



HOLY SPIRIT

The Third Person of the Trinity is the most mysterious. Even Jesus said the Spirit blows where He will and can't be seen easily. But the Holy Spirit is also God at His most present to us—even inside of us. He is constantly at work in the world, in the church and in people to change things for the good. If you want to see God's power in your life, look for the movement of the Holy Spirit.

HOLY SPIRIT • Acts 2:14–21 • John Goodale • June 16, 2019

Last Sunday we began a four-week series on the Holy Spirit. We're working our way through chapter 2 of the book of Acts, seeking to better understand the Spirit's role in our lives. In the same way God was present among His people when Christ walked the earth, His presence and influence continue in our lives today through the Holy Spirit's work.

I need to let you know up front that we have our work cut out for us today. It's one thing to listen attentively to a sermon; today you'll hear a sermon about a sermon. Actually, it's more than that: you're going to hear a sermon about a sermon about an Old Testament prophecy. Doesn't that sound exciting?!

I wonder if you've heard the story of the church building that burned down, and a nearby bar owner who offered his facility for Sunday worship since it was closed at that time. He promised to have it cleaned up after Saturday night and gave the pastor a key—but he forgot about the parrot that lived there.

The parrot was awakened early Sunday morning by the pastor, who arrived early to prepare things for worship. After watching him for a few minutes, the parrot squawked, "New bartender, new bartender!" A bit later the choir arrived to rehearse; after watching them for awhile, the parrot squawked again, "New floor show, new floor show!" Eventually the church members began trickling in for worship. After a number of them had gathered, the parrot looked around and squawked a final time, "Same old crowd, same old crowd!"

Look, when our passage begins with a reference to drinking, there's no easy way to transition into it! Last week we learned that a crowd was gathered in Jerusalem at the outset of chapter 2; the Holy Spirit suddenly came upon the disciples, allowing different nationalities to understand what they were saying. As the people tried to make sense of what had happened, some dismissed it as drunken behavior. That's where we pick up today.

Rather than become defensive at the charge of drunkenness, Peter used humor to engage the crowd in 2:14–15. He noted that there hadn't yet been enough time in the day to drink to excess! Think how good it must have felt for Peter and the disciples to have answers in this moment. Throughout Jesus' ministry, they were the ones who didn't get it, asking questions and being questioned by

Jesus. Now others had questions, and their time had finally come to explain what they'd learned. To do so, Peter turned to the book of Joel.

Have you ever wondered how a fisherman knew one of the smaller Old Testament books well enough to quote it in this setting? It's not unlikely that after Jesus promised the Holy Spirit before returning to heaven, Peter and the others poured through the Old Testament to learn what had been said. The Minor Prophet Joel offered the clearest anticipation of this outpouring of the Spirit; Peter had obviously studied it enough to apply Joel's words to this moment.

Joel's prophecy occurred after locusts had invaded and destroyed all that was living in the land. Rather than reassure the Israelites that things would be okay, Joel compared this to God's final judgment. This helps us understand why the prophets probably weren't the first to be invited over for dinner! In the midst of his gloomy message, Joel adds words of hope: God's blessing would eventually come.

Twice in Acts 2:17–18, we read God's promise to pour out His Spirit. This would have been perceived as an encouraging sign of God's activity and presence. The phrase "pour out" suggests a generosity and liberality of what was given. Its wording is consistent with the idea of a faucet that's open wide, allowing a full flow of water.

Prior to this moment in Acts, God's Spirit had been given only to those who spoke and led on His behalf. In the Old Testament, this included leaders, prophets, judges and kings; in the Gospels, it was John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. Joel spoke of a day when all would experience the power of God's Spirit; Peter notes that this day had come. From that day forward, God is generously pouring His Holy Spirit into all who follow Him.

This is a wonderful gift—but we can choke the flow of this gift in our lives when we resist or limit His influence. As J.I. Packer noted, "The question isn't whether you have the Spirit, but whether the Spirit has you?" We limit His influence when we insist on thinking, acting and responding the way we want to, rather than as the Spirit is leading us. When our lives are too full or preoccupied, we leave little space within to be responsive to the stirring of the Spirit. The Apostle Paul warned elsewhere against quenching the Spirit; he understood that this would result in experiencing the Holy Spirit not as a pouring out,

but as a trickle.

We need to experience a strong flow of the Spirit, not only for our benefit but also for the good of God's church. The Holy Spirit was given to build God's church. You could say on this Father's Day that He's the Fatherhood of the church; the Spirit called it into being in Acts and has sustained it over the years. Let's look at Joel's words and note three roles that the Holy Spirit plays today in our lives and in our church. As we do, I encourage us to consider to what degree we're quenching or cooperating with God's Spirit.

First, the Holy Spirit unites. Joel's words in Acts 2:17–18 emphasize that the Holy Spirit is given to all God's people: young and old, women and men, free and servants. These broad descriptions offer a picture of the diversity of the church the Spirit is drawing together. Though there were pronounced social hierarchies in those days, the early church flattened them. This resulted in a beautiful breadth of community that modeled Christ's love for the entire world. But let's not minimize the challenge of keeping a lot of different people together as one body.

We acknowledge the Spirit's unifying work in The Apostle's Creed when we affirm the holy catholic church. The word catholic points not to one particular branch of the church, but to the one universal church under Christ. Think of the Holy Spirit as relational glue that's kept a wide variety of God's people together all these years. Our shared faith and the Lordship of Christ brings us together, but it's the Spirit's influence that keeps us together. Like the early church, we're all surrounded today by people who are different from us. We think and act differently, we often value different things and we see things differently. In our differences, we sometimes rub each other the wrong way. Is this news to anyone here?!

