

ACTS 4 2DAY: Ministering in the Holy Spirit's Power Acts 1 and 2 1/10/10 Jon Ulm Manassas, VA
(Dynamics of the Early Church #1)

As a boy I imagined the Holy Spirit was a lot like "Casper the Friendly Ghost." You know, he looked like a ghost, but he was nice to people. He went around doing good things for God. Did any of you do the same thing?

I'm sure the main reason I had this idea was that, when I was a boy, we used the King James Version of the Bible and in the KJV, the Holy Spirit was called "the Holy Ghost."

As I got older, I noticed that most Christians talked about the Holy Spirit as some kind of impersonal force of God in the world. Impersonal, I say, because we never referred to him as "him" but as "it." When most Christians talked about the Holy Spirit's activity, they said "it" did this or that, not "he" did this or that. It was only later that I started correcting myself because I had learned that the Holy Spirit is as much a Person as God the Father or God the Son are. He too was in the beginning when we were created, so we are made as much in His image as we are made in the image of Almighty God or the Son of God. (I hope I'm not making you even more confused than before!)

I have deliberately retrained myself to say things about the Holy Spirit like, "He is our Comforter," "He is our Advocate," He is God's indwelling presence inside every Christian."

What amazes me still, however, is the hesitance we have to speak much about the Holy Spirit even today. I guess we are afraid someone will think we are Pentecostals or something. We think that they think that if we start talking too much about the Holy Spirit we are liable to start rolling around on the floor and dancing wildly in our worship services. Of course, that's not going to happen.

Maybe you heard about the visitor that came to the old-line, high-class denominational church one Sunday. As the song service progressed, he was really taken with the music and begin moving around and waving his arms in the air. One of the deacons came up behind him and said, "You really need to stop that" to which the man replied, "What? I've got the Spirit!" The deacon replied, "Well, you didn't get it here!"

This morning we want to open a study of the Book of Acts together. Acts is the fifth book in the New Testament, and Dr. Luke wrote it as a history of the opening months and years of the Church of Jesus Christ. He followed the same plan he had followed for the Gospel of Luke: he interviewed everyone he could, then set down in an orderly fashion what had transpired in the first decade or so of Church history.

He focused a good bit on the activities of the Apostles of Christ – especially Peter, John, James, and Paul – so that many people call this book "The Acts of the Apostles." I think it is more appropriate to call it "The Acts of the Holy Spirit," because it shows so clearly the powerful and deliberate activities of the Spirit of God in the world and in the Church.

Our study of "The Acts of the Holy Spirit" will focus on the dynamics of the Early Church that helped it to be so effective in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ. The first of these dynamics, as you've already guessed by now, is that the Early Church always "ministered in the Holy Spirit's Power."

I wish the same was true today and, of course, it can be. We are not yet a congregation that I would say always "ministers in the Holy Spirit's power," but we could become such a church, couldn't we?

What makes for a Healthy Church, a Vibrant Church that carries on a powerful ministry for God? Perhaps we can begin by talking about what an Unhealthy Church looks like. What is lacking; what is going on in weak and unhealthy churches that keeps them from doing much for God? One preacher said, Unhealthy Churches are characterized by **Four Deadly Diseases**:

The disease of Prayerlessness – they give lip-service to prayer by having several prayers in their services, but they do not pray with passion for lost people who need Jesus.

The disease of Stagnation – they are content to stay the same year after year; they have no desire to grow, they have no plan for reaching out

The disease of Compromise – they look pretty much like the world around them; they tolerate sin and their standards keep slipping along with the rest of society.

The last deadly disease he called "Excessive Organization" – but I think we can put it much simpler. The fourth deadly disease is **Too Many Meetings and Not Enough Ministry**. This eventually becomes true of

most churches, that almost all of their activity is about getting together for their own enjoyment and mutual benefit. This, too, is Deadly to the cause of Christ in the world!

What's missing in all of these churches is what might be missing in ours sometimes: the Influence and Impact of the Holy Spirit. Even if we had moved over to the Vint Hill Road property last year and were growing by leaps and bounds, we could still be missing the Influence and Impact of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Ray W. Ellis said,

“The work of the Holy Spirit is vital to the revitalization of a local church. . . . Without the presence of the Holy Spirit at work in the life and ministry of a local church all efforts are in vain. A local church may experience numerical gains in attendance, but without the ministry of the Holy Spirit the church will not experience redemptive, Kingdom...growth.”

