

The Holy Spirit in Acts

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- [0 : 0 0] So I'm going to read a variety of passages from Acts chapter 1 and 2 to think about how the church begins.
- So we'll begin in Acts chapter 1, verses 4 to 8. On one occasion, while Jesus was eating with the apostles, he gave them this command.
- Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you've heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.
- So when they met together, they asked him, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them, it is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.
- And then if we flick over to chapter 2, we'll read verses 1 to 4 first of all. And then verse 16 and 17.
- [1 : 3 5] As Peter draws the crowd's attention to the prophet Joel, and he says what happens can be explained by what was spoken by the prophet Joel.
- 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.
- Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs of the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke.
- The sun will return to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.
- And then finally, for us now, we'll look from verse 32 to 39. And we read there, God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.
- [2 : 3 5] Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.
- Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this. God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, Brothers, what shall we do?
- Peter replied, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call.

So we'll leave our reading there. We're thankful to God that we can hear the word that the Spirit inspired. We're going to think about those passages and one or two others as we begin this new series, where we think about the Holy Spirit in a believer's life, and particularly the Holy Spirit in the life of the church.

So, why a series on the Holy Spirit? Two reasons. One is that you hear, you know, if you read Christian books, anything to do with the Trinity, the Spirit is often described as the forgotten member of the Trinity.

[4 : 07] There is that appreciation that we can easily lose a sense that the Spirit is personal, that he has a distinct work in a Christian life and in the church.

And so I hope, as we spend a few weeks thinking about the Holy Spirit's work, it will be encouraging for us to see how the Spirit actively and personally works in and for us.

And I think, too, we always need that constant reminder that the Spirit serves as the glue that binds a Christian to Jesus Christ.

So we'll be remembering time and again that we need the work of the Holy Spirit to reveal Jesus to us, to apply the work of Jesus to us, and to keep showing us more of the glory of both the Father and the Son, to help us in our worship.

But also, it seems important in the time that we find ourselves to recognise that just as we are bound to Jesus, he is the head of the church, so we are bound in Christ and by the Spirit to one another.

[5 : 17] And so I hope that this will be a way to strengthen our appreciation of our fellowship, that even though social distancing is separating us, still we are bound together by the Spirit of Christ in his church.

And so we begin today thinking about the Holy Spirit and the life of the church for that reason. I have three things to say, and one book to recommend if you find that you've got lots of time on your hand.

George Smeaton, a free church professor, I think he was, back in the 19th century, wrote a book on the Holy Spirit, which I have been slowly working through. It's an excellent book. I've got some quotes from him for everybody's benefit.

First thing to say, the Spirit is at work in the founding of the church. The Spirit's there right in the beginning. That's Acts chapter 1. Here's Smeaton.

The great work of the Spirit is called the church. So the Spirit is actively involved in establishing the church. So we've read there, Acts chapter 1, verses 4 and 5.

[6 : 26] Jesus' words to the apostles, Wait in Jerusalem until you receive the gift my Father promised. What was that gift? Well, we know from the Old Testament and from Jesus' words, the gift he has in mind is the Holy Spirit.

And that's why Peter, when he preaches, draws the crowd's attention to the promise of Joel in the Old Testament that's now being fulfilled. We can also think of the words connected to the New Covenant in Ezekiel 36, verse 26.

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. So there was this promise from the Father of the Holy Spirit that would come on the people of God.

And so Jesus tells the apostles they are to wait in Jerusalem until they are baptised with the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus promised.

And you remember John the Baptist said, I baptise with water, but one who is among you baptises with the Holy Spirit and with fire, speaking of Jesus. If we take a step back, think about Jesus' baptism, which was for him the beginning of his public ministry.

[7 : 39] What do we see? So we hear the voice of God, this is my son who I love. What do we see? We see God the Spirit come down on Jesus as a dove.

Jesus does ministry in the power of the Spirit. And so now here, as the church is formed, and they're told to wait for ministry to begin, what are they waiting for?

They're waiting for that same Holy Spirit to come on them. The same Spirit in Christ would be the same Spirit in the apostles.

And that's the same Spirit in the same Spirit of Christ is in us, is in the members of Buclue, is in Christians, whoever we are, if our faith is in Jesus.

