



Acts Chapter 3-4

Spend some time discussing some of the key points from the last 3 weeks regarding the Holy Spirit and the Book of Acts:

1. The Holy Spirit helps us be like Jesus and live for Jesus on earth.
2. The message and mission of the early church was Christocentric: Jesus is central to everything the church is and everything it does.
3. The Holy Spirit keeps the mission of Jesus at the heart of the church.
4. Our role is to pray, serve and speak in the name of Jesus; God's role is to confirm the message to others by His power and love.
5. The centrality of prayer, worship, the apostle's/biblical teaching, devotion to the fellowship of believers and testifying to our faith in Jesus in the early church.

In the Book of Acts and the NT we see three dimensions or experiences of the Holy Spirits in our lives:

- Being filled with the Holy Spirit (Salvation)
- Living in the Holy Spirit (Sanctification)
- Being empowered by the Holy Spirit (Service)

Read

The Believers Pray

23 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. 25 You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

*" 'Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?*

*26 The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord*

and against his anointed one.'

27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

The church began and thrived when prayer was at the heart and foundation of their lives and mission. Do you see how they are praying- they are immersed in their Scriptures and are interpreting the OT through Jesus. There was depth, context and shape to their prayers—informed and directed by the Holy Spirit, yes, but shaped by how God had acted and spoken as revealed in the Bible.

This is what Jesus said in Luke 24:

⁴⁴ He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

"They are calling up a very specific text which speaks graphically and powerfully of the Messiah as the son of God, destined to rule the whole world. Woven deep into the heart of early Christian belief was exactly this note, as we find in a passage in Paul. In Romans 1:3–5, where he may be drawing on an early Christian confession of faith, he declares that in the resurrection God demonstrated that Jesus really was his son, the Messiah from the seed of David, and that this Jesus was therefore the Lord of the whole world, claiming allegiance from all people." Tom Wright, Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-12

Discuss how biblical knowledge can enlarge our vision of who God is and what God does, and so inform our praying. How does knowledge of God help deepen our love for God?

Read

29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

What are some of the threats to faith in Jesus and sharing him with others in our day? Discuss

Speak your word with GREAT BOLDNESS- what was the content of that word and why was it so urgent?

- Jesus died to forgive our sins and free us from the guilt and shame of our sin
- God raised Jesus to life- we are witnesses of this
- Turn to God in faith and trust
- Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit
- Be part of God's plan to bring justice and peace to the earth (there were no needy people among them...)

Why is it urgent?

- Because it's the one and only way to make peace with God.
- Because it's not just a piece of interesting information, it is a message of life and love.
- Because people are suffering, hurting, living sinfully, lost and alone, and our world is a mess.

"Most significant is the fact that these early Christians were not praying for relief from oppression or judgment on their oppressors but for enablement "to speak your word with great boldness" amid oppressions and for God to act in mighty power "through the name of your holy servant Jesus" (v. 30). Their concern was for God's word to go forth and for Christ's name to be glorified, leaving to God himself their own circumstances. With such prayer surely God is well pleased. Luke has evidently taken pains to give us this prayer so that it might serve as something of a pattern to be followed in our own praying." Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in The Expositor's Bible Commentary

"Not 'Lord, please cause them to die horribly' or 'Please stop them being so unpleasant.' Not 'Lord, let this persecution stop,' or even 'Please convert the authorities, so that your work can go forward.' Rather, quite simply, 'Now, Lord, look on their threats; let us go on speaking boldly; and will you please continue to work powerfully.' The opposition are there, and God knows about them. We are here, and we need to be faithful, to continue to speak of Jesus boldly and confidently. And here is the power of God, which is not in our possession but which, because of Jesus, will continue to be at work to set up signposts pointing people to the new thing which is happening through him." Tom Wright, Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-12

Spend some time discussing what your life would look like if God was first in your heart, serving Jesus was the most important thing and sharing his love and word with others was a great joy and privilege. What makes this difficult? How might your prayers be shaped by their example here?

Read

31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Do you notice what happens in their worship time? GOD SHOWS UP! It's powerful, memorable and transforming. One of the main reasons we have seen decline in the Western church over the past 100 years, and a massive increase in New-Age spiritualities and non-Christian religions, is that the church has lost the depth of spiritual experience of God upon which it was founded, and, it defaulted to majoring on beliefs and morality. By focusing solely on doctrine and behaviour—"believe these doctrines and be good"—we unintentionally starved people of genuine and fulfilling spiritual experience and nourishment and they went looking elsewhere.

We focussed on doctrines and beliefs, but missed the hunger of the human heart to taste and see that the Lord is good. And our colleges focussed on the formation of the mind to understand theology, but lacked the frameworks and intent to deepen the heart in love for God and experience of God. “For evangelicals, as J.I. Packer put it, theology must always be related to the activity of ‘trusting, loving, worshipping, obeying, serving and glorifying God’.”

Our services became tedious, dull and predicable and people sat as observers not as participants. But experiencing God together in prayer and in our gatherings need not be a rare occurrence or go the way of the Dodo and the Tasmanian tiger! Let us stir up faith, return to Jesus—or come for the first time and raise our voices heavenward to God and reach out in love for one another and our world

“The church needs to learn, in every generation, what it means to pray with confidence like this. We do not go looking for persecution. But when it comes, in whatever form, it certainly concentrates the mind, sends us back to the scriptures, and casts us on God’s mercy and power. The church needs, again and again, that sense of God’s powerful presence, shaking us up, blowing away the cobwebs, filling us with the spirit, and giving us that same boldness.” Tom Wright, Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-12

We can accept that this particular prayer event was a once off occurrence in history and we should not feel guilty or inadequate if the house is not shaken after we pray! However, is there a correlation between their unshakeable desire to serve God and put Jesus first—even before their own lives—and God’s pleasure in rewarding such faith with more of His presence and Power? That is, will we experience more of God when we are obedient and wholehearted?

Read

The Believers Share Their Possessions

³²All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

³⁶Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), ³⁷sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.

“The subject of Christian social concern, which appears in 2:42–47 quite naturally along with matters of fellowship and worship in the context of the believing community. For Luke as well as for the early Christians, being filled with the Holy Spirit not only concerned proclaiming the Word of God but also sharing possessions with the needy because of believers’ oneness in Christ.” Richard N. Longenecker, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in The Expositor’s Bible Commentary

What sort of qualities, practices and attributes in the first church community resulted from people believing in Jesus and being filled with the Holy Spirit? How can our church communities whether in Small groups, Sunday gatherings or other fellowship times be more like this?

A Prayer

Father God, we ask you to give us your Holy Spirit now.

Holy Spirit come, fill us with the love of God;

Holy Spirit come, affirm that we are God’s children;

Holy Spirit come, lead us in the way of Jesus;

Holy Spirit come, give us power to testify about Jesus;

Holy Spirit come, let your joy fill our hearts;

Holy Spirit come, lead us in the truth of Jesus, Amen.

A prayer for all day everyday: Holy Spirit, help me be like Jesus and live for Jesus.