
Holy Spirit Gives Gifts

Acts 2:1-21

¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” ¹²Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

¹³Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

¹⁴Then Peter 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. ¹⁵These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

**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.**

**¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.**

**¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.**

**²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious
day of the Lord.**

**²¹ And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”**

THE FESTIVAL OF PENTECOST

The year was 1900, in Germany, a young family prepared to celebrate Pentecost. On Saturday, they picked out the tree—a birch tree—and brought it inside for decoration. They helped the congregation put up their birch tree in church. On Sunday, Mom woke up at 4 AM to start meat and potatoes. And by 6 AM, the

whole family was at the park for the city band concert. “*Come, Holy Ghost,*” they roared. Then it was off to worship on Sunday and Monday with a feast afterward. They celebrated Pentecost the way we celebrate Christmas. Interesting, right? How will you celebrate Pentecost?

Pentecost is the third major festival in the church calendar. At each festival, we get a gift from a different person of our triune God. Christmas is the festival of God the Father, who so loved the world that he gave us his one and only Son. Easter is the festival of God the Son, who gave up his life for us and rose victorious for our forgiveness. Pentecost is the festival of God the Holy Spirit, so today, our theme is

THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES GIFTS.

What gifts does he give? Well, we could talk about many, but today we’ve got time to focus on three. The Spirit gives us 1) Outer Power, 2) Inner Joy, and 3) A Team. By learning about the Holy Spirit’s gifts, we’ll know how to celebrate Pentecost, and it won’t involve cutting down birch trees.

OUTER POWER

The first one is outer power. Picture the Christians on Pentecost. It’s about 50 days after Easter, ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven. What have they been doing? Waiting. Jesus told them to remain in Jerusalem until I send the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us they were sitting in a house. And then the Spirit brought them power from outside. **Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. (Acts 2:2)** A violent wind is

one of the most potent forces in the world. Wind has destroyed entire cities, wind energy powers entire cities. If you've ever stepped outside during a tornado or hurricane, you've felt that power. On Pentecost, nothing was destroyed because it was just the *sound* of a violent wind, but the power was evident. And that power came from outside of the people. It wasn't a psychological experience that happened inside a person's mind—they all heard it. And it wasn't even from within the world. It says, "**a wind came from heaven.**" The Holy Spirit gives us power from outside ourselves.

That truth puts us on a collision course with our culture. Individualistic westerners think that power comes from within. The world says problems are out there, and solutions are in here. The Bible says the issues are in here, and the answer is God's power which comes from out there, actually up there.

A famous therapist, Lori Gottlieb, used to promote her services by saying, "I'll help you with things you'd like to change about yourself." But recently, she changed her pitch. So many people no longer believe they have problems in themselves. Instead, they think that their situation is the problem or other people are the problem, so she now promotes her work by saying, "I'll help you learn how to deal with difficult people in your life." The world assumes we have inner power. The Bible says we need outer power.

A perfect illustration of that is today's first lesson when Ezekiel saw a valley of dry bones. That's the human condition. By nature, bones have no intrinsic power to come to life, and we have no inherent ability to solve our biggest problems. We are

spiritually dead. I cannot, by my own thinking or choosing, believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him. But the bones come to life when the breath of God comes. In Hebrew, the word for breath is also the word for spirit. The Spirit of God has power outside of us, out of this world, to help us with the problems we were born with. That is a truth far more honest than our culture's idea and far more hopeful. You can't do anything to change someone else's heart, and you can't do anything to change your own heart—the Holy Spirit gives you power from outside of yourself. That's what he did on Pentecost.

You see it in Peter. Before Pentecost, he denied knowing Jesus. Then after Easter, he didn't know what to do. After Pentecost, he becomes such a fearless preacher that he would rather take repeated beatings, rather go to his death, than betray his Jesus. So, the Spirit gives outer power to you too.