Here's our first question: in our interactions at First Pres, is the Holy Spirit revealed in us in a pouring out, or a trickle? If we feel more judging than loving toward others around us, will we invite the Holy Spirit to change this? If we're not happy with something around here, will we be led by the Holy Spirit to build up rather than tear down? If we've been hurt by another, can we believe the Holy Spirit can move us to where we can't go on our own, and make forgiveness possible? How God's people treat and interact with each other is a mark of the Holy Spirit's influence and work in our midst.

Second, the Holy Spirit equips. Looking again at

Acts 2:17–18, Joel notes an outward evidence of the Spirit's influence for the good of God's church: prophesy, visions and dreams. Those seem a little out of the ordinary for our context today. Elsewhere, in 1 Corinthians 12:7, though, Paul affirmed the Holy Spirit's equipping of each of Christ's followers with spiritual gifts. God knew that our own best efforts wouldn't be enough to build and sustain His church. So the Holy Spirit equips each of us, empowering us to do more than we're capable of on our own. We trust that our elders when they lead, Deacons and Stephen Ministers when they love, teachers when they teach and many others who also minister, are all doing so out of their giftedness and the Spirit's influence. That's the only way we'll effectively be Christ's church.

Perhaps spiritual gifts also feel like an unfamiliar marker of the Spirit's equipping work in your life. If so, Paul offers another template of how the Holy Spirit equips us to build up God's church. In Galatians 5:22–23, he highlights nine qualities that he refers to as the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit equips each of us to have the character of Christ for the good of the larger body. Considering the presence of these qualities in our life leads to our second question: Does your living out of the Spirit's equipping of you reveal a pouring out or a trickle of the Holy Spirit in your life?

Finally, the Holy Spirit compels outward. Notice the word "everyone" in Acts 2:21, and think about who this includes. Since these words were spoken, millions upon millions have called upon the name of the Lord and been saved, including you and me. But the Holy Spirit's work isn't done simply because we're now in the fold; many more have yet to learn of and call upon the name of the Lord. That's why God calls us to be more than just a great place to be a Christian; we want to also be a great place to meet Christ, where people can learn about Him and call upon His name.

Here's why this is so important: 30 years from now, most of us won't be sitting here in worship. But the Holy Spirit will still be here, along with all whom He leads to call upon the name of Jesus in the following years. We want to be part of this work; there's nothing biblical about sitting back and watching the Spirit work in the lives of others.

The Holy Spirit led the early church out into conversations and interactions with others who called upon Jesus and were saved; His influence in directing people to Jesus continues through us, as He com-

pels us outward. Though we may be uncertain of what to say and how to approach, be encouraged that the one who leads us has been doing this for centuries. The Holy Spirit speaks through us, draws through us and invites people to Jesus through us. So here's our final question: Does our movement outward into the world reveal the Holy Spirit poured out in us, or does it suggest only a trickle of the Spirit's influence?

These are hard questions. And if we're honest, when we consider the Holy Spirit's role in our lives, we can easily become discouraged; we see too many places where we're not influenced. So I want to make sure we catch one more element of today's passage. We've looked at its message; let's take a closer look at the messenger.

Of the 19 significant speeches in Acts explaining the Christian faith, eight were made by Peter. His remarks in today's passage provide the first recorded sermon following Christ's return to heaven. Peter is the man of the moment, effectively engaging the crowd, explaining what God had done.

This is the same Peter who often said the wrong thing during Jesus' ministry and was even rebuked by Jesus on one occasion for doing so. This is the same Peter who denied Christ three times after boasting that he'd never do such a thing. This is the same Peter who was a seemingly uneducated fisherman when Jesus got hold of him.

Friends, if God could bring about this much change in Peter, let's be encouraged by what the Holy Spirit can still do with each of us. Last week, Tim noted, "The Holy Spirit is God at work in you to make things different." We know all too well our shortcomings and limitations; places where we wish there was more of us. Peter is a wonderful example of God's power and desire to make things different in us, for His glory. Don't settle for just a trickle of the Spirit's influence in your life. Live and interact with God in such a way that the Holy Spirit will be poured out in you.

God has been building His church through the Holy Spirit for 2000 years. He continues to do the same today through each of us who are united, equipped and compelled outward by the Holy Spirit.

STUDY GUIDE

HOLY SPIRIT • "Church Builder"

Acts 2:14–21

UP: Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word

Read the passage for the week: Acts 2:14–21.

- 1) What do we learn about the Holy Spirit from these verses?
- 2) Peter looks to the Old Testament to explain what is happening at Pentecost. What role does the Old Testament play in your own faith? How is it still important or relevant for Christians today?
- 3) In the Old Testament, God's Spirit fills particular people, at particular times, for particular purposes. But, according to Peter, the Holy Spirit is now available to all people. What does the declaration that God has "poured out His Spirit on all" mean for your life?
- 4) Our society often determines our self-worth and value by how close we are to those in power and how seriously they take our input. We are often very careful to tend to these relationships as they affect our status and lifestyle. What does the knowledge that you are not only close to God, but actually filled with His Spirit, mean to you?
- 5) Reread verse 21. What does it mean to be saved? How are you already experiencing this? What do you think or hope is yet to come?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

A few weeks ago you brainstormed ways to be outwardly focused this summer. How is this going?

IN: Connect with Each Other

Close with this ancient prayer of the church:

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.

And kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

And you will renew the face of the earth.

Lord, by the light of the Holy Spirit

you have taught the hearts of your faithful.

In the same Spirit help us to relish what is right and always rejoice in your consolation.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.