

The Coming of the Spirit

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Date: 20 September 2026

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[0:00] Good morning, church. Would you turn with me to the book of Acts, chapter 2. That is page 855 or 866 in the Pew Bible, depending on which version you have. Acts chapter 2. We're continuing our series in the book of Acts today. Let me pray for us, and then I'll read.

O great God of highest heaven, glorify your name in us. We ask for your help as we come to your word, Father, that by your Spirit we would behold all that he is saying to us, your church, to the glory of Christ our King. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

All right. Let me read Acts chapter 2, verses 1 through 21. Acts 2, 1 through 21. Luke writes this, And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians.

[1:58] We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God. And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, What does this mean? But others, mocking, said, They are filled with new wine. But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, Let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it's only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel, And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even on my male servants and female servants in those days, I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above, and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. So how is it, how is it, how is it that a small group of frightened, puzzled, and largely uneducated men and women could so quickly become a force to be reckoned with right across the known world? How was it that this small group of men and women could, in a few short years, be said to be turning the world upside down? How?

Well, the answer is right here in Acts chapter 2. Here Luke tells us how the seemingly unsinkable happened.

He tells us how the church was born and where the church's real power and life comes from. And the answer is the Holy Spirit. God, the Holy Spirit.

Acts chapter 2 is the account of what we now call Pentecost, the day when the ascended Lord Jesus sent the Holy Spirit upon the church in the fulfillment of His promise and in the fullness of His saving work.

[4:39] This was a day in history from which there was no turning back, a historical event in God's plan of redemption that marked a new day, the day the Holy Spirit began His new covenant ministry and began empowering the church for its Christ-given mission.

And that means, like Jesus' death and resurrection then, Pentecost was a unique day, a unique event in history. But just as we can learn about Jesus' ongoing significance from His life and death

and resurrection, so too we can learn today about the Spirit's ongoing significance from this event, the day of Pentecost.

And it is, is it not, important that we should come to learn about and come to know and come to behold and worship God, the Holy Spirit. Why? Because He is the reason why there is a church at all.

You see, without the Holy Spirit, there is no proclamation. There is no mission. There is no conversions. There are no Christians. There is no worldwide Christian movement.

Everything that we have and do that is of any lasting spiritual significance is because of the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, we are like a sailboat without wind.

[6:06] We are like a stack of wood without fire. The glorious riches of Christ and His salvation would ever remain removed from us without the Holy Spirit.

The gospel message itself would remain ever foolishness to us without the Holy Spirit. It is all because of God, the Holy Spirit. So if, as a church, if as Christians, we are going to look in the right place to learn where the real source of our life and growth and mission come from, we have to look to God, God the Holy Spirit.

So what does the day of Pentecost show us about the Holy Spirit? What does this day help us to understand today? Well, I want to look at three things that the account of Pentecost helps us to understand about the Holy Spirit today.

Here are the three. Spoiler alert. We're going to look at the Spirit's power, the Spirit's work, and the Spirit's goal. Okay, let's consider first the Spirit's power. We see this in verses 1 through 4 of this passage.

Luke tells us that when the day of Pentecost arrived, the disciples were all together in one place. Now, what was Pentecost? Well, Pentecost, long before it described a certain Christian movement of the 20th century that we call Pentecostalism, right?

[7:30] Long before all that, Pentecost was a Jewish feast. In the Old Testament, it was called the Feast of Weeks, one of the three great annual celebrations that God commanded His people to hold. And the Feast of Weeks was a harvest celebration that took place 50 days after Passover.

And that's how it came to be called, in the Greek-speaking world, Pentecost, because the word Pentecost comes from the Greek word for 50. So, Jews would come to Jerusalem from all over the Roman Empire, all the places where the Diaspora had happened, and there were communities of Jews.

They would come from all over to Jerusalem to celebrate this feast, thanking God for His provision, offering to God the first fruits of their labors, asking God to bless all of their work to come and the harvest to come.

That was Pentecost. Now, interestingly, over time, in Jewish history, they had spent 40 days with Him after His resurrection.

They had seen Him ascend to heaven just over a week earlier, and they were waiting, just as Jesus had told them to, waiting for the promise of the Holy Spirit.

[8:42] And on the day of the feast of Pentecost, the day when the harvest was celebrated, the day when they remembered how Moses went up and ascended on the mountain and came down with God's law, on that day, the ascended Jesus fulfilled His promise, and the Holy Spirit came in power.

