

THEY WERE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 2:1-21

Key Verse: 2:4

“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”

Let me ask you a question. Was there a turning point in your life that changed the course of your life? To many of us, it was the moment when Jesus became our Savior and Lord. Marriage, job, and college could also take us to different directions. To the disciples of Jesus in this passage, it was what happened at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came on them and they were transformed into very different people. They were no longer fearful. The Holy Spirit enabled them to speak boldly about Jesus--his death and resurrection. May God help us to experience what they experienced so that we may also be transformed by the Holy Spirit!

I. THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES AT PENTECOST (1-4)

Look at verse 1. *“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.”* It had been 10 days since Jesus was taken up to heaven. During this time, the disciples did three things. First, they obeyed Jesus’ command to stay in Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Spirit. Second, they all joined together constantly in prayer (1:14). Third, Peter stood up to address the betrayal of Judas that left a scar in their minds. They chose Matthias to fill the empty place. Ten days had passed, and they were still all together in one place. No one left the prayer meeting to attend to personal business. They were still united in prayer. Then it happened.

Look at verse 2. *“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.”* The Holy Spirit came from heaven like a violent wind. It was not actual wind, but the disciples felt like it was a hurricane-force wind. Like the wind, the Holy Spirit is invisible, but powerful. Jesus compared the Holy Spirit to the wind. He said, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (Jn 3:8). In both Hebrew (“ruach”) and Greek (“pneuma”), the same word refers to wind, spirit and breath. After God formed man from the dust of the ground, he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being (Ge 2:7). In the same way, the Holy Spirit gives birth to a new spiritual life in those who believe in Jesus (Jn 3:5-6). At Pentecost, all 120 disciples experienced the breath of God that brought a revival to their lives.

Look at verse 3. *“They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.”* The Holy Spirit came to each of them like tongues of fire. Fire symbolizes the purifying power of God. John the Baptist said Jesus would baptize us with the Holy Spirit and fire (Mt 3:11, Lk 3:16). The Holy Spirit baptizes sinful people with holy fire that purifies them from their sins. This is what happened to the prophet Isaiah. When Isaiah met the Holy God personally in the temple, he realized that he was a sinner with unclean lips, because he would speak unbelieving words out of his despair. But an angel took a live coal from the holy fire and touched his lips (Isa 6:7). His lips

were cleansed by the fire. Isaiah became the greatest prophet who proclaimed the salvation and the judgment of God.

The apostles had been men of worldly desires. For three years, they were trained by Jesus to see things with spiritual eyes. But they often spoke unbelieving words, looking down their human situation. When the Holy Spirit came to each of them, however, he burned away their impurities and enabled them to speak and write about the Son of God. They wrote the New Testament for us with the Holy Spirit.

Now at this point we could spend time to discuss the doctrine of the Holy Spirit with various theological arguments. But here St. Luke simply tells us what happened to the believers on that day. He does not add any discussions. We learn that their personal experience was important. Just as Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit came on them. The Spirit came to rest on each of them (3). Each of the 120 disciples experienced the Holy Spirit. They did not need anyone to explain it to them. They personally experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, our faith must be more than the knowledge about God in our heads. We need to experience our relationship with him personally. We need to experience the power of the Holy Spirit.

Look at verse 4. *“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”* All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came to live in them as his dwelling place. In the Old Testament, the Israelites had to go to the temple to be with God. There they offered animal sacrifice to God for the atonement for their sins. Only a priest could enter the inner sanctum to meet God. But Jesus came to change everything. He died on the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. At the moment Jesus died on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Lk 23:45). It symbolized the dawn of a new era when God would dwell in the hearts of ordinary people like you and me. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, he filled each of the 120 disciples with his own presence.

Jesus called the Holy Spirit the gift of God (Ac 1:4). Indeed the Holy Spirit is the best blessing that God can give us. When the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, he, like fire, warms our hearts with the love of God. Paul says in Romans 5:5, “God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.” Many people are unhappy in this world. Why? Because they don’t have enough money? Because they don’t have a good job? No. Mainly because they don’t know how much God loves them. Because they still remain in sin and death. Because they don’t have true hope in the kingdom of God. But when Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit, we are set free from sin and death. The love of God melts our cold hearts like fire. He gives us true joy and peace. He gives us confidence, courage and strength to live in this world as men and women of God. We are transformed into people with hope in the kingdom of God!

II. THE WONDERS OF GOD IN OUR OWN TONGUES (4-13)

The apostles experienced something very powerful at Pentecost. The Spirit of God came down like a strong wind and tongues of fire to touch their hearts. They could feel

the presence of God personally. All their fears had gone away. What else did they experience on that day? Verse 4 says that they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. The Holy Spirit enabled them to speak foreign languages that they had never learned. Wow. This impressed a lot of people.

Look at verses 5-8. *“Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?’”* These God-fearing Jews from all over the world were in Jerusalem to observe the major festival. When they heard the disciples speaking in their own languages, they were utterly amazed. They were flabbergasted even more when they learned that the disciples were uneducated country people from Galilee. With their jaws still open, the Jews said in verses 9-11: *“Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”* Geographically, Parthia, Media and Elam were to the east of Jerusalem. Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, and Pontus were to the north. Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Rome, Crete and Cyrene were to the west. Egypt and Arabia were to the south. These 15 different places encompassed Jerusalem. In other words, they represented the entire world of their time. No wonder verse 5 says that they were from “every nation under heaven.”

