

## Flashpoint

Acts 2:1-13

Acts 2:1) When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place. 2) Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying. 3) They saw tongues like flames of fire that separated and rested on each one of them. 4) Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them. 5) Now there were Jews staying in Jerusalem, devout people from every nation under heaven. 6) When this sound occurred, a crowd came together and was confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7) They were astounded and amazed, saying, *“Look, aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans?”* 8) *How is it that each of us can hear them in our own native language?* 9) *Parthians, Medes, Elamites; those who live in Mesopotamia, in Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10) Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts), 11) Cretans and Arabs — we hear them declaring the magnificent acts of God in our own tongues.”* 12) They were all astounded and perplexed, saying to one another, *“What does this mean?”* 13) But some sneered and said, *“They’re drunk on new wine.”*

Huddled in their upstairs prayer room, 120 believers waited for ten days, and then it happened – flashpoint! In science lab, a flashpoint is the lowest temperature at which a given liquid will ignite. In a political arena, a flashpoint is a situation or dispute likely to escalate into war. **In a Christian context, flashpoint occurs when a believer and a church are indwelled and empowered by the Holy Spirit!**

The Book of Acts is more than just a narrative describing the birth of the church. Acts forges specific Turning Points in the life of the Church. These turning points are intended to challenge us as the 21<sup>st</sup> century church. We must admit that as the church, especially in America, and specifically as Southern Baptist, we are not what we used to be. On any given Sunday in America, only 17% of Americans attend any local church. As Southern Baptists, we are the largest non-Catholic denomination in America, but for the past 40 years, an entire generation, 80% - 90% of our churches are experiencing plateau or decline – plateau meaning a level growth pattern, not upward growth but not downward growth either, and decline, meaning a drop or negative growth. Many of those churches experiencing growth, the growth is minimal when compared to reaching the lost and unchurched in their

cities and communities. It's time for a turnaround. It's time for a comeback. It's time for a breakthrough. It's time to awaken the sleeping giant!

Two questions confront any church: "Who Are We?" and "Why Do We Exist?" Many Baptists would consider these two questions unnecessary. But I submit to you that "**Who Are We?**" and "**Why Do We Exist?**" **define the most serious questions for a church to consider.** I would suggest further that these two questions are the most important questions for First Baptist Lafayette to consider before you are ready for the next pastor. So, with these two questions on our minds, this morning we examine this spiritual flashpoint, a case study of the role and function of the Holy Spirit.

**1. The filling of the Holy Spirit verifies the Presence of the Spirit.** In Acts 1:4, Jesus commanded them *to wait for the Father's promise.* Now, after a ten-day prayer meeting, the promise shows up in a visible and audible sign. *A sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying.* A sound – *echos* (echo) – like a mighty wind whirring violently, perhaps even tornadic. (A.T. Robertson, Word Pictures, 3:20) In the Old Testament, wind phenomena often escorted an appearance by God. For example, when the prophet Ezekial stood overlooking a valley of dry bones, they came to life when God's breath – God's wind – blew upon them. (Ezekial 37:9-14). After the wind, *tongues like flames of fire, separated and rested on each one of them.* As with the wind phenomena, fire phenomena in the Old Testament pinpointed God's presence, as in God speaking forth to Moses out of the burning bush. (Exodus 3:2) After the wind and tongues of fire, *then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.* **The sound like the wind and the tongues like flames of fire verified a filling to the full of the Holy Spirit.**

As recorded in John 14:16-17, on the night before His crucifixion, Jesus assured His disciples, that though He was leaving them, God the Father would send in His place *"another counselor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth."*

"*Counselor*" translates the Greek word *parakletos* = **one called alongside to assist, help, and to protect.** The Holy Spirit is the Counselor Alongside. The Amplified Bible provides six other names which could translate *parakletos* in addition to Counselor. The most common synonym is "*Comforter*", which describes one who relieves another of mental distress. Other synonyms include: *Helper* – One who supports, *Intercessor* – One who speaks on behalf of, *Advocate* – One who pleads the case of another, *Strengtheners* – One who enables, *Standby* – One who can be relied upon. How wonderful would it be to for one person to function in all of these roles in your life! Are you distressed or discouraged? – then you need the Comforter. Are you facing a serious decision? – then you need the Counselor. Do you need support for your personal responsibilities? – then you

need the Helper. Are you burdened by a broken relationship? – then you need the Intercessor. Are you being criticized, falsely accused, or misunderstood? – then you need the Advocate. Are you hounded by the habits of sin? – then you need the Strengthener. Are you overwhelmed by an emergency? – then you need the Standby. I have an announcement to make – **The Holy Spirit IS ALL of these to us – comforter, helper, advocate, strengthener, standby, counselor, intercessor.**

