

2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters

Sermon Series - The Book of Acts/God's Plan for His Church

Sermon Title - The Spirit of the New Testament Church! Part 2

Sermon Text - Acts 2:22-47

Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

Introduction:

"On Christ the solid Rock I stand, All other ground is sinking sand!"

In this world I'm so thankful that my solid rock is Jesus and as long as I keep my eyes on Jesus and follow the leading of His precious Holy Spirit, who lives in me, I don't have to worry about sinking in the quicksand of this world's ways! Let's pray and ask God's Holy Spirit to bring the truth of Scripture alive to our hearts and to begin a spiritual awakening in us that will spread out of these four walls into a hurting and broken world! Let's pray!

Remember this is a continuation of last week's sermon. Last week we discovered that...

1. The Holy Spirit, He is the Person of God

As such, He is our Teacher, our Guide, and our Counselor! But we also learned that...

2. The Holy Spirit He is the Presence of God

In our personal lives and in the church! And we begin today with a look at the truth that...

3. The Holy Spirit is the Power of the Church

We turn to our text to see the power of God shown through His precious Holy Spirit! The Power of God to save, to transform, to do things that could never be done by human strength or wisdom! The Holy Spirit brings...

The Power of Boldness

God shows us the amazing power of His Holy Spirit as He takes the very man who had denied Jesus three times and who had run away weeping bitterly, God, by the person, the presence and the power of His Holy Spirit uses Peter to start a world wide spiritual awakening! Listen to what Peter boldly told the very people who had nailed Jesus to the Cross, the people he was once so afraid of that he denied even knowing Jesus! Peter said to them...

Acts 2:36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

The power to be bold with the Gospel of Jesus and yet loving towards others in this world and culture truly depends on the power of The Holy Spirit! We just can't do that in our human flesh!

And why not? Because the world will not always be receptive to the gospel and may even be offensive! Peter knew the crowd he was talking to and what they were capable of, but he wanted them to repent of what they had done to Jesus and be saved! And as we'll see today, many of those who listened to Peter preach that day were saved. And while Paul the Apostle was evidently not there on the day of Pentecost, we know that he was one of the Jewish leaders who would later convert to Christianity and write these beautiful words to his young apprentice Timothy...

2 Timothy 1:7 For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

2 Timothy 1:8 So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.

And Paul would also write these powerful words...

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

And on the Day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter was certainly not ashamed of the Gospel, because he knew it was the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes! We then see in our text that The Holy Spirit used Peter's words to bring...

The Power of Conviction

Acts 2:36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Acts 2:37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Folks, where do you think conviction of sin comes from? It comes from The Holy Spirit of God! Not everyone responds to the conviction of The Holy Spirit, but those who do, God saves! We'll talk about how that happens in just a moment. However, you need to understand that if you are not a believer but feel drawn to Jesus, that is The Heavenly Father drawing you by His Holy Spirit. We see this in John's Gospel where Jesus said...

John 6:44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.

And how does the Father draw people? By His Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit convicts people of their sin and draws them. The Holy Spirit takes the truth of the Word of God straight to the heart and the word empowered by The Spirit cuts to the heart! The writer of Hebrews put it this way...

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

And here's a very important thing to understand: When the Holy Spirit draws someone they are at that time enabled to make a choice! In fact Jesus...

John 6:65 ...went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them."

But here's a sad thing! There are those that reject the conviction of The Holy Spirit and walk away. Right after Jesus talked about The Father drawing and enabling people to come to Jesus this happened...

John 6:66 From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

John 6:67 Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?"

I don't believe Jesus would have said this if they didn't have a choice!

John 6:68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

John 6:69 We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

John 6:70 Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!"

John 6:71 (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)

Jesus had chosen Judas but Judas chose to betray Jesus and walk away. And we know from Scripture that this decision didn't catch God by surprise. God has the ability to know what we're going to choose without making our choice for us! God is sovereign and knows all things, but a man or woman is responsible for their choices! When a person comes under the conviction of The Holy Spirit, God enables them to make a choice. For that moment the blinding power of sin is held at bay by The Holy Spirit and the person has the ability to see sin for what it is. If they choose to respond in a positive way The Holy Spirit brings...

