

Revival: A Spirit for Revival
Acts 1

Dan Hamel
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This last year was quite the season for college basketball. Any Purdue fans in the room today? It wasn't such a great season if you are a Kentucky fan, with your team losing in round one of the tournament (which about 100 people in this congregation reminded me of, thank you). It was even worse if you are an IU fan and your team didn't even make the tournament. There is something special about college basketball and the energy and heart behind the devotion. This week I was reminded of legendary coach Dean Smith, who led the University of North Carolina for 36 years, won almost 900 games, made it to eleven Final Fours, won two national championships, and coached some of the most prolific players in the NBA, including, of course, Michael Jordan. Dean Smith passed away several years ago at the age of 83. He made headlines after his funeral because in his will he stipulated that after his death he wanted to do something for his players he was never able to do when he was their coach. This was before the NIL era, when people couldn't just hand athletes hundreds of thousands of dollars to get them to play for their team. Back then, every penny was scrutinized. No gifts were allowed. So a few weeks after his funeral, all 180 players who lettered in his program received a \$200 check in the mail, and the memo line said, "Enjoy a dinner out, compliments of coach." That story warmed the hearts of so many because here was a loving man who wanted to find a way to bless and encourage people after he was gone.

That reminded me of the words of Jesus. As he was finishing his earthly ministry and was preparing to return to heaven, he told his disciples something similar. He told them he was going to send them a gift, specifically that he was going to send them the Holy Spirit, and they couldn't go anywhere or do anything until the Spirit came. "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4). Jesus said, "I am leaving. You won't see me again, but don't worry. You're going to have something better than the Son of God right next to you, you are going to have the Spirit of God living inside of you. So just wait. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). You won't be able to do anything until the Spirit comes. But when he comes, there's nothing you won't be able to do. In the capital city of Jerusalem, and in the surrounding region, and in the entire world, the Holy Spirit will give you power to tell people about me and bring a revival!

That is the very thing that took place. In Acts 1, Jesus promised to send the Spirit, and in Acts 2, he did it.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-4)

I want to point out three things about this.

First, it was Pentecost, a Jewish feast that happened fifty days after the Passover. Did you know that today is Pentecost Sunday? It is exactly fifty days after Passover. Pentecost was a feast to celebrate God giving the law, which told people how they were supposed to live. Under the Old Covenant, if people wanted to know how to honor God, they would go to a book and find what it said. Now, in the New Covenant, Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit to replace the role of the law. And the Holy Spirit is better in every way. The Spirit not only shows us how to live but he changes our hearts and gives us the power to do it.

Next, take note that when the Holy Spirit came, tongues of fire separated and came to rest on each of them. What is so significant about this is that fire was used in the temple to symbolize the presence of God in the temple. The fire was never allowed to go out, as a perpetual reminder that God was always there. (Part of what Hanukkah celebrates is that a small amount of oil that should have lasted only one day miraculously lasted to keep the fire in the temple burning for eight days.) But now, instead of fire burning in the temple, where is the fire? It's resting on Jesus' followers! This is a turning point in human history. When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain in the temple was torn, meaning that God's presence is now no longer confined to the temple. He's on the loose, active among us! The fire resting on the disciples means that the Spirit is living inside us of. Instead of going to the temple, we ourselves become a temple! God lives inside of us.

Third, when the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak in other tongues. This is a truly incredible miracle. When they spoke, the Spirit supernaturally enabled them to speak in such a way that those who spoke different languages could understand them in their native tongue. This is something that still happens today. I am friends with a woman named Amy Orr Ewing, a leading voice for Christianity today. She has a PhD from Oxford, has spoken before the UK's parliament on numerous occasions, has spoken in the US on Capitol Hill and in the West Wing, and is an honorary lecturer at the prestigious University of Aberdeen. She is as credentialed, as academic, and as trust-worthy as you can get. Last year we were in a small group meeting with pastors, and she told us about a time that she was visiting Prague. She went to a downtown area with lots of foot traffic to try to witness and tell people about Jesus. She is from the UK and was speaking in English, but she said every person who passed by her heard her speak in Czech. She said, "I've never studied Czech. I have no idea how to speak Czech. I was speaking my language, and the Holy Spirit supernaturally translated it into the language that people could hear." She said she's never seen it happen before and it hasn't happened since—but it happened that day, and because it happened, because they could hear the gospel in their own language, dozens of people placed their faith in Jesus.

That's what's happening in Acts 2. But instead of people from only one country, representing just only one language being able to hear the gospel, look at what we see:

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" (Acts 2:5-11)

If you look at a map of the known world at that time, literally every part of the known world was represented in Jerusalem that day, and something profound happened. God is reverse the disunity and confusion that took place in the Tower of Babel. Do you remember that story from the book of Genesis? At that time, humanity was all living in one concentrated place and was able to speak the same language. But they exploited those benefits to build a tower from earth to heaven. So God confused their language and humanity dispersed. Here in Acts 2, representatives from the entire world came back together, and for the first time since Genesis, they can all understand each other. And what is the message they hear? It's not that people have made their way to heaven, but that heaven has made a way to us. God sent his son, who died on the cross, who reconciled all people, and is restoring his purposes for the entire world.

Then Peter says, "This shouldn't surprise you! God promised this in the Old Testament!"

This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.” (Acts 2:16-18)

From the very beginning, God promised and God desired to send his Spirit on all people! Jesus dying for our sins and rising again, allowing our sins to be washed away and for our hearts to become fitting vessels for the Holy Spirit finally made it happen!

The Spirit’s presence brings so many of the promises of the Old Testament to fulfillment. Let me show you one more in this passage. If you go back to the Old Testament book of Exodus, when Moses gave God’s people the law, do you remember what happened? When Moses came down from the mountain, all the people were worshipping an idol and engaged in revelry. “That day about three thousand of the people died” (Exodus 32:28). That’s what happened when the Law was given. But when the Holy Spirit comes, and a sermon is preached about Jesus for people from all around the world to hear, and the Spirit opens their hearts to believe in Jesus, what was the outcome? “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day” (Acts 2:41). When the law was given there was death. When the Spirit comes, he brings life! There was a revival that happened there in Jerusalem, with 3,000 believers joining the church in one day! But revival wasn’t contained to Jerusalem. Read the rest of the book. Revival starts in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, in chapter 2, and the book ends in chapter 28 with revival happening in Rome, the capital of the empire, and it happens in nearly every major metropolitan area between the two. Once the Holy Spirit comes, revival cannot be stopped!

There are two principles here for us. First, the Spirit’s presence is essential. Jesus’ apostles had been trained by him for three entire years. They had thirty-six months of following Jesus, listening to his teaching, being coached and instructed by him, and yet Jesus said to them, “Don’t go anywhere without the Holy Spirit.” In John 15:5, Jesus said, “Apart from me you can do nothing.” If *they* couldn’t do anything apart from the Spirit, what makes us think we can? The Bible tells us that God is the one who formed humanity. He shaped and designed our lives. As cars are designed to need fuel to run, as phones are designed to need a charge to work, as sailboats are designed to sail with the wind, when God designed your life, he designed you to depend and rely upon the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is essential to life the way God designed it. He made it so you cannot live the life you are called to live without the Spirit. If we want personal revival to come, if we want revival in our family to come, if we want revival in our church to come, if we want revival in our community to come, we are 100% reliant upon the Spirit of God to move.

I remember talking to a friend who attends this church but lives on the west side of town. It’s about a thirty-five-minute drive for him and his family to come here, and they pass by really good, Bible-believing churches on the way. A while back I asked him why he comes to The Creek. He said, “This might sound a little bit mystical, but when we walked into this church for the first time, we sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit. We can’t explain it, but neither can we deny it. The Spirit is moving here, and we want to be a part of it.” I hope his words are always true.

When I first became aware of who the Holy Spirit is and how important the Holy Spirit is to the Christian life, I came across this prayer I want to share with you:

**Holy Spirit of God,
Visit now this soul of mine,
And tarry within it until the eventide.**

**Inspire all my thoughts.
Pervade all my imaginations.
Suggest all my decisions.
Lodge in my soul's most inward citadel
And order all my doings.
Be with me in silence and in my speech,
In my haste and in my leisure,
In company and in solitude,
In the freshness of the morning and the weariness of the evening.
Give me grace at all times
To rejoice in Thy mysterious companionship.**

I prayed that prayer every single day for ten years, asking the Spirit to move, and recognizing without him, I can do nothing. Maybe this is a prayer you'd like to print and incorporate into your prayer life, as well.

The Spirit's presence is essential. Second, the Spirit's power is undeniable. When God first sent his Spirit, a violent wind blew, the house shook, fire came down, and people spoke in other languages. But it wasn't only the supernatural miracles on day one. The Holy Spirit's power changed the people who he filled! Before the Spirit came, Jesus' followers had been cowering in fear, hiding behind locked doors, trying to survive another day. When the Spirit came those cowards were transformed into courageous preachers who stood up in public forums and boldly declared for everyone that Jesus is the Messiah, crucified for our sins and raised from the dead. When they were threatened with prison and death they said, "We have to decide if we are going to obey God or you. Come what may, we've chosen to obey God." What brought about the change? The power of the Spirit inside of them.

The Spirit is still giving people power like that today, people like Domingo and Irene Garcia (see photo below). He's a mechanic. She's a hairdresser. They regularly share their story about the early years of their marriage, when Domingo was an alcoholic, physically abusive, and serially unfaithful. They share about Irene's hatred toward Domingo, her verbal abuse toward him, and her fantasies that he would drive his car off a cliff and die. That was their former life. Then they talk about how the Holy Spirit transformed them, how their marriage has been restored and Irene calls Domingo the godliest man she knows. They tell of how God healed them and filled them with love, and how they have been able through the years to foster thirty-two children and adopt sixteen of them. Even in their sixties, they have eleven kids living in their home (see photo below). In their testimony they say, "The Holy Spirit healed us. The Holy Spirit changed us. The Holy Spirit gave us supernatural love for one another, and then gave us love for children in need." When you look at changed lives, what else can you say other than that the Spirit's power is undeniable.

We need to cry out to God and say, "Holy Spirit, have your way in my life. Exchange my hoarding and greed for generosity. Exchange my control with trust. Exchange my bitterness with love. Exchange my addiction with dependency on you." In his book on the Holy Spirit, pastor Francis Chan shares these words:

The Bible tells us of the Holy Spirit's amazing power at work in us, our Spirit-enabled ability to put sin to death through Him, and the supernatural gifts He gives us. Accordingly, it's natural to expect our new life with the Holy Spirit to look radically different from our old life without Him. Yet this is not the way it is for most people. We don't live very differently. We don't expect the Holy Spirit to act. This may be a silly illustration, but if I told you I had an encounter with God where he entered my body and gave me a supernatural ability to play basketball, wouldn't you

expect to see an amazing improvement in my jump shot, my defense, and my speed on the court? After all, this is God we're talking about. And if you saw no change in my athleticism, wouldn't you question the validity of my "encounter"? Churchgoers all across the nation say the Holy Spirit has entered them. They claim that God has given them a supernatural ability to follow Christ, put their sin to death, and serve the church. Christians talk about being born again and say that they were dead but now have come to life. Yet when those outside the church see no difference in our lives, they begin to question our integrity, our sanity, or even worse, our God. And can you blame them?

We want just the opposite to be said of us. We want people to say, "There is no denying the transformation in your life, your love, your joy, your hope, your kindness, and I want to know more about Jesus because of the example I see in him in you."

The only way to experience revival is if the Spirit comes. When the Spirit comes, he brings life: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Genesis 1:1-2). What was the planet like after creation? Formless and void. No beauty. No color. No life. Nothing. Only darkness. Then, the Spirit of God began hovering over the waters. And as the Spirit of God hovered over the earth, the next verse tells us, God said, "Let there be light." There may be areas in your life right now that feel formless and empty, where all you see is darkness. Those are the places we are sometimes ashamed to bring to God. Those are the very places we need to open up to God, to ask for his Spirit to come and hover over us, to bring the light and the life that is only available through him.

This is Pentecost Sunday! For the last 2,000 years, this has been the one day of the year that the church has remembered the sending of the Holy Spirit, and so today is the perfect day to cry out to God, and ask him to send the Spirit afresh in our lives. Jesus said, "How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13). So let's ask him.