



Central Peninsula Church

Catalog No.
1307-3
Acts 2:1-13
Mark Mitchell
November 26,
2006

Catching the Wind

SERIES: *Acts: The Rest of the Story*

Have you ever had an experience where you needed more than instructions? It's like you get into your car in the morning to go to work and you turn the key and nothing happens. The battery is completely dead. You call a nearby service station and relate your problem to the attendant. He tells you: "Sure, we can take care of it. Bring it on in."

That's not a lot of help. But isn't that the trouble with a lot of religion? You get instructions, but you don't get power. You get good advice, but you don't get the strength to carry it out. Good advice without power is bad news.

Scripture is full of "good advice" that we cannot carry out on our own. That's the problem with the Old Testament Law. It tells you what you should and should not do, but it doesn't give you the power to perform. It announces a death penalty of guilt on our heads without any assistance. It says, "Do this; don't do that" with no help.

Even the Sermon on the Mount by itself is bad news. Have you tried to do what Jesus says we're supposed to do? Jesus says if you are angry with your brother you are guilty of murder! Just this past week I committed murder several times! If that kind of thing were all of the religion that Jesus had to offer, it would be very bad news. Who in the world can live by it?

The disciples also saw Jesus cure people who were sick. He brought at least two dead men back to life. He restored sight to the blind. He put lame folks back on their feet. Then he turned to the disciples and said, "Go and do even greater works than these." Good news? He might as well have told them to swim to Africa. It's never good news to tell someone to perform the impossible.

Maybe the hardest thing he said was, "Love one another even as I have loved you." How did he love us? He gave up his life. Who in the world can love like that?

I. Jesus gave his disciples more than commandments, he gave them power.

Jesus knew his disciples needed more than his commandments; they needed power. So Jesus told them to stay in Jerusalem until they received the promised Holy Spirit. "You will receive power," said Jesus, "when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. But you've got to wait for it. When you've received that power, you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

To have his commandments plus his power is good news. If it had not been for the events recorded in the second chapter of Acts, we wouldn't be here today. The cross is good news about God's love. The resurrection is good news about eternal life. Both the cross and the resurrection, though remarkable demonstrations of the love and power of God, would have been forgotten events in ancient history if the Holy Spirit had not provided the dynamic for the witnesses to go into all the world and speak that good news.

The enthusiasm felt by the disciples following their encounter with the risen Lord was mere human emotion and no match for the opposition they would encounter. They needed more than just human enthusiasm; they needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus knew exactly what his disciples needed and he promised to supply that need.

II. The disciples were filled with the Spirit.

Acts 2 tells us what happened in a very straightforward way. Look at vv.1-13.

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. They were amazed and astonished, saying, 'Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs--we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.' And they all continued in

amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others were mocking and saying, 'They are full of sweet wine.'"

A. The Holy Spirit was symbolized by wind and fire: I want you to notice the symbolism here. Luke doesn't tell us that wind blew upon them or that fire fell on them. He says, "**A noise like a violent rushing wind filled the whole house . . . there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves...**" They heard something like wind; they saw something like fire.

Throughout Scripture, wind is an important symbol of God's Spirit. The Hebrew word for "spirit" is ruach, which is the same word that is used for "wind" or "breath." Scripture says that God "breathed" into Adam's nostrils the breath of life and he became a living being. God's breath, God's Spirit gives life. Jesus spoke with Nicodemus about this. Jesus told him that to receive eternal life you had to be born again. Nicodemus thought he was talking about natural birth, but Jesus was talking about spiritual birth. He said, "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit and that which is born of the flesh is flesh." And then he said that the Holy Spirit is like the wind in that it blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you can't tell where it comes from or where it's going. You can't see the wind; you only see its effects. Here in Acts we have not just the wind, but we have something like a violent, rushing wind. This life-giving breath of God is powerful in its effects.

The other symbol was fire. The fire reminded them of the holy presence of God. They remembered Moses in the wilderness being startled by a bush that seemed to burn yet wasn't consumed. As Moses approached the bush he heard the voice of God from the bush, saying, "Moses, this is holy ground. Take off your sandals." Later, when God appeared on Mt. Sinai, his presence was symbolized by fire and thunder. It was a holy presence. And then when burnt offerings were consumed by fire in the temple, that fire symbolized the consuming righteousness of God. These people who experienced all of this at Pentecost knew what those symbols stood for.

B. The Holy Spirit broke the communication barrier: The whole city of Jerusalem became aware that something was going on. The disciples had probably moved out of the house they were in by now and were near the temple. A throng of people gathered around, wondering what had happened. It was to this astonished, curious throng of people that Peter would soon preach. But before he started preaching, this diverse group that had come from all the countries in that part of the world heard in their own language everything that was said. The Holy

Spirit gave the disciples the ability to speak in other languages. In doing so he had simply broken the communication barrier, so that they all could hear God's mighty deeds proclaimed in their own native language. As we go through the book of Acts we'll see that the gift of tongues is given on three different occasions, each with a very specific purpose. Here this gift communicates the idea that this wonderful thing God was doing was for people all over the world. The language barrier would be broken, as would all barriers. It was like the tower of Babel in reverse. Instead of people being scattered because of language, they would be united through the gospel.

A tragic element of the church's history is that it has often acted as an exclusive social club rather than the body of Christ. In the early days there were those who didn't want to allow Gentiles into the fellowship. In the Middle Ages, and during the Reformation, Jews were excluded from church membership. In recent generations people of different races have been made to feel unwelcome by the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant church. Of course, the church hasn't only excluded people on the basis of skin color. People have been snubbed because of age, gender, and socioeconomic status. This long list of countries that Luke provides shows that this miraculous event was representative of God's intention to include everyone and everybody into the fellowship of his church. Whereas in Judaism there were sharp distinctions in the status of Jews and Gentiles, in the church of Christ those distinctions are eliminated.

As the crowd witnessed the miraculous events on the day of Pentecost, their reaction was either amazement or amusement. Some were amazed, astonished, perplexed. Others mocked them and said that these people were drunk. One thing is for sure: they were unable to ignore what was going on.

It's like back in 1981 when Howard Cosell was voted "Most Loved" and "Most Hated" sportscaster—in the same survey! That's because his personality was so overbearing that you either loved him or you hated him—but he made it very difficult for you to ignore him. That's how people will respond to us when we're filled with the Spirit; they'll want to join us or they'll ridicule us, but they'll not be able to ignore us.

Something extraordinary had happened. Something had changed their lives. The Spirit of God had fallen upon them and by that one act had initiated for all Christians down through the centuries the possibility of the indwelling power of God. It was after this outpouring of the Spirit of God that we find the church doing the things that Jesus did and boldly proclaiming the gospel.

III. Believers are baptized and filled with the Spirit.

I believe that first Pentecost was unique. It was unique in the same way that the birth of Jesus was unique. When Jesus was born, there was an angel choir to

announce his birth. There were shepherds who heard the music and went to see. There were wise men who saw a star and came from afar to worship at the manger. But we don't try to recreate those things today, except as a sort of pageant at Christmas time when we remember the birth of Jesus. In terms of our Christian experience, we don't try to reproduce those other kinds of phenomena. In the same way, Pentecost wasn't meant to be repeated with its unique phenomenon, but rather to symbolize a new era in which the Holy Spirit would indwell and fill and empower every believer.

This was the beginning of the Christian era; the birthday of the church. Now God takes up residence in the lives of his people through the Holy Spirit. And from that day to this, those who have opened their lives to Jesus Christ, who have responded in faith to him, are people in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. The New Testament makes it plain that when we receive Jesus Christ, we're baptized with the Spirit, and placed into the body of Christ. Without the Spirit, we cannot be children of God.

And it's the Spirit of God who transforms us and empowers us. Jesus doesn't just provide forgiving grace; he also provides transforming grace, enabling grace, the grace of his real presence. You don't live your Christian life alone, by your own power; you live it under the presence and power of the Spirit of God.

I'd like to point out several things about this. *This experience with the Holy Spirit is, first of all, relational.* It's not an "It" but a "Him" relationship. All of the dynamics of interpersonal relations happen between us and the Holy Spirit. If you want to have friendship, there are certain things you have to do, otherwise friendship don't develop. You start ignoring that person, giving him the silent treatment, and see how long your friendship has meaning. In relation to the Holy Spirit, when I say this experience is relational, it involves all of those dynamics. That's what Paul means in Galatians 5 when he says, **"If we live in the Spirit, let's walk in the Spirit."**

When we talk about being filled with the Spirit, we're talking about a dynamic relationship with a person. When Lynn and I got married and were pronounced husband and wife, I didn't say, "Okay, honey, now you go your way and I'll go mine." No, that was the beginning of a relationship that needs continual cultivation to be meaningful. It's the same way in your relationship with the Holy Spirit. So many people act like, "I got saved. I received the Holy Spirit. What more is there for me?"