The Power to Repent

Acts 2:38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Several things about these two verses! First of all repentance means to turn from going in one direction and to make an about face and go the other way! Repentance involves confessing that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness! Repentance is a decision, which we will see again in

just a minute. And when a person admits they are a sinner in need of forgiveness and they choose to turn to Jesus by believing in Him through faith, and calling upon His Name, they are saved. At that moment of decision, they are baptized in the precious blood of the Lamb! The Greek word, Baptizo, means to dip under. So spiritually we are dipped under and covered by the blood of Jesus. As a result our sin and shame are washed away by Jesus! So in this context when Peter calls for them to be baptized in water we must understand that the preposition "for" in the Greek is pointing to an action which has already taken place. A literal rendering of the Greek would be to say "Repent and be baptized for your sins have been remitted, or forgiven! So this verse is not saying you have to be baptized in water to be saved! And we know that the thief on the cross admitted he had sinned and asked Jesus to remember him when He entered into His kingdom and Jesus said "Today you will be with Me in paradise!" He had no chance to be baptized in water! So why did Jesus want His followers to be baptized? Baptism was a way to publicly identify with Jesus after they had repented of their sins and decided to follow Jesus. Baptisms didn't happen in a church building, they happened in very public places like the Sea of Galilee or the river Jordan. And when people saw this they knew those being baptized had made the decision to identify themselves with Jesus!

And then Peter says...

Acts 2:39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call."

What promise is Peter speaking about? The promise he had just started in verse 38, that if a person is obedient to repent, receiving forgiveness of their sins and identifying with Christ they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit! His Spirit is the way Jesus comes into our hearts and lives! And when Peter says...

Acts 2:39 "--for all whom the Lord our God will call."

We know that he is talking about those who respond to the call of God because of the context and witness of Scripture like John's gospel and 2 Peter 3:9...

John 1:11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

John 1:12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

John 1:13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

And then we discover that The Holy Spirit brings...

The Power of Truth

Acts 2:40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

Only Jesus could save them from the penalty and power of sin, but they would have to make the choice to walk away from the corrupt things of the world. In other words, they would have to make the decision not only to allow Jesus to save their soul, but to allow Him to save their lives in this world. As I've said before, when we repent of our sins and decide to follow Jesus, He becomes our Savior, our Redeemer, saving our soul and He promises to be with us even until the end of the ages! But He also wants to save our lives from the wickedness of this world and the powerful and destructive effect of sin on our daily lives. We can't do anything to save our souls but accept what Jesus has already done for us on the Cross of Calvary. However, we save ourselves from this corrupt generation by allowing Jesus to be the Lord of our lives on a daily basis. We allow Him to direct our attitudes, our actions, our behaviors and our choices! You see, the truth is that the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in our lives when we accept Jesus as our Savior. Paul stated this in his letter to the Corinthian Church...

1 Corinthians 6:19 Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;

1 Corinthians 6:20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Once we've accepted Jesus as our Savior and He comes into our hearts by way of His Holy Spirit, He never leaves us. However, we do not become robots or zombies, we still have a mind and a will that both need to be submitted to the leadership and the Lordship of The Holy Spirit. Remember this, being filled with The Holy Spirit is not us getting more of the Holy Spirit, but The Holy Spirit getting more of us! This truth is sadly neglected in the teachings of many churches. That's why so many Christians live defeated lives. They neglect the Power of The Holy Spirit, refusing to let Him into certain areas of their lives and thereby keeping Him from saving them from this corrupt generation! Remember this..

John 8:31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

John 8:32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

You see, Jesus not only wants to forgive you of the penalty of sin, He wants to save you from the power of sin! This is why discipleship is so important! And we find in our text that The Holy Spirit brings...

The Power of Decision

Acts 2:41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Those who accepted Peter's message! They made a decision to follow Jesus! Never forget that Jesus said this...

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Whoever believes! Paul the Apostle would later describe what it looks like to accept the message of the Gospel in Romans 10:9-10. He states that the righteousness that is by faith says...

Romans 10:9 If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

Romans 10:11 As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame."

And on the day of Pentecost around three thousand made the decision to confess with their mouths and believe in their hearts that God had raised Jesus from the dead! And remember, many of these would have been in the crowd that screamed for the crucifixion of Jesus! But they were cut to the heart and repented of their sins. Boy I would have loved to have been there for that baptism service! And I'm pretty sure Peter had some help doing the baptisms! But I'm equally excited to see what God is going to do in our day! Some would say, "Pastor Larry, I just don't know, I mean things are so different today and people are so skeptical, and it's just hard for me to see how we could even have a spiritual awakening given the moral, cultural and political climate in our country. And when you look at the terrible situations around the world, I just don't know if there could be a repeat like The Day of Pentecost! Well let me remind you of the circumstances and background of our story today. Israel was occupied by the Romans. A majority of the religious leaders were corrupt and had sold out to the Romans in order to maintain their institutional power and control. Jesus, the leader of the grass roots movement for reform had been brutally crucified. There were only 120 left of the thousands who had once attended Jesus' outside rallies. The threats of ongoing persecution were real. These 120 had seen the brutality of what would happen to anyone who opposed those in power and yet, at the most prominent and highest attended Jewish festival, these people, led by Peter, emboldened by the person, the presence and the power of God's Holy Spirit, they made their stand! They proclaimed the truth and stood on their convictions in a loving, yet bold and passionate way and God poured out His Spirit and drew the hearts of lost people to Him. God is still calling and enabling people to be saved to this very day! The same power that was available to the New Testament Church is available to Northshore Church! Listen to Paul's words to the Church at Ephesus...

Ephesians 3:16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

Ephesians 3:17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,

Ephesians 3:18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,

Ephesians 3:19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,

Ephesians 3:21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Folks, God's purpose for His Church has not changed and this brings us to our last but very important point...

4. The Holy Spirit reveals the Purpose and fuels the Passion of the Church

We find this beautiful description of the New Testament Church in our text and I believe the Holy Spirit inspired these words to serve as a template for the purpose and mission of any Biblically based church...

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Acts 2:43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

Acts 2:44 All the believers were together and had everything in common.

Acts 2:45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

Acts 2:46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,

Acts 2:47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

This passage is a template for the purpose and mission of the church which includes outreach, evangelism, discipleship, prayer, fellowship, ministry to one another, unity of mind and mission, praise and worship, and church growth! I believe our church purpose statement is in line with this...

Northshore Church's Purpose is to see the One who gave His life for us exalted and the ones He gave His life for transformed!

Our Mission: Transforming Worship, People and the World!

And our text says that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer! And what led to this passionate devotion? The answer is found in Titus 3:4-7..

Titus 3:4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared,
Titus 3:5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.
He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,
Titus 3:6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,
Titus 3:7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

And here's what we need to understand: The Holy Spirit has gifted each of us with talents and gifts that He will also empower to help us help the Church to fulfill its purpose! Ray C. Steadman wrote these powerful words...

"The work of the church is to heal the broken-hearted, to bring deliverance to the poor, to open the doors to the captives, setting free those who are bound in prisons of doubt, fear, anxiety and selfishness, and leading them out into liberty, freedom and power. That is what God has called us to do, and it takes every one of us to do it. We are all in the ministry, and each is given a gift for that purpose." Ray C. Steadman

Let me say this: the Holy Spirit not only reveals the purpose and fuels the passion of the church, He gives spiritual gifts to aid and empower the members of the church to work in concert with one another so they can minister effectively to each other and to the world in which they live. But here's a sad truth that Ray Steadman pointed out and it's also a hard truth...

