

Acts 2:1-4

Tongues of Fire

2/8/15

*When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. **2** And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. **4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

From time to time, it's good to think about what you really want out of life. Maybe you want a happy home with healthy, well-adjusted children, someone who will love you and whom you respect and love in return, maybe a satisfying job with enjoyable colleagues and adequate pay. Maybe you want to have enough to retire on, take a few trips. What are you aiming at? Too many have aimed too low, at the Devil's tasty targets, so once we get the good job and house and sweet car, we're content but with a hollow, leaking contentment.

You were created for so much more. I don't mean to quit your job or not hope for happy, well-adjusted children, but where does God fit? Too often, even with Christian people, God becomes a means to an end and not the end itself.

Here's what I mean: we pray for Him to provide and give and protect and heal so we can do those things we've always wanted to do instead of saying, "How can I do all things to the Glory of God? How can my life be lived out in a thousand ordinary activities? How can it Glorify Jesus?"

Your life is not about *you*, and the Holy Spirit in you (if you are a believer) is pressing against the flesh, pressing you to turn your gaze to Christ, to live your life for Christ, to saturate your mind with Christ and drop this two-bit Christianity that flirts so hard with the ways of the world.

Our Christian heritage reaches back to the powerful passage in front of us. We know it as the Day of Pentecost, the day when the Third Person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, came to change everything and to do it through men and women who love Jesus.

In the Old Testament, the preacher Joel prophesized about this day. In Luke 3, John the Baptist said Christ would baptize with the Holy Spirit and Fire. Jesus said that after He ascended, the Holy Spirit would come and we would receive power to be used to Glorify God. Here's the truth:

The Holy Spirit Creates a Holy People to be Used by God

Your life is to be used by God and the Holy Spirit does that. Let's talk about how the Holy Spirit does that.

The Holy Spirit Creates Life

It's hard to know exactly where to begin with this passage. The disciples are together on the Day of Pentecost (a word that means "50th"), a Jewish Festival 50 days after Passover.

By this time, it commemorated the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai and v. 2 says it happened suddenly. They didn't plan for it. God just did it, and listen to the description in v. 2, "And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty wind – and it filled the entire house where they were sitting."

The fact that the coming of the Holy Spirit is described as a wind is important. In the New Testament and in the Old Testament there is one word that describes wind, breath, and Spirit. In the Old Testament it is "ruach." In the New Testament it is "pneuma." These are exactly the words that Jesus uses when He talks about what it means to become a Christian.

In John 3 when Jesus talked to Nicodemus, He told Nicodemus "unless you are born of the *pneuma* – wind and spirit – you cannot see the Kingdom of God. John 3:6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit." Why did He say this? It's because the Bible portrays us – when we are outside of Christ – as being "dead in sin." If you are dead in sin, you don't need to turn your life around or try harder: You're Dead! And you need life. You need the Holy Spirit to convict and awaken to change and convert you.

Look, you don't just need to make a *decision*; you need to be *resurrected*. Decision-making is flesh; coming to Christ is Life and it's the work of the Spirit. When Jesus was talking to Nicodemus, he was most likely referencing Ezekiel 37, when Ezekiel preached to the dry bones and the bones came together and formed a great dead army. But we were dead. It wasn't until the Spirit came that there was life. Jesus talked extensively about the Holy Spirit in John 14, 15, and 16. He said the Holy Spirit will dwell in you, help and prompt you, convict you when you are confused, reveal God to you and give you life. The Holy Spirit creates a Holy People to be used by God.

1. Holy Spirit Creates Life.

The Holy Spirit Cleanses Life

In v. 2 you hear the wind but in v. 3 you see something: "divided tongues of Fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them." Tongues of Fire. We'll get to the tongues part, but first the fire.

In the Old Testament, fire represented the presence of God; for instance, in Exodus 3:2-5 there's a burning bush; in Exodus 13:25, a pillar of fire; in Exodus 24:17, a consuming fire; in Exodus 40:38, an indwelling fire. In Leviticus there is Nadab & Abihu – an avenging fire.

This fiery presence of God brought judgment and purification and, at the Day of Pentecost in Acts, the tongues of fire were a visible representation of the overshadowing presence of God. Furthermore, v. 3 tells us that the tongues of fire rested on each one on them, indicating that-- although they were in a group setting, like ours-- this was a personal experience, an individual personal relationship with Christ.

We know that the judgment of God was poured out on Jesus at the cross and the Holy Spirit now comes and purifies. We call it sanctification – growing in Christ. It's why you are convicted inside when you sin. These sins come to your heart and mind so that you can confess them to God and be cleansed. The Bible says in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins – he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" When is the last time you just came absolutely clean before God and poured out these sins big and small instead of hiding, rationalizing and making excuses? The Holy Spirit comes to burn those sins with fire, and confession is the spark and starts the cleansing.

1. The Holy Spirit creates life.
2. The Holy Spirit Cleanses life.

The Holy Spirit Clarifies Life

We dealt with the fire, let's deal with the tongues.

V. 4 says they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the spirit gave this utterance. Let's read v. 5-6 to see what happens. *Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.* The Day of Pentecost was not a day of speaking in some unintelligible Heavenly language; it was a day of clarity as the Holy Spirit took the Gospel and made it understandable to people from all over the known world.

Let's not equate being filled with the Holy Spirit with the bizarre. Instead, when the Holy Spirit empowers a movement, the mighty works of God are preached in an understandable and compelling way. Bringing clarity, not confusion, and that clarity always centers life on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It's what the Holy Spirit does, it creates a holy people to be used by God.

Let me close with what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit in John 16:13-14, "When the Spirit of truth comes; he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority but whatever he hears he will speak and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

The Holy Spirit points to Jesus, to His perfect life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection. This now is your invitation to change.

(Pastor prays)