“Spiritual health and renewal are possible when we begin to seek the Lord with all our heart and allow the Holy Spirit to give us His vision and energize us as His leaders in the church. When we get out of the way and permit the Holy Spirit to lead, we can follow His vision for the church.”

The disciples of the 1st Century learned that God could do FAR MORE than they ever dreamed He could when they followed His lead. They were just as weak and just as fearful as we often are, and yet amazing things happened on a regular basis because they submitted to the Spirit's power and wisdom.

Illustration -

A businessman purchased a tropical plant. He put the plant in his office and did every thing he knew to keep the plant healthy. He gave it water, plant food, sunshine and lots of tender loving care. After two weeks the plant was turning brown and dying. He called the Florist and asked if the plant had a guarantee because the plant was dying. The Florist asked how he was caring for the plant. He said he was giving it water, plant food and sunshine. The Florist asked: “Are you misting the plant?” “What do you mean, misting the plant?” The Florist replied, “The plant you purchased is a tropical plant and it needs high humidity. Take a spray bottle and spray mist on the plant for a week or two.” After two weeks of spraying the plant it turned green and was revitalized.

Without a proper climate in the local church you can do everything right and not experience health and vitality. God cannot bless a toxic church climate. A proper climate for church growth is found when the Holy Spirit is in charge and the leaders in the church are practicing and modeling Biblical qualities.

Unhealthy churches are filled with conflicts, carnality, and leaders who are more interested in control than allowing the Holy Spirit to lead. The focus of toxic churches is inward. They are ingrown, lack vision, lack a passion for souls, and are comfortable, apathetic and satisfied to “play church.”

By contrast, what do we see in the Church of the Book of Acts that shows that it Always Ministered in the Holy Spirit's Power?

Let's go to the first two chapters of Acts to find out, reading first from Acts 1:1-8.

Here is the way Luke begins his account of the last days of Jesus Earthly Ministry and the beginning of His Church in Jerusalem.

[READ Acts 1:1-8.]

Jesus was then taken up into heaven, and soon the disciples returned to the upper room where they had been staying. They and the other followers of Jesus continued in prayer for several days. During this time, God chose a man named Matthias to become the twelfth apostle, since Judas Iscariot had betrayed Jesus and then hanged himself.

Chapter 2. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit came upon them in an unmistakable way. Jesus had told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power, and there is no denying that's what happened on the Jewish Day of Pentecost.

[READ Acts 2:1-4.]

John Hamby said,

“On the Day of Pentecost, power from heaven came down. The power of God turned despairing doubters into dynamic disciples. They had received the promise of the Holy Spirit and were clothed with power from on high. But power for what? Did they receive the power of God simply so they could feel good about

themselves? Did they receive the power of God to keep it to themselves? No! They received the power of God to energize them to be witnesses to Jesus Christ in a secular society. The power of the Holy Spirit was for people; to enable the disciples to reach out and touch human need and share the liberating truth of the Gospel of Christ. ... We must never be content to sing "Standing On The Promises" while all we're doing is sitting on the premises. Pentecost is meant to enable us to reach out and touch others."

On the same day that the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, there were thousands and thousands of Jews and other God-fearing people who had come to Jerusalem from virtually every nation to celebrate Pentecost. Luke tells us in verses 5-13 that Peter and the other Apostles began speaking in the languages and tongues of the people from dozens of nations and regions of the world, even though they had never learned those languages. The visitors to Jerusalem and the Jews alike were amazed at what they heard, and they all gathered together in the center of the city. They asked each other, "What is going on?" "What in the world does this mean?"

Let's pick up the story in [Acts 2:14-21](#). [READ]

Peter then continued to tell the crowd about Jesus Christ and why God sent him to earth. His message convicted them of their guilt for killing Jesus just 50 days earlier, and many of them were convinced that they stood condemned before God. Notice what happened then, verse 37.

[READ [Acts 2:37-41](#).]

Here is the beginning of the Church of Christ. Through the guidance and wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit alone, God launched the Church of Christ when 3,000 people responded to the Good News of Jesus on that day! From that day on, they continued to preach and teach and serve in the power of the Holy Spirit!

Are We a Spirit-Filled Church? Can we claim that we, too, minister by the power of the Holy Spirit?

In this story of the first day of the Church of Christ, we find the identifying marks of a Spirit-Filled Church. Here was a church led by the Spirit of God. The first Church was a church of Power, a church of Purity, and a church of Passion.

