

Text: Acts 2:1-13

Title: The First Church: Born by the Spirit

Homiletical Truth: Let us be filled with the Spirit, speaking about God's wonderful works

Date/Location: Perhaps late 2011; Wednesday 6/14/2023

Introduction

Until now in the narrative of Scripture, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has been somewhat limited. Now, we will learn about three of his ministries that either started or had a fresh reboot on the Day of Pentecost.

I. The Day of Pentecost

- A. Pentecost would have officially started on Saturday evening, at 6pm. But the narrative begins when it was Sunday morning, before 9am.
- B. The 120 disciples were still gathered (1:13, 14). Chapter 1 told us there were 120 people, which would be the 12 disciples plus 108 others. Remember, it has been 8 or 9 days of waiting for the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised them. And from 1:14 we expect they were still “continuing with one accord in prayer...” meaning they were of one mind or purpose. They had a singular focus on the things of God and the promise of Christ about the coming of the Spirit.

Application: all together – still sticking together after a week! That is hard to do when it is other sinners you are together with. And it is even harder because you yourself are a sinner!

C. The strange happening

1. There was an unusual noise, LIKE a fast wind. This was a sign of the outpouring of God's Spirit (see 2:17 for Peter's explanation).
2. There was a unique appearance of “divided tongues of fire” that rested upon each person. Just like the sound was not an actual windstorm, this appearance was not real fire. It appeared LIKE fire. Earlier on in Matthew 3, the likeness of a dove was a representation of the Spirit in Matthew 3:16.

I reflect on the Lord's earlier teaching of baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt 3:11). This is the fulfillment of the start of Spirit baptism. What about the fire? The appearance LIKE fire is not a fulfillment of the baptism of fire. That indicates a separate thing— judgment.

3. They were all filled with the Spirit. How would we know that? Only because the Bible says so. Without that, we would maybe conjecture that their ears hurt from the sound, or their hair was burned with the fire or they began to act crazy for some reason. But divine revelation tells us that what was happening was filling with the Spirit. The disciples would be familiar with the concept of filling from the OT, Exodus 28:3, 31:3, 35:31; Gen. 41:38.

D. What about Spirit baptism? We know this event is connected with Spirit baptism because:

1. The Lord promised Spirit baptism to happen “not many days from now” in Acts 1:5.
2. Peter connects the Lord’s promise with the event in Acts 11:15-17.

E. In this case, filling was accompanied by or resulted in their speaking in tongues. This is not always the case, nor has it always been the case.

F. This is clearly a unique event in the lives of the disciples, unique in the New Testament up to this point, and unique as far as world history is concerned. Nothing like it ever happened before.

Perhaps the closest would be the Spirit of God coming upon the seventy (actually 72) elders in Israel to help lead the Israelites. Read Num. 11:16-29. Note there that the men initially prophesied but did not continue to do so (KJV has a wrong translation here). Moses wished that “all” of the Lord’s people would have the presence and ministry of the Spirit.

Such a wish would not be fulfilled in any measure until Pentecost, when v. 4 says “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Note: I am not saying all prophesy today.)

G. I understand the event to have been the fulfillment of the promise of Spirit baptism as well as an incident of Spirit filling, as well as Spirit gifting them with tongues. This was a very important event. These three are distinct ministries of the Spirit. I can say that because:

- a. Every believer is baptized by the Spirit.
- b. Only some are filled to a lesser or greater degree with the Spirit at any given time. Others are not walking in obedience to the Spirit at certain times.
- c. And again, fewer were (and none today are) given the gift of speaking in other languages.

H. Now I will address these three Holy Spirit ministries in reverse order.

II. Spiritual Gift of Tongues

A small group of Galileans, so identified by their mother tongue and culture, were speaking in a bunch of foreign languages. Visitors in the area heard them and thus verified that what was happening was real.

A. Real languages of a multitude of nationalities, including Jews who spoke:

1. Parthian and Medes and Elamites
2. Mesopotamia
3. Judea and Cappadocia
4. Pontus and Asia
5. Phrygia and Pamphylia
6. Egypt and parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene
7. Rome
8. Cretans and Arabs

Following Luke's layout, this is 8 distinct groupings, and at least 15 languages. Most of these people were probably at least bilingual, because they knew their mother tongue as well as Greek, the common language of the empire at the time.

B. The nature of the gift.

This was a speaking gift, not a hearing gift.

It was given by the Holy Spirit. See 1 Cor. 12:4-11.

This is a human language gift, not a heavenly language or angelic language or whatever. The primary exegetical problem with this understanding that I am aware of is 1 Cor. 13:1, which says, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels." It assumes the existence of a language which the angels speak. And, they most certainly do communicate to receive instructions from God and respond to Him. As personal beings, God has endowed them with the ability of language. Their communication in human languages is what we read about in the Bible because they are talking with *people*. There may be an angel language that God shares with the angles. But the text does not indicate that God gives the angel language to *people*—it just says "IF I were to speak in those kind of languages"—but without love—then it would be worthless. Furthermore, speaking in a language no one can understand is also worthless. Gibberish is worthless.

3. The Content of the Gift. The wonderful works of God. The text is not more specific. We are probably correct to say that their speech included the gospel, and perhaps a more general proclamation of the great things God has done throughout history. The purpose of the gift seems obviously to spread the news of the new work of God, to evangelize, and to launch the church age and local churches.
4. The response of the people was:
 1. Confusion – “what is this?”
 2. Amazed – “how can this be?”
 3. Marveled
 4. Amazed and perplexed – “what does this mean?”
 5. Others mocked – claiming that the disciples were drunk! Notice how they recourse to a naturalistic explanation instead of a supernatural explanation. On the surface, this is an obviously flimsy argument. How do drunk people babble and “just happen” to say things in another language that are coherent?
 6. Peter responds in the following verses that their mocking was baseless because it was only 9am in the morning—no one would be drunk by then, and certainly not all 120 people. (Sure, an alcoholic person may drink first thing out of bed, that that was obviously not the case here.) In addition, as I understand “new wine,” it has a low alcohol content. You would have to imbibe a fairly large amount of it to get drunk if you were accustomed to wine at all.
5. **Application:** What are our *tongues* speaking? Perverse things? Empty, useless things? Jestings? Gossip? Swearing? Complaining and grumbling? How about the wonderful works of God!?

III. Spirit Filling

- A. While we cannot speak in a tongue today unless we go about the hard work of learning a language, we can be filled by the Spirit. To be filled with/by the Spirit means to be influenced by the Spirit so that our actions are evidence of His presence.
- B. Eph. 5:18 – influence of the Spirit, the results of it are listed in the following verses and have to do with obedience to the law of Christ. When we gather for worship and instruction, fellowship and evangelism, we submit to one another, speaking to one another, singing and making melody to the Lord, and giving thanks to God.

C. **Application:** The proper mode of Christian existence is to be filled with the Spirit. In this “mode,” the believer evidences the characteristics of the Spirit’s work, simply put the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). This is not an all or nothing proposition. A more mature Christian will more consistently evidence this influence of God in his or her life. An immature Christian can evidence this work also, but will naturally have more fits and starts, ups and downs.

Too often, Christian experience is NOT to be filled with the Spirit, that is, not exhibiting the Spirit’s fruit in our lives. Exhibitions of selfishness, pride, strife, jealousy, anger, covetousness, lust, and the like demonstrate a pushing away of the Spirit of God.

To be truly under God’s influence the Christian must *know* the Word of God so that you are aware of the Spirit’s work and the characteristics that He builds into our lives; you must *desire* to walk with the Lord; you must *strongly dislike* your sin; and you be *convinced* that it is right to live in such a way that pleases God.

D. Contemporary situation: In Acts 2, the filling of the Spirit was seen in a snapshot of time in which the disciples spoke with tongues. Since tongues-speaking does not happen today, we see Spirit-filling in other ways—including speaking in song! But the two activities of the Holy Spirit are connected in this historical event.

IV. Spirit Baptism

A. While we cannot speak in a tongue today in the miraculous sense, and while we who are Christian believers may not always be filled with the Spirit, Christians are as a matter of theological fact baptized by the Spirit. See 1 Cor. 12:13. It is not something we seek or ask for. No place in the Scripture are we instructed to do that.

Luke 11:13 encourages us to ask of God for things we need. The example request of the Holy Spirit is not specifically tied with baptism. It can refer to asking for the Spirit in salvation, or asking for the wisdom of the Spirit, or the fruit of the Spirit of God. Christians, however, need never ask for the Spirit to be present, for He is always present.

B. The book of Acts states that Spirit baptism happened (remember: tie the promise of the Lord in Acts 1:5 to Peter’s statement in Acts 11:15). If God was going to do a new work on the earth, He had to start it sometime, and whenever he started it, you could expect there to be an “edge case” or special situation in which some people would receive it in a way that is unusual. If nothing else, it was unusual because it was the first time. But

it was also unusual because these people had been believers in Jesus up to this point. Today, the way Spirit-baptism happens is immediately upon one's belief into Christ.

- C. The epistles explain what this means. We do not find much detailed explanation in Acts. Acts is a narrative that is describing what happened, but it doesn't necessarily parse out all the finer details of it.
 - 1 Cor. 12:13 – All Christians are brought into the body of Christ.
 - Gal. 3:27 – All Christians are put into Christ.
- D. The church is the body of Christ (Eph 1:22-23). People are baptized by the Spirit into it. This first happened on Pentecost.
- E. This particular Pentecost was the birthday of the church.
- F. **Application:** Thank God for placing you into the body of Christ and “in Christ.” Again, if you are a Christian, you need not ask for this. It is your standing by new birth. It brings you into a real, substantial family connection with all those who are in the Lord in history, in the present, and in the future. It is a real *community* or communion or fellowship of people who are believers in Christ.

Conclusion

The Church age can be accurately described as the age of the Holy Spirit. Not that He was absent before, but His ministries are magnified today.

MAP

Outline of the Chapter

- A. 2:1-13 The First Church: Born by the Spirit
- B. 2:14-39 The First Church : Peter's sermon that birthed the global church, and the first local manifestation of the church
- C. 2:40-47 The First Church: Growth and Activity