

Lesson 10 | February 4, 2024

The Spirit-Empowered Church

Study Text: Luke 24:46–49; Acts 2:1–4; 6:1–7; 8:58; 13:2–3; 1 Timothy 3:8–13; 2 Timothy 4:5

Central Truth: The Holy Spirit empowers the Church for effective ministry.

Key Verse: Luke 24:49

I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high (KJV).

“Now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven” (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will explore the work of the Holy Spirit in the beginning days and years of the Church.
- Students will identify and appreciate the diverse work of the Spirit in the Church as He empowers believers.
- Students will believe God for an expansion of the work of the Spirit in their own church.

Introducing the Study

Say: What would you say if someone asked you, “What is the Church?” Truth is, you might hear a variety of answers to that question—some that are correct and others that are misconceptions.

Opening Activity—What Is the Church?

Ask: How do people define the word church? Some people say it’s the building where Christians meet. Others say it’s Christians out in the community. Still others say it includes everyone on earth who follows Christ.

Say: All of these answers have some truth. But the full definition of Church is this: the living, active body of Christ in the world; a community of faith following Him together. The term *Church* must include an element of activity and a sense of purpose being fulfilled. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As we continue to move through this unit, we will see many examples of the Church in action. Followers of Jesus are people of worship, service, faithfulness, holiness, love . . . the list of descriptors goes on and on. But none of these things happens because of our own strength. The Church can only accomplish its purpose through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. In this lesson, we will explore what it means to operate in this power.

Part 1—Filled with the Spirit

Filled for a Mission

Luke 24:46–49

Say: As Jesus prepared His followers to lead the Church, He clearly described the Spirit’s role in the work they were about to begin. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Resource Packet Item 1: The World of the First Century (Map)

Distribute the map. Encourage students to refer to it as you come across place names in this lesson and the rest of the unit.

Luke 24:46 picks up the story of Jesus when He appeared to His disciples after the Resurrection. As He had done many times before, Jesus reminded them His mission had been foretold by the prophets. “It was written long ago” that the Messiah would die and then rise from the dead (NLT).

But the prophets’ words would not just be fulfilled by Jesus’ death and resurrection. Additional Old Testament prophecies would come to pass as the gospel was preached to all nations or peoples (verse 47). The apostles would play a central role, since they were witnesses of His life, death, and resurrection (verse 48).

This gospel mission could not happen through human effort. Yes, people preach the message, but salvation from sin is only possible through the authority of the name of the Lord (verse 47). Human words cannot carry such authority on their own. Effective preaching must be accompanied by “power from heaven” (verse 49, NLT).

Jesus instructed His apostles to stay in Jerusalem, where He would “send the promise of my Father upon you” (verse 49, KJV). Scholars note this is a unique way to refer to the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Holy Spirit is not mentioned directly in the Greek here. (Some versions, including the New Living Translation, supply “Holy Spirit” for clarity.) The phrasing used serves to emphasize the idea of divine promise, ensuring the disciples would not be required to undertake this mission on their own. Instead, they would be “clothed with power from on high” (literal translation). The mission was vital to God’s plan, central to the work of God’s people, and only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit.

God’s plan continues through us. Like those apostles, we must rely on the Holy Spirit to proclaim the message of salvation. We might be tempted to make the Spirit our assistant in pursuing our goals and vision for ministry. But the opposite is true. We cannot be effective in this mission without the Holy Spirit empowering us and engaging with those who hear.

Discuss

- ? What do you think it means to do the work of proclaiming salvation and forgiveness through the power of the Holy Spirit?
- ? What will happen if a person proclaims Christ without the Spirit's power?

On the Day of Pentecost

Acts 2:1–4

Say: Acts 2:1–4 is a turning point in the formation of the Church, marking the moment God's people received the fulfillment of Jesus' promise in order to effectively proclaim the kingdom of God to the world. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

It is significant that the event described in Acts 2 occurred on the Day of Pentecost, one of three major Jewish feasts ("the feast of weeks," Deuteronomy 16:16, KJV). The Feast of Pentecost took place seven weeks after Passover. The word *Pentecost* comes from the Greek word for "fifty," signifying the fifty days between Passover and Pentecost. Because Pentecost celebrated the beginning of the harvest, it is also called the Feast of Firstfruits. A portion of these firstfruits would then be presented to God as an offering in the temple.

By the time of Christ, many Jews also used Pentecost to celebrate the giving of the Law. They based this on an understanding from Exodus 19:1 that the Law was given on Mount Sinai around harvesttime. As a result, the Feast of Pentecost was seen as a time for covenant renewal.

