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Of Wind and Fire

Acts 2:1-13

Intro: Luke, in writing the Book of Acts, is communicating to us 21st century believers exactly what the Holy Spirit did to glorify Jesus Christ in the church through the 1st century preachers of the gospel. Acts 1 relates the circumstances that lead up to the coming of the Holy Spirit while 2:1-13 explains how He came to the church. We should keep the events of ch1 in mind as we begin ch2, because ch1 promised the Holy Spirit's coming. This truth reminds us that everything that happens in Acts is simply an unfolding of what God had said was going to happen. Our text today is the fulfillment of what Jesus said in 1:4-5 while the rest of the book is the fulfillment of His Great Commission in v8.

In Acts' version of the Great Commission, Luke places great emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit. The disciples were being sent by their Master into the unbelieving world with the message of the gospel. But they weren't expected to go in their own strength. If they had attempted to go out into the world in their own strength, nothing would have happened. At Pentecost no one would have believed if the Holy Spirit had not blessed Peter's preaching. The people would have laughed at Peter, or they would have done something worse.

Acts ch2 records the event that we have been waiting for. Not just since Jesus mentioned it in 1:8 but all the way back in John 14, 15 and 16. Jesus hadn't been shy about alerting the disciples of the Holy Spirit's soon arrival and not just that, He also told them why the Holy Spirit was coming, what He was going to do and what His coming would mean for them! We, like the disciples, have been waiting for the Spirit's arrival but what does it actually mean for the church? What does it mean for the individual believer? There are large denominations in the church that base their entire theology on the events of Acts 2 but are they accurate? The only way to properly understand what the coming of the Holy Spirit means is by looking at the symbols the Spirit has given to help us understand it.

1 – 1st, let's set the scene. The Day of Pentecost was a yearly Jewish feast that was held 50 days after Passover. This feast celebrated the arrival of the

first-fruits of the wheat harvest. We could look at all the symbolism that relates the feast of Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the church but that's not Luke's point here. Note that he specifies that the Day of Pentecost had fully come. Jesus ascended into heaven 40 days after His resurrection and Pentecost occurred 50 days after Passover. This means that a full 10 days had passed since Jesus had commanded the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

This is significant because, when Jesus told them to wait for the Spirit's arrival; He didn't tell them how long they had to wait. They had no idea of when the Holy Spirit would show up; they only knew that He was promised to come. It would have been logical for them to think His arrival would occur on the same day Jesus was taken back up into heaven; or 3 days later; or even 7 days. But that didn't happen. They had to wait a full 10 days, until the Day of Pentecost had fully come. This speaks to the patient obedience of these saints. The Lord's command was only clear on 2 points – that the Holy Spirit would come and that they were to wait for His coming. That's all they had to go off of so all they could obediently do is wait patiently for His arrival.

We can imagine how much their patience was tested during this time; not to mention their kindness and compassion for one another. What were they doing during this time? **Ch1** shows they practiced obedience; they stayed in fellowship with one another; they were in constant prayer and Bible study and prepared themselves for whatever the Lord had planned for them. What was God doing during this time? God used this time to break them down and then to build them up again. The disciples revealed in **1:6** that they had a completely different scenario in mind concerning the resurrection and glorification of Christ. They were looking for a physical kingdom to be established right away but God knew they needed a full 10 days to relieve them of this great misconception of His intentions for them.

Yet, despite the trial of their patience and obedience, despite the apparent delay and anticipation of what was coming, they all stilled stayed together! Again, Luke points out that they were gathered together sharing the same love for God, sharing the same heart for the things of God, sharing the same unshakable trust in the promise of God. There's an important lesson here for us today. Before we can truly be filled by the Spirit for service, we

must honestly recognize and acknowledge our emptiness. We must see our utter helplessness in doing the work we've been called to do and allow ourselves to be filled. By continuing to gather together for prayer, in obedience, these disciples did just that. They recognized that they didn't possess the resources in themselves to accomplish any of what they were called to do; instead, they had to completely rely on the work of God in and through their lives.

2-4- What do you think of when you hear the term Day of Pentecost? Most modern Christians immediately associate the arrival of the Holy Spirit to speaking in tongues. But, does the exercise of this obvious spiritual gift explain really explain the process of the Spirit's coming upon these early disciples and empowering them for service. I would submit that the answer to that question is no. Sure, the disciples did speak in tongues but while this was the result of the Spirit's coming, it does nothing to illustrate or inform us as to how the Holy Spirit made His entrance into this body of believers. If we only look at Pentecost in terms of speaking in tongues then we will inevitably get off track from what Holy Spirit desires to teach us about Himself. The Holy Spirit was presented to the disciples symbolically in 2 specific ways: as wind and as fire. If we want to understand what the coming of the Holy Spirit means to the church, we must have a clear understanding of what these 2 images mean and why the Holy Spirit employed them.