Again, to take a step back, Jesus, the night before he died, in John's Gospel, king and head of the church, Jesus said, in John chapter 16, verse 7, it is good for you that I am going away.

[8 : 45] Unless I go, so Jesus is thinking about his going, unless I go, the counsellor, the comforter, will not come to you. And then, in John chapter 14, Jesus has already said, I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you.

So notice there, Jesus departing, and Jesus coming, are joined together. How are they joined together? They're joined together with a promise that Jesus would save the Spirit.

It's the Spirit of Christ, who comes to dwell in the church. And it's the Spirit of Christ, that will enable and empower the church in ministry.

So in Acts chapter 2, we read, the church comes into existence at Pentecost. The gift of the Spirit is given. The gift promised by the Father, promised by the Son, arrives.

And then they get that ability to speak in other languages, and instantly, Peter is preaching, because the Spirit wants to share the glory of Jesus, the good news of the Gospel, with other people.

[9 : 51] And what we see, is that that same Spirit, that enables the apostles to preach, enables Peter to preach, it convicts and convinces the crowd of the message of the Gospel.

They believe that Jesus really is the Son of God, He really was sent by God, demonstrated to be the Saviour by His miracles, and that He was handed over by God's foreknowledge, and they, in their sin, had killed Him, but God raised Him.

And the Spirit, by His Word, by the preaching of the Word, builds 3,000 into the Church.

Every single person who is baptised that day, 3,000, showing they identify with Jesus, every single one of them receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The great work of the Spirit is called the Church. The Spirit reveals Jesus as the Son of God, reveals Him as the risen Lord and Saviour.

[11 : 00] It's the Spirit who causes us to be born again. So we can say that if we're part of God's Church, that that's only because the Spirit has opened our eyes to see our sin and our need, to see Jesus as good, to see Jesus as Saviour, and to look to Him in faith.

The Spirit welds us in and unites us to Christ. And then we are united together as a Church by faith. So the Spirit is at work in the founding of the Church.

I'd sort of connected, but building on that, let's say, secondly, that the Spirit is the bond uniting the Church to Christ.

How can we say, as sometimes we do, I belong to the Church? That's not about the fact that we happen to go to a shared location, that we share proximity, and that we take part in religious practices.

And that's good news for us, because those things have been taken from us temporarily, but that does not mean we stop being the Church. It doesn't mean we stop being the people of God. What the Bible says is that God is building His Church, Christ is building His Church, and He sends the Spirit as that cement that unites us to Christ.

[12 : 30] So as Jesus builds His Church, the Spirit is at work. And we're going to turn this time to 1 Corinthians chapter 3. I just want to read a couple of verses there, in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, where Paul is using the picture of the Church as a temple-building project.

And there in 1 Corinthians 3, in verse 10, we read, And then he goes to talk about, with Jesus as the foundation, there's various materials that can be used.

Some of those are good and will last. Some of those are not and will not last. But then verse 16, Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

So here is Paul the Apostle. He's saying, I've laid in Corinth the foundation for the Church, which is Christ. Christ as cornerstone, Christ as foundation.

The Gospel is what the Church is built on. And then he uses this image that the Church is like a temple-building project.

[13 : 57] And it's Jesus' project. And the only way to build the Church is on Jesus and His Word. But then the finished article there in verse 16 is that we become a temple in which God's Spirit lives.

That's a wonderful image of the Church. The Spirit of God lives in us. Again, we are seeing here that we become part of the Church only by having saving faith in Jesus.

So the Spirit calls us to believe. The Spirit binds us to Jesus. Christ comes to us by His Spirit in us. And we become part of this temple-building project.

So here's the amazing truth for you to consider. Maybe you're in your sitting room. Maybe you're in your kitchen. Maybe you're in your bedroom. But here is this wonderful image. Now just as in the Old Testament, where did God choose to dwell?

On the earth, He chose to dwell in the temple. And what we see regularly at the temple is that the cloud of God's glory filled that temple.

[15 : 07] But now in the New Testament, God chooses to live in His people. God chooses us, the Church, as His temple.

And so we are filled, as Christians, with the Spirit of glory. So the Holy Spirit joins us to Christ as the foundation. The Holy Spirit joins us to Jesus as the head of the Church.

So from top to bottom, beginning to end, whether we're together or whether we're apart, we are one body, one temple, where Christ lives by His Spirit.

