

“THE PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT”

Scripture: Acts 2:1-13

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One of the great blessings of being a Christian is that God has so many promises that we can depend upon. He promises that no temptation will overtake us that is uncommon to man. He will give us the strength to resist temptation. No matter what we are going through He promises to give us grace. In Romans, chapter 8, He promises that all things can work together for the good for those that love Him. And especially we have the promise of eternal life that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life and those that believe in Him, even though they die, yet shall they live.

But I want to speak to you today about one of the great promises as we celebrate the birthday of the Church, and that is the promise of the Holy Spirit. In my doctorate ministry cohort (that's what they call it — they don't call it a *group* when you spend all that money for tuition — they call it a cohort) there is one fellow that is president of a Pentecostal Bible College up in Pennsylvania and he is warning me that there are not as many main line people in the group coming up this June, and so they are determined to make a Pentecostal out of me and get me fired up. We'll see about that. But, really, the Holy Spirit is not just for the Pentecostal Holiness Church, not just for Charismatics; it is the norm. When the Spirit came, Jesus wanted them to wait in the city until they were clothed with power from on high. So it is the norm, and it's the gift that God gives us to live the Christian life.

Let me share with you about the Holy Spirit coming on that first day of Pentecost. In Acts, chapter 2:

2:¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? ⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs--we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"

¹²Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

In his book, *Come Thirsty*, Max Lucado describes Megan. Megan is 21 years old. She does

make-up for the Bishop Bentley show out in Los Angeles. They panic because the show is about to go on and they don't have the guest that they had been promised, and they don't have any back-up plans like they normally have, so it just so happens that Jesse Carpenter wants to come and share with them about how to deal with stress. She puts his makeup on; she knows he's different. He doesn't seem to really like the makeup. But he goes on there; he is interviewed. He teaches Community College in Saw Grass, Alabama, and said, "Really, what does someone from Saw Grass, Alabama know about stress? Jesse Carpenter's sharing of that, described stress as oftentimes a sign of a deeper longing in the soul. A lot of ways we deal with it is vacations or pills or pleasures, but oftentimes, though, what it means, is there is something deeper that someone is looking for, or as we call it, "They are sipping from the swamp," that is, they are drinking from a water they were never intended to drink about.

Megan liked what she heard. In fact, the next day — and the interview only lasted seven minutes — she was having a glass of tea in the morning and Jesse Carpenter happened to come over and sit down with her. He asked her about her life. He knew about her tear-stained pillow at night.

"How did you know that?" She began to talk about that she had come a long way from being a majorette in high school from Missouri, the God-fearing family she grew up in, the boy friend that had dumped her; she just couldn't quite get over that. She wasn't getting along with her parents so she heard you could make a lot of money making commercials out in Los Angeles, so she came out there. She kept getting turned down, kept getting turned down. She went to cosmetic school and she didn't even get through that, but she went to interview for this job and she compromised her morals, but she got the job and Jesse said, "You know, God never intended you to be this crusty, this hard-hearted."

First she was offended, but then she was intrigued. "Well, can you tell me how not to have this hard heart?"

Max Lucado goes on in that book to describe what a dehydrated soul is like. God intended for us to drink from, as Jesus described it, rivers of living water — that water that brings nourishment, that water that brings new life.

I remember early on in seminary that I got some food poisoning and walked down, very sick, to the infirmary and I was dehydrated. I felt so glad that those people were there to take care of me and that I could get an IV and get hydrated again. But, oftentimes, when we are not connecting with the Holy Spirit, we lack that clear water. Or, as Jesus talked to the woman at the well in John chapter 4, that well that will never run dry. And that is what the gift of the Holy Spirit is all about and I want to share with you that what happened on the day of Pentecost still can happen in our lives, as it could happen for Megan.

When you look at Acts, chapter 2, I want you to think for a few moments about, truly, do you really want to allow the Holy Spirit to come into your life? Would you be willing for Him to bring that new life into you? First of all, who is the Holy Spirit? In Acts, chapters 1 and 2, the Disciples are waiting. Jesus had told them to "wait in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." And it even says that when they gathered on the mountain that some still

doubted. Even though the Risen Christ had appeared to them, taught them, they still had their doubts, but Jesus had appeared to them for forty days. For forty days Jesus has been teaching them, but still some still had their doubts.

