

“The Spirit of Acts” January 23, 2022

Welcome! Good to be with you today. This morning we’re gonna be in **Acts 1:4-8**. And as you’re turning there, if you’re brand new with us, welcome. We’re in a new series this year on the book of Acts, and we’re taking all this spring and all this fall to tackle this book. The reason behind it, in a lot of ways, is to help us as a church family unpack and examine exactly what it means to be the church. What does it mean? What do we do? What’s the point of it?

Last week, Pastor Adam looked at the opening lines of Acts and said that the church at its most basic sense is to be a *witness* to Jesus. That the primary means by which to change the world, to invite all corners of the globe to experience the rule and reign and love of God, is through ordinary people like you and me. Which is wild to think about, right? Jesus could have, you know, stuck around after he rose from the dead and maybe marched up to Caesar and the emperor and said, “Hey remember me? You put me to death? And that didn’t work out too well...so...you gonna bow down to me or what?” He could have done that, sure. But that’s not what Jesus does. He says the primary way the nations will learn about King Jesus is through ordinary people like you and me making His name known. We are God’s Plan A.

So how on earth do we even begin to do that? Acts 1:

Act 1:4-8

4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; **5** for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” **7** He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. **8** But 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.”

So, Jesus just rose from the dead. He’s been hanging out with his disciples for the last 40 days. And he charges them with this world-altering mission. And you gotta imagine, some of these guys might be pretty amped up. But notice what Jesus says in v.4:

Acts 1:4

...he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait...

Huh? You want us to wait?

Jesus is saying in this passage, “Hey, before you go out and tell the world about me, before you help thousands come to faith in me, before many of you die terrible deaths at the hands of your enemies...I want you to wait.” Now I don’t know about you, but that strikes me as a bit strange. Like, if you were a football coach and you just gave the most inspiring, amped-up huddle and your players are bouncing off the walls, you typically right after that go charge the field and play. But Jesus doesn’t do that. He gives them all the hype and then says, “Now slow your roll.”

Now why does Jesus tell them to wait? He says it in v.5 and v.8:

Acts 1:5

“...you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

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.”

Jesus is saying that the Holy Spirit is gonna come soon after He leaves and it's gonna change the game. If they want to be on mission and make God's name known in their city and beyond, it's mission-critical they have the Holy Spirit working in them and through them.

Now when I say the Holy Spirit - I'm talking about the third person of the Trinity, who is God, equal in power and glory to God the Father and God the Son, in every way, who now dwells in us when we profess faith in Jesus. If you wanna dive more into all that theology and what that means, we've got our Scripture Guides you were handed when you walked in as well as a handful of helpful resources mentioned in those footnotes. But all this to say, **He's a very big deal.**

In fact, elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus makes similar statements about how mission-critical it is that his disciples be filled with His Spirit. Check it out:

John 16:7

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”

Check it. Jesus says it's to our advantage that He goes away, so He can send us His Spirit. Or to put it another way, Jesus says it's better for them to have the Spirit than it is for Him to stay with them. Or, as one pastor put it, Jesus is saying: **the Spirit inside you is better than Jesus beside you.** That's what Jesus is saying.

Jesus is convinced in the Gospels and in these verses in Acts that if we don't have His Spirit within us, we will not be able to be effective witnesses. We won't be able to be on mission. We won't be able to endure suffering. We won't be able to do a single thing apart from the person of the Holy Spirit living and working in our lives moment by moment.

Jesus says His Spirit filling us as believers is better than him standing right beside us. He tells his early followers to just sit and wait until they are filled with the Spirit. So to Jesus, his people being filled with His Spirit is a **huge deal**. In fact, I don't know how he could have language it to show how big of a deal it is to him. It's more advantageous for him to be gone, but us filled with His Spirit than it is for us to sit and eat a meal with him, ask him questions, and listen to his answers.

