

“Filled With The Spirit”

Acts 2:1-4, 32-36

May 27, 2007

Read Acts 2:1-4, 32-36.

I commend to you the rest of the Acts 2 account of the events of Pentecost and Peter’s sermon because they are worthy of study. We are going to limit our focus this morning to the beginning and end of the accounts to talk about “being filled with the Holy Spirit.”

A little review: the name we attribute to this celebration, Pentecost, actually refers to one of the three great festivals in Jerusalem that would draw Jews from all over the world. Passover, or the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which Jesus celebrated with his disciples on the last night of his life prior to the crucifixion, was the first. Pentecost, or the Feast of the Harvest, which is a festival making offerings to God for the harvest of the *first fruits* of the season, was the second and it would be scheduled for 50 days after the Passover. The third was the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year, when they gathered in all the crops at the final harvest. (Exodus 23).

So, Jews from around the world were gathering in Jerusalem in order to make their “thank offering” to God for the first fruits as established in Exodus.

Jerusalem must have been interesting at that point. The waters would not have completely settled from the events of the Passover week: the news of Jesus’ crucifixion at the Passover would have been in the forefront of many minds; particularly because the first fruits offerings would be the first major event in Jerusalem since that time. There may have been rumors of Jesus’ resurrection still floating around, but the disciples had pretty much kept to themselves.

And then, suddenly, God acts.

If you hope in God, Pentecost is the day for you. It is a day when we remember and celebrate the birthday of the church. It is the day we are reminded of how the Spirit of God came suddenly, how the amazing works of God were proclaimed in many languages, and how three thousand were saved in one day.

Pentecost is a prime example of a couple of things: God is real, God is faithful to His promises, and God calls us to a living relationship with him. It also shows us a few things about being filled with the Holy Spirit: God responds to prayer in ways we cannot imagine; and, God gives us the Holy Spirit so that we may give him all the glory.

Prayer

Pentecost began fairly simply. The disciples were all together in one place. They were waiting.

For what were they waiting? They were waiting for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In chapter 1 verse 4, the risen Lord Jesus tells the disciples not to leave Jerusalem, but “to wait there for the

promise of the Father. ‘This,’ he said, ‘is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’”

So they waited.

We are not good at waiting. We do not like waiting. No one likes to go to the doctor’s office of the Department of Motor Vehicles. More the point, we do not like waiting when we do not really know what is going on. There you are, sitting in the waiting room, listening to noises and voices that you cannot identify, and you are anxious because you are not sure you know what is going to happen when your name is called. You are not in control of your time. If you are like me, you begin to think of all the things you could be doing if you weren’t stuck here doing nothing.

The disciples were waiting for the baptism with the Holy Spirit; whatever that meant. Would it be like the first king Saul, who went into a frenzy with the prophets? Would it be like King David and an anointing to be men after God’s own heart? What would it look like? What would it feel like? No one could say for sure. But the risen Jesus had said, “wait,” so they waited.

However, while they were waiting, they were not reading People magazine or doing the “seek and find” in Highlights. The Bible says they “were constantly devoting themselves to prayer.”

In short, they were praying that God would fulfill his promises in them. God did not answer them immediately, nor even at the end of 22 minutes (if you don’t count commercials). They were constantly devoting themselves to prayer.

One of the things I hear a lot – and I mean *a lot* – is, “I do not know how to pray.” Yes, you do. Yes, you do.

If you hear me now, you are half way there. Prayer involves listening. If you are able to say, “I do not know how to pray,” you are communicating, which is the other half. There is not a single person in this room today who does not know how to pray.

It is like a child saying, “That’s not fair.” They do not really mean, it is not fair; they mean, I do not like it and I want things my way. “I don’t want to pray,” means, “I do not know if I am wasting my time if I cannot get what I want from God.”

Prayer involves submitting ourselves before God. To the outside world, it looks like a waste of time. However, when we talk about the Holy Spirit filling us, we must be willing to have a *personal* relationship with God. It means spending time with God. It means sharing with God. It means listening to God. We cannot be filled with the Holy Spirit if God is not present.

Let me approach this differently: many people want to go to heaven. In my memory, I can hear radio announcers reporting polls indicating that they hope they will go to heaven. Whether it is a golf course, the ultimate shopping mall, or clouds where you can eat as much Philadelphia Cream Cheese without worry about the calories, the picture of heaven that many people have is shallow and fundamentally incomplete. It seems like many people would be surprised to know

that GOD is in heaven. So it is with prayer; many times we seem surprised that God would show up.

Having witnessed the resurrection, the disciples devoted themselves to praying for God to show up: for God to be faithful in keeping his promises and answering prayers. They prayed for days and days that God would fulfill what Jesus said, “you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

Persistence in prayer is an important part of growing our relationship with God. A few weeks ago, we read Jesus’ parable in Luke 11 about the friend going and knocking on a neighbor’s door at midnight. Do you remember the last line? “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” The disciples devoted themselves to praying for the Holy Spirit.

