



The Spirit-Filled Church

Series: Acts -- Worldwide Witness to the Worth of Jesus Christ

Acts 2:42-47

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Pastor Nick Shaffer

When we take a broad look at the Scriptures, beloved, what we see is that the Word of God is all about the Kingdom of God. Starting with creation, through the fall, the establishment and history of the nation of Israel, the prophecies of the Messiah, the incarnation of Christ the rightful King, His redemption of His people and establishment of His kingdom through His death and resurrection, the proclamation of His kingdom and the future consummation of the Kingdom – the storyline of Scripture is the Kingdom of God and the central character of Scripture is the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings.

That is so important to remember as we continue to look at the Book of Acts. We have to keep the Book of Acts in its context in the overall flow of the redemptive plan of God. The Book of Acts a bridge book, bridging the Old and New Testament, bridging the Old and New Covenant, bridging the expression of the Kingdom of God in the nation of Israel, a shadow of the eternal expression of the Kingdom of God in the church, the blood-bought people of God from every age, bridging the promise of God in the OT: “I will be your God and you shall be my people” to the fulfillment of the promise – the giving of the Holy Spirit by which God dwells with and in His people forever, bridging the proclamation of the nation of Israel regarding the Kingdom of God to the proclamation of people from every tribe, nation and tongue declaring that Jesus Christ is Eternal King and Lord, to the praise of God the Father.

Specifically the book of Acts deals with the preaching of the gospel and the effect of the passion, resurrection and exaltation of Christ – salvation and the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit with the people of God in order to empower the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom that has been revealed but is yet to be consummated. The central message is Christ, just as it is throughout the entirety of the Bible. To disengage the Book of Acts from its place, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit from His role in magnifying Christ, leads to all manner of theological error and unmoored preaching and teaching, treating the ministry of the Holy Spirit

as almost independent of and disconnected from the overall theme of Scripture and of the gospel. It isn't. There is a progression to be seen here, a progression of the unfolding of the glorious person and place of Jesus Christ as Lord over all. That is the theme –worldwide witness to the worth of Jesus Christ.

In fact, the text that we are looking at today follows logically from what has preceded it. Having first described what happened on the day of Pentecost, and having supplied an explanation of this out-pouring of the Holy Spirit as distinctly related to and the result of the ministry of Jesus Christ – His atoning, propitiatory, substitutionary, sacrificial death and resurrection from the dead and His exaltation to the Father's right hand – as explained in Peter's Christ-saturated sermon that he boldly delivered in Jerusalem, Luke now goes on to describe for us the effects of Pentecost. He gives to us a picture of the Spirit-filled church. What happens when the gospel of Christ is received in the power of the Holy Spirit and men and women are saved and filled with the Holy Spirit? The result is the church of Jesus Christ, a Spirit filled church. This picture that Luke paints for us is one that we should long for here and now. So I want you to join me in looking at this picture of what a Spirit-filled, Spirit-saturated, Spirit-directed church looks like. Luke gives to us a picture of what the church is to be, what it must be, what we must be...what we must be.

Listen to Luke's words once again. Start in verse 41 and read these words again and appreciate the richness and beauty of them. "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." (Acts 2:41–47, ESV)

What a beautiful picture this is of what a truly Spirit-filled church is supposed to be, the effect that the gospel and the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit has on the people of God. In broad categories, Luke talks about teaching and learning, fellowship, worship, and the potent witness to Christ that is the result of those. We are going to look at this Spirit-filled church in those categories this morning, but before we do, I want to draw your attention to one word in

particular; one word that underlies all of this, and that one word is “devoted.” Underline it. Circle it. Highlight it. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

That word – devoted– is a very strong word in the Greek—proskartereo. It emphasizes constancy of purpose, determined resolve, a refusal to be distracted, being solidly committed to something, given fully to the pursuit of something as valuable. What I want for us to see as we look at the practices of this Spirit-filled church is that these things were not a temporary emphasis, not a season, not some 40 days of purpose kind of gimmick – they were THE defining characteristics of this church. And this devotedness clearly demonstrates the deep-seated transformation that had taken place in their lives as a result of the new-birth and their faith in Christ. We are meant to see that the entire focus and direction of their lives, the desires of their hearts had changed radically. They were no longer the same people, no longer enemies of God. They were the company of the redeemed.