Now I'm just speculating here, but I think a lot of American Christians might just disagree with Jesus on this. Now, of course, no one's gonna say that out loud and say, "I disagree with Jesus." But I think many might. I think if given the choice between a meal with Jesus and being filled with His Spirit, we'd immediately start brainstorming entree ideas. "I guess I'll go with fish because he seems to eat that a lot?"

In fact, **According to a Barna Research study, 60% of American churchgoers say there is no such thing as the Holy Spirit.** That the Holy Spirit is just a symbol for God's power, presence, or purity. That's over half of the average American churchgoers denying that the Spirit is real.

So, what I want to get at is, what might we be missing? What do we not understand from what Jesus says about the Spirit that over half of Americans who claim to be Christian don't even believe the Spirit of God exists? Why is it such a big deal that the Spirit of Christ indwells us as his followers?

So, for the next few minutes, what I want to do is give you a brief crash course on who the Spirit is and what He does.

1. The Holy Spirit is God's presence

The Holy Spirit connects us to the presence of God... or to say it another way, the Holy Spirit makes the presence of God real to us.

John 14:18

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

Matthew 28:20

"...I am with you always, til the very end of the age."

By the Holy Spirit, God becomes present with us. Think about your closest friendships and how you experience the most closeness with them and joy with them when you're hanging out with them. When you do things together. When they're with you and stick it out with you even when you go through difficult seasons of life. For better or for worse. And the Scriptures say that because the Spirit is a person, His presence is in you. The God of the universe, dwelling in you, promises to never leave you or forsake you. For better or for worse. In the highs and the lows. God's Spirit connects us to His person. But it gets better than that because point 2...

2. The Holy Spirit empowers us to know God

God's Spirit empowers us to see and know the truth of Jesus, to know him, understand His teaching, and walk in His ways. So think about this, when you feel convicted over sin, like, you know, when you've done something that doesn't honor the Lord and you know your sin gets in the way of you experiencing deeper intimacy with God and you want to turn away from that sin - that conviction you rightly feel is the Spirit communicating to you and empowering you to know God deeper.

Or think about this, when you read Scripture and there's either a light-bulb moment or you come to understand things about who God is and what He's done in your life - that illumination is the Holy Spirit communicating to you and empowering you to know God more.

When your desire is to go to God in prayer so you can experience deeper abiding with Him, and you desire to live more and more for Him, growing in holiness - that is the Holy Spirit working in you. That's God Himself IN YOU - moving in you so that you might look more like Him. That's the Holy Spirit doing things in you and through you that you could not do on your own.

My boy, Eugene Peterson, says it like this:

"...it is the lived conviction that everything, absolutely everything in the Scriptures is livable. Not just true, but livable. Not just an idea or a cause, but livable in real life. Everything that is revealed in Jesus and the scriptures, the gospel, is there to be lived by ordinary Christians in ordinary times. This is the supernatural core, a lived resurrection and Holy Spirit core, of the Christian life."

In other words, I can look at the Bible and see the types of lives these disciples lived, or read what they're calling me to do; and, apart from His Spirit, it feels like an overwhelming, impossible task. BUT, if I have the Spirit working in and through me - God's power and presence inside of me - then it turns the impossible into possible. **Romans 8:11** talks about how the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead now dwells in us. The same Spirit.

I bet at least some of us in here may be thinking... "I don't know about that. I can't even seem to stop sleeping with my girlfriend or get rid of my anxiety or anger or what have you. Where is this power?"

This is where the Holy Spirit as a person really matters. Here's what I mean: You may not believe it, but back in college I used to go to the gym. One of my roommates and friend, Kyle, was a physical trainer for the football team, and was like, the strongest guy I know. He was one of those dudes who wasn't really tall, but had to buy shirts in XXL so his arms could fit through the sleeves. Like, THAT kind of strong. And we would often go to the gym together, and I knew if I needed the power and the muscle - he was there. I didn't sit down by myself, regulate my breathing, and work my emotions up into a frenzy to channel the power of Kyle. No, when I needed the power to move something heavy that I couldn't lift... I called on him. I called him to come over and give me a hand. And then we'd partner together to move whatever it was that needed moving.