And on this Pentecost, you see, there would be an even greater harvest. And on this Pentecost, it wouldn't be God's law coming down on tablets of stone, but it would be God's own Spirit coming down, filling them, writing His Word on their very hearts.

And when the Spirit arrives, Luke says, he says it was like wind and like fire. A sound like a mighty rushing wind fills the house, and what looks like fire comes down and rests on each one of them. I always thought it was funny as a kid that phrase tongues of fire. It's a sort of interesting word picture when you think of like, I think he means sort of like, you know, not like literal tongues, right? But like branches of fire falling down on each one of them, right? Of course, these images, wind and fire, they're images of what? They're images of power. And images that are fitting for the power of the Holy Spirit.

[10:13] For as Jesus Himself taught in John 3, do you remember? Jesus says, the wind blows where it wills. You cannot see it, can you? But you feel it. You can feel its effects. Wind is powerful, even though you can't see it.

And fire, well, fire is something that you can feel. Fire, you can feel its warmth. But you can't grab fire with your hands, can you? It's immaterial, fire itself.

Like wind, God the Holy Spirit is invisible. Like fire, God the Holy Spirit can't be measured or grasped. But like storm and like fire, the Spirit of God is powerful.

But this wind and fire speak not just of the power of the Holy Spirit. Wind and fire in the Old Testament were images of God's own powerful presence. It was a pillar of fire, was it not, by which God led His people through the wilderness.

It was a mighty wind by which God caused the valley of dry bones to rise in Ezekiel's vision, do you remember? So with the arrival of the Holy Spirit, God had come.

[11:23] The third person of the Trinity, awesome in power, eternal, all-knowing, completely good. The Lord, the Giver of life, the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, as the church would eventually come to codify and confess in the Nicene Creed.

But in the context of the book of Acts, what does this powerful presence of the Holy Spirit signify? What does it mean? Well, in the context of the story of Acts, it means this. It means that Jesus Christ is indeed on the throne. He is indeed the Lord of heaven and earth.

Jesus promised that He would ascend to the Father's right hand, and He promised to send the Holy Spirit, the one the prophets of Israel had all spoken of and looked forward to. And on Pentecost, Jesus fulfilled that promise.

Seated at the Father's right hand, He now reigns. You see, in His ascended humanity, Jesus had forged the broken link between earth and heaven because of our sin.

[12:42] And now, by sending the Spirit from the Father, heaven was coming to earth, and the reign of our King had begun. And just as the Spirit hovered over the waters of the original creation in Genesis 1, bringing order and beauty and life, So now the Spirit rushes upon the church to advance the new creation, bringing restoration and beauty and new life.

So, brothers and sisters, do we appreciate the power of the Holy Spirit? Or do we just give Him lip service?

Perhaps we need a bigger view of who He is and what He's come to do. Yes, we acknowledge the Holy Spirit, but do we depend on Him?

Or do we depend on our own strength, and our own intellect, on our own plans? Instead, friends, we should acknowledge, and we should confess that whatever strength we have, whatever intellect we have, is a gift from Him.

And we should use it in prayerful dependence on Him, not despising those gifts or rejecting those gifts, but using them for His glory and depending on Him for their right use and wise execution.

[14:05] In prayerful dependence on the Spirit. You see, I wonder if you think that the trials you're up against are too big for you, and you've tried your own intellect and your own strength to get after them, but you've found them too big for the task.

Surely the disciples thought about being witnesses to the ends of the earth and thought, we are too small for such a big task. And Christian, when you think about the trials before you, the truth is, they are too big for you, but they are not too big for the Holy Spirit who is in you.

When God's Spirit filled the tabernacle in the Old Testament, do you remember that story? What happened? They build the tabernacle, God's Spirit comes down. Do you remember what happens? God's presence by His Holy Spirit was so weighty and so glorious and so powerful that the priests and the people who were gathered that day fell to the ground and they were unable to stand. God's holiness was so palpable and real and weighty. And friends, the same Spirit, if you are in Christ, now lives in you, in us, the church.

It's not for nothing that the New Testament calls believers, calls the church, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Greater is He that is in you than he who is in the world.

[15:41] But, you know, I think it's worth considering as well that the Holy Spirit works not just in these outwardly dramatic ways like He did on the day of Pentecost. As the story of Acts will progress, we will see the work of the Holy Spirit happening in inward and quiet ways too as He opens people's hearts to believe.

