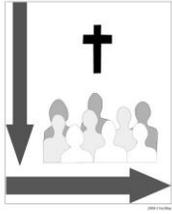


Week Forty-five: An Empowered Kingdom - Acts 1, 2, 6:1-6



Overview

God chose Abraham to produce a people through whom He would reveal Himself. After bringing them out of Egypt He spent 40 years forming them into a community, with laws that established a governing structure both spiritually and communally. They struggled with insubordination, rebelled, and eventually went into captivity. The Revelation of Jesus Christ clearly demonstrates that God is not

finished with Israel, as the Apostle John

sees their evangelistic activity during the tribulation and millennial reign of Christ.

Jesus spoke of “other sheep” (Jn. 10:16). He responded to Peter’s confession, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” by introducing His church: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Mt. 16:18).

One noted author weds the kingdom of God and the church:

“The kingdom is God’s reign and the realm in which the blessings of his reign are experienced; the church is the fellowship of those who have experienced God’s reign and entered into the enjoyment of its blessings. The Kingdom creates the church, works through the church, and is proclaimed in the world by the church.

There can be no Kingdom without a church—those who have acknowledged God’s rule—and there can be no church without God’s Kingdom; but they remain two distinguishable concepts: the rule of God and the fellowship of men and women.”¹

God called Israel into relationship with Himself so that He would be exalted among the nations through His reign over them. Likewise, He calls the church to experience His reign over them through the power of the Holy Spirit so that the nations will know that He alone is God.

This lesson focuses on the church—her initiation and her influence.

Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will understand today’s need for the same power that was released at Pentecost to create a bold community of Christ-followers who turned the world upside down.

Key Truths

The Holy Spirit comes with power, just as Jesus promised.

The Holy Spirit comes to indwell His people and develop them into a community through whom He will reach the world.

¹ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament, rev ed.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 117.

The Holy Spirit's empowering work transforms frightened individuals into a mighty band who worship, minister, and reach out to extend the kingdom by missions and evangelism.

Lesson Outline

The Book of Acts is the historical record of the spread of the gospel message from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The first church is inaugurated by the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem. It experiences the problems growing churches typically experience today: the need for power, proclamation, and organization.

1. The Need for Power and Its Results - Acts 1:4-14

Jesus commands his disciples (120 men and women) to wait in Jerusalem for the Promise of the Father—the Holy Spirit. Several Old Testament prophets foretold this outpouring in Isaiah 32:15-20; 44:3-5; Ezekiel 39:28-29; Joel 2:28-3:1; and Zechariah 12:8-10. After the disciples watch Jesus ascend into heaven they return to Jerusalem to pray and wait.

Results: Acts 2:1-13 describes the results of receiving the Holy Spirit. Christ-followers, filled with the Holy Spirit, begin proclaiming the gospel in the languages of the hearers, creating quite a stir in Jerusalem.

2. The Power of Proclamation and Its Results - Acts 2:14-39

Peter proclaims a message in which he attributes the disciples' bold and unusual behavior to a prophecy made by Joel (Acts 2:15-21). He summarizes his list of Jesus' miracles, wonders, signs, death, and resurrection with another prophecy, this one made by David (2:25-28). He concludes his message by instructing his hearers: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (2:38). Peter invites them to experience what they themselves had experienced—the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Results: Acts 2:40-47 describes the results of Peter's proclamation, "Then those who gladly received His word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them" (41). The church is born

Luke describes the early church:

- They continue to spend time under the Word, with one another and in communal prayers (42)
- The apostles do many signs and wonders in their midst (43)
- Generosity prevails as they sell their possessions to meet the needs of others (44-45)
- Spontaneous worship breaks out as they experience unity (46-47)
- Others are added to their numbers daily (47)

Paul captures this need for proclamation, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not

heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). He links faith to hearing, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (10:17).

The growth of the early church depends upon the Holy Spirit's power and the proclamation of the gospel.

3. The Need for Organization and Its Results - Acts 6:1-7

Israel knew what it was like to live in community where every one did "what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 17:6). There was a history of communal dysfunction, even though they had organization (laws, Levites, and leaders). What they could not do, the Holy Spirit does in community.

- The Apostles, full of the Holy Spirit, lead the church in prayer and ministry of the Word (2, 4)
- Deacons, full of the Holy Spirit, ensure that needs are met and things go smoothly (1, 3, 5-6)

Results: The division of ministry (proclamation & administration) carried out in the power of the Holy Spirit furthers the growth of the kingdom: "Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (7). The priests see the difference between their community of rule-keepers and the community of Christ-followers who are filled with the Holy Spirit, who boldly proclaim Christ, and who live sacrificial lives—their power and joy are compelling

Application - What does this lesson teach us about God? Man? Sin? Redemption?
Proclamation without power is simply the transfer of information.

Service without power is simply the transfer of goods.

The Holy Spirit comes to birth people into the kingdom of God and to empower them to minister in such a way that the Word of God continues to spread

The church is a community of believers who recognize their need for the Holy Spirit's power in both proclamation, service, and organization.

Summary

God speaks through the proclamation of Spirit-filled believers.

God acts by empowering His people to proclaim the good news of the gospel and to serve one another.

God reveals the kingdom influence an empowered people have in the world.

Discussion Questions

In what ways do churches today differ from the first church in Jerusalem?

What evidences of the Holy Spirit should believers look for in their churches?

Do churches today demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit? Why or why not?