Let me just say this. When you must relentlessly beg professing Christians to hear and delight in His Word; when you have to hound them to fellowship with God and with His people; when you must plead with them to make the worship of God the central priority of their lives; when you must continually scheme and strive to try and make Christ and His true church desirable; the issue is not all those things that church strategists talk about – the great idol of relevance, niche ministries, new and improved programs, better follow up, shorter and softer sermons, the need to dialogue and not be so stringent about gospel truth, etc. The problem, the issue with those people is no new-birth. These Jews who had responded to the gospel call were new people in a new Spirit-filled community, born again by the Spirit of God unto saving faith in Christ. And it showed. How? First,

The Spirit-filled Church is a Word-loving Church. Luke records that they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching. There are a variety of things that Luke could have said about this fellowship, but the first thing he stresses, in spite of the experience as great as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which may have caused them to focus on the pursuit of spiritual experiences, is that they devoted themselves to the teaching of the Apostles. This church was not driven by the desire for mystical experiences that may have caused them to disdain or ignore theological truth. They were not miracles and signs seekers. The early church, the Spirit-filled church knew nothing of the anti-intellectualism, anti-doctrinal disdain of Bible knowledge that characterizes some quarters of Christianity today. They were not given to human philosophy and fallen

human wisdom. They wanted truth – truth about Christ, truth about the person and purpose and eternal plan of God, truth about holiness and true righteousness, truth to build their lives upon, truth to renew their minds, truth by which they could be conformed to the image of Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

They wanted Biblical truth and they wanted that truth from the Apostles. They did not imagine that because they had received the Spirit that they could dispense with human teachers appointed by God. They wanted the truth from Christ's appointed men, the Apostles, men authenticated and attested to by many wonders and signs. Do you see? The wonders and signs accomplished by the Spirit of God through the apostles were not some spiritual form of entertainment; they were a necessary testimony to them as Christ's true messengers and bearers of the true Spirit-inspired preaching. And what made these signs necessary? Because there was not yet a NT, not yet the completed canon of the Holy Scriptures by which we are able to test every Spirit. As John would later write: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world." (1 John 4:1, ESV) We test them to day by the completed canon of the Word of God. These wonders and signs were necessary to authenticate them as the messengers of Christ before the message of Christ was recorded in Holy Scripture. This church wanted the truth of the Word of God. They craved it, longed for it.

The Spirit filled church is a church that exemplifies the command of Peter: "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good." (1 Peter 2:2–3, ESV) A church that desired to "Let the word of Christ dwell in (them) richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in (their) hearts to God." (Colossians 3:16, ESV) This is always the first mark of a Spirit-filled church, of a Spirit-filled Christian.

I can remember people saying to me things like, "Don't talk about doctrine. I don't need doctrine. Doctrine divides. All I need to know is Jesus." That sounds so spiritual doesn't it? It's not. It is utter foolishness. You cannot know Christ in truth apart from knowing the truth of Christ as taught in His Holy Word. And it is a far cry from the heart of the early church that was steadfastly, continually devoted to coming together to devour the Word of God that came from the apostles. Understanding the apostles' doctrine is essential to knowing God, to delighting in Christ, to worshipping and obeying Him. The responsibility of those who are preachers and

teachers is to, themselves, dig deeply in the Word of God and then to break it open to those under his care. Those who are being taught have the responsibility to do all they can to be good learners of the Word. It is an uncommon thing these days.

Just look around. In this non-reading, entertainment driven, emotionally overcharged, experience-oriented, bucket-list culture that pervades the professing church, there is so much confusion about the essential truths of the Christian faith. And little wonder when the Word of God is so often neglected and watered-down and apologized. I'll never forget, very early in my ministry, when I made a statement in a sermon along the lines of "I'm sorry but the Word of God says..." A dear brother in Christ, Henry Bournes grabbed me after the service, his eyes kinds of flashing, and said to me: "Don't ever apologize for preaching what the Word of God says...ever!" And I haven't done it since.

The truth remains. There is no such thing as a Spirit-filled church that does not give itself continually with determined resolve to the study and application, to the learning and the living of the sacred Scriptures, the Apostle's doctrine preserved for us in the Word of God. The first and foundational sign of a Spirit-filled church is one in which the Spirit-filled people do not neglect or ignore the Word of God and seek some shameless substitute for it, but are compelled by the Holy Spirit to root and ground its life corporately and individually in the eternal truth of God's Word. From the very beginning the church was rooted and established and submitted to the Apostles' teaching, to the Word of God. The Spirit filled church loves Christ and loves His Word. That is essential and if it does not exist, no matter what someone may call the gathering they are a part of, it is not a church. This is of first importance, but it is not alone.

The Spirit-filled Church is a Fellowshiping Church. Luke tells us that this early church "devoted themselves to...fellowship." Almost all of us have heard the word that is translated as "fellowship." It is *koinonia*. It is word with a great depth of meaning. The fellowship that Luke describes speaks of shared life, of common life, intimate relationship, communion with someone. And there are two aspects to this fellowship that Luke is describing – vertical and horizontal. John bundles them both together with the proclamation of the Word in 1 John 1, when he writes: "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3, ESV)

The fellowship that this Spirit-filled church devoted themselves to was first vertical. By virtue of the sacrificial death that Christ died on their behalf to reconcile them to God and because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they had fellowship with Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. The old enmity had been taken away, replaced by a relationship as intimate as that of a father with his Son. “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” (Romans 8:15–17, ESV) This early church reveled in the fellowship of grace and peace that was theirs in Christ.

