

A Spirit Empowered Church

Bethany Assembly of God

Pentecost Sunday

5/28/2023

Central Proposition: We can be a Spirit-empowered church.

Introduction

It was 50 days after the Passover and the disciples were waiting in Jerusalem, just like Jesus said they should. After His resurrection, He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and he told them to wait for the Promise of the Father, the baptism in the Holy Spirit. So, for a week or so, they waited. I'm sure they were excited. After all, Jesus rose from the dead! They may have been confident. Many of the apostles didn't have any trouble being confident while Jesus was alive, even when they shouldn't have been so confident in themselves. Maybe they were anxious to get started telling people about the risen Lord, but they were obediently waiting.

Jesus knew they would need more than good intentions for what He was asking them to do. Their good intentions had failed Him before. They were going to need more than their own enthusiasm, ambition, and good ideas. He wasn't asking them to start a new religious sect; He was sending them to proclaim the resurrection and plant the Church all over the world. They were going to be agents that would change history and the way the world works.

Some of them probably felt a bit sheepish. Peter denied Jesus three times. Thomas doubted that Jesus was resurrected. One of the twelve had betrayed Jesus; how did they not see that coming? Only one of them had the courage not to run away even after Jesus warned them and encouraged them concerning His death. What would overcome this weakness? How was God going to use this bunch to proclaim the good news and change the world? See **Acts 2:1–4**.

Maybe you feel sheepish, unable, weak, or passive. Maybe you even feel ashamed for past failures to stand up for the Lord or share your faith. Today, I'm encouraged to tell you that you can be part of a spirit-empowered church. It's not all up to you. It's not all up to you because God wants to do in your life what He did in the disciples' lives on the original day of Pentecost: baptize you in the Holy Spirit. And, He has placed you in a church that can be empowered by the Spirit to continue telling the world the good news about Jesus.

In the past, we've talked about how the purpose of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is to empower us for witness. God is working in your life, and you should be looking for that, expecting it. But the Holy Spirit is also working in us and through us collectively, as a church.

The Holy Spirit not only gives boldness to witness in a direct, one on one manner, He also gives gifts through which the church is built up and accomplishes her mission for the Kingdom of God. You can see this trend coming throughout the pages of Scripture. Joel 2:28-29 was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost.

God said He was going to broaden the group who could experience His empowering presence. It wouldn't just be priests and prophets, but anyone who would call on God. Jesus was

the beginning of this process and demonstrated what a Spirit empowered life looks like. See **Luke 4:18-19**.

Jesus' own ministry, though He is the Son of God, was empowered by the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus relied on throughout His life on earth. And after Jesus died for us and was resurrected, He promised to send the Holy Spirit. See **Acts 1:8**.

That took place on the Day of Pentecost and that baptism in the Spirit was like a gateway to the gifts the Holy Spirit gave to empower the Church to carry out the Mission of God. The apostle Paul wrote about these gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14 as well as Romans 12.

Paul goes on to describe a variety of spiritual gifts, some obviously supernatural in nature, some oriented around teaching, and some that are service oriented. On Wednesdays, we're taking a close look at the gifts of the Spirit and I encourage you to join us this summer for that study that I am praying will be instrumental in helping us develop our practice of spiritual gifts and become a more Spirit-empowered Church.

I share all of that to demonstrate God's longstanding purpose to empower His people and His Church. This is God's promise and His plan both for our growth and for the spread of the gospel. And since this is what God wants, we can say with confidence that **we can be a Spirit-empowered church**. We shouldn't think of the Holy Spirit's empowering work as something for super spiritual people or only certain churches. God wants to empower you and to empower this church. He wants to give us power beyond our own talent and experience for His Kingdom. But as with all things related to God's purpose, He expects a response and He wants us to cooperate. How do we do that?

1. Wait for it. (Watch 'til the end.)

Have you ever wanted to show someone something, maybe like a cool trick or a science experiment of some kind and you could tell that they were losing interest, so you said, "Wait for it...wait for it!" Or maybe you've sent someone a video and something unexpected happens near the end and so you captioned the video "Watch 'til the end."

I think if Jesus were recording the story of Peter's discipleship and how he became an apostle, He would probably caption the video, "Watch 'til the end." You might put up with some of Peter's missteps, but when you get to the part where he denies Jesus three times after declaring his devotion to Jesus and after Jesus had warned him, you're probably turning that movie off. But I can imagine Jesus saying, "Wait for it. Wait for it. Watch 'til the end," because on the day of Pentecost, after Jesus poured out the Spirit on His followers, Peter stood up in front of a crowd and in earshot of the religious leaders he had been so afraid of and preached the gospel with such power that 3,000 people believed in Jesus that day.

Wait for it. Jesus had told His disciples to wait for it. See **Acts 1:4**. We can be a Spirit-empowered church and that starts with waiting for it.

When God told the disciples to wait for the promise of the Father, they obeyed Him, remaining in Jerusalem and seeking God in His Word and in prayer together. It was an active waiting, involving faith in the meantime, and I encourage you to take advantage of the many opportunities we have to pray together: Wednesday nights, Thursday over the noon hour, Saturday evening, Second Sunday at Six, or one of our special prayer services throughout the year. These are opportunities for us to wait with expectation for the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Our waiting should be responsive as well. When we're gathered in church, we should be responsive to God and His Word. We should respond in worship and prayer. But I would specifically encourage you to be responsive at the end of the service. Don't resist. Be swift to respond in prayer, waiting on the Lord.

And that ties into another element of waiting on the Lord, which is perseverance. Sometimes, we need to linger, to press in. Be responsive. Be in His presence, waiting with expectation for what He wants to do in us by His Holy Spirit.

2. Expect it.

When you are baptized in the Spirit and walking in the Spirit, there should be a sense of expectation that the Holy Spirit is going to work through you. He may nudge us to talk to someone about our faith or to pray for someone. He may prompt us to encourage someone or to be generous and meet someone's need. He may push us in unexpected ways, maybe even in ways that make us feel awkward or uncomfortable. He *is* the Holy Spirit, is it surprising that He would want to push us beyond our comfort zone?

The expectation we should have as Spirit-led believers is faith that causes us to look for the leadership and prompting of the Spirit. Being led by the Spirit and prompted by the Spirit and used by the Holy Spirit should be normal for us. We should expect gifts of the Spirit.

When we come to faith in Christ, we are made new. This is a total change of perspective. It's no longer religion; now, you're on mission for Jesus. Your devotion isn't partial; it's total. See **Acts 2:43-47**. This was a result of the work of the Spirit among them. Their entire expectation about life changed. Their perspective was totally different. There was an expectation that God was with them, would meet their needs, and would fuel their growth. They were looking for it. When the Holy Spirit is working in the church, it should change our expectations. We should expect to see His work and be used by Him.

Do you expect the Holy Spirit to use you? Do you expect Him to give you gifts and empower your ministry? It could be that your lack of expectation – your lack of faith – is part of what is hindering His work in your life.

3. Practice it.

We need to practice putting ourselves in positions where the Holy Spirit can empower us for service. God promised to pour out His Spirit on all kinds of people. So, we shouldn't think that it's just for an elite group, for people with a title or for especially charismatic people. The promise is for everyone and when we receive it, we should walk in it and practice it.

See **Acts 6:1-10** and notice a few things with me. First, they were selecting people to distribute food to help keep unity in the Church. That wasn't the job with the spotlight. In fact, you could even interpret what the apostles said as demeaning, that they shouldn't neglect God's Word to serve tables, but it wasn't demeaning. They wanted men full of the Spirit and wisdom. Whatever your place of service, you should be full of the Holy Spirit.

Second, notice how Stephen's ministry expanded from serving tables. He was doing signs and wonders and speaking with authority. How? He was in a position for the Spirit to work and he allowed the Spirit to work through him. He didn't ignore the Spirit because he wasn't an apostle and he practiced the gifts in this new area of ministry that had opened to him to great effect.

The Holy Spirit gives a wide variety of gifts to a wide variety of people, and He wants us to practice those gifts. The Bible mentions prophecy, teaching, service, generosity, healing, encouragement, mercy, leadership, faith, and more.

Since the Holy Spirit gives such a variety of gifts and the Bible says He gives gifts to everyone, you should practice them. Practice the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives according to the faith that He gives you.

4. Unite Around It.

The final way we can cooperate with the work of the Spirit is to unite around it. This has to do with how we use the gifts. 1 Corinthians 13 was originally written about how a church was using spiritual gifts and calling on them to use them in love for one another. As our Pastors were recently praying together, one of them prayed for unity. As they were praying, I began to think about how Jesus taught His disciples to be unified and love one another, see **John 13:35**.

Their love for one another would lead to unity and their unity would lead to accomplishing Jesus' mission. The world will know that we are His disciples when we love one another. The Spiritual Gifts are given to minister to one another and to the world out of love. We can have a love that leads to unity that leads to mission.

The Gifts of the Spirit are not disconnected from loving each other or from our mission to make disciples. They are intertwined. The Spirit wants to give each one of us gifts that both build the Church and reach the unsaved with the Gospel. These goals go hand in hand and the Holy Spirit empowers both.

Conclusion

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is the gate to experiencing these gifts. It opens the door to the things the Holy Spirit wants to do to empower us. Often, people have all kinds of questions about specifics, like, “Can’t someone be used by the Holy Spirit without being baptized in the Holy Spirit.” Maybe they can. I’m not here to put rules around God. However, the story of the early Church in Acts seems to demonstrate the pattern that people were baptized in the Holy Spirit with the initial, physical evidence of speaking in a language they didn’t learn or understand, and then the Holy Spirit began working among them, empowering them with gifts that made the mission of Jesus successful. If that’s the case, why wouldn’t we want to open that door for the Spirit to work in our lives?