

PENTECOST FIRE – 4 UNLEASHING THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT... AGAIN!

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On this good Mother's Day I want to visit with you about the 4th Purpose of the Holy Spirit. We have been discussing that the Holy Spirit came to: 1) Convict the world (and us) of sin; 2) Convince us and the world of Truth; and 3) To Glorify Jesus.

Attempting to answer the question: WHAT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT COME TO DO: today I propose that the 4th Purpose of the Holy Spirit is:

THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME TO BRING US POWER.

There is a distinction I think must be made right upfront, which might prove helpful as we proceed. The Holy Spirit does not deliver to us HIS power, but the power of God, and; The Holy Spirit is not just the "agent" delivering to us God's power; The Holy Spirit IS God's power. The Spirit is the active presence of God in the life of the world. The Holy Spirit possesses no power but that which he has received from his compatriots: God and Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit operates fully as the Person and Presence of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son; but the Spirit does not operate as an independent contractor, or private agency; He, the Holy Spirit, is GOD'S POWER.

That being said, and as we consider our text again this morning, I want to focus on the things that came about in the lives of the disciples, following the outpouring... actually that would be too tame to just call it an outpouring...following the fire storm; immediately succeeding the tsunami; maybe even more accurately, after the cyclone of God that happened at Pentecost; some things happen, to the disciples...to the early church...and eventually to US. Here is how Rick Kirchoff describes what happens after the Holy Spirit begins to reveal God's Power:

“When God sends forth the Spirit amazing things happen: barriers are broken down, communities are lifted up, opposites are reconciled, unity is established, disease is cured, addiction is broken, cities are renewed, races are reconciled, hope is established, people are blessed, and church happens. Today the Spirit of God is present and we’re gonna’ have church. So be ready, get ready. . . God is up to something. . . discouraged folks cheer up, dishonest folks ‘fess up, sour folks sweeten up, closed folk, open up, gossipers shut up, conflicted folks make up, sleeping folks wake up, lukewarm folk, fire up, dry bones shake up, and pew potatoes stand up! But most of all, Christ the Savior of all the world is lifted up.” My descriptions probably won’t be so poetic or inspirational; but here goes: When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost:

1. THE HOLY SPIRIT INSTITUTIONALIZED POWER

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. Acts 1:8

Prior to the Spirit’s coming there certainly were times and events and situations where power was demonstrated from on high. But after this Spirit of God came; power became the norm! The disciples immediately began to feel and respond to and experience dramatic, even miraculous demonstrations of God’s power. They saw blind people see, and lame people walk, and sinful people changed, and religious people humbled, and humble people exalted. They saw things they had seen Jesus do, but now they were the agents God was using to do them. They commanded demons to desist, they demanded prison doors to open, they shouted down crowds and mockers, and commanded audiences with princes and kings. These same men who freaked out at a little wind on Lake Galilee were now overpowered’ by the Wind of God, as power came to them, went through them, overwhelmed them, under girded them, and compelled them onward!

There were all kinds of power being demonstrated; healings, exorcisms, miracles, testimonies; but none greater than the scene of transformed lives.

Think of Peter who 40 days prior had not only abandoned his Lord after trying to kill the soldier, swore he didn't know Jesus before a peasant girl in the courtyard, and denied 3 times that he was not a follower of Jesus! This same Peter; now filled with the Power of the Holy Spirit stands on a stump and preaches to the masses gathered for Pentecost in Jerusalem from all across the Middle East. This is his first recorded sermon...and 3000 people got saved! What changed? He did, by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

I don't know what change or transformation needs to happen for you in your life today, but God does; and the Holy Spirit can bring that transformation to reality, at the mere flick of a switch. That switch in your own heart, mind and will; that says: "Ok, I'll give up trying to control this situation, and yield my surrender to YOUR will." The power will begin to flow, and you'll be just as amazed at the gawking onlookers in Jerusalem. I mean that, there is TODAY that same Power available for you, in what ever area of your life needing attention. You just have to tap into that power source: The Holy Spirit.

2. THE HOLY SPIRIT INSTILLED PURITY

Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. Acts 2:3

The mention of flames or fire is a predominant metaphor for the Spirit throughout recorded Bible History. One of the by-products of fire is its purifying effect. We are saddened at the tragic loss of trees and vegetation during a wild forest fire; but we should not overlook the fire's power to eliminate the underbrush, and burn up weeds that had been choking out the healthy plants. A good fire cleans up the forest, though its effects might take years to be seen.

It was not dissimilar in the NT Church planted that day of Pentecost. A few weeks hence Ananias and Sapphira tried to cheat God and the new church out of something they had pledged to do; withholding money they had previously promised to share. God taught the early church a lesson by removing them from their midst.