Doubts are not all bad: that's a sign that you have faith, but it's struggling. It's struggling to grow, but you have to admit: They have been with Him for three years; He has died; He has risen from the dead and now He begins to speak about it's better for me to leave because the Comforter is coming. Jesus spoke about it this way in John, chapter 14 when He talked about the Holy Spirit coming:

¹⁵"If you love me, you will obey what I command. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— ¹⁷the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

Part of the mission of the Holy Spirit is for us to know the truth, to know that, as Jesus said, "Continue my word, then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

It's important to know what really is the truth about God and Jesus Christ. Sometimes I can do a little bit of grocery shopping; I'm not very good at it, but I can go get burgers and get ready for a hamburger meal, a lot of times on Saturday night. And if I am waiting, I like to look at the magazines. There was one that caught my attention about a month ago. You may have this magazine, but it had this cat on the front. His name was Lester and the CIA is doing experiments with him. Apparently Lester the Cat is a spy in Iraq, and I just couldn't pass that up. And so I got that and I looked inside and there was actually a picture of the cat parachuting down into Iraq.

I bought it for my cat because my cat sleeps about 18 hours a day. I thought it might motivate him to have a little more purpose in his life. Sidney told me that that's nonsense, you know that's not true, so yesterday when I saw that (I think it's the same magazine) it had Elvis on there. And Elvis is gray-haired now and it had "Elvis 2008" and said he was alive, but you had to buy it to find out where he has been all this time, and so, if you bought that, I wish you would tell me because I resisted this time.

But the Holy Spirit empowers us and especially He brings out the truth of the scriptures. He helps us to know what the truth is so we don't have to drink from that swamp as that fellow from Alabama says. We can drink the clear water. The Holy Spirit comes to empower us to live the Christian life. And what a great difference He makes. I heard a story of a man that at the turn of the century, in a raffle, he won a car! The only problem is, he has never seen a car, didn't even know what a car was. So he got his mules, hitched up the car and drug it back into town because he didn't know that you could operate it.

Too many of us are going through this life trying to be good, trying to be Christians, trying to live the Sermon on the Mount, but we are not connected to the Power. The Holy Spirit comes to empower us. He is the third person of the Trinity. He is the gift that the Church needs to have. Why do we need the Holy Spirit? Well, go back to Acts, chapter 2 and you find, well one, the

biggest reason is He will transform us; He is empower us to live the way God intended us to live. When you look at Acts, chapter 2, let me read to you just a little bit about the first Christian sermon. Now mind you, this is the first time that Peter has preached; this is the same Peter that denied his Lord three times. In verse 14 it says,

¹⁴*Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.*

¹⁵*These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!* ¹⁶*No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:*

¹⁷*"In the last days, God says,*

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your young men will see visions,

your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸*Even on my servants, both men and women,*

I will pour out my Spirit in those days,

and they will prophesy.

¹⁹*I will show wonders in the heaven above*

and signs on the earth below,

blood and fire and billows of smoke.

²⁰*The sun will be turned to darkness*

and the moon to blood

before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

²¹*And everyone who calls*

on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Peter is preaching the first sermon and he is letting them know that this is fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy — the Prophet Joel — that the day will come when the Spirit doesn't come out on a few prophets or kings, but is for all people.

Why do we need the Holy Spirit? He will transform us into being the Christians that God has called us to be.

In John, chapter 16, it talks about the Work of the Holy Spirit. In verse 7 it says:

⁷*It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.* ⁸*When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; ¹⁰in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.*

What does this tell us about the Holy Spirit? Well, first of all, it is the third person of the Trinity, but especially it is Great Evangelist. He is One that goes forth and convicts people of their need for Jesus Christ, in the first place. (Tape change)

... it is love; it's joy; it's peace; it's patience; it's kindness and gentleness and faithfulness and

goodness and self control. The Holy Spirit also gives gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are listed in I Corinthians 12. He gives us tasks, but not just tasks. He gives us specific gifts to be used. And He gives them to the body of Christ. He gives them to individuals, but He gives them to the body of Christ, that the Church will be strong and healthy and built up and everyone will work together and realize that all different people are important. And especially, the Holy Spirit is a Comforter. He is a Counselor.

I don't know if you saw this, but back in 1992 Derrick Redmond, British Olympian in the Barcelona Olympics, he was favored win the 400 meters. I think it was a heat, but he took off and about half way through he came up lame. He had torn a hamstring, but he didn't stop. He just kept hobbling around the track. And then there was this older gentleman that kept trying to get through security to get to him. He has a shirt on: "Have you heard the kid today?" and they finally let him go when they realized that this was Derrick's dad. And he went over to him and of course he started crying, but he told him, "Son, you don't have to finish this race."

He said, "Yes, I do."

And so Dad said, "Well, we're going to finish it together." So he saw that as really touching, but they finished together, the father and son to the finish line. But that's what the Holy Spirit does; He especially comforts us and helps us when we need help.

