

The Birthing of the Church: Part II

Acts 1:1-11; 2:1-16

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FBC Waynesboro

In the fullness of the Day of Pentecost, they were all together upon the same. These are the opening words in the passage that proclaims to us the birth of the church. We gathered last week in this beautiful birthing room and are back here again this Sunday. Last Sunday we spent our time on this one sentence. Let me review quickly. This sentence consists of two phrases. The focus of the latter part of the sentence, they were all together upon the same, is on what is fundamental to the church. The church that is bought by the blood of Jesus over which God is sovereign as He works in the church and through the church by His Spirit is made up of people, they were all; who gather in a place, together, who are seeking to fulfill a purpose, upon the same. So the church is fundamentally group of people gathered in an agreed upon place for a special purpose that is revealed by God. But the church is also the culmination of the fullness of the Day of Pentecost. This special word “fullness” points to that which brings into full focus that which it represents. So that on this day we see in the birthing of the church the full focus of everything represented in Pentecost.

We learned last week that Pentecost represents the faithfulness of God in bringing in the harvest so that the church consists of those who have been harvested by the grace of God and by that same grace are seeking in and through the church to be faithful to God. We saw further that Pentecost represents the fire of God that fell on Sinai as God showed Himself a Holy God who desires a holy people. So that the church consists of those who have been converted out of the world come together in the church to live a life that is holy to God and thus separate from the world. And we also saw that Pentecost represents the focus of God in giving the Word of God at Sinai so that those whom He calls are His. The church is built upon the absolute authority of the Word of God to which we submit and seek to obey so that we can say to the world and show the world that we are not of the world by the way we do our work in the church and live our lives in the world. So this little sentence is about fundamentals and it is about fullness. And it is about one other thing that begs our attention: it is about fulfillment.

One commentator who wrote a definitive commentary on the Book of Acts says that everything that is found in chapter one comes to fulfillment in the opening words of chapter two. So that if we are going to understand the full force of these words, we must know what has happened in chapter one. Let’s go there to

see what is going on there and what you see first of all is that Acts is a continuation of something that has come before. That something that has come before is the Gospel of Luke. At the beginning Luke tells us that what he is writing here is the simply the continuation of everything that Jesus had begun to do and teach. Now when we read the Gospel of Luke we learn that in it we see the culmination of everything that God had been doing from before the foundation of the world. In other words, in the coming of Jesus, in the communication of the Gospel in and through Jesus, in the crucifixion and coming back to life of Jesus, and in the communication of Himself alive after death to His followers we see the central concern of everything that God was doing from before the foundation of the world. It was all about Jesus. It was all for Jesus. He is the One through whom the world was created, by whom the world is sustained and in whom alone is salvation for anyone in the world. Now we come to this second volume and hear Luke say that what we have here is the continuation of who Jesus is and what Jesus does but by the end of the first chapter Jesus has ascended to heaven to the right hand of God and what comes to be is the church so that we can say that the church on earth is the continuation until the very end of all that Jesus is and all that Jesus does. The church is the fulfillment of the person, the promise and the purpose of Jesus.

The church is the fulfillment of the person of Jesus. Look at verses 2-3. What Jesus was doing between His resurrection and ascension sets the stage for the church if we are going to represent Him to the world. First notice that Jesus was doing what He was doing under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. He was giving to those whom He had chosen and called His commandments so that they would know who they were to be and what they were to do. But He was doing this through the power of the Holy Spirit. Now if the Lord Jesus who was perfect in every way and endured the shame of the cross for our sin and was brought forth from the grave victorious over death was living His post-resurrection life under the power of the Holy Spirit, then what would cause us to believe that the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives is an option. A person professing to be a believer without the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives is an empty enemy of God. A church seeking to do her work without the power of the Holy Spirit is a force against the Kingdom of God and no factor in the Kingdom of God. It was Vance Havner who in the 1950's said about the church in America that the Holy Spirit could vacate most of our churches and we would go on as before since He was not present in power to begin with. The church in the power of the Holy Spirit represents Jesus to the world. We are the fulfillment of His person.

The church is the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus. Look at verses 4-5. They are to wait until the promise has been received. Now the word for "wait"

here does not mean to sit around wondering when this promise is going to be fulfilled. It is used here in the same way that it is used in relationship to believers anticipating the second coming of Jesus. It is an intense word that indicates intensive and very focused activity. Its first focus is abiding in Jesus. So to wait is to give attention to our relationship to Jesus. It is to do what is necessary to nurture and to nourish that relationship. We want to grow in relationship to Him so that we can become more like Him. The emphasis in this first focus is worship. To wait upon God is to worship God. A person who belongs to God is passionate about the worship of God and perseveres in the worship of God. If this is going to happen then we must observe the second focus of this word and it is to listen to and learn the word of God that bears witness to Jesus. We grow in relationship to God through worship and through the study of the Word of God. To wait before God is to worship God and to be in His Word. And all of this finds its focus in the picture painted by the word: it paints a picture of a person who is living in a small circle, a circumscribed space the center of which is the worship of God and the Word of God and when our focus is on the worship of God and the Word of God, God fulfills His promise in the gift of His Spirit to us.