The importance of wind as a symbol is clearly seen in the linguistics of the classical languages. It's hard to really appreciate it in English since spirit usually means nothing more to us than either the Holy Spirit or the human spirit. In the ancient languages of Hebrew, Greek and even Latin, the word for spirit was also used for wind or breath. So when **Acts 2:2** says that they heard a sound...as of a rushing, mighty wind; wind also means spirit. Thus, anyone who normally spoke and thought in Hebrew, Greek, or Latin would have immediately recognized the symbolism.

The Hebrew word for wind / spirit is ruach. You can't say it correctly without a strong sound of breath (ru-aaah). So what is true linguistically—the word means both breath and spirit—is also demonstrated sensually. It's the same with the Greek pneuma and the Latin spiritus. In each of these ancient languages, you can't even say the word for spirit without making an audible breath sound. This fact plays an important part in helping us understand how

God is revealing Himself in certain parts of the OT.

At the very beginning of the Bible, in the initial phase of Creation, [Gen 1:2](#) says that the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. This doesn't mean a whole lot to us in English. We might think the Holy Spirit was like a dove skimming over the waters. But that's not the idea at all. In Hebrew, the Holy Spirit of God is portrayed as God's breath; as the creative, moving, dynamic breath of God. It was this breath; the divine, life-giving wind; that was blowing across the waters at the beginning.

In the very next chapter of Genesis we have the account of man's creation from the dust of the ground. It says, "The LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being" ([Gen 2:7](#)). This teaches that apart from the breath of God, man was just dead material. He was as dead as dust he was made of. In order for man to have life, God, who is the source of all life, had to breathe some of His life, some of the divine breath (spirit) into Adam. Only then did Adam become a living being.

Jesus picks up on this same idea in His conversation with Nicodemus in John 3. Jesus didn't just tell Nicodemus he needed to be regenerated in some mystical way in order to have eternal life; He told him straight up that he must be born again ([3, 7](#)) with the word again not only meaning: "again, just like the first time" but also "from above." Nicodemus didn't understand what Jesus was getting at, but we can, if we put these things together.

In [Gen 2:7](#), God *breathed* into Adam and he became a living being. His Spirit (breath / wind) was the vehicle. Jesus is saying that the new life that all people need must be *breathed* into them in a way similar to God's creation of Adam. Just as God breathed into Adam and he became a living physical being, so today, if someone is to be saved, God must breathe into them again by His Holy Spirit from above, so they might become spiritually alive. We may be physically alive without the new birth, but if we are to become spiritually alive God must breathe His Spirit into us.

When we put all this together we begin to see why the image of wind is so important in Acts 2. The sound of a rushing, mighty wind recalls the image of the Spirit of God hovering over the waters at creation. This suggests that Acts 2 describes a new creation – one that's more important than the

original creation. The physical creation is destined to pass away but what was accomplished by the Spirit at Pentecost is eternal. So, the story in Acts 2 resembles the account in Gen 2, where God breathes life into man. Pentecost is a life-breathing experience. The coming of the Holy Spirit symbolized the coming of the creative power of God to establish a new era in which lost sinners who are dead in trespasses and sins can be brought to spiritual life.

fire – the 2nd symbol for the Holy Spirit is fire but it's not just fire – it's tongues of fire. This doesn't just mean they were little flames. Tongues are what we use to speak; and when we speak, what do we do? We breathe out! That's how we make our larynxes work. It's how we produce sounds. So the main point is reinforced again: When the Holy Spirit, the breath of God, enters a person to enable them to give out some of what God has given them, that person talks about Jesus. So, both wind and fire involve speech but there's more to this image than that.

What does fire symbolize? Well, in the OT it often symbolized the presence of God. The earliest instance of this is seen in Gen 15, where God established His covenant with Abraham. Abraham had made all the preparations for the ancient rite of covenant making. He had taken several animals, cut them in half and laid the halves in 2 rows. It was customary in that day for both parties of the covenant to walk between the separated animal carcasses and make their vows there. But, God caused Abraham to fall asleep and as he slept, God appeared in the likeness of a smoking oven and a burning torch and passed between the carcasses Himself alone. God was making a unilateral covenant with Abraham. He established it on His own authority without any participation on Abraham's part.