"If you were a visitor from another planet and visited churches across this country today, you would probably draw the conclusion that the church operates to run meetings on Sunday's. Everything is aimed toward that; all the work of leadership is directed toward that, and when it is over, it starts all over again. But that is a far cry from God's concept of the church. The church consists of all those who have truly been born of the Spirit and are thereby a living body, growing and developing within the world, to touch the hurt and death of the world with the life and love of God." Ray C. Steadman

Folks, it's not that Sunday is a bad thing, it is not, it is a wonderful thing, and the Bible says that we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but if we only shine our lights in this building on Sunday mornings and we fail to shine our lights out there where people are, the church has lost its purpose and its passion is misguided! I don't want to be a part of a church that is not actively seeking to make a real and dynamic difference in the world. I don't want to be guilty of leading a church to settle for anything less than God's full intentions for His church: to be salt and light in an otherwise tasteless and darkened society. Would you agree? Let me share some Scripture that will help you understand this more clearly.

Ephesians 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called;

Ephesians 4:5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism;

Ephesians 4:6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

Ephesians 4:8 This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people."

Ephesians 4:9 (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?)

Ephesians 4:10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

What does that mean? Remember what Jesus said...

John 16:7 But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

Paul continues...

Ephesians 4:11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,

Ephesians 4:12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

Ephesians 4:13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

Ephesians 4:15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

Ephesians 4:16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

I just can't tell you how important it is that each and every one of us who have accepted Jesus into our lives allow His Holy Spirit to empower us to be the light of the world! In fact Paul said this to the Church at Corinth...

2 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

So make no mistake about it, this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. Peter, the one who preached that powerful message on the Day of Pentecost would later write these words...

1 Peter 4:10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

Here's my question to each of us here today and it's a question for me as well...

Am I using the gifts I have received from God to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms or am I too busy, too preoccupied, too distracted, or too focused on other things that I'm not focusing on what matters to God? And what matters to God? One thing is that we share His love. And trust me there's opportunities all around us if we are sensitive to The Holy Spirit's presence, power, purpose and passion for the church, and the church is us! On Friday morning I left my house about 5:30am to come down to Slidell to take a picture of the full Harvest Moon. I decided to go over to Hwy 11 close to the Oak Harbor BLVD so I could get a picture of the moon setting over the marsh to the west. I took a few pictures as I patiently waited for the moon to get closer to the horizon. I had arrived a bit early and believe it or not a chilly wind was blowing. As the moon got pretty close, someone came up to me and said, "what are you taking pictures of?" I said the harvest moon. They then started talking to me about some of the pictures they had gotten with their phone of the marsh and some of the wildlife. They showed me some of the pictures and they were really good. I then looked back at my camera and the moon to see if it was getting closer to the horizon. The moment I had gotten up early for. She said, "I'm sorry, I'm distracting you!" I said "Oh no that's not a problem," and she asked me if I take a lot of pictures. I told her that I do when I get a chance, but that I stay pretty busy and that I was a pastor and a chaplain. She asked me where the church was and I told her. She then told me that she was going to walk down to where she usually goes and fishes and takes pictures beside the road. She said there's some really giant fish down there and a big alligator. And for some reason she told me she had lost her hook. Big fish! I told her I would stop down there as I was leaving and take a few pictures. I figured I would give her one of my cards and share with her a little more about our church once I got down there. It was now around 7:00 and the moon was just getting to the horizon but the haze pretty much obscured the detail so I packed up my camera and drove down to the little area she had told me about. In case you didn't know, Highway 11 is really busy at that time of the morning. I got in the truck and believe it or not I didn't have a single one of my cards. But I figured I would just tell the lady about the website with my music and pictures and the link to our church website with our messages. But when I got down there she was nowhere to be found! My heart sank as I thought about my missed opportunity to share Jesus with her. And here's the strangest thing, as I was walking across the street to get back to my truck I looked down and there was this big shiny gold hook on the ground. I picked it up and thought, wow, we're supposed to be fishers of men and I sure missed a golden opportunity. I prayed and asked God to forgive me for being so obsessed with the perfect moon shot that I forgot my purpose and passion to share His love. I know God loves that lady and she may already know Him, but if not, I pray that God will draw her with His precious Holy Spirit, even with the little bit of conversation we had and maybe she'll come to church and I'll have another opportunity!

Let's pray!