The promise is the baptism in Spirit that is holy and that makes us holy. To be baptized in the Spirit of God is the blessing of God to every believer. It is the Holy God breathing His Holy Presence into our very being so that He from that point forward begins the work of making us His Holy People. Now there are two basic biblical realities here that you and I must not miss. The first reality is our recognition that what is about to happen is the paradigm for the period of the church that is different from what has been and different from what will be. Prior to this time, the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God came upon those whom God chose and stayed so long as God desired the Spirit to stay. But all of that is changing here. Remember that John was told that the one upon whom He saw the Spirit descending and remaining is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The pattern of the Holy Spirit in coming upon Jesus becomes the paradigm for the Spirit of God coming upon those who come to God through Jesus. And this happens only during the age of the church in which we now live. Let me explain what this means and why it is so critical.

The promise of God to every blood-bought, born again believer is that in the moment that we are saved by the grace of God, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit of God who becomes the first down-payment of our full redemption by God, Ephesians 1:11-14. What this means is that when we are truly saved, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit as one who belongs to God. And that which belongs to God is kept by God. That is our assurance. It is a beautiful, bountiful blessing. It is also

our burden. Let me explain. That which God seals as belonging to Him is that which God controls and changes in real and radical ways for His glory. Paul not only teaches that we are sealed by the Spirit, He also teaches that the Spirit begins a work in us that cannot fail. Now let's be real careful here. It cannot fail because God does not fail to control and to change for His glory that which belongs to Him so that when a person says that he or she belongs to God and is not being changed by God, we can safely and biblically conclude that that person does not belong to God. Because God does not fail on His promise. He baptizes in His Spirit of Holiness for the purpose of making holy every person who truly belongs to Him.

Here is precisely our problem in our period. Why mention the baptism of John with water not only here but later? Because it is the only baptism that some who think they are saved really know. The baptism of John was for repentance. It was a baptism for those who were changing their minds and their direction in life. But what if I am baptized in water and my way of seeing and shaping life doesn't change? What if I profess faith that does not produce a real and radically transformed life? What is it worth in the eyes of God? Absolutely nothing. That is why the promise of Jesus to those who truly know Him and faithfully follow Him is the baptism in the Spirit of Holiness that makes us holy. We experience the change. It is real. We express the change. It is radical. We are forever being changed in a way that is revolutionary. If you are saved, you are sealed. If you are sealed, your life even this day is being shaped by the Spirit of God through the Word of God for the glory of God. And if that is not true of you, then what you are holding onto for security is like grabbing thin air.

One other thing here that I want to mention just briefly. Being baptized in the Spirit is a one time event that happens in the moment of genuine, grace-filled and God-given salvation. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is something that happens every day. If you are a real believer, you are walking every day under the anointing of the Spirit of God. You are bearing witness by the power of the Spirit. You are doing battle with your flesh and this world. You know and understand the weapons that are formed against you and you know that they cannot prosper because you are under His protective power. But each day you are walking and working and speaking and sharing and serving in the Spirit. So that every morning you have to seek His filling. Fill me. Use me. Break Me. Melt Me. Glorify yourself through me. D.L. Moody was asked one day if he prayed often to be filled with the Spirit and he said that he did and when asked why he said, "because I leak." And oh how I pray that that is true for you and me that the Holy Spirit of God poured out upon us will be poured through us in such power that we pray for fresh wind and fresh fire every day.

The church fulfills the person of Jesus and the promise of Jesus but the church also fulfills the purpose of Jesus. I am so glad for verse 6. It reminds us that none of us gets it fully and does it perfectly. But then comes verse 8 and the purpose of Jesus for those who have received the promise and are fulfilling His work in the world. I want you to see three things here. The word for power is implosive and explosive. The coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives shatters our lives and our worlds. It devastates our desires and ambitions and gives to us an entirely new understanding of who we are and why we are here. Second, We know that who we are and why we are here is that we are witnesses, martus. The word means that we have already died. We are crucified to this world and our flesh. And because of that we know that our only reason for living is to testify to the truth that is Jesus. Let me tell you what I believe: too many of us do not witness because we are not witnesses. It is impossible to call others to that which we are not committed ourselves. How can we call people to have their lives changed by God when we are as consumed by the world as those who are most worldly. It is true historically that the most powerfully, effective witnesses are those who have surrendered themselves so completely to Go that the world and what it offers means nothing to them. Third, to live and live and to tell the good news of Jesus becomes our goal wherever we are. These words are progressively geographical; they simply tell us that from those closest to us to those who are enemies we are to be faithful in our witness for Jesus until we go home.

I want you to see this at the end. The church is the fulfillment of the person, the promise and the purpose of Jesus. What in every element is common? Jesus shows us Himself under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Jesus gives the promise of the Holy Spirit and makes it clear that His purpose is accomplished in the church only through the power of the Holy Spirit. That leads me to a question for today and a preparation for next week. We will learn next week from examining what happened at Pentecost what a church looks like under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. But here is my question: what is the evidence in your life today that you have been sealed and are now being shaped by the Holy Spirit? And if there is little or none, is there conviction today? Is God calling you to submit and surrender your life to Him?