Later on in the OT we see where God appears on Mt. Sinai. God's presence was symbolized by fire and thunder. His was a holy presence. No one was allowed to climb up the mountain to see what God was like except Moses, who was invited. If anyone else did, they would die. The writer of Hebrews was referring to this when he wrote in ch12, "For our God is a consuming fire" (29). What does fire do? It does 2 important things.

1st, fire is a source of light. In the ancient world light came either by the sun or by fire. When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost, the first experience they had was spiritual illumination. That's why Peter could

preach such a persuasive sermon. He understood the OT as he never had before. He was given the ability to preach it to enlighten those who heard him. Wherever the gospel has gone into the world it's always brought enlightenment. Apart from God's self-revelation humanity has no idea who God is. But when the gospel comes there is light. People can see as they could not see before. They can see who God is and what the gospel is. More than that, they can see what they are apart from Jesus Christ and what they can be in Him.

Light also brings warmth and it's the same when the Holy Spirit is working. Our world is not just in darkness, it's also out in the cold: unwarmed, unloved and un comforted. That is, until God begins to draw near to warm us. Christianity is meant to be a spreading flame. Jesus alludes to this in giving the Great commission in 1:8. This prophesied expansion of the gospel began at Pentecost. That's why the 2nd part of our text talks about the different people who were present in Jerusalem who heard the gospel in their own language on that day (9-11). These people, reached for the first time at Pentecost, spread out in all directions of the Roman Empire like ripples on a pond.

filled – another term that needs to be defined is filled. Many mistake this filling of the Holy Spirit with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They claim that the Pentecost “baptism was a special experience that involves the gift of speaking in tongues. They further claim that speaking in tongues is the only sure evidence that one has been baptized with the Spirit. Now, the Bible does talk about the baptism of the Spirit but never in those terms. In the NT, the baptism of the Holy Spirit has to do with regeneration or being born again. It results in the regenerated person being identified with Jesus Christ, spiritually in the sight of God and publicly before other men and women. To be baptized by the Holy Spirit is to be a Christian. It has nothing to do with imparting some special kind of blessing.

To be filled with the Holy Spirit is different, and that's what's being described here. The disciples didn't become Christians at Pentecost. They were already believers. They believed in Jesus. They were meeting together. They were praying. They were studying the Bible. But now the Holy Spirit came upon them in a special way to empower them for their task. They were filled for service. This term appears 14 times in the NT, 9 of them are in Acts. What's interesting about these 14 occurrences is that the 1

circumstance common to each case is that whenever Christians were filled with the Holy Spirit they immediately began to testify forcefully and effectively about Jesus Christ.

It's not that they spoke in tongues, though that did happen in some cases. It's not that they performed miracles, though occasionally miracles were performed. No, in every case where Christians were filled with the Holy Spirit, they immediately began to testify verbally about Jesus. Clearly, the disciples spoke in tongues here on Pentecost but that's not the emphasis of the text nor is it part of the other examples of being filled. In [Acts 2](#) the emphasis is upon the fact that everyone heard about Jesus.

So, how can you tell if someone is Spirit-filled? The answer is if they speak often and effectively about Jesus. It's not about whether they speak in an unintelligible language or do miracles. The question is: Do they testify to Jesus Christ, and does God bless that testimony in the conversion of lost souls? When the Holy Spirit comes in power, what we are to have is not some particularly intense spiritual experience. We don't have to speak in tongues so that everybody will hear our words in their own language in some miraculous way. No, we need to have a widespread speaking about Jesus. Everyone will hear as the gospel spreads through the testimony of those who are obeying the Great Commission. That's what we are called to do. That's the task that our Lord sends us out into the world to do.

The truth is; much like in [Acts 2](#), those who are truly filled by the Holy Spirit become incendiary witnesses, they are set ablaze. But, they are not set ablaze for their own benefit but for the purpose of setting other people ablaze! For those who are filled, the fire of the Holy Spirit is so intense and so meaningful that they just can't keep the message of the Spirit to themselves. So they speak about Jesus often and everywhere, and, as a result, little fires spring up here and there. Pretty soon there's a great fire of revival raging that spreads across the world. We might not see a raging fire in our community right now but there is a fire. The Holy Spirit is working. We need to be part of that working and see the flames spread. 😊