Sometimes the wind is a storm. Sometimes the wind is a gentle breeze. Sometimes the fire is blazing and you can't miss it because it's resting on your head.

Sometimes the fire is warm and comforting through cold nights. Friends, so too, the work of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, our tri-personal God batters our hearts, as John Donne once wrote.

But sometimes the Holy Spirit works gently and softly over time. But consider whether the Holy Spirit decides in His sovereignty to work in you in outwardly dramatic ways or whether He decides to work in quiet inward ways.

Remember, it's the same powerful God at work, the same fire, the same miracle of His personal presence in your life.

[16 : 59] One way isn't better than the other. The Holy Spirit knows just what we need and when and how. So this is what we see first, the power of the Holy Spirit.

Next, we see the work of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit's work. We see this in verses 5 through 13. After the Holy Spirit descends in power, the disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit, begin doing what? They begin proclaiming the mighty works of God in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance, Luke says.

Presumably, as they're gathered in the upper room and the Spirit falls, they begin praising God and the praise starts to overflow such that they go out into the streets and probably into the temple courts and crowds start to hear the sound of this praise in all of these languages, in these other tongues, and they begin to gather.

Now, what does Luke mean? What was happening? What does he mean by these other tongues? Well, verse 11 explains it. You can see there. After listing all the regions from whence the Jews had gathered to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem, countries and regions from nearly every part of the known world, right, Luke reports the crowds as saying, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God, in our native tongue.

On that day, the Holy Spirit miraculously enabled the church to speak languages they did not know so that everyone could hear about the mighty works of God, that is, the powerful deeds that God had done in and through Jesus.

[18 : 33] Now, let's consider this scene a bit more. What language do you know? Do you know what language almost everyone spoke in the first century?

No matter where you came from, you could probably speak Greek. You know, it's funny, we say today, we say, it's all Greek to me. It's funny, in the first century, that would have been like, oh, we understand it perfectly because we all speak this sort of common form of Greek.

Now, why did everyone speak Greek in the first century? Well, because Alexander the Great, because of Alexander the Great's military conquests that happened hundreds of years earlier. As Alexander's empire expanded through the sword, Greek became the language that everyone needed to use to get by.

It became the language of commerce. It became the language that connected the empire. And long after Alexander's empire collapsed, Greek remained as the sort of common language of the people. Now, of course, there was a benefit of having this common Greek language, Koine Greek, as it's called. It allowed people from different cultures to do interactions and to do transactions well enough.

[19 : 46] But, in addition to knowing Greek, everyone there on that day, from different parts of the known world, everyone also had, what the crowds call, in verse 11, their own tongue.

I think of our church, many of you here, I'm guessing all of us here, speak English, right? But for a lot of you, it's not your native tongue.

It's not the language of your home, your people. It's not the language of your heart. Here's the point. When the ascended Jesus sends His Holy Spirit upon His church and empowers them to advance His reign, does it spread like the empire of Alexander or the empire of the Caesars who were enforcing Latin on their subjects?

Does it spread with the coercion of another tongue? No. God comes in their midst and does what? He speaks their language.

The Spirit's first witness in the church is miraculously in the native tongue, the heart language of everyone gathered, no matter where they're from.

[21 : 11] You see, friends, this is the central work of the Holy Spirit, to witness to Jesus Christ in all the earth, to take the things that Jesus has done and declare them so that all can hear.

This is what Jesus Himself taught His disciples before His death and resurrection. Jesus was teaching them about the Holy Spirit, and in John 15, 26, He says, When the Helper comes, whom I'll send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about me.

He will glorify me. And the miracle of tongues on the day of Pentecost was a sign, was a sign that this message was for everyone.

Now, of course, it was only Jews who heard that first witness on the day of Pentecost, but as any reader of Acts can see, the day of Pentecost also points forward to the day when the Gentiles, too, would hear the Spirit's testimony to Jesus in their own tongue and belief.

And that's why, by the way, when Cornelius, if we fast forward ahead in the book of Acts, that's why when Cornelius, the first Gentile believer, hears the gospel from Peter and believes, there's this seeming like mini-Pentecost. In Acts 10, the Spirit falls on them and they speak in tongues, too.

[22:33] Why? Because God's demonstrating in that special moment that the Gentiles, too, are now included in the one family of God around Jesus the King.

Now, there wouldn't be two churches, one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles. Just as there's one Lord, the Lord Jesus, and just as there's one Holy Spirit, so there is one church to the glory of God, the Father.

One church, one people, but many tongues, many languages, many cultures. And you see, this is what, this is what no earthly ruler and no earthly empire could ever achieve, a united people, united in all their diversity, not forced into uniformity, but liberated into a symphony of praise.

Do you remember the event in Genesis that happened right before God's redemption plan really got rolling with Abraham?

What was it that happens right before the episode with Abraham? Do you remember? Sword drill time. It's the Tower of Babel, right? What happens in the Tower of Babel?

[23:49] Humans, in their pride, gather together and say, let's build a tower to heaven and make a name for ourselves. So, they build up, they gather all their resources, they build a tower, they think themselves pretty great, God sort of looks down at their tower and says, oh, that's nice.

Look at what you've done. And he says, don't you see, this isn't my plan for you. My plan for you was to go forth and to multiply and be fruitful and cultivate the earth to my praise, but here you are building your little towers, consolidating power, that's not how this is going to work.

So, he confuses their tongues and scatters them in all directions. And the curse of Babel that sits over humankind is that in our alienation from God, we're alienated from one another.

Literally, we can't even speak one another's language. But when the Holy Spirit comes and testifies in all of those languages to the resurrected Christ, what happens?

the curse of Babel begins to be undone and humans are united again, having been reconciled to God. Of course, not everyone there on the day of Pentecost heard it as a symphony of praise.

[25:08] There were some who mocked them and said, they're full of new wine. Friends, it's going to be the same for the church of every age. Our spirit-filled witness will face ridicule at times, so don't be surprised when it comes.

But, you know, consider at the same time, at the same time, consider that when the Spirit fell upon the church on that day of Pentecost and they began praising God for His mighty works, their joy was so overflowing, their speech was so rambunctious with praise, their voices so loud with good news that they could actually, they actually could be accused of being drunk with new wine.

How about you and me? When the witness of the Spirit comes home to your heart, when the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection comes home, oh, then Christians have every reason to be ecstatic.

Death is defeated, friends. sins are forgiven, eternal life is granted. The God of the universe looks upon you in Christ and He calls you beloved. We have every reason to be overjoyed, so don't bottle up your joy, Christian.

Let the world think we're crazy. Our King is alive and there's nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[26:41] So, friends, we've seen the Spirit's power, we've seen His work. Lastly, let's take a look at the Spirit's goal. In verses 14 through 21, Peter stands up and explains, I think equally with some jest in his voice, says, friends, it's only 9 a.m.

Obviously, we're not drinking, right? Instead, Peter, to explain what's happening, turns to a passage of Scripture to explain what's taking place. And that passage is Joel chapter 2.

And as Zerion read for us earlier in the service, Joel chapter 2 foresaw a day when God's Spirit wouldn't just fall on a chosen few amidst God's people, a priest here, a king there, a prophet there, but rather the Spirit would fall on all God's people, male, female, young, and old, rich, and poor. They would all prophesy. That is, they would all speak forth the praises of God. And when the Spirit came like that, that would be the start of what Peter calls, what Joel calls, the last days.

In other words, the final great act of God's plan of redemption, the last chapter in God's saving plan was unfolding and unfurling right before their eyes.

[28:14] Peter tells the crowd that day, this is it. The Spirit has come as promised, and the final chapter has begun. The Spirit is bringing to fulfillment God's saving work what the Father planned from eternity and what the Son accomplished through His finished work is now being applied by the ministry of the Spirit.

And the conclusion of this last great chapter of God's saving plan will be what verse 20 calls the day of the Lord. That is the day when Jesus, as He promised, returns to judge and to save.

But as the Spirit does His work in these last days, looking forward to that day of the Lord, as He does His work of testifying to Christ during these last days, what is His goal?

Well, look at how the passage of Joel comes to an end. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

The Spirit's goal is nothing less forgiveness of sins. And our salvation, that is, our total rescue from sin and all sin's effects.

[29:33] And what is the hallmark? What's the centerpiece of this rescue? What's the linchpin, the heart of it all? Later in Peter's sermon in verse 38, he says that the heart of this salvation is the forgiveness of sins.

The forgiveness of sins. To be pardoned for all of your offenses against God. To have God wipe your record clean.

To be reconciled to God your Creator. To know that God, under whose just judgment you once stood because of your waywardness and rebellion.

To know that that God will now never bring you into condemnation. And instead, He will embrace you not merely as His creature, but embrace you as His daughter and as His son.

Friends, this is what the work of Christ has achieved. You know, too often we spend so much of our time and energy and deliberations thinking about how we can fix this problem and this problem and this problem and this problem.

[30:44] Not realizing that all of those problems stem forth from the heart of the issue. That we're alienated from God, the source of life. Why do we see death all around us?

Because as humans we're like a flower that's been cut from its stem and the petals are wilting. So what do we do? We try to like spray the petals with all of this stuff to try to get it alive.

But it doesn't work. Why? Because we're ruptured from the source of life, God Himself. And what Jesus has come to do is reconcile us to God to get to the source, to get to the heart of all of our death and decay, to fix it from the inside out.

You see, this is what the work of Christ has achieved. He died in your place for your sin. He rose on the third day to newness of life so that everyone who repents and believes in Him can be forgiven of their sins, reconciled to God, and granted a life that never ends, eternal life, a life that will last forever and that begins now.

The Spirit bears witness to Christ so that you might hear and so that by His work in your heart you might repent, believe, and be saved.

[32:12] And the Spirit is proclaiming that same message here this morning. And every time the Scriptures are opened and the gospel of Christ is proclaimed, the Spirit goes forth and says, call on the name of the Lord Jesus and be saved.

Will you respond to that work of the Spirit this morning? And friends, the Spirit's work of witness isn't just something that goes forth to unbelievers calling them to believe and be saved.

That ongoing witness of the Spirit happens in believers too. What does Paul say in Romans? The Spirit bears witness with our Spirit that we are indeed what?

Sons and daughters of God. The Spirit will continue to speak that word in your heart so that you will continue to live more and more and be more and more who you are in Christ.

Because you see, salvation in the Bible isn't just a future reality. Yes, it is future. it has a glorious hope and completion to come, but it's underway now.

[33 : 28] For all who believe in Christ by the Spirit's power, your sins are forgiven now. Your relationship with God is restored now. You're united to God's people now. You're part of His kingdom now.

And that means life in these last days cannot be the same as it was before. for those who know Christ and are filled with His Spirit.

Our life here, the way we organize our life and live our life and arrange our life and center our life, it cannot be the same because heaven has come down to earth and begun the work of making all things new.

And for the dramatic social change that would take place when God arrived in His kingdom.

as if to say that when God does His mighty work, the world will never be the same. It will be like the world is in labor pains, but through it all, a new creation is coming to birth.

[34 : 58] And let's boil that down to you and me. Friends, if you take Jesus Christ as your Lord, it will mean a revolution in how you live your life. you will no longer be in charge.

He will. To surrender to His loving kingship may mean dramatic changes to your lifestyle, to your goals, to your life plan. It may feel sometimes like your world is falling apart because of its radical newness, because of the way in which all the old things you used to depend on and live for are no longer now the center of your life.

But that disorientation and reorientation, that's not the end of the story because repentance, that is, surrendering your life to Jesus, centering your life on Him and His love, yes, it will at times feel destabilizing and risky and deorienting.

The old world you're used to is falling away, but the new creation that God is ushering you into is far and away worth it. the Spirit is in the business of saving you, not just forgiving your sins, but remaking your whole life, sanctifying you, making you holy and beautiful just as God Himself is holy and beautiful.

Just like the Spirit came down on the waters of the unformed first creation and brought form and beauty, that's what the Spirit is up to now.

[36 : 35] He wants to take your native tongue and make it sing His praise because, friends, that's what your native tongue is meant for.

For too long, the languages of our hearts have sung the praise of this fallen world with its false gods, and what we've gotten in return is spiritual death.

But the Spirit has come to liberate you to sing a new song, the song that only you can sing, the unique song of your life in the praise of your Creator and Redeemer, in the praise of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit.

That's the Spirit's goal. And, friends, that's how a small group of once frightened, once puzzled, and once in the world's eyes, simple men and women so quickly became a force to be reckoned with.

And that's how you and I will continue to turn the world upside down, not by ourselves, but by God, the Holy Spirit. Let's pray.

[37 : 47] Amen. come, Holy Spirit. Come and do your work.

Come liberate us from sin and idols. Come grant us faith in Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Come do your work of purifying work.

Come do your work of gifting your church for ministry. Come do your work of magnifying the name of Jesus in our midst. And, Spirit, allow us, help us, empower us to keep in step with you.

To the glory of the Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.