That's like the elderly couple whose family had grown and gone. They didn't need all of the house, so they decided they'd remodel part of it and rent it as an apartment to have a little extra income. A young couple came and looked it over and said, "We're getting married next week. This is perfect. We'd like to rent it and we'll move in when we get back from the honeymoon." So they rented it. A few months later the elderly couple was sitting

in their living room. She had her favorite magazine. He was over there with the newspaper. She looked up from her magazine right through the window into the living room of that apartment. There was that young couple snuggling on the couch whispering expressions of their love. She looked over at her husband and said, "Looks mighty nice, doesn't it?" He grunted a little bit. After a moment she said, "Maybe we ought to try that again." He looked up from his paper long enough to say, "I told you once I loved you, and if I ever change my mind, I'll let you know."

A lot of people act that way toward God. "I told God once I wanted him in my life, and if I ever change my mind, I'll let him know." But to do that is to ignore the Holy Spirit. Being filled with the Spirit is something we have to cultivate and maintain, like a garden. That's why we have commands in Scripture such as, "Do not quench the Spirit," and "Do not grieve the Spirit" and "Be filled with the Spirit."

Second, I would say this experience is rational. It's a conscious, deliberate relationship with a person. It's just as rational as two people entering into a contract. It's not some blind commitment based on emotionalism. It's rational. It's intelligent. I can understand it. I can think through what it means to live and walk in the Spirit as I study the Bible. Paul says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace..." Some people have the impression that people who are filled with the Spirit act like nuts. No, when you're filled with the Spirit, you're the most sane, dedicated, honest person in the world. My model for that is Jesus himself. That doesn't mean there aren't times of great joy and emotion, but it's a rational kind of experience.

Third, this experience is also renewable. While baptism with the Spirit happens once at conversion, being filled with the Spirit is renewable. Here in Acts 2 it says, **"They were filled with the Holy Spirit."** But it doesn't stop there. I read in Acts 4:8 this, **"Peter, having been filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke to them..."** And then I read in 4:31 that while the early church in Jerusalem was praying the place was shaken **"and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness."** And then I read about Stephen in chapter 7 that right before he was stoned to death, he was **"full of the Holy Spirit and looked into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at God's right hand"** (7:55). And then I read of Paul who in chapter 9 was filled with the Spirit when he was converted but then again in chapter 13 it says, **"But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him and said..."** (13:9). And it was Paul who said in Ephesians 5:18, **"Be not drunk with wine...but be filled (continually) with the Spirit."** That's something that is to keep happening in your experience and mine.

Every year before the rains start I have to go up on my roof and clean out the gutters. It's a very messy job. First, I take my blower and blow all the leaves off the roof and out of the gutter because I have a big oak tree that hangs over part of my roof and sheds leaves all year long. And then I have to scoop the sludge out of the gutter and run a hose down through the spouts to make sure they're not clogged. Things that have accumulated over the Fall, Winter and Spring have to be cleaned out for the water to flow. Each year it has to be done. I cannot say, "Well, I did that last year. No need to do it again." It's the same way in our spiritual lives. We have to keep blowing away the leaves and cleaning out the sludge so that the living water of the Holy Spirit can flow.

This morning I call you to an honesty before God that says, "Lord, I'm willing to do whatever I must do. I'm willing to clean out whatever sludge has accumulated in my life, so that I can be filled with your Spirit and become a channel for your power to flow."

CONCLUSION

Don't get me wrong, you can't catch the wind of the Holy Spirit. You can't package it in a box. You can't run it down and collar it with a leash. You could take a bottle and hold it open against the wind and quickly cork it. But wind that is contained is no longer wind. It's just air. It's air that's capable of sustaining life, but it's powerless to drive the sailboat across the water or to lift the soaring hawk to greater heights. You can't catch the wind.

Sometimes we've tried to catch the wind. We've tried to catch the wind in our own little theological systems, our theological definitions and outlines. We say, "Here is where the Spirit fits into our theology."

There are those Christians who, having some kind of a special experience, say, "This is the Holy Spirit, and unless you've experienced this particular kind of activity in your life, you're not filled with the Spirit." They have boxed the Spirit into their experience.

Too often we treat the Holy Spirit as if he were an idea to be debated and not a person to be received. Essentially, we've closed him in so that he becomes air that sustains life but that's all.

Jesus said, "The Holy Spirit is like the wind that blows where it wills," and you see its effects, you can feel its force. But if you can't catch the wind, at least the wind can catch you. You can't contain him, but you can be filled with him. You can't tie him down, but you can be released by him. You can take the ropes off the sails of your life and catch the driving force of his presence. You can't catch the wind, but you can be caught by it. You can't take the Spirit and make him fit your mold, but you can turn your life over to him and let him remold you.

Have you discovered the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in you through faith in Jesus Christ? It wasn't the commandments of Jesus that made the early disciples effective in their living and in their witness. The commandments of Jesus by themselves are bad news. But the commandments of Jesus plus the power of the Holy Spirit is good news.