Holy-Spirit presence affirms a significant turning point for the church. Prior to the New Testament, God spoke to his people through the patriarchs, the kings, the priests, and the prophets. The Spirit of God would reveal truth to these leaders, and they would then speak to the people *“thus saith the Lord.”* Following the Old Testament era, for a period of three years, Jesus Messiah, the promised one, the Name above all names, the blessed redeemer, the living one, God in human flesh, Spoke truth and revealed truth through his words, his miracles, his life, and his teachings. We, the 21<sup>st</sup> century church, are privileged to have the written word, the Scriptures, and specifically, the Gospels, to reveal the words, miracles, actions, and Teachings of Jesus. But Jesus was not omnipresent (he was fully God, but also ministry complete, Jesus left planet Earth, and in His place, God the Father sent the Holy Spirit, and His supernatural Spirit speaks to His people and His church today. What a tragedy it would be if God were to remove His supernatural Presence from us, and we would keep right on doing what we’ve been doing. The filling of the Spirit verifies the Holy Spirit’s supernatural Presence within His body and His bride, the church.

**2. The filling of the Holy Spirit validates the Power of the Spirit.** The flashpoint of the filling of the Spirit begs a question. What could they do after they were filled with the Spirit that they could not do before they were filled with the Spirit? What were the evidences of the filling of the Spirit? The most obvious evidence involves connecting Acts 1:8 with Acts 2:4. Acts 1:8 maximized their assignment: *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses (Martus = one who gives testimony) in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* Acts 2:4 validates how this witness would happen: *“Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit gave them ability for speech.”* These tongues were not “unknown”, as some of our charismatic friends would have us believe. Verse 6 validated that the crowd was confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language (*Dialektos* = dialect). **The presence of the Holy Spirit empowered them to communicate in different languages as the Spirit enabled them.** The Spirit’s enabling is a rare Greek phrase meaning “to

*“speak with gravity or significance.”* The time would come when these first-century Christians would be scattered into the world. But initially, Jerusalem would be inhabited by ethnicities and languages representing all of the people groups of the world at that time, all together in one place celebrating the Jewish Day of Pentecost. Empowered with the Spirit, they were able to communicate, in all of these languages, the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The list of nations conveys a multiplicity of nationalities: People groups from the East (Parthians, Medes, Elamites; those who live in Mesopotamia); the locals (those from Judea, and perhaps even Samaria); the northern dialects (Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia); Northern Africa (Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene); visitors from Rome, Italy; Cretans (the Mediterranean islands), and Arabs (the other half of the lineage of Abraham).

The early church from its birth, was multi-cultural and multi-ethnic. I’m more and more convinced that our generation, our culture, our worldview, is more common to the first century than any other generation before us. Would we be shocked to know how many nationalities live in Lafayette, LA and the region we call Acadiana? (Just as an example, 13 different Asian nationalities and language dialects live within five miles of First Baptist). Do we have the courage to find out how many language dialects are spoken in our high schools and the University two blocks from here? God has brought the nations to us.

Not only empowered to communicate, but **The Holy Spirit empowered them to participate in fulfilling the Great Commission to make disciples of every nation.** The Act 1:8 challenge “*to witness to the end of the earth,*” connected to the Matthew 28:20 directive “*to make disciples of all nations*” loomed large ahead of them. And it still looms large ahead of us. In 2017, our International Missions Board identified 11,659 people groups (people who share a common language and culture), of which more than one-half (6,744) are considered “unreached.” An unreached people group is one where less than 2% of its population identify as Christians. Among these unreached people groups, more than one-half of them (3,789) are “unengaged” unreached people groups, meaning no Christian witness or assigned missionary to engage them with the Gospel. More than one-fourth of all the people groups on this planet do not now know the Gospel and have never heard it in their own language. We must keep on going to all the nations. We southerners know about “all y’all.” All nations means “all y’all.” (See Mark Hearn, Technicolor, pp.18-19)

Growing up in a Baptist Church, my earliest recollection was the Broadman hymnal and then the Baptist hymnal. I can remember singing this old hymn, “*Lord*

*as of old at Pentecost, thou didst thy power display. With cleansing, purifying flame, descend on us today. Lord, send the old-time power, the Pentecostal power, thy floodgates of blessing on us throw open wide, Lord, send the old-time power, the Pentecostal power, that sinners be converted, and thy name glorified.*” As a young person, I’d sing that hymn and be thinking, “But we are Baptists, not Pentecostals. What’s a Pentecostal hymn doing in the Baptist hymnal!” But I eventually understood that the Pentecostal power was not reserved for specific church or denomination, but for all believers. And so, I’m waiting and longing and praying and preparing for **A New Flashpoint: Lord, Send the Old-Time Power!** The public opinion of the Acts Flashpoint: They were all astounded and perplexed, saying to one another, “*What does this mean?*” But some sneered and said, “*They’re drunk on new wine.*” The Apostle Paul reminded us in Ephesians 5:18, that we who call ourselves Christians must not “*get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled by the Spirit.*” What should a healthy church look like? A healthy church should look like a gathering of people drunk with the Spirit.”