I'm not up here to say that the only purpose of the church is to kick out or keep out people whose lives are less than perfect...that would be stupid and leave this church completely empty. What I am here to say is that the Holy Spirit's power is still at play today, providing impetus and inspiration for all of us to have our own lives cleaned up. You don't have to clean up your act to meet God, come just as you are...but after you have met God, don't deny the Spirit his work of reworking you, and transforming your life!

I believe we do a disservice to sinful people by patting them on the back and adding our stamp of blessing to their sin, by not holding up the standard that when people meet God, when people encounter Jesus, when folks get sweep up by the Spirit, their lives change; sin has to go. Part of the power of the Spirit is to help us get our lives more in line with Jesus. And just like the undergrowth in a burned out forest, it's painful at first; it takes time; but let it begin today...and let it begin in me!

3. THE HOLY SPIRIT INSPIRED PASSION

And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability. Acts 2:4

One of the byproducts of the coming of the Holy Spirit was that the 120 or so disciple/apostles gathered in the upper room...were suddenly overcome with these flames of fire; and instead of passing around the offering plate, or lining up for Holy Communion, or standing up for the next hymn or sitting down for the sermon...these fledgling, denying, awkward, simpleton fishermen, prostitutes, laborers and losers... BEGAN preaching to ALL the people gathered in Jerusalem.

The Spirit was God's power unveiled and unleashed that day...on all those who had not yet heard, seen, or believed in Jesus, his only Beloved Son. The disciple/apostles became the passionate preachers of the day. They were no more familiar with the Spirit than are we. They were no more acquainted with the demonstration of the gifts than are we.

They were no more experts at receiving and exercising the spiritual gifts on that day, than we might be today! They just couldn't help themselves...when the Spirit came, they couldn't keep it to themselves!

I believe that one of the greatest blessings of Pentecost; is the restoration of Passion. I have a hard time processing passionless people. I'm just simple enough to believe that if you can't get passionate about something in your life...then why are you living? And if you can't get passionate about the life that you have because of what Jesus did for you, then I'm not sure you get what he did for you.

4. THE HOLY SPIRIT INSURED PEACE

And when the Day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all in one accord, in one place. Acts 2:1

One of the byproducts of God's power revealed in and through the Holy Spirit is the prospect and promise of peace. Obvious is the peace we have now with God, less obvious is the peace we can/should have with each other, but the one I think is most remarkable is the peace that these early disciples found with the world, or more accurately their place in their world.

I won't discount that Peace with God is where all of us start. So many of us have such turmoil in our lives because of busy schedules, hectic lives, frantic kids, needy parents, unpaid bills, impending political doom...whatever the source of your stress, there is not much peace in many of our lives; and we need it...and we can find it in a relationship with God, though the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

I also won't discount that there needs to be peace in the church. We need to be in unity and accord about the mission God has called us to fulfill, and the vision we have received to accomplish that. We are to be kind and loving, generous and supportive of each other, especially those fledgling disciples among us. I'm proud to serve a church that at least for the most part...loves each other!

But I can't overlook the peace that these early church leaders found interacting with their world. They tried the communal living experiment, but soon found that withdrawal from society was a failure. They began to engage and be engaged by their culture while never losing their stranglehold on what held them together; the power and presence of God. They lived distinctive "Christian" lives without flaunting their faith, without hiding their hope, even while losing their lives for the cause to which they were committed. Would to God that we might be so engaged with our culture, not hiding out in some modern day Christian commune, but by actively encountering the people who don't yet know Jesus, and winning them, by the example we set by trying to live Authentic Christian lives.

We must learn the lesson that peace in our hearts, peace in our families, even peace in our church is not enough...we are citizens of this world till Jesus takes us home, and we have to find a way to lovingly lead and win that world for Jesus.

In conclusion, I thought of an ironic scene I observed many years ago during the Rose Bowl parade in Pasadena California, one New Years Day. During the middle of the parade, it became obvious something was wrong with one of the floats right there in the middle of the street, right in the middle of their prestigious parade. A beautiful float suddenly sputters and quits...it was out of gas. The whole parade was held up till someone could retrieve a can of gas, slip it under the roses, and pour it in the tank. The amusing/ironic thing was that this particular float was built by and a representative of the Standard Oil Company. With all its vast oil resources, they were out of gas!

And I couldn't help but wonder as I reread that story...are there people or congregations today who are out of gas? Are we keeping our tanks full of God's Power through the Holy Spirit's work? Or are we trying to make it till the end of our parade just getting by on the fumes left in the tank? There is power available from the Spirit today, you just have to flip that switch, stop relying on your own power, yield you life to another; whose tank never runs draw, whose power is never in short supply, whose reserves are never empty, whose price never goes up...or down! Give Jesus your life, and receive all the power at His disposal, through the person, the purpose and the POWER of the Holy Spirit. AMEN

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