Against the backdrop of God's covenant promises, we can look even more deeply into what was happening in Acts 2:1–4. Those gathered were "all with one accord in one place" (verse 1, KJV). This wording emphasizes the unity that marked the Early Church. Such unity was the answer to Jesus' prayer in John 17:20–21.

Acts 2:2–3 record clear, dramatic symbols of the Spirit and the very presence of God as we see it manifested in the Old Testament. In both Greek and Hebrew, the word for "wind" is also used of the Spirit (Genesis 1:2; John 3:8). In the first century, Jews often used the word *heaven* in reference to God to avoid saying "God." So, the emphasis here is that the wind or Spirit filling the gathering place is coming directly from God.

Then what looked like flames settled on each person. In the Old Testament, fire symbolized both God's judgment and God's refining work. Specifically, scholars point to 1 Kings 18:36–39, where fire demonstrated both God's presence and His endorsement of Elijah as a prophet of the true God. Here in Acts, the fire of God signifies His approval of Jesus' followers as His sanctioned prophetic witnesses, fit to bear His message.

Acts 2:4 records that every person in attendance "was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability" (NLT). This supernatural speech would be a sign and a witness to the crowds gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost. Jews came from throughout the ancient world for this celebration, so hearing these people praising God in the native tongues of many nations

would be irrefutable proof God was doing something special. The gospel would indeed be preached to all people.

Discuss

? Why is it meaningful to see the connections between God's Old Testament covenant promise and the events of the Day of Pentecost?

Part 2—Empowered to Serve God's People Serve Those in Need

Acts 6:1–7

Say: Pentecostals often focus on the role of the Spirit in equipping us for evangelism and missions. But the Spirit equipped the Early Church for a wide array of ministries, and the same is true today. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Every local church has needy people among the congregation. As we focus on the outward reach of the church, we must not forget the inward ministry as well. The Early Church provides a good example of serving the needs of our church family.

The Early Church experienced amazing growth. But this growth brought certain problems. Tension developed between Greek-speaking and Hebrew-speaking believers (Acts 6:1). The Greek speakers were Jews who were from nations outside the Holy Land. They were likely part of the *Diaspora*, Jews who had moved outside their native land. Evidently, the Early Church had developed a food distribution program to help the widows among them, but these Greek-speaking Jews complained that their widows were being overlooked.

This problem was rooted in language and culture. For a number of religious reasons, native Jews already tended to avoid anything linked to the Gentiles. The language division probably intensified these divisions, threatening the unity of the Body.

The apostles called a meeting of the church to address the issue (verse 2). They recognized the need to care for widows fairly, but they also needed to spend their time in prayer and in teaching God's Word. So, they asked the congregation to select seven Spirit-filled men from among them who could administer the food program (verses 3–4). This suggestion pleased the people. Following the apostles' guidelines, they chose seven administrators and commissioned them in prayer.

Notably, one of these men—Stephen—is described as “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (verse 5, NLT). This is a good reminder the early Christians valued the Spirit's involvement in every aspect of ministry—not just preaching and teaching. In this case, the Holy Spirit provided wisdom for administering outreach, restoring equity, and maintaining unity to the Body.

After the believers' meeting, the Word of God spread and the number of believers increased rapidly (verse 7). This validates the decision the apostles and the congregation made. Through the work of the Spirit, the Church flourished.

Resource Packet Item 2: Compassion Ministries

Distribute the worksheet and complete it as a class. Identify ways students can be involved in reaching out to the needy in your church.

Discuss

? In what ways can the empowerment and wisdom of the Holy Spirit help a church meet the needs of its congregation?

? What are some specific needs in your church? How can your class help meet these needs?

Empowered to Lead

1 Timothy 3:8–13

Say: What qualities do you look for in a godly leader? We might be tempted to answer that question with a list of characteristics that make an effective speaker or preacher, but 1 Timothy 3:8–13 reminds us Christian leadership must include spiritual virtues. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The word *deacon*, as described in 1 Timothy 3:8–13, comes from the Greek word for “servant.” Deacons operate in a position of servant leadership within the church, often in areas associated with the congregation’s tangible needs. Their role is first observed in Acts 6.

However, the New Testament also regards deacons as leaders whose lives are characterized by the power and work of the Holy Spirit. Note how the qualifications for deacons resemble the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23. A deacon should be self-controlled in personal behavior and in spiritual practice. Faithfulness will be evident in matters of family and the Christian faith. First Timothy 3:9 states the deacon should be “committed to the mystery of the faith” (NLT). Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is a mystery in that it is only known through the revelation of the Holy Spirit—both in God’s Word and in the human heart. The deacon is to be wholly committed to salvation in belief and behavior alike.