On the Day of Pentecost and almost every day after that, it was obvious this was a **Church of Power**. God moved across the thousands and thousands of people in that crowd as only God could. Peter and the other apostles had no intention of going out to preach about Jesus on that day, but when the Spirit came upon them they were carried out into the streets speaking in about every tongue known to man! When this simple fisherman named Peter stood up in their midst and preached to them in their common language, Greek, he was preaching the first sermon he had ever preached. It is obvious it was God who gave him the words to speak and it was God who translated that message into the hearts and minds of everyone who was there. It was the Spirit that convicted many on that day of their guilt and convinced them that Jesus was the only One who could save them from their sins. 3,000 of them received the grace of God and obeyed what God told them to do. After the feast of Pentecost, the Good News was then taken to nations far and wide. It was God's Power: God's Saving Power, God's Transforming Power, and God's Energizing Power for whatever God had in mind to do that day!

This first church, this Spirit-Filled church, was also a **Church of Purity**.

The disciples who had gathered in that upper room were amazed to see tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them (Acts 2:3). The idea associated with fire is the idea of Purity and the purifying work of the Holy Spirit. God was calling men and women to repent and to come clean before God, something none of us can do on our own.

The early church was a church of Purity. We can look at examples in the Book of Acts like the example of Ananias and Sapphira in Chapter 5. Here was a married couple that decided together to deceive the leaders of the church and lie to the Holy Spirit. When many people were giving to help with the needs of others in the church, Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property then lied about the amount they sold it for so the Church would praise them for their generosity. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Peter saw through their deception and they were both struck dead for lying to the Holy Spirit!

Those who came to Christ in the Book of Acts were told to turn from their lives of sin and to follow and obey Jesus Christ as their Lord. None of us is perfect and without sin, but our life in Christ is to be one of purity in our lifestyle and the choices we make from day to day. We can't just ignore or become lenient toward sin in ourselves or the Church. The Church of Christ has a responsibility to declare and demonstrate the values and holiness of people who belong to God and live for Jesus.

The third sign that the early church was a Spirit-Filled Church is that it was a **Church of Passion**. The early Christians were passionate about sharing the Good News with anyone who was lost in sin.

They had a Passion to Tell the Gospel. It was a passion inspired by the Holy Spirit, not something they had dreamed up on their own. Just as the believers were carried out into the streets of Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, so were they carried daily into the Temple and from house to house so they could share what God had done for them in Christ. Just as Jesus had said they would "be His witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth," they kept spreading from neighborhood to neighborhood and city to city and nation to nation as they took the Gospel of Christ everywhere they went!

We will see in our study how Persecution scattered them in every direction, but as they were scattered they willingly shared the Good News of Jesus.

We will see how the Spirit of God came upon the church in Antioch in Acts 13 and told them to SEND OUT missionaries to foreign countries so that the Gospel would be taken to people who had never heard of Christ. This was a Church of Passion, Passion for the Lost!

Do we have that same Passion for Lost Souls today?

It is easy for me to get up here and preach a sermon about the Church and the need to be a Spirit-Filled Church. It is easy for you to sit in these comfortable chairs and listen to my sermon and even "Amen" the things I've said. But the hard reality is that our church will never be a Spirit-Filled Church until it is filled with individual Christians who are Spirit-Filled people!

A Spirit-Filled person is a person of POWER. They are energized and enabled and powered by the Holy Spirit himself. Day after day they obey whatever the Spirit tells them to do.

A Spirit-Filled person is a person of PURITY. They don't compromise with the world around them. There is honesty in all they do. They have a clean thought-life. They live for Jesus, not for their own pleasures.

A Spirit-Filled person is a person of PASSION, Passion for Lost Souls. They are willing to tell anyone who will listen to them about the best thing that has ever happened to them! They are motivated by the Spirit of God to tell others what Jesus has done for them so that He can do the same in their lives!

In his book, *The Crisis in the University*, Sir Walter Moberly tells Christians, "If one tenth of what you believe is true, you ought to be ten times as excited as you are."

If Jesus Christ has made a difference in your life or mine, we ought to be telling other people about Him. We ought to be testifying to the radical changes Jesus is making in our lives and telling people that He is the only Savior in this world. That's what a witness is. That's what a Spirit-filled person does.

If we want to be a Spirit-filled church, we must begin by becoming Spirit-filled individuals. Today I challenge you to investigate your life. Are the marks of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in your life? Are you the Spirit-filled person that is needed to make our church a Spirit-filled Church?

PRAYER

Song, *Take My Life*