

Themes in the Book of Acts
“Spirit”
Acts 19:1 – 7

Acts 2:1 – 4:

“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”

Acts 19:1 – 7:

“While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?” “John’s baptism,” they replied. Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all.”

So this morning we continue in the book of Acts where we’ve been picking up on key themes.

You know, core ideas, issues, areas that keep popping up and shape what Acts is about.

Theme’s like the kingdom of God – Jesus the King.

We’ve talked about witness, especially this act called evangelism – this verbal speech act of speaking to and with others about Jesus.

Then last time talked about power encounters where, in the name of Jesus, the power of Holy Spirit confronts the power of malignant spiritual beings to bring freedom, hope and peace.

Last week we talked about this community of faith gathered by and around Jesus called the church.

When the Lord gathers us together we receive something so fundamental, so often talked about in the New Testament, that we can miss it – encouragement.

Encouragement is God saying, through you and others, “Keep going! You can do it! God is with you; God is for you!”

Today, I think we come to the last in this series.

So we come to an area so fundamental to what the book of Acts is about.

And it’s not an it; it’s a ‘who’.

And the who is... the Holy Spirit.

Acts is a book where the ministry and activity of the Spirit is unmissable.

Just in terms of numbers he is mentioned fifty-six times in the Book of Acts.

I mean, if I was to name the Book of Acts, I would call it, “The continuing acts of King Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit by His people, the Church”.

When you read Acts – and Scripture – you do find there is no aspect of Christian living that is not governed or empowered by the Holy Spirit.

So you can’t talk about the book of Acts without talking about the Holy Spirit.

And when I was thinking about where passage to preach from, Acts 19:1 – 7 came immediately to mind.

This account of Paul meeting these twelve who had some teaching from John the Baptist.

As Paul interacts with them, he senses that something that was deficient; there’s something not quite right with them.

So what Paul does is he becomes Doctor Paul – does is he does a bit of diagnosis of the problem.

He asks and he probes.

And what’s his diagnosis?

What they’re missing is the Holy Spirit.

They say, “We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

Which is strange.

Why is it strange?

***“Why is it strange for them to say
“We have not even heard there is a Holy Spirit?””***

John the Baptist said in each of the four Gospels, that Jesus would baptise in the Holy Spirit.

And John drew on what is in the Old Testament.

I mean Genesis tells us that the Spirit hovering over the newly created world and began to shape and form it.

In terms of God’s word, he inspires it.

When it comes to people the Spirit rested on judges, kings and prophets.

And what happened when they fell on them?

They carried out acts of power and deliverance.

They were enabled to go beyond their normal human limitations.

And yet there are areas of limitation about the giving of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.

One, the giving of the Spirit was only temporary; the Spirit would empower people and then withdraw.

Two, and it only fell or rested *on* people, not *in* them.

For example, in the case of Gideon the Spirit of the Lord ‘clothed him’ or literally ‘wrapped itself around him’.¹

Third, it was only for a few; not everyone received the Spirit.

However the Old Testament did look forward to the Messianic age, the time when the Holy Spirit would be *in* all God’s people and all God’s people would be enabled to know Him intimately.

Ezekiel 36:26 – 27 prophesied:

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put my Spirit *in* you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

¹ Judges 6:34.

And from Joel which is quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost:

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.
¹⁸Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.”

Jesus came and said:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the 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.” (John 14:16 – 17)

So how was that these disciples of John could say, “We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit”?

Well it seems that they weren’t unaware of the Holy Spirit but were unaware that the Spirit was given and even available to them.

They do not know about the presence and the power and the reality of the Holy Spirit for their lives.

And what was true for them is true for us even today.

There are people today in our churches where it’s like, they don’t even know about the Holy Spirit.

I mean, in my early discipleship there was an expectancy around the moving of the Spirit.
People would have prophetic dreams, they’d be words of knowledge.
People would be encouraged that God was interested their personal lives and struggles.

You’d hear the stories of people like Jackie Pullinger who lived in a slum called the Walled City in Hong Kong, where she worked as a missionary for decades.

What lead her there was dream and when you got there what she would do is minister to the drug addicted by praying for them in tongues. I mean, they had no health or medical insurance to draw on. But as Pullinger prayed in tongues over these the addicts they would be miraculously and completely cured.

As I've shared before, the first Christian youth camp I ever went on was about six months after becoming a Jesus follower. It was like no other time in my life. It was fantastic in so many ways: great speakers and great sung worship and excellent day time activities.

But best of all was the nights: after the speaker all the chairs at the front were cleared away and an invitation was given. One, for those who never committed their lives to Jesus and two, for those wanted to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

And the Spirit showed up; there were words of knowledge and prophecy over these young people's lives. Some began to speak in tongues. Some cried. Some shook. There was even deliverance from evil spirits.

(Christian youth camps are so tame these days 😊).

Most of all there was joy and enthusiasm for Jesus that did not wane quickly.

When I read the Book of Acts, what I experienced seem absolutely reasonable and normal.

***“Do you think there is the same openness to the Holy Spirit today?
And if not, why not?”***

If not, here's where I'm up to:

Teaching is one.

Some Christians have been taught to be skeptical about the work of the Spirit and some to the point of be rigidly opposed to the Spirit's working:

“See all the amazing thing Jesus continued to do by His Holy Spirit?”

That's not for you.

Then there are other times when you talk about the Holy Spirit, you get blank stares.

For others it's like, “Oh yeah I doing fine on my own thank you.”

(and I'm like, are you really?)

Being “Filled with the Holy Spirit” and “full of the Holy Spirit” are Luke's favourite way in Acts of describing the believers' involvement with the Spirit.

To receive Jesus as your King and forgiver of your sins, means that another life comes to live in your life.

This other life – the Holy Spirit – does something in you and through you.

It's activity and action.

Something ignites and lights up inside of a person.

The Spirit is God's empowerment and enabling.

He brings power to witness to Jesus.

He brings understanding to God's Word.

He gives gifts and grows fruit.

Gifts of the Spirit are new enablings that are *not* the same as your natural abilities.

The Holy Spirit grows 'fruit', of love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

What he also does for many people is he brings *rest* and *refreshing* and *release*.

Most of all the Holy Spirit is Someone to be experienced, and He is Someone to be enjoyed.

And this is all experiential.

I mean, on the day of Pentecost there was the "sound" like wind.

There was what "looked" like tongues of fire.

They "spoke" in tongues which was the declaring of God's wonders.

I could talk a lot more.

We can spend hours speaking about the Holy Spirit, which would be a great thing.

But here's the thing: this is not so much an issue of information.

It's not so much an issue of information but *impartation* and an invitation.

Paul placed his hands on these twelve and they received the Spirit.

The Spirit was imparted through Paul to others.

One of the primary ways God wants to give more of His Spirit is through other people.

So for you, when was the last time someone placed their hands on you and prayed that you might have a fresh impartation of the Holy Spirit?

Have you ever had that happen?

So I what I felt to do this morning is offer an invitation.

That as we close and as we sing, if you want a fresh filling of the Spirit, you come.

And I and others will pray for you and with you.