Peter Marshall, Chaplain of the US Senate years ago, said it this way:

God does not leave us comfortless, but we have to be in dire need of comfort to know the truth of His promise. It is in times of calamity and days and nights of sorrow and trouble that the presence of sufficiency and the sympathy of God feel very sure and very wonderful. Then we find out that the grace of God is sufficient for all our needs, for every problem, for every difficulty, for every broken heart, for every human sorrow.

I am so grateful; God is so good to me, bringing me through a car accident. I am back on the road, so watch out for me; I'm watching out for you! I don't trust anybody; I really eye-ball everybody. But I think it was so ironic: I remember my family got together. Mom still had a few things, in going through her estate, and one of them was — I call it her "old folk's lazy-boy." It is battery operated. I decided to take it for sentimental reasons. It's been in my study — I bet I had't sat in it two or three times. Well, I tell you, the last couple of weeks it's been wonderful. I can just operate that battery, get up, in and out. But sometimes we are proud people, people that like to do everything on their own, and have a hard time accepting the gift and the help of the Holy Spirit. But He comes and He will help.

How do we receive the Holy Spirit? Well, Peter preached his first sermon. He does pretty good. I mean, Peter is very direct and in verse 37 we pick it up. It says:

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

³⁸Peter 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. ³⁹The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Well, what were the results? Verse 40 says:

⁴⁰With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." ⁴¹Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

That's pretty good! First sermon; three thousand come to Christ. But that was more a tribute to the Holy Spirit. It was more a tribute to those Disciples waiting in prayer, and God moved upon their hearts and changed them.

How do we receive the Holy Spirit? First of all, we need to believe that He really wants to pour it out upon us. In Luke's Gospel, He says,

11: ⁹Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. And He says, ¹³If you then, though you are evil, (that means having sin in your life) know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

We begin with *asking* and then second, we *repent*. That means we change our minds; that means we allow the Spirit to change us so that He can fill us. The Spirit is Holy so anything that is unholy, He will change.

Katherine Marshall shares her disappointment as she did a Bible study on the Holy Spirit and she had read about so many people like Charles Finney, D. L. Moody, and some of the other great ones; they really prayed for the Spirit. It was very emotional and a lot of excitement and joy, and for her it wasn't like that at all. And she thought, well, nothing's happened, but then she noticed a change. She noticed that someone was checking her critical tongue. She had a habit of giving her opinion and giving it readily, and she realized that maybe God doesn't want her opinion expressed quite so much, or maybe not in that same way. And so He began to work on her speech.

There is a word of warning that, when He comes, He will come in the way that will best help us to grow spiritually and step up that spiritual maturity. Why is it needed? Because the Church needs the Pentecostal power. The Church needs this power, this love for Christ. What happens when He comes in? He gives you a love for Him; He gives you a love for His work.

Let me close by sharing the first time I really made a Bible Study on the Holy Spirit. It was when I was a salesman at the Eureka Company. I was selling vacuum cleaners. I wasn't that good at it but I made a living. I was living in Wilmington and for a couple of years I had felt that God was calling me to preach but I just struggled with it; I just really had a lot of problems with it. I just wasn't sure. I got a job, at least, and I met Liz in Wilmington, so that was the

best part of that, but I still was struggling about, I just don't know what God wants to do with my life. And I read Billy Graham's book on the Holy Spirit. You know, you could trust Billy, and you know that whatever he writes about or preaches about, it's going to be the Bible. And I read his book and it really went through the Old Testament and the New Testament about who the Holy Spirit is and how He works in your life. Nothing fancy, no pizzazz, but just straight forward how He works in your life. And so I prayed that God would pour out His Spirit upon me, and I still remember the greatest hindrance I had was fear. I was afraid that I would become fanatic; I really was afraid of losing control.

I have to look back and say, "Surrender really is the problem here." But I surrendered to "whatever You want me to do." And then, you know what? Clarity about preaching came. There was a peace. It wasn't a hard decision. I mean I just felt at peace — this is what you ought to do. You don't have to worry about the details, this is what I want you to do. When He comes, oh, what a difference it makes. He brings joy; He brings us love. Yes, He brings correction, but He brings us power, spiritual power, for the living of Christian life. Let us pray.

O Lord, bring forth Pentecost once again, not only to our Church Family for which we are so grateful. We are so grateful for the heritage that we have. We pray, Lord, to be found faithful in our generation. We pray for the many great tasks before us, that Lord, You would give us the courage and the vision and the power of Your Holy Spirit, Lord, to truly make a difference in this community and in this world. For we pray for the Spirit to come upon this community, this state and this nation, unto the world, Lord, we do pray that You would pour out once again, this power of Pentecost, this glorious gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen.