advanced degrees in theology just to say what God has done in Jesus. The promise of the Holy Spirit, according to Jesus, is that the Holy Spirit will give you the power to speak. It is not your power; it is His power, and the Holy Spirit delights to make Jesus known.

So this morning, Pentecost Sunday, we have been asking the question, "Why do we need the Holy Spirit?" There are two things that I want us to take deeply within us today:

Number one. **The Holy Spirit empowers our witness.**

Number two. **The Holy Spirit creates the church.**

When we bear witness to Christ, when we speak about Him, it is the wonderful experience of the Spirit's power. The result of that speaking is not our own pride. The result of sharing Jesus is the creation of this extraordinary community called the church. So, let's look at these two things together.

When we say the Holy Spirit empowers our witness, I want to be clear that the witness that is empowered is a witness, a testimony to God's saving action in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I remember as a new Christian, going to church, and sometimes when someone would say something profound from the front, they would call out, "Can I get a witness?" Why do we do that? To summon a witness from the congregation echoes this meaning of bearing witness as publicly confirming the truth of something. When people are called in as witnesses, they are witnesses brought in to confirm the public truth of something, not a private interpretation. We bring a witness into a courtroom in order that the facts of the case may be established and a public truth can be verified. Usually it is verified through multiple attestations. The great public truth to be verified in this world is the public truth that Jesus Christ lived, died, and was raised from the dead. So our witness, our testimony, contributes to this public verification. To do this, we need the Holy Spirit's presence and power. Jesus promises in Acts 1:8:

"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."

The power of the Holy Spirit will compel our verbal witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

When the Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, believers were gathered together in one place, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. What was the first thing that happened when they were filled with the Spirit? They started talking. Acts 2:1-4 tells us:

"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."

The Holy Spirit is a speaker. The Holy Spirit delights to speak the mighty works of God that have happened in Jesus Christ. That is the first thing we see. The Holy Spirit empowers us, each one of us, to bear witness, to offer a public testimony to confirm what has happened and,

specifically, what God has done in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Peter, the Galilean fisherman, is filled with the Holy Spirit, and he speaks. I want you to notice what he says. In Acts 2:22-24, he tells his fellow disciples:

“Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it.”

What he says, what he talks about is Jesus-centric. I want to challenge all of us on that point. Are most of the words that we speak Jesus-centric? Or do we like to talk about a lot of other things? When the Holy Spirit speaks in and through us, the Holy Spirit directs conversations to Jesus or about Jesus. It is thrilling to see what happens to people when they hear what God has done through Christ. It is one of the ways that we know the Holy Spirit is speaking through us. Peter experiences the Spirit and begins to talk about Jesus. He says many things. He says that Jesus was attested by God in His public ministry with His mighty works and signs. God was working through Jesus. The Holy Spirit knows the life of Jesus. Remember, the Holy Spirit was there at the very beginning, at Jesus's baptism. In Matthew 3:17, God tells us:

“This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

People experience the presence of God in the life and teachings of Jesus.

As Peter summarizes Jesus' public ministry, he moves to the climactic events of Holy Week. Jesus was delivered up, as the *ESV* says, “according to the definite plan.” Isn't that a good, hope-filled statement? It tells us that the crucifixion of Jesus was not an accident. It was God's intentional plan. The word that is used here is sometimes translated as “predestined.” It is a word that means that the cross is not an accident, that what God was doing in Jesus was not only His public ministry, but that it was God's plan and His intention. Jesus truly died. He was crucified.

But the Gospel ending in Acts 2:24 is that God raised Him up.

“God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it.”

Jesus lived; He was someone who was recognized by extraordinary ministry; He was publicly executed; and now He is alive. Those events are the substructure of the gospel message. Peter says that Jesus' being raised actually loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for death to hold Him. It's as though death tried to hold Jesus in the grave, but God said “no,” just like that angel who rolled back the stone and sat on it. Death is our number one fear. The

gospel contains with it a promise that death has been defeated.

