

Pentecost: The Holy Spirit Then and Now

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Date: 04 June 2017

[0:00] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Now that is an amazing, awe-inspiring, awesome thing to think about in and of itself.

But think about this for a second. That same power, that same person, God the Holy Spirit, is at work in our world today. Do you believe that?

What an awesome thing to consider. We are not alone. We have not been left comfortless. The Christian life and the call to carry the gospel to all nations. All of those things are not in jeopardy today.

And why is that? Because the Holy Spirit is here. Here. Now. The Holy Spirit continues to show up. Just as He did then. And to show up with power to restore and to transform.

Praise the living God. The presence of the Holy Spirit, the power of the Holy Spirit, guarantees victory for all who believe the gospel. Victory over the world.

[1:32] Victory over the flesh. Victory over the devil. As the Spirit draws us to saving faith in Christ and cleanses us from the guilt and the power of sin. The presence and the power of the Holy Spirit guarantees victory for the spread of the saving message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Praise God this morning. Today. Today. I want us to think about the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit and the transformation that the Spirit brings.

Transformation for individuals. Transformation for families and cultures and society. Transformation for every tribe and every tongue in this hurt and broken world.

Now let's start at the most basic level. Let's talk about what the power of the Holy Spirit means for the individual believer.

In our passage from John's Gospel for this morning, here's what Jesus says to His disciples. I will ask the Father and He will give you another helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him.

[2:43] You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. The Spirit of truth. The Holy Spirit. We just marked the ascension of Christ and now we remember that the ascension does not mean that we've been left alone.

No. The Spirit dwells with us and in us and will be with us forever. Isn't that an amazing and precious promise?

Amen. Now as I thought on this, I thought about one of the joys of parenting, of teaching our children the faith because they often come up with some seriously insightful questions when we talk with them about things.

I've found Mia, for example, wondering how it is that Jesus can be in our hearts if He is in Heaven. Well, this morning I think we see our answer. through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit who dwells with us and in us forever.

Now what does that mean for us? What does that mean to have the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit? I think that one of the best illustrations is found in our passage from Ezekiel this morning where we see that the Holy Spirit works an incredible change in our hearts.

[4:02] God says, I will give them one heart and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them.

And they shall be my people and I will be their God. Now in some sense I'm getting a little bit ahead of myself here because this passage is talking most directly about the whole community of God's people but I think it also applies to individual believers.

We see this incredible image in our Ezekiel passage. A new spirit. A new heart. Now we're talking about a serious heart transplant going on.

A hard, stony heart is removed and a soft heart of flesh is given. The stony heart is removed. That heart that doesn't believe the Gospel.

That heart that doesn't cling to Christ in faith. That heart that doesn't love God. That heart that doesn't love neighbor. That heart that doesn't desire to obey God. That heart that strives after sinful desires.

[5:10] That heart is taken out. The Spirit removes that heart and gives a heart of flesh in its place. A heart that believes the promises of the Gospel.

A heart that puts all of its trust in the atoning death and glorious resurrection of Jesus. A heart that loves God. A heart that loves neighbor. A heart that desires to obey God.

A heart that strives after righteousness. Out of gratitude for the free gift of salvation. A heart that has been transformed by the Holy Spirit.

That is the reality we're talking about. That's the reality we see in Ezekiel. And isn't that an amazing thing? If we are tempted to think of that as routine.

If we're tempted to think that the power that is at work in us is routine. Let's think about what Paul says in Romans. If we are believers.

[6:08] The power. The power. The power. The power. The spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us. Think about that.

That power dwells in us. That power sustains us. And that is power to carry us through all the trials, setbacks, and disappointments we might face in our lives. That's power.

For us never to give up hope, but to place all of our confidence in God's precious promises to us in Jesus. That is power to flee from sin and to grow in holiness.

That power. That person. God the Holy Spirit. Even prays in us and for us when we don't know how to pray. And the spirit's power dwelling in us gives us life.

The spirit dwelling in us means that we can even rejoice in our sufferings. As the scriptures say, knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character.

[7:10] And character produces hope. And hope does not put us to shame. Because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Thank God. The spirit gives us a new heart. The spirit transforms us. The spirit dwells in us and sustains us.

Now, in this life, will we still stumble? Yes, we will. Will we still fall short? Yes, we will. Will we struggle with sin until our dying breath?

Unfortunately, we will. Will we continue to need God's mercy found in the cross of Christ? Yes, we will. Will we still? Will we still?

But, still. Even in this life, we will be able to say, as John Newton, the author of Amazing Grace, once put it, I am not the man I hope to be, but by the grace of God, I am not the man I used to be.

[8:09] The spirit gives us life, regenerates us, brings us to faith, and sanctifies us as we grow in grace. The spirit does that in believers and individuals.

But that's not all. The spirit can and does transform families, cultures, communities, societies. We see that in the book of Acts. And we see that when we look at the history of the church since the New Testament era, up to the present day.