Praying for the Holy Spirit is to desire God. It is to seek God’s face, to know God’s heart, to pursue God’s will. Are we so devoted? Do we really want the Holy Spirit? For example, it’s nice to read about the disciples speaking in tongues and proclaiming God; is that something you and I *want* to happen to us?

That is scary for many people. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is pretty transparent. People can see. People *will* see.

Isn’t it strange; what is best for us, what gives us great joy – it is the very thing we shy away from because of what other people might think. If there is a Padre homerun hit this afternoon, will Petco Park erupt in praise? Do you think any less of your neighbors for cheering the Padres or the Chargers? Why, then, when God has acted to give us *eternal* salvation do we act as if it is a state secret to be guarded?

Yet, look to the disciples again. The disciples’ devotion to prayer did not change God, it changed them. As a result of their devotion to prayer, God prepared them for what was coming. Their devotion to prayer before Pentecost was a time of preparation and equipping for the ministries ahead. Pentecost was a surprise to the crowd, it was not a surprise to the disciples. They may not have known all the specifics, but they trusted the one who was preparing them.

Being Filled With The Holy Spirit Causes Us To Give God All The Glory

Consider Peter.

Peter takes the opportunity afforded by the amazing outburst to address the crowd. He responds to the challenge that the euphoric proclamations of the amazing works of God are inspired by alcohol. Here, this simple fisherman, without theological credentials or a three-striped robe, explains to the crowd how Jesus was the fulfillment of all they had read in Scripture and what God has done. He first takes them back to the prophet Joel which we read earlier. Peter is picking up on:

- Joel was written to emphasize God’s sovereignty over all nations; to describe the consequences of breaching God’s covenant; and, to call the people to renewed faithfulness. Peter’s sermon lays out these themes as they were played out in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; the difference is that God takes upon himself – in Jesus Christ – the consequence of the sinfulness of humanity. In verse 24, Peter says this, “But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.” Friends, this is incredible good news!
- The specific part of Joel that Peter quotes is from a dramatic turn in the prophecy; it moves from the consequences of sinfulness into the promise of God to restore the people to the blessing of life in communion under covenant. *God is due our worship – none other.* Salvation will come to everyone who calls on the name of the LORD. Or, as Peter says, “Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” When the Holy Spirit fills someone, the glorious works of God are proclaimed boldly and clearly.

The work of the Holy Spirit in filling the disciples is shown in Peter. Peter was able to declare how the words of Joel were being witnessed in the presence of those gathered that day. He is saying to the pilgrims who have come to Jerusalem that God is real, God has acted, God has saved, God has done it; and the filled-with-the-Holy-Spirit Peter says, we have seen it and we cannot help but tell you about it. In short, Peter says, “We glorify God!”

The response of the people is our response, “What do we do now?” Peter has the answer, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promises are for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

There may be some here this morning who have not responded to the call or, perhaps, the Holy Spirit is convicting your heart. If you have never made that decision or if you have never received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I encourage, implore, urge, exhort, invite you to do so today. Come forward at the end of the service to pray with our Gardener ministers, asking Jesus to be your Lord and Savior and receiving the Holy Spirit. As Peter will say later in Acts, “There is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.”

For those who have been saved, Pentecost is a reminder of the charge Jesus gives the disciples for what they will do when filled with the Holy Spirit, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” What amazed the people in Jerusalem was that they heard of the “wonders of God” declared in their own language. You know, that’s still true today. There are more people than we can count who need to hear of the wonders of God in their own language. Hearing about the wonders of God means being a witness – sharing our testimony – of what God has done and what God has done in our lives.

Conclusion

In the church today, we seem to have lost the expectation that God will do amazing things. The filling of the Holy Spirit seems very distant and like something that could be explained away if

we looked at it long enough. We have settled for a very passive God, a God who once was very active but now seems to be more interested in other areas of the creation. There is a sense in which congregations feel like they are just doing church in order to obey God's command. There is a sense in which congregations act as if they have to build the church themselves; that if they work harder and do more stuff, that people will come and join.

Pentecost is the day for those congregations. It is a day to remember that it is God who acted, who acts, and who will act. God does amazing things – filling believers with the Holy Spirit – transforming lives in an instant. It is God who will act to build the church, using us as His instruments of grace, proclaiming the good news so that those who do not yet know him will hear the wonders of God in their own language.

So, what is being filled with the Holy Spirit all about? It is a manifestation of abundant *living*, experiencing the joy of our salvation, of rejoicing and praising God. In other words, it is how we live out the chief end of mankind; the chief end of mankind being what? To glorify God and enjoy him forever.

That's Pentecost: glorifying God and appreciating the eternal enjoyment of God – here and now. "This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear." It was true then and it is true now and it will be true forever.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

8:45 Prayer and Offering

10:00 Offering