Peter speaks by the Holy Spirit. He quotes from the Psalms. The first Psalm he quotes is Psalm 16. Remember that the Scriptures are breathed out by the Spirit, so it is wonderful to see the Holy Spirit quoting the Holy Spirit and interpreting the meaning of Psalm 16:10:

“For You will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let Your Holy One see corruption.”

Peter interprets Psalm 16 Christologically. He says this cannot be about David because David died, was buried, his tomb was there, and yet he spoke of the resurrection. Peter’s Christo-centric speaking, the Holy Spirit speaking through us, points people to the gospel events, climaxes with the declaration that this Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses.

There’s that word again: “witness.” The Greek word is *martyr*. *Martyr* doesn’t simply mean someone who has died for their faith. That is the more specific meaning. It came to have that meaning because some Christians did bear witness to Christ to an extent that it was costly to them, and in some cases it cost them their lives. They were called martyrs because they bore an ultimate witness to the public truth that Jesus lived, died, and was raised. Their fearlessness at the threat of death was perceived as strong, corroborating evidence that death had been defeated. How do you explain these people not afraid of dying? Peter says we are all witnesses. Not only that, but he says that Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of God. He has received the promise of the Holy Spirit: Jesus who was crucified and resurrected is now alive and doing things. The first thing Jesus does upon His return to the Father is pour out the Holy Spirit on His people.

What’s the conclusion? Peter’s conclusion, in Acts 2:36, is:

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ.”

The public witness and testimony of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus affects people. It is not a monologue; it is adding your voice, your testimony to what you know to be true about what God has done. When people hear about Jesus, the amazing work of the Holy Spirit happens in them. Often, people begin to feel conviction, remorse, interest, a longing for faith. The Holy Spirit working and speaking through you has a very real effect by the Holy Spirit in the hearer.

We are a pretty hardhearted group on our own. Have you noticed that? It is true for you and for me. Our hearts are unresponsive to God on our own. John Wesley called this “prevenient grace,” which is a great expression. It is the grace that comes to us in advance in order to make

our hearts responsive to God. It is the grace that we receive before we know we needed grace. In that great hymn *"And Can It Be?"* there is a line in the hymn that says, "Thine eye [God's eye] diffused a quickening ray." This means that God sent forth a blast of light into our souls to make us alive enough to respond to the gospel. That is what it means, in a very poetic way. Some of us don't even know that we have received "a quickening ray," but that's what happens to people. When we talk about Jesus, the effect is expressed in Acts 2:37 in this way:

"Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'"

When they heard this Holy Spirit-empowered speech and witness about Jesus, their hearts were pierced. Their hardened hearts were melted, or cut open, and they asked, *"What shall we do?"*

When the Word of Christ goes out through you, people who are indifferent to God suddenly become open. People are stirred from our apathy to action. Those who have become desensitized—and that is such a hard place to be—suddenly become sensitive. So they asked, *"What shall we do?"* And in Acts 2:38-39, this is Peter's answer:

"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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself."

When we talk about Jesus, and people wonder what they are supposed to do, please never say to them, "Well, just try to be a better person." That is the wrong answer. What does someone do, what does anyone do in light of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection? They repent of their sin.

I like to tell people, "You can't be a Christian unless you can verbally say, 'I'm sorry.'" Those are powerful words, aren't they? They are powerful words in relationships. It is damaging to relationships if you cannot verbalize those words. But Christians come in the gate of the Kingdom of God by simply and profoundly saying to God, "I'm sorry." We do not have to provide a full detailed list; God knows that list. We can be sorry for what we have done. We can be sorry for what we have left undone. We can start at the top. According to Jesus, the greatest commandment of God, what God requires of humanity is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Most of us don't need to go further than that. We have let other loves take first place.

To repent is to say you're sorry. The action that comes with that is a baptism, which is a confession of faith in Jesus that "I unite with Jesus in His death and in His resurrection." If you have never been baptized, I want to invite you to be baptized. Talk to one of our Elders or our

pastoral staff. This is a thrilling and defining moment in your life. We have baptisms here regularly. We love to celebrate baptisms. Baptism signals the forgiveness of our sins and we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Christian life is not just about forgiveness of sins. It is that, but it is also about being cleansed from our sin and forgiven. Those are powerful words, "You are forgiven." Then, as a cleansed person, by the atoning death of Christ, we are filled with God's presence without God's presence destroying us. God's fiery glory can safely dwell among us.

"The promise is for you," Peter said. It is for your kids. Kids can be filled with the Holy Spirit; that is a wonderful thing. There is no age restriction. Everyone who is far off is also included. I love the far-off people. The Latin word *pagan* means "far off." For people who seem so far from God, the promise is for them, too.

So for everyone the Lord calls to Himself, the response is like the preacher's dream scenario. In Acts 2:41, we read:

"So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls."

The response to Peter's first Christian sermon ever preached is 3,000 people who confessed Christ as Lord. Then they're baptized. When we go to Jerusalem, the steps that go up to the Temple Mount are still there, where Peter stood and preached this sermon. It is really moving to stand on those steps. Right behind those steps are all of these large ritual baths. So the logistics of three thousand people being baptized are already set in place. No one had to fill the baptistery. It was right there. It is so moving to see that.

The Holy Spirit wants to speak, not just through preachers. Eighty-five percent of people who become Christians in the world become Christians through your words, not mine. That means God likes to share this joy. And it is thrilling! The Holy Spirit empowers our witness.

The second thing we see in this passage is that the Holy Spirit creates the church. In Acts 2:42 we read:

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers"

American culture has a proclivity to being individualistic. We tend to think that admitting that we need something is a sign of weakness. I remember when we moved into our neighborhood. We saw our neighbors across the street only occasionally, for very short slices of time. The garage door would come up, we'd see them, wave, they would drive in, and the door would close. One day the wife came out to check the mail and the door locked behind her. She was

stuck outside. The garage door code wasn't working. My wife is European, and in Europe, the response to this scenario is, "Well, come on over to the house and sit and talk." But the neighbor across the street wouldn't cross the threshold of our house. She preferred to stand outside, in the heat, waiting for the service company. It was an odd thing to us. I mean, at least have a glass of water! Wait in our house until they come! But that mindset is all around us. It thinks, "Life is meant to be lived individually, alone."

But we know that is not true. We are not created that way. The first "not good" in the Bible is: *"It is not good for man to be alone."* We are made for relationships. We are made with a deep longing for community. The Holy Spirit creates Christian community. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that the community of the church is the product of the Holy Spirit. I am so grateful for that work among us here. That is a real work. This is a real community. It is amazing. I am looking out at you. I see your faces. You know what I'm talking about. When you go through something difficult, there's this family of Christ that comes around you; or you experience something really joyful and important in your life, there's a family that comes around to celebrate that with you; or you're seeking after God and growing in your walk with Christ, there are other people pursuing that alongside you. It is so powerful. That is not the work of the Elders or the pastors. That is the work of the Holy Spirit.

That is what we see in the end of this passage: The Holy Spirit creates the church. The Holy Spirit creates a group of people who are devoted to God's Word. They are dedicated to listening to the apostles' teaching. They are dedicated to fellowship, a sharing in common of life. They are dedicated to the breaking of bread. This is not just meals in the Commons or the Atrium. The breaking of bread described here is the language that Luke uses in his Gospel for Jesus taking bread, blessing it, and breaking it. This is the community celebration of that sacramental gift, of that feasting in remembrance of what God has done. Our fellowship meals, in some sense, are an extension of the fellowship that is created by remembering together the death and resurrection of Jesus. We also are devoted to prayers, to praying for one another.

All who believed were together. They had things in common. People don't ordinarily do this. Believers sold some of their possessions and gave the money away to people in the community who were in need. We don't usually do that. This is not like the first century equivalent of United Way. This is a product of the Holy Spirit defining a familial relationship so that we treat a brother or sister in Christ as we treat a brother or sister in the flesh. We treat a fellow believer in Christian community as we care for a son or daughter. To share this kind of sacrificial love and care for our family members is built into us. The amazing thing is that the Holy Spirit creates a family in Jesus Christ. It is so wonderful to be part of it.

In the end, in Acts 5:47, we read that God is the real actor here:

“And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

Those looking at the Greek New Testament will be thrilled, ecstatic, to notice that the first verb, *added*, is in the imperfect tense, which means that this is ongoing action. It means that God is dynamically active in an ongoing way. Day by day, God is doing it, adding to the community. If you are new here in this church today, praise God for this your first Sunday. God brought you here. I believe that. If you are here and you're celebrating your fiftieth year at Kenwood and thousands of services, praise God. You know what I'm saying is true: the Holy Spirit creates a very real community here, and that it has been happening for generations. That is God's active, divine activity.

But there is also a divine passive tucked in here at the end. It is just as important. The Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were *being* saved. Passive voice. Dear friends, we are people who need to *be* saved, not people who can save ourselves. There it is, tucked into this clear expression, that God is actively working among us, God is saving people, and He is doing that by the empowered witness of the Spirit and creating a church community. We really need that.

The great climax of what the Holy Spirit does among us is to do these things. I want to ask you to invite the Holy Spirit into your life afresh. That is what we all are longing for. Pentecost Sunday is a great Sunday for a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit.

I have run out of gas twice in my life. The first time I ran out of gas, I was close to the gas station. I was in college, and when you're in college you tend to put just a couple more dollars in at a time. I had inherited my grandmother's large Buick Electra 225. It was a V-8. It had an analog clock in it. The clock was on one side of the dashboard and the hands moved clockwise, and on the other side was the gas gauge. With that massive engine, it seemed like the gas gauge moved at the same speed as the clock. I remember the feeling. I was running out of gas, but I could see the gas station. On the other hand, I had so much momentum in that car that I thought, “no problem. I can just coast in.” I was coasting in, and I remember thinking, “I’ve really gotta stick the landing ‘cause I can’t move this car once I stop.” I came in; I coasted to a stop; and I filled up. (The other time I ran out of gas I was really busy in graduate school and I didn’t even notice that I was running on empty. It was simply user error.) Sometimes we are trying to live the Christian life on empty. We need to be filled up.

The point this morning is that we need the Holy Spirit. You need the Holy Spirit. I need the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is moving in us, the Holy Spirit empowers us to speak. The Holy

Spirit empowers us to ask questions of others, like, “Are you a man of faith?” What a simple question; it can open up a whole conversation. “Can I pray for you?” “Have you ever read the teaching of Jesus? Would you like to read them with me?” Sometimes I ask people, “Have you ever had a negative experience in church?” That is a really disarming question. People open up. Sometimes people have no idea about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and you get to be the first person to explain it to them. That is so special.

This morning I want to invite us to do something simple and profound together in response to our reading. I want us to ask the Holy Spirit to freshly fill us all, because I know from God's Word that when He does that, He will empower us to speak in ways that will be really exciting and joyful. We will find ourselves coming back and telling each other, “Let me tell you what happened!” It is wonderful! We will also have a fresh appreciation for what the Holy Spirit creates in this holy community, the church. So I want to invite you to ask for a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit. I want you to tell God yourself, “Holy Spirit, I need you.” If we have learned anything over these last six weeks together, it is this: We need the Holy Spirit. Let's ask Him to fill us afresh together.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we honor You. We add our voices to the public testimony that You have lived, died, and been raised, and that You poured out the Spirit upon Your return to the Father. I ask You afresh to pour out the Holy Spirit on me and these my brothers and sisters. Empower us to speak and create and sustain this vibrant church family.

We pray in Jesus' Name. Come Holy Spirit, come. Amen.