What can we learn from their speaking in tongues at Pentecost? First, the Holy Spirit enabled them to speak in foreign languages to declare the wonders of God. The Spirit enabled them to proclaim what God has done to save us through his Son Jesus Christ. This is the primary reason why the Spirit enables us to speak in tongues, even though the Spirit also helps us to pray in spirit by speaking in a tongue (1Co 14:14; Ro 8:26). Second, their speaking in tongues teaches us about God’s broken heart for all peoples of the world. Until this time, God had used Israel as his chosen people. They were his instruments to proclaim his words. The problem was that they spoke in Aramaic and Hebrew. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew. If foreigners wanted to study the word of God, they had to learn the language first. But now the Spirit enabled the apostles to speak in languages of the world to declare the “wonders of God.” In various languages, they proclaimed, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” God must have longed for this day since the tower of Babel. At that time, the world had one language and a common speech. But the sinful people tried to build a tower to reach to the heavens to challenge God. The Lord came down to stop their nonsense. He confused the language to scatter them (Ge 11:7). It caused pain to God’s heart when he did so. Still he loved the world so much that he began a long-term redemptive plan by calling one man named Abraham, from whom the nation Israel came. At last, God could say what he really wanted to say to all peoples of all nations, that he loved them, in their own native language.

When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, he enabled the apostles to speak in other languages to peoples of all nations. We know how difficult it is to learn a foreign language. It takes a lot of time and effort to learn just the basics of a foreign language. But the Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to speak other languages with no study. This teaches us the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. It also teaches us how much God wants to communicate with peoples of the world. In Acts 1:8, Jesus gave his disciples his world mission command. They will be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. They thought perhaps their grandchildren could go to the ends of the earth as missionaries. However, when the Holy Spirit came on them, they were empowered to carry the gospel themselves. The gospel spread to the world in their own lifetime. When the Spirit came on them, they began to understand the broken heart of God who wants all people to be saved (1Ti 2:4), not wanting anyone to perish (2Pe 3:9).

Compared to the apostolic time, today's world has become much smaller. It took them several months to travel to another country. Now we can do so in hours. Modern communication gives us instant access to many people. What does this mean to us? Modern technology gives us new means to preach the gospel, but it does not give us the power to do so. The power comes from the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit can empower us to preach the gospel to all nations in this generation. We pray for America to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We pray for Muslim and communist countries. This is our constant prayer. Often it sounds unrealistic to us, when we look at our own situation. But this is not our own idea. Jesus gave us the command to be witnesses to all nations. He promised that we would receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on us. The Holy Spirit enables us to share the gospel with young people on our campus, while we pray for world mission.

Upon witnessing the event at Pentecost, people in Jerusalem had two different responses. Many people were amazed by the work of God. But there were scoffers. They made fun of the disciples, saying, "They have had too much wine." Where there was work of God, there was work of Satan. This is true today. Some people try to discredit the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit among us. We should not be surprised when this happens to us.

III. I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT ON ALL PEOPLE (14-21)

When the Apostle Peter heard the scoffers, he was not daunted. He stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel." The first point of Peter's Pentecost sermon was that what happened to them on that day was not a ransom, unexpected, human event, but the fulfillment of God's promise.

Joel was a prophet of ancient Israel. What did he prophesy about the Holy Spirit? Look at verse 17. "*In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.*" The prophet Joel prophesied that God would pour out the Holy

Spirit on all people (Joel 2:28-29). The Holy Spirit is not given only to some special people, but to all people, including sons and daughters. There is no distinction of sex, age, or social class. God pours out his Spirit on all people, including servants, both men and women, and both young and old. The Holy Spirit comes on all people who repent their sins and accept Jesus as their Savior and Lord (2:38).

When the Holy Spirit comes, sons and daughters will prophesy. What does this mean? In the Bible, prophesying means more than predicting future events. It is to proclaim the word of God. It is to proclaim the love of God shown through his Son Jesus Christ, and above all, the coming kingdom of God. When the Holy Spirit comes, our sons and daughters will speak about what Jesus has done, what he is doing, and what he will do in the future. They will become excellent Bible teachers.

When the Holy Spirit comes, young men will see visions. They can see God's vision for them and for the whole world. Without the Holy Spirit, young men tend to think about girls, computer games, cars, and sports. But when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, they realize that God created them for a greater purpose than some small pleasures in life. They will have a spiritual insight and vision for the glorious kingdom of God. They can see how God wants to use them in his world salvation plan.

Look at verse 17 again. *"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams."* When the Holy Spirit comes, even old people will dream dreams. They don't have to fade away in nursing homes. They don't have to spend all day in the park, feeding pigeons or taking naps on benches. They can dream dreams. They can participate in God's work by praying for world mission. They can share their wisdom by studying the Bible with young people. I know a couple from Chicago UBF who is serving the work of God in Rwanda as silver missionaries. It was amazing to listen to him talking about young people there. He was passionate. He sounded like a young man.

The coming of the Holy Spirit is the dawn of a new age in which God comes into our hearts to work out our salvation. He will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below (19). His work on earth will continue until the great and glorious day of the Lord, that is, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Look at verse 21. *"And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* Anyone who accepts Jesus as his or her Savior and Lord by calling on the name of the Lord will be saved. This is a promise by God, given to all of us in writing!

In today's passage, we learned how the Holy Spirit came on the believers at Pentecost. It was a life-changing experience for the disciples of Jesus. The Holy Spirit can transform us to be servants of God. He empowers us to preach the gospel to all peoples of the world. Let us pray earnestly for the filling of the Holy Spirit so that we may be powerful witnesses of Jesus.