Like, I know that's a bit of a cheesy example, but that's a bit how it is with the Spirit. The Spirit is not just a power, but a personal power... to help us do what we cannot do on our own.

In my life, when I need help because I can't do, or "lift" something...I don't need a philosophy. I don't need a strategy. I don't need insight. I don't need more information about the thing I am trying to lift but cannot. I don't need more mindfulness. I don't need more positive thinking.

I need a person to come help me! I need someone who can lift what I cannot so that something becomes possible that was previously impossible when I was by myself! And when it comes to following Jesus, we cannot possibly do this without a person who has the strength that we don't have, helping us.

And here's the thing...I find that a lot of Christians mostly just have a Christian worldview - a Christian framework for understanding their life and the world around them. And that's good. It's true...and a worldview will work just fine most of the time...until you need a person...until you hit rock bottom...until you get that phone call...until your kid gets that diagnosis...until infertility interrupts your dream...until you've tried every resource imaginable to combat your addiction...until you come to whatever place that is, where you finally find that proverbial stone you're unable to lift...

THAT is when you need the person of God, the power of God in you and with you.

3. The Holy Spirit empowers us to make Him known

This last point brings us back to our passage in Acts this morning:

Acts 1:8

"But 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 empowering presence of God through the Holy Spirit moves us and drives us not only so that *we* might know God, but that the world might know God. God's presence and God's power is too good to keep in - it's meant to go out. The message that God loves the world, that He's made a way to forgive sin; and, now every corner of the world, no matter where you're from or what you've done, is now invited in on this - is too good to keep to ourselves. The Holy Spirit living and working in you now empowers each and everyone of us to go out and make His purposes known wherever we go. And when we say everyone, we mean everyone. Whether you're the most extroverted, social butterfly in the room, or you're the most introverted human being - the Spirit living and working in you now empowers you to go make known the good news of King Jesus through word and deed.

On top of that, the Holy Spirit even now gives each and everyone of us special gifts to use in our church family to help make Jesus known in our city and beyond.

In another one of those "hold up" verses where Jesus talks about His Spirit, he says this:

John 14:12

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father."

Hold up. Wait a minute. Now Jesus is saying that all the stuff you see Him do in His ministry, once his disciples are given His Spirit, they're gonna be able to do...more? We sure about this Jesus? Jesus is talking here about the multiplying effect His ministry will take now that we have His Spirit. Where 2,000 years ago it was just Jesus empowered by His Spirit; now, through His Spirit there are billions of people all over the planet, gifted with different spiritual gifts so that at the name of Jesus every tongue and nation will bow, confessing that Jesus is Lord.

All of us are called to make known the name of Jesus with our words AND some of you are gifted by the Spirit with administration...so use that gift in our church to make Jesus known. Some of you are gifted with generosity, some of you with hospitality, and some of you are gifted with prayer in a greater way than the rest of us...all of us are called to work together, to exercise our gifts together so that we might invite people into this life-altering, world-changing message: that God loves you, and He is calling you to follow His way.

We can't do this on our own. It's too big for us, but the Spirit now empowers us; and, God is inviting us to partner with Him to help move the world forward because He loves us. He doesn't need us but because He loves us, He wants us to experience the joy of making His love known to the world. **And what's wild, let's connect the dots from points 1, 2, and 3. The more I make His name known, the more I experience His presence; and, the more I experience His presence, the more empowered I am to live the Christian life; and, the more I'm empowered to live the Christian life, the more empowered I am to make His name known.**

This is a silly illustration, but I think of one of my kids, Sawyer. The other day I got home, my car's dirty, and he's hanging out inside the house. And I said, "Hey man, I could really use your help out here." He lights up. He's like, "Oh, Dad needs me," and he runs outside. And I hand him the garden hose with the spray gun - and he's five - so he thinks it's the coolest thing in the world. And I say, "Dude, I could really use your help cleaning this car off. Will you help me?" He gets the biggest smile on his face and starts spraying the car down, like, "Dad look! I'm doing it! I'm being helpful!" And I'm just hanging back smiling while he just has a blast spraying all the dirt off the car. Then after 10-15 minutes it's all done, and the rest of the day he's beaming when he looks outside and sees our clean car in the driveway. And I say, "Yeah man, look at what we did."