INNER JOY

The Spirit also gives inner joy, which you can see from another sign that happened on Pentecost. **They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:3-4)** Fire was closely associated with God's presence. In the Old Testament, when God appeared to Abraham, he appeared as a burning pot. When he appeared to Moses, a burning bush; to the children of Israel, a pillar of fire. When he came to Elijah on Mount Carmel, he sent fire. Visually, the Spirit of God often looked like fire. And on Pentecost, that presence of God came intimately to each one of the disciples. It didn't destroy them or scorch them as

it had in the old days. It filled them with the Holy Spirit and with joy inside of them.

That's what we prayed for when we recited Psalm 51, and we'll sing it again after the sermon. We said, **"Take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of your salvation."** (Psalm 51:11-12) Of course, the Holy Spirit will not do or undo the work of salvation. That's been accomplished. Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead. It's a recorded fact of history, whether you believe it or not. But the Holy Spirit gives us a subjective experience. He gives us joy that comes from knowing the facts about Jesus. The job of the Holy Spirit is to take the idea of salvation and put it into your heart so you can have inner joy.

Here's an illustration. A man and his wife had a Saturday morning tradition of going to the car lot and checking out the new cars. They could discuss their favorites, appreciate craftsmanship, and daydream about what it would be like to have this or that one. The husband had been admiring the new red truck, the curve of the hood, the bells and whistles inside. "You like that one, don't you, honey." "Yeah!" And she tosses him the keys with a little bow on top. "It's yours." That car's always been beautiful, but now it's *his*. His eyes light up, his heart swells. That's what the Holy Spirit does when he takes the objective beauty of the gospel—Jesus loved the world, and he gave himself up for it—and he makes it yours.

You have been baptized. God wanted you, such as you are, in his family. Eyes grow wide. While you were still in your sins, Christ died for *you*, of all people, even you. Heart swells. Scholars at Princeton Divinity school know way more about Jesus than any of us, but they don't *have* Jesus because they don't believe it. By a

miracle, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you do. Lord, take not your Holy Spirit from me, but restore to me the joy of your salvation!

The inner joy of salvation is kind of like being drunk. At Pentecost, the disciples were ecstatically proclaiming their happiness, and the skeptics thought they were drunk. But, of course, they weren't drunk. They were filled with the Spirit, which is similar because both make you joyful and fearless. But in different ways. When you're drunk, you are joyful and fearless because you are stupid. You don't remember the realities of your everyday life. The Holy Spirit does the opposite. He makes you joyful and fearless because you are fully aware of reality. Reality is that God loves you. The creator and redeemer of the world loves you. If he's on your side, what could you possibly need to fear? Inner joy comes from the Holy Spirit.

A TEAM

The Holy Spirit gives outer power, inner joy, and finally, a team. Did you notice that it wasn't just Peter who was filled with the Holy Spirit? And it wasn't just the Apostles. It said, **"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit."** (Acts 2:4) Well, how do we know it wasn't just all the apostles? Because Peter said so. He said, **"This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 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. ¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men, and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy."** You see men and women, young and old, even servants prophesy. In short, *all people* are on the Holy Spirit's team.

We should say, the Bible teaches in many places that authoritative teaching in public worship should come from mature Christian men like elders and pastors. So we're not saying every person is the pastor of a church. But "prophecy" does not mean delivering a sermon—and thank the Holy Spirit that pastors aren't the only ones on our team! To prophecy means to tell about God. Pre-schoolers do that when they sing "Jesus Loves Me," and so do their moms. Teenagers do that when they let their light shine for their peers, and so do their great-grandpas. So all of us are on the team. And our sport is sharing joy by telling about God to one person and then another.

Oh, and there's one more person on the team—the Holy Spirit. He's out there right now, bringing joy, telling about Jesus, putting faith in people's hearts. He's going to get his work done. And he wants you to join him. He's made us a team.

HOW WILL YOU CELEBRATE?

Those are three gifts from the Holy Spirit, outer power, inner joy, and a team. So how will you celebrate? We haven't cut down any birch trees, and we don't have a potluck. So how about this? Today, tap into power outside of yourself by listening less to your thoughts and more to what God says about you. Today, experience inner joy by believing that God loves you. Today, join the Spirit's team by looking for ways to share your joy with someone the Holy Spirit is already working on. The Holy Spirit has given us some fantastic gifts. Let's play with them.

Amen.