Acts 1:8*Wind and Fire: The Power of the Holy Spirit*

***Dynamite***Thank you so much to Julie for sharing that story. It is an amazing reminder that the Holy Spirit is still active in our world.

It is also a good introduction for our sermon today. We are in an ongoing series called *Wind and Fire*, where we are talking about the Holy Spirit. So far, we’ve seen that the Holy Spirit is God—He’s the third person of the Trinity. He is a person—not a force or an “it”. He is mysterious—one of the Bible’s favorite images for the Spirit is wind—you can’t see the wind, but you can see the effects of the wind. And He is Christ-centered—the Holy Spirit’s biggest priority is that we look to Jesus.

Then, last week, we looked at the story of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the whole church. We saw that the promise is for all who call Jesus Lord, not just for a few spiritual elite. And we saw that the Holy Spirit’s mission is to bring the message of salvation in the name of Jesus to the whole world.

Now, today, we are going to talk about the Power of the Holy Spirit.

This week I went online and did a search of every Bible verse that uses the word Spirit and the word power. I got back 30 verses. 30 verses that talk about the Holy Spirit and emphasize the power of the Spirit. And those are just verses that have the two words together, that doesn’t take into consideration longer passages that might connect the two. The power of the Spirit of the Lord is a significant theme in the Bible

Perhaps the most well-known verse that makes this connection is Acts 1:8.These are the final words Jesus speaks before the book of Acts describes His ascension back into heaven. He’s already told the disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the gift promised by the Father, the gift of the Holy Spirit. **Then He says this**:

**8**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.

Jesus promises that when the Holy Spirit comes, those who receive Him will also receive power. The Greek word here is **dunamis**—which is an interesting word because when Alfred Noble needed a word for a new, explosive substance he had invented, he used this word and called it “dynamite.” Not that it originally meant an explosion, but it is a word that means strength, might, ability and capability.

When Jesus says that His followers will receive power from the Holy Spirit He is telling them that they will receive a supernatural capacity to do things that they would not be able to accomplish without the Spirit in their lives. To paraphrase a quote I read from J.I. Packer, but couldn’t find the original back, “Supernatural living through supernatural empowering is at the very heart of New Testament Christianity.” I’ll put it like this, our big idea for today: **The Holy Spirit is given to us in order to give us the power to do things we would not otherwise be able to do.**

The Holy Spirit is sent to empower us. There are several things that the Bible talks about the Holy Spirit giving us the power to do—and we’ll talk about more of them in the weeks ahead—but for now I’d like to talk about 4. Four things the Spirit gives Christians the power to do:

***Our Struggle…Against Spiritual Forces***First, **the Holy Spirit equips us for spiritual warfare**. This is what Julie described in her experience in Haiti. It’s probably the most dramatic thing you see the Holy Spirit doing as you read through the New Testament.

Especially, it’s what we see in the book of Acts. Last week, we saw the elaborate way the Holy Spirit announced His arrival on Pentecost in a wind that couldn’t be felt and fire that didn’t burn and uneducated Galileans becoming world-class linguists. And as you go further into Acts you will see the Apostles healing a crippled man (Acts 3:1-10) and performing “many miraculous signs and wonders” (Acts 5:12). Let me take you to Acts 8:4-8 as an example. This is the story of the good news coming to Samaria. Jesus said they would be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. So this is **the beginning of step two in Jesus’ instructions:**

4Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. 5Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. 6When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. 7For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8So there was great joy in that city.

This sounds a lot like what Julie was describing. This is the power of the Holy Spirit showing up in miraculous healings and other signs; and, in particular, in driving out impure spirits. Ephesians 6 reminds us that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil in this world. As Christians, we believe there is a supernatural world, and there is spiritual warfare. The Bible tells us there is more going on then just what we can see, hear and touch; and the Holy Spirit helps us fight those battles.

If you believe in God, then you cannot dismiss stories like this. If you believe in God, then you have to believe He is capable of miraculous healings and supernatural exorcisms. If God is the same God as the One described in the Bible, then there is no reason to think He is any less capable of doing these sorts of things now as He was then.

But it is interesting to note that when these miraculous signs and wonders occur in Acts, it is usually as the good news of Jesus is crossing into new territory—here into Samaria, later in chapter 10, as the good news reaches the Gentiles (“the ends of the earth”). Some theorize that these kinds of signs and wonders are more likely to be seen in missionary settings then in places where the church is long established. Moreover, while it seems like we read about a lot of miracles in the Bible they remain—even Biblically speaking—relatively rare occurrences.

And the caution we must take, when it comes to the more dramatic displays of the Spirit’s power like this is that we are not so caught up in the signs that we lose sight of the salvation they are pointing us to. In fact, if you keep reading about Philip and the Samarians, you’ll see a cautionary example of this.

It