Now - could I have done that on my own? Of course. But to see my son do something that I called him to do and to give him the means to do it, then to see the joy on his face, man, that brings me so much delight in return. There's a deeper camaraderie and relationship that my son and I have now because I've invited him and empowered him to do something with me.

And I know all analogies break down at some point, but in a lot of ways this is what God is calling us to as we're on mission, fueled by His Spirit. Can God do it on His own? Of course. But he's inviting us in on this. He wants us to know the joy of being empowered by His Spirit to know Him and make Him known in our lives and the lives of others.

And **this is what the disciples do** from here on out in the book of Acts and in the New Testament. We'll look at it more closely next week, but Jesus delivers on the promise of the Spirit not too long after. And everything we see the disciples do in Acts is made possible through the empowering presence of God the Spirit working in them. So they're able to teach boldly, and they're able to delegate and lead wisely, and they're able to communicate the gospel clearly, and sometimes they're able to say a word of prophecy - which we'll talk about later in the series - and sometimes, they share the gospel right away and people immediately become Christians and sometimes it doesn't happen. Sometimes they pray to escape prison and it happens, and other times in the New Testament it doesn't. And sometimes they're able to pray a prayer of healing - and sometimes God answers those prayers right away and sometimes he doesn't. But the point is, the Spirit is on the move through them and now some 2,000 years removed from this story, on the other side of the world, that same Spirit is now on the move in us and with us.

And what would happen if we saw God's divine presence at work in us and through us wherever we go?

- What would it change tomorrow if we knew God wanted to use us? Wherever we go, that God wanted to use...YOU?

When you head into work, if you knew the personal, empowering presence of God was going into work with you and was going before you, and HE wanted to use you in the interactions and conversations you have with your coworkers so that you would advance His kingdom, would you pray for those opportunities more? Would you have a sense of expectation? Would you be a little more observant? Would you keep your eyes up looking for where He might want you to engage? A person to talk to? A need to meet?

I know that type of thing seems so out of the ordinary for many of us, but I can't help but wonder how ordinary it might become if we actually believed that this is who God is...and had an expectation for it.

But, let me bring it down even further...

- What would it change about the way you pray? What would it change about what you pray for?
- What would it change about the way you come into LifeGroup on Tuesday night? Might you actually expect him to use you to speak a prophetic, encouraging word to someone else there? Might you actually expect Him to want to move and grow and transform you and the people you're with during that time?
- What would it change about you to walk into your house after a long day's work to know that the Holy Spirit was in you and with you to gift you, lead you, guide you, and help you engage with your family?

All the stuff we are ultimately after as a church - salvation, lives transformed, people delivered from brokenness and slavery to sin to wholeness and freedom - all of that is not stuff that we accomplish through the work of our hands - through strategy or program. Not that our faithfulness doesn't matter - it certainly does - but that is a spiritual thing only the Spirit can do - that is **a spiritual weight that only the Spirit can lift.**

And I'd love for you to catch a vision for that with me, for a moment...of course, that includes more people here on Sundays and more LifeGroups and more baptisms...but, what if it also includes more marriages being healed, and more people obsessively obsessed with their appearance able to find freedom and be equally present with the social elite and the poorest of the poor.

So, for this morning, for this series, for us as a church family...let's step into this. Let's pray some big prayers and ask the Spirit to move.

Because if what Jesus says is true - that the Spirit within us is better than Jesus beside us - then let's embrace that together. Let's sing knowing that it's only the Spirit that can change our hearts. Let's pray knowing that it's only the Spirit that can work in the hearts of those around us. Let's invite Him in and ask Him to work for our good and for the good of the world.