The qualifications for deacon teach us the Holy Spirit intends to empower every aspect of the Church—not just evangelism and preaching. The Spirit must enable the work of spiritual leaders, whether they are preaching a sermon, leading a Sunday School class, resolving disputes, stewarding finances, or discipling young believers.

Discuss

? Why is servanthood so closely related to spiritual leadership?

? What are some ways the Holy Spirit empowers people as they serve and minister to one another?

Part 3—Empowered to Spread God’s Word

Empowered for the Supernatural

Acts 8:5–8

Say: Just as the Holy Spirit empowers us to thrive in community as the Church, He also empowers us to proclaim Christ to the world. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Acts 8:5–8 illustrates how the Holy Spirit empowered the spread of the gospel. In this chapter we find Philip, who had been chosen to serve as a deacon in Acts 6, in Samaria sharing the message of Christ. The location is key. The Jews often rejected the Samaritans because their ancestry was both Jewish and Gentile. (They descended from Jews who were left in northern Israel after the Assyrian invasion who intermarried with non-Jews.) However, the Samaritans are the first group mentioned outside of Judea in Acts 1:8. The reach of the gospel would spread both geographically and culturally, and preaching to the Samaritans was a key step as the message of the risen Christ moved beyond its Jewish beginnings.

In Acts 8, the Samaritans were eager to hear Philip’s message and were drawn in by miraculous signs, including deliverance from evil spirits and healing from paralysis (verse 7). Again, the Holy Spirit was meeting people’s spiritual and physical needs.

This account reminds us to maintain a proper perspective when it comes to the supernatural. God delivers and heals because of His compassion for people. This is consistent with His nature. But the fundamental purpose of miracles is to testify to the reality of the kingdom of God and to point people to Jesus. Then He ushers them from spiritual darkness into the light.

As Pentecostals, we pray and believe for divine help and healing (James 5:13–15). When the Holy Spirit performs the miraculous, we must make sure God receives all the glory. Not only will our own faith grow, but we will point lost people toward the new life available in Christ.

Discuss

- ? How would you describe the purpose of miracles in the Church today?
- ? Describe a miracle you’ve heard about, seen, or experienced. How did it impact you? How might it impact an unbeliever who saw it happen?

Empowered with Wisdom and Guidance

Acts 13:1–3; 2 Timothy 4:5

Say: When we think about the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we often focus on the supernatural. But the Spirit also works among Christians to bring divine wisdom and guidance when we need it most. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Acts 13:1–3 records the beginnings of Paul’s first missionary journey. It is important to look at the setting described here: A very diverse group of Jewish converts to Christianity had gathered in prayer and fasting. (Those listed were from as far away as Libya.) Clearly, the gospel was spreading far and wide, and the church in Antioch reflected the diversity of that expansion. The leaders’ prayers for guidance were answered in a prophetic word from the Spirit. They were to commission Barnabas and Saul (Paul) for a missionary journey.

The Church today must rely on the Spirit as well. In 2 Timothy 4:5, Paul exhorts Timothy to “keep a clear mind” (NLT). This is a call to remain sober and strong in the faith regardless of the situation. Although fears can arise from outside threats or our own uncertainty or insecurity, we need not be afraid as we carry out God’s plan. The Holy Spirit is with us wherever we go.

Discuss

- ? What are some ways the Holy Spirit has granted you wisdom?
- ? What kinds of fears might we experience today as we share the gospel?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Resource Packet Item 3: The Spirit (Cinquain Poem)

Distribute the worksheet and have students create their own cinquain poems about the Holy Spirit. Invite them to share their writing with the class.

Say: Without the Holy Spirit, the Church would be little more than an organization of people doing religious work. We must check ourselves daily to ensure our priorities and passion come from the Spirit and not our own desires.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Find new ways you can serve someone in need this week.
- Offer to pray with someone in need of a miracle.
- Pray each day that the Lord will help you be more attuned to the voice of the Spirit as you fulfill your role in the body of Christ.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

The Spirit’s Revelation to Joseph.
Genesis 41:33–40

Tuesday:

The Spirit’s Work in the
Wilderness. Isaiah 63:7–14

Wednesday:

The Spirit’s Ministry through

Daniel. Daniel 4:1–9

Thursday:

Baptism in the Spirit Prophesied.

John 1:29–34

Friday:

Rivers of Living Water Promised.

John 7:37–39

Saturday:

Breath of God Exhaled.

John 20:19–23