Now, in our Bible studies, we've been looking at the book of Acts. This morning, I will give you the Cliff Notes version. But here's what we see after the spirit comes.

We start to see entire families converted to Christ. We start to see Jewish and Gentile communities forming in cities, proclaiming the gospel, impacting their societies, healing the sick, caring for the poor.

The gospel is continuing to go to places where it had never been heard. All that is the work of the Holy Spirit. Changing individuals, changing families, changing communities.

[9:17] Through the spirit-empowered proclamation of Jesus Christ. And what happened?

Thousands are saved. Roman swords can't stop it.

Prison cells can't stop it. The religious authorities that are resisting it can't stop it. And why is that? It is because the Holy Spirit will not be stopped. Through the history of the church, we see that continuing.

We see it happening again and again. As I thought about that reality, I started to think about some of the amazing things that have happened since the start of the evangelization of Africa.

Things that are impacting us today, especially as Anglican Christians. Now, when we had Bishop Marcus Dogo with us, he talked with us a little bit about how Nigeria was evangelized.

Well, here's what happened. Some university students felt called to go and proclaim the gospel there. So they did. They got there. They knelt down and asked that God would give them that land for the sake of the gospel.

[10:26] And guess what happened? He did. A mission that was spearheaded by some university students developed into a church that has over 20 million worshipers on Sunday mornings.

And that's only counting the Anglicans. I'm not sure of the total number of Christians in Nigeria, but I know the number is huge. And as American Anglicans, we are now reaping the benefits of that mission as our Nigerian brothers and sisters are instrumental in the work of re-evangelizing the West.

I also thought the East African revival, which incredibly impacted the church in Africa and inspired the church around the world, especially us as Anglicans.

How did that start? What have been the effects of that? It started simply enough. An English missionary to Rwanda in the course of his travels met a Ugandan Christian.

And that Christian said to him, There is something missing in me and in the Ugandan church. Can you tell me what it is? They spent a couple of days deep in prayer and Bible study.

[11:32] They sought the power of the Spirit. They pursued sanctification and holiness in a deeper way. And then the Holy Spirit started to move. One account says this of what happened next.

Immediately, conversions began to take place. Christians started to confess faults and resentments to one another. Forgiveness was experienced and broken relationships were restored.

The revival spread through Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda. What was the end result? Well, the account goes on to say this. The fruits of the revival had mainly been in East Africa itself.

Though many Christians throughout the world have been enriched by its message and inspiration. Thousands of Africans were converted. Nominal Christianity disappeared practically overnight. People openly acknowledged their sins and turned from them. And the church was thoroughly renewed. Now, as Anglicans, even in the West, we certainly felt the fruits of the revival.

[12:37] Because the Anglican churches in these places have become strongholds for the biblical gospel in our communion. Let's think for a second about what I think is a really important and pertinent question.

Why can't that happen here? In our community? In our city? In our nation? The answer is that it can.

And how do I know that? Because I know that the Holy Spirit is able to do it. So let's ask Him this morning. We can be confident. We can bear witness to the gospel with confidence.

Because we already know that by the power of the Holy Spirit, the gospel is going to prevail. It's going to reach every tribe, tongue, and nation on this earth. There will be redeemed people from each of them.

A great multitude that is beyond numbering. So Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit, is good news for the whole world.

[13:39] It is good news for us in countless ways. And it's good news that we need to remember and be encouraged by as we strive to live the Christian life and to reclaim the gospel everywhere.

We need good news this morning. I think about the recent series of terrorist attacks in London. The most recent yesterday. I think about the political instability around the world.

I think about the violent attacks on Christians in Africa, in the Middle East. I think about the uncertain economic future. I'm sure you think about these things too. And we can think about these things and start to become fearful.

And we're encouraged to be afraid. We turn on the news. We listen to political commentators. We log on to social media. And we are bombarded with the message. Be afraid.

I'm here to say this morning, don't be afraid. We are not alone. We are not comfortless. As Paul says in Romans, You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear.

[14:52] But you have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba, Father. We have received the spirit of adoption. By the spirit, we know God as our loving Father.

Do not be afraid. You don't have to be afraid. I recently ran across this quote from Os Guinness. It said this, The story of Christian reformation, revival, and renaissance underscores that the darkest hour is often just before the dawn.

So we should always be people of hope and prayer, not gloom and defeatism. Defeatism. God, the Holy Spirit, can turn the situation around in five minutes.

I know that's true. The Holy Spirit can turn things around immediately. We've seen it again and again. So let's call out to him this morning.

That he would transform our hearts. That he would transform our lives. That he would transform our families. That he would transform our city. That he would transform our nation. And that he would transform our world.

[16:08] Because, brothers and sisters, he has not changed. His power has not changed. He is able to do today what he did on that day almost 2,000 years ago.

Come, Holy Spirit. In the name of the Father, of the Son, of the Holy Spirit. Amen.