

The True Purpose of Pentecostal Power

Anxiety, fear, doubt. Having experienced the myriad emotions accompanying the awe of Jesus' earthly ministry, His heart-wrenching crucifixion and triumphant resurrection, the apostles found themselves in the last moments with their soon-to-be-ascended Savior. They anxiously awaited some grand blueprint for their lives. "What will happen in His absence?" their minds surely questioned.

Previously, outside of Christ's presence, the apostles were pitiful. They were crippled by fear in a boat as a storm raged. They failed to cast out a demon from a mute boy. They fell asleep after Jesus went away to pray in the garden. When questioned by authorities, the most loyal even refused to acknowledge his relationship with his beloved Messiah (Matthew 14:22; Mark 9:14–29; Luke 22:39–46; John 18:15–18). Yes, their lousy track record when away from Jesus gave plenty of reason for worry. Will His return to heaven leave them so powerless *and purposeless* once again?

Calming their raging thoughts, Jesus reminded His followers of the promise He spoke of so frequently—the gift of God's Holy Spirit—who would come to enable His followers to continue His mission in even greater and mightier ways (John 14:12). Indeed, the same Spirit that empowered Jesus's ministry would also give power to this otherwise powerless people (see Acts 1:4–8; Romans 8:11). "Wait here for the promise," Jesus instructed. "You will be baptized with the Holy *will* receive power ... And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:5; 8, emphasis added).

"Be my witnesses." This was the great purpose that the disciples awaited. A witness, as defined today, is one who

experiences something and then shares about his or her experience. In other words, in Acts 1:8, Jesus commissions us to simply share the stories of our transformation.

The Greatest Evidence of Spirit Baptism

Undoubtedly, the book of Acts models some incredible experiences in the Spirit. It's the beginning of the "tongues" phenomenon, and largely, the ability of everyday Christians to engage in deliverance and healing. While these manifestations are crucial, they were never intended to be as some have made them—the greatest evidence of Spirit baptism. This point is crucial for the respect of the Pentecostal experience into the future: The ultimate purpose of power is not for mere emotions, such as goose bumps or flighty revelation. No, any accompanying power and manifestations are always for the greater purpose to continue the ministry of Jesus beyond ourselves.

Let's use the five stories of Spirit baptism within Acts to review this.

On the Day Pentecost (Acts 2)

Gathered in an upper room, the Holy Spirit descended upon more than 120 believers in dramatic fashion. Yes, this first instance of Spirit baptism was evidenced with incredible manifestations, such as wind, fire and tongues. But these believers did not remain in this phenomenon as if they'd reached some pinnacle of spirituality. Instead, they knew as Jesus instructed: first comes the Spirit, then comes power and then comes purpose. And these new believers were bent on using this power to fulfill Christ's commission.

Peter might be the best example of Pentecost's effect on an individual. Remember that Peter was the one who, for the sake of his reputation, denied Jesus three times. But freshly baptized with the Spirit, this experience propelled Peter to rise up and speak out in a way that welcomed more than three

thousand people into the Kingdom of God in a single day. The great evidence of this newfound Pentecostal power in Peter's life was that he was no longer characterized by fear of man, but by an insatiable desire to be a witness to Christ.

On the Samaritans (Acts 8)

Like in Jerusalem, those in Samaria experienced their own day of Pentecost. Acts records that Peter and John were sent to Samaritan believers who had just previously accepted Christ through the preaching of Philip. As the two apostles laid their hands upon the people, the Spirit descended in a such tangible way that a man named Simon inquired how much money he could give in order to experience the same. "Give me also this power," he implored, "so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:19). While the apostles rebuked Simon for attempting to purchase the power, he did at least immediately understand that the purpose of this power was not to be contained, but to be shared.

On Paul (Acts 9)

Most of us are familiar with Paul's story. On the road to Damascus, this Christian persecutor was knocked to the ground from an encounter with the risen Christ that changed his course, but left him temporarily blind.

While Paul was blinded, the Lord instructed a disciple named Ananias to find Paul and lay hands upon him in order to heal his eyesight. Ananias did as the Lord instructed, and in an instant Paul was healed and filled with the Spirit. With this, Paul could not be silent, but began to preach Jesus as the Son of God. The greatest result of Paul's spirit empowerment was his ongoing fervor to preach the gospel and create disciples.

On the Gentiles (Acts 10)

Possibly the most controversial Pentecost experience happened to the Gentiles. The disciples argued whether or not God's

Spirit could possibly reside within those with no history with Israel's God. Yet Peter reported back to the Jerusalem church that as he began to preach, the "Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning," evidenced by speaking in tongues and praising God (Acts 10:46; 11:15). The real evidence of power, however, isn't in whatever came out of their mouths, but in what happened next. The Gentile church grew dramatically, which prompted Paul to make it the focus of His ministry. From this, the faith spread far and wide, creating a movement of which most of us today are the products.

On the Ephesians (Acts 19)

Acts records the fifth and final Pentecost experience upon some Ephesians. While in Ephesus, Paul happened upon a group of eleven disciples and asked, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" "No," they replied, "we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." With this, Paul baptized them in the name of Jesus, and then laid hands upon them so that they would receive the Spirit. As a result, the Ephesians began to prophesy and speak in tongues.

Like all the others we've reviewed, the story doesn't end with this experience. These disciples were so moved that Paul remained with the church in Ephesus for two years. The largest miracle is that what began with eleven disciples grew into a Spirit-filled church so empowered that these believers got the word of the Lord out to all who dwelt in Asia (Acts 19:10).

To Be Continued ... by You!

As we've seen, the book of Acts begins with Christ's commission to be filled with power in order to be His witnesses. The remainder of the book chronicles this mission, made possible by this power, through Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. But the book closes with Paul imprisoned in Rome, obviously short of "the ends of the earth." Surely Luke knew

the rest of the story, so why didn't he share it?

Many believe the answer lies in a literary technique used in those days, which leaves off the ending in order that the reader continue the story in his or her life. It's important to see the significance of this! The sixth group that is to experience its own "Day of Pentecost" is us. Like those in the early Church, you and I are also tasked with this experience. That is, we are to pursue a baptism of the Spirit and expect its accompanying power in order to be witnesses—to share our stories of transformation—to the ends of the earth.

Don't set the goal of your Spirit baptism simply on manifestations of power, as awesome as they are. Determine that your encounter propel you into the purpose of continuing the mission of Jesus, in your own ways, to the ends of the earth.

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