And the last thing to say about the Spirit of the Church for today is that the Spirit is at work in the worship of the Church. I think it's important for us to recognise this as we live in strange days for a few weeks.

You know, we can worship in our pyjamas, which isn't normal. On a Sunday, we are finding that this virus is restricting our shared worship.

[16 : 18] And we weren't able to have a Lord's Supper last week. We have no services. So it's important for us to see that we are still a worshipping people and the Spirit is at work as we worship.

And again, one of the things I hope will come out of this time of isolation and distance is that it will make you and I long for shared worship, to long for community and fellowship as the people of God.

It's one of those things that sometimes we don't always appreciate what we've got until what we've got is gone. So I hope whenever we get the chance to come back, we'll come back with a new appreciation of the privilege of being able to worship.

Certainly for me this week, I've also been thinking about having a new appreciation for the struggles of the persecuted church. Thinking about stories of believers who are isolated permanently and they cannot worship with anybody else and they dare not share their faith because they don't know who to trust.

They don't know whether if they talk to someone about Jesus, they'll get reported to the authorities, thrown in prison or killed. And so ours is temporary. And still, thanks to technology, we can still worship.

[17 : 33] And so we remember our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ. But it's so important for us to remember, even in these strange days, the Spirit of Christ will work among us as we worship.

Again, George Smeaton, he said, the presence of Christ by the Spirit in the church is the church's glory.

And whether we meet in a building together or whether we meet remotely thanks to technology, nothing changes that. Christ is present by his Spirit.

And so, while we may look small and insignificant to the world, in God's eyes, we're glorious. Because the Spirit dwells in us. I want to read another couple of verses, this time from 1 Peter, chapter 2.

1 Peter, chapter 2. And we find here, Peter is picking up on the temple image that Paul used, but also talking about the church as priests. So, in 1 Peter, chapter 2, verse 5, or read verse 4.

[18 : 41] As you come to him, the living stone, rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to him, you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

So, he's saying the church is a holy priesthood. We are a set-apart people. Set-apart for what? Set-apart to serve God. And there, in verse 5 particularly, it says, we're set-apart to offer spiritual sacrifices.

In other words, we're set-apart so that we might be a worshipping people. Everybody in the world worships something, but we are to worship the one true God. And so, we offer spiritual sacrifice in our shared worship and in our daily lives of loving obedience to him.

And those things don't change. And whatever our circumstances and restrictions, we still can worship together corporately, and we can still live lives of worship and loving obedience to God.

And then also, in verse 9, the same idea is picked up again, but taken in a slightly different direction. You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.

[20 : 09] For why? That you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. So we are set-apart, called to worship, and we are called to witness, to declare the praises of him who called us from darkness to light.

We are to share the good news of the salvation of Jesus with others. But the point for us today is that we worship and we witness with the help of the Spirit of Christ in us.

Here's one last George Smeaton quote, and I find this so helpful for thinking about what is it that's happening when people gather together as the people of God to share worship.

This is true whether we do it in one building or we do it remotely. Here's what Smeaton says. He says, the Lord Jesus acts from God to us and from us to God in both instances by the Holy Spirit.

So the Holy Spirit is central to our worship, bringing us the grace of Jesus to us and enabling us to praise in response.

[21 : 29] So practically, what does that mean for us in these days? It means that whenever we read the Bible with one person, with a hundred, with a thousand people, we need the Spirit of Christ to speak to us and to enlighten our hearts and our minds so that we can grasp the truth so that we might live out that truth.

When we pray or when we listen to God's Word being preached, the Spirit of Christ uses it to bring fresh grace from God to us.

Uses that prayer and that preaching to bring salvation. So we see the Spirit as the channel, the channel through whom we receive grace from God and the channel through whom our praise and our worship returns to God.

So as you sit at your kitchen table or as you sit at your couch and do family worship, as you sit around the computer now and think about worship and maybe it feels slightly different and artificial, remember the Spirit of God in you is bringing the grace of God to you and wants to help you to respond in real worship and praise.

So we need the Holy Spirit and we're so thankful the Holy Spirit established the church, establishes us in the church, unites us to Christ and helps us in our worship.

[23 : 11] So we'll hear hopefully lots more about the work of the Holy Spirit in coming weeks but we'll leave it there for now. and