But this was not merely an individualistic thing. Because they each shared in the common life with God that all believers have in Christ, they shared their lives with one another. Their lives were interwoven with each other in real and true relationship. True fellowship with God and fellowship with other believers goes hand in hand. True Christian fellowship consists of genuine, deep, sustained, forgiving, spiritually challenging, mutually supportive, and honest relationships -- relationships that pointed one another to Christ and spurred one another on to greater godliness and devotion to the Lord. Anything else is a cheap and tawdry substitute. Before it was even written, they were obeying the command of Hebrews 10: “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:24–25, ESV) They worshipped together; they ate together; they lived life together. Real fellowship is a life-giving, soul-enriching, love-nourishing, and joy-producing thing. It is absolutely essential.

Luke also points out a very practical way that their fellowship with one another worked itself out. He says: And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. Now this was not communism, the enforced sharing of goods on the basis that no one has any right to own anything. Nor was it socialism, that allows you to own something but denies you the right to own too much as measured by someone else’s standard. Those things are worldly rip-offs of true fellowship. Listen, beloved, they shared their goods, their possessions, what they had because they were generous, and they were generous because God had been so generous to them – lavish in His love, lavish in His grace, lavish in His mercy. God had been generous with them and they were determined to be generous with one another.

They were transformed people, mastered by Christ, redeemed by grace and governed by the Word of God.

I want you to notice something else about this. All of them had all things in common, all were selling possessions and belongings to care for others. Some in the church were living in poverty while others were prospering under the hand of Providence. But there was no entitlement mentality, no me-first, I must be served, someone has to give me what I deserve, if you want me in your church compete for my attention and give me stuff kind of mentality that is so prevalent in the American church. They all gave of themselves. It was not expected only of the few, the rich, the mature, the young, the old, to give of themselves but of all who would have true fellowship in the body of Christ. Fellowship comes only through giving of yourself. Some people never know the joy of true Christian fellowship because they do not know what it means to give themselves away. They demand, but they do not give. If you want to experience true fellowship, you have to be a giver. Speaking of the Macedonians, Paul makes this clear saying of them: “they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.” (2 Corinthians 8:5, ESV)

True fellowship among the people of God is “dangerously unselfish.” Dangerously unselfish. Unselfish not only with our money or goods but with our time, our love, our influence, our care, our availability to other people. Fellowship costs. It demands that you be a giver, not just a taker. Dangerously unselfish. God blesses that kind of life lived out in loving him and loving each other in his name. It’s the way He intends us to live. It’s the way we grow together in relationship with the Father, the Son, and with each other. Fellowship creates a family that can welcome new members into it. A Spirit filled church is a fellowshiping church. But there is more.

A Spirit-Filled Church is a Worshipping Church The devotion of this fellowship was expressed by corporate worship, by worshipping together. Luke records that they devoted themselves...to the breaking of bread and the prayers. The definite article – the breaking of bread and the prayers – accentuates two aspects of the corporate worship of the early church, the Lord’s Supper and corporate prayer.

They regularly celebrated the saving work of Christ, His perfect life, His redeeming death, His love, His faithfulness, His righteousness, His reign, His promised return through sharing in the Lord's Supper and they prayed together. They prayed together. Even in the best churches today, that may be the most neglected thing – they prayed. They cherished their times of prayer together and yet consistently that is the least attended, least invested part of corporate church life everywhere. Beloved I'm telling you, if we desire to really be a NT church in every way, we must give more attention to corporate prayer. I would say to you that this is the weakest link in any church today, even our own. What can be of more consistent value and demand more devotion than meeting with the people of God to call upon the sovereign Lord of the universe who delights to hear and respond to His people in prayer. We need to make this more of a priority, more of our corporate life together and that means that we need to prioritize the prayer meeting of the church above other things. I said this few weeks ago and I will say it again this morning. EM Bounds says and I agree with him: The life, power, and glory of the church is prayer. The life of its members is dependent on prayer and the presence of God is secured and retained by prayer. The very place is made sacred by its ministry. We must become greater men and women of prayer, mightier and more faithful in prayer. Are we devoted to prayer? Very convicted writing this sermon...

On Wednesday, our entire service, after we sing praise to God, is going to be devoted to corporate prayer. I hesitate to say this because I know the risk. I know that as soon as something like that is said in a church, the attendance gets cut in half at least – because it is “only” a prayer meeting, as if it were some small, insignificant and worthless thing. If you think that, you need to check your heart. I know the risks in saying this. Surprise me, beloved. We talk about really praying together but its only talk if we do not do it. If we really want the power and the presence of God, we need to pray together. I'm challenging you to make this Wednesday a priority and to do it. I'm talking the entire church body – children, students, everybody all together in this room praying together. We will put together some prayer guides, some prayer points that we need to pray for and we are going to pray. It is not why I am doing this, but it will be a good test of our hearts as a church. Will we be devoted to prayer?

Later on, Luke describes the beautiful way in which the worship of God permeated their lives. He says: And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. I want you to see the beautiful balance of this. They worshipped both in the temple and in their homes. They gathered corporately and formally, most likely in the court of the Gentiles, which would have been large enough for the 3000+ when they worshipped

together and the Apostles preached and taught. And then they gathered informally, in each other's homes. So we see formal and informal gatherings of the church, structured and unstructured, traditional and spontaneous – that is the nature of worship in the Spirit filled church.

Let me show you something else. They were both joyful and reverent. The two are not exclusive of one another. Luke describes their joyfulness in this way, they had -- glad and generous hearts. This is a phrase together that literally means “exultation and sincerity of heart.” Another way to say this is that they had “unaffected joy,” that is, it was not affected – not exaggerated or pretentious, not put on or drummed up, not showy and hollow. It was real joy. They were joyful, praising and fellowshiping with Christ together, who had redeemed them by His blood, calling upon Him in prayer, enjoying the constant communion of the Holy Spirit, celebrating the salvation of Christ in all its benefits.

At the same time, their joy was not irreverent. Just as joy is an authentic work of the Spirit, so is reverent fear of the Lord. Luke says: awe came upon every soul. God was in their midst, at work in their midst, dwelling with them and they knew it. They had a profound sense of God's presence and they did not treat His presence with casualness, with indifference, did not take His presence for granted or treat it as some small thing. They honored Him with joy and with awe. They transcended their earthly perspective and caught a glimpse of the eternal glory of the living God, caught a vision of His greatness, holiness, majesty, power, and steadfast and eternal love. They came to worship with expectancy; with anticipation of the way that Christ was going to reveal Himself to them.

The consequence of the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit in this church, in the lives of these believers, was that they had favor with all the people. Now, of course, that does not mean that they did not have any opposition to them – we will see that in just a couple of chapters. No, what Luke is saying is that they were winsome. Their lives were winsome and they drew all kinds of people, just as Christ, in His incarnation, drew all kinds of people to Himself. Their testimony, their witness to Christ was believable, because Christ was their life. He had invaded every aspect of their living. They had open doors because their lives were open books and those open books were genuine and true. In that, we see the last characteristic that I want us to see this morning.

The Spirit-Filled Church Is a Witnessing Church Luke tells us: And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. And that tells us that they were not a church that was turned in on itself. Through the preaching of the gospel, their impassioned prayer, their witness, through their changed lives and the impressive love evidenced in their common life together, through their example as they were praising and living lives of worship, the Lord added to their number day-by-day. God did the adding. Of course He did. He is the head of the church. It is He that bestows salvation on human souls. But He did it through their faithful lives. Do you see? The early church's witness was not a sporadic thing, not an emphasis, not an occasional activity, not an organized program, because their faithfulness to Christ was not sporadic or occasional, but real and true. It was the natural overflow of their lives and God gave the increase.

John Stott says of this increase: (Jesus) did not add them to the church without saving them (no nominal Christianity at the beginning) , nor did He save them without adding them to the church (no solitary Christianity either). And it has been the pattern ever since. This is the picture of the Spirit-filled church, the one that turned the world upside-down. The application question this morning is very simple.

Are We This Kind of Church? Are we? Do we have this kind of church? Does this describe us? A Spirit-filled church is eager to receive the apostles' teaching, eager to believe what Jesus and His apostles taught, eager to submit to the Word of God. A Spirit-filled church delights in fellowship with God and perseveres in fellowship with one another in love, admonishing, teaching, building up and correcting one another, caring for each other, body and soul. A Spirit-filled church worships God together, in the church and in the home, sharing the Lord's Supper, praying together, with joy and with reverence. A Spirit-filled church is a witnessing church, a Christ-exalting church, a gospel preaching and living church with a missionary spirit because the Holy Spirit is a missionary Spirit. This is what the church is to be. This is what a Spirit-filled church is. It is fellowship of Spirit-filled believers, a fellowship of the like-minded and like-hearted.

So maybe the better question to ask ourselves this morning is: "Am I a Spirit-filled believer? Are you? Am I? Does this describe you? If you find yourself failing the test, I pray you will cry out to God to search your heart and show you how you are grieving the Holy Spirit and ask that He would grant to your heart repentance for the sake of yourself, this church, and the world around you.

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