

Empowered to Begin [Acts 2:1-13]

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Big Idea: The Spirit didn't come to create a spectacle; He came to launch a movement.

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// INTRODUCTION

We're continuing our journey through the book of Acts in our series "*Empowered: The Church Unleashed*."

Remember, we began with the resurrection of Jesus, and it wasn't the end of the story. Jesus was just getting started! Dr. Sean McDowell gave us compelling evidence for the resurrection, and last week, we saw Jesus' ascension and His command to WAIT for the promised Holy Spirit before beginning the mission.

That brings us to today's message from Acts 2.

Remember last week's theme: ***Without the Spirit's power, we're just playing church. With His power, we can change the world.*** Today, we will see that power arrive in one of the most dramatic scenes in all of Scripture... Pentecost. It's the moment when EVERYTHING changes. The disciples will not move from WAITING to WORKING. They will become those empowered witnesses Jesus promised in Acts 1:8.

It's an origin story much like the ones we celebrate in our own lives... birthdays, anniversaries, graduations... important moments that mark new beginnings. ***Today, we are looking at the birthday of the Church*** – the moment when the Holy Spirit arrived and launched a movement that would change the world.

// PRIMARY TEXT [Acts 2:1-13]

On the day of Pentecost, all the believers were meeting together in one place. ²Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. ³Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. ⁴And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

⁵At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. ⁶When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.

⁷They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, ⁸and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! ⁹Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome ¹¹(both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!" ¹²They stood there amazed and perplexed. "What can this mean?" they asked each other.

¹³But others in the crowd ridiculed them, saying, "They're just drunk, that's all!" [Acts 2:1-13]

// THE MEANING OF PENTECOST

Before we dive in, *let's understand the origins of Pentecost*. This wasn't just some random day that God chose. Pentecost was already an important Jewish festival in Israel.

Pentecost was the Greek term for the ***Festival of Weeks***.

- First day of the wheat harvest in Israel.
- Celebration of God giving the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Because it was such an important festival, Jews from across the known world had already traveled to Jerusalem to participate. The Bible says there were *devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem.* "The disciples, who were also devout Jews, were gathered together, waiting as Jesus had instructed them.

While we often focus on the twelve, ***Acts 1:15 tells us there were about 120 believers gathered together.*** These are people who had followed Jesus, witnessed His resurrection, and were now waiting as He commanded.

// DON'T MISS THE POINT

Before we get to what happened next, ***I want to address something really important.*** The Book of Acts is filled with signs and wonders... incredible, amazing, and truly miraculous events. But here's what we need to understand... ***They are NOT the point of Acts.***

In this book, we're going to see amazing stories of God working through ordinary people, but the miracles aren't the main focus. ***What matters most isn't that signs and wonders happened, but WHY they happened.***

I wholeheartedly believe the Spirit of God is alive and active today. I believe and continue to preach the same power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in every believer.

We need to be careful not to confuse the DESCRIPTION of what happened at Pentecost with the PRESCRIPTION for how it must always happen.

Let me be clear... I'm not saying God doesn't work miraculously today. He absolutely does! But sometimes, if we're not careful, we chase the miracle and end up disappointed with God when our experience doesn't match exactly what we read in the Bible.

There's an important principle for reading and understanding the Bible... ***Sometimes Scripture is describing what happened, and sometimes it's prescribing what should happen.***

Let me show you what I mean...

- Acts 1 – We have a ***description*** of how the apostles cast lots to choose a new apostle. This doesn't mean we should choose church leaders by drawing straws today.
- Acts 10 – We have a ***prescription*** from God to Peter that the Gospel is for all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. And thankfully... bacon is back on the menu 😊

The Spirit didn't come to create a spectacle, He came to launch a movement.

Don't chase the miracle and miss the point. ***Pentecost is an invitation to living as an EMPOWERED WITNESS to the good news of Jesus in both word and deed.***

// THE ARRIVAL OF THE SPIRIT

So, what exactly happened at Pentecost?

On the day of Pentecost, all the believers were meeting together in one place. ²Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. ³Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. ⁴And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability. [Acts 2:1-4]

Pentecost marked the end of Christ's earthly ministry and the beginning of something new. ***The Holy Spirit didn't come for a brief visit, He came to dwell permanently in God's people.***

I mentioned this last week... this was prophesied 100s of years earlier. In Ezekiel 36, God promised...

²⁶And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations. [Ezekiel 36:26-27]

To help Ezekiel understand this promise, God gave him that famous vision of the valley of dry bones. Like the breath that brought those dry bones to life, the Spirit of God, like a mighty rushing wind, breathed new life into the people of God. ***At Pentecost, the OT people of God became the NT people of God by the power of the Holy Spirit.***

Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we are the recipients of this promise. ***We are the dry bones who come alive with the very breath of God!***

// THE MOUNTAIN OF GOD'S PRESENCE

There's another powerful parallel here I want us to see. ***In the OT, the glory of God was so overwhelming that people feared they would die in His presence.***

In Exodus 19, when God prepared to reveal Himself at Mount Sinai, ***He warned that anyone who even touched the mountain would be put to death.*** Then the Lord descended upon the mountain in a cloud of fire and called Moses up.

Exodus 24:17 describes God's glory as *"a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel."* When Moses came back down after being in God's presence, ***his face shone so brightly that people couldn't even look at him.***

We often talk about "mountaintop experiences" ... those high points in our life where God feels especially close [church camp, conferences, concerts, moments of worship/prayer]. Some of us have grown up chasing these moments, thinking the faith journey is just a series of emotional, spiritual highs.

Here's what's incredible about Pentecost... The Spirit of God came down like fire. Only this time, ***the people of God became the mountain.*** And it wasn't just for a moment, but the Spirit came to dwell permanently in every believer.

God has put His Spirit in us, giving us life. A life in communion with Him. A life of pursuing holiness. And a life as an empowered witness for the mission.

// THE PURPOSE OF PENTECOST

I know what some of you are wondering and waiting for... *What about speaking in tongues? Isn't that the main point here?*

Well, no, it's actually not. ***First, what's described here in Acts 2 isn't the same thing as what's described in 1 Corinthians 14, which talks about speaking in tongues as a private prayer language between you and God.***

What happened at Pentecost was a unique event for a specific purpose. The Holy Spirit came upon the believers.

³Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. ⁴And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability. [Acts 2:3-4]

What's equally, if not more important, is what this was meant for.

⁵At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. ⁶When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.

⁷They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, ⁸and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! [Acts 2:5-8]

Do you see what's happening here? People from all across the world, all with different languages and dialects, could hear the disciples speaking in THEIR own native tongue. ***The miracle was as much in the HEARING as it was in the SPEAKING.***

We'll look at this deeper next week, but later, when Peter stands up to preach, he's not speaking multiple languages simultaneously, but everyone hears him in their own language.

The point is clear... ***the very first time the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached, it's heard by people from every nation of the known world.***

Just as Jesus promised in Acts 1:8... *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere – in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

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// LIVING IN PENTECOST POWER

So, what does this mean for us today?

Many of us struggle to be witnesses and make disciples because we're trying to do it in our own strength. We're trying to give life without acknowledging the Life-giver. We're trying to impart understanding without relying on the Spirit of Truth. We're trying to witness to the world without drawing from the Source of Power.

When this happens, we look more like the scared, scattered disciples during Jesus' crucifixion than the empowered people of Jesus sent on mission.

There have been times when I've relied on my own abilities... knowledge, speaking, charisma... while those things aren't bad, their insufficient. The moments of greatest impact haven't come from my talents but from my surrender to the Spirit's power working through me.

That's what Pentecost looks like in everyday life... not always dramatic manifestations, but divine empowerment when we need it the most.

// THE TRANSFORMATION OF PETER

We can't complete the story of Pentecost without reflecting on what happened to Peter. We'll look at this more closely next weekend, but for now... There's something about how Peter is portrayed in the Gospels that makes us picture him as the impulsive, hot-tempered guy who just couldn't get it right.

Peter was inconsistent and full of bold declarations that he couldn't back up. He even denied Jesus three times when it mattered most. But then the Holy Spirit comes and everything changes for Peter. ***Suddenly, He's empowered. He's dynamite.***

Martyn Lloyd-Jones describes the difference between simply living as a Christian and being clothed with power from on high. He puts it this way...

"A father is walking down the road with his son's hand in his own, and the child is enjoying the presence of his father and knows that he is loved. Then, without the child doing anything special, moved only by the father's love, the father reaches down and scoops his son off his feet and up into his arms. He hugs the child tightly, showers him with kisses, tells him he loves him more than life itself, and sets him down again. The child already knew his father loved him, there was no doubt. But oh, the added measure of assurance, the joy of knowing that love is not based on anything you have done but simply flows out of the heart of the father. That is what it means to have God near."

This, Lloyd-Jones says, ***is what happens when a person is filled and empowered with the Holy Spirit.***

This is what happened to Peter at Pentecost. He was swept up in an overwhelming sense of God's love and grace, so much so that he leaped to his feet and began to proclaim the good news of Jesus. As the crowd gathered around this simple fisherman turned preacher, Acts 2:37 says his words ***"pierced their hearts"*** and ***from that sermon, 3000 people, from around the world, responded to the gospel!***

And that was just the beginning. The gospel continued to increase. And increase. And increase.

- From Jerusalem and throughout Judea
- Throughout Rome and into Europe and Africa
- Then into England and China
- Into Mexico and South America
- Then into the United States and into PA
- Into Pittsburgh and now into our lives.

The point of Acts 2 is not primarily about how the Spirit came, but what the Spirit was for... to empower the people of God for the mission of God.

The Spirit didn't come to create a spectacle, He came to launch a movement.

Are you living in Pentecost power?

Have you settled for a Christianity based on your own strength and abilities? Or are you daily surrendering to and depending on the power of the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit didn't come just to make you feel better. He came to make you an empowered witness. He came to break down barriers between people. He came to empower you to proclaim the good news of Jesus to your Jerusalem, Judea, your Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

May we be a Spirit-empowered church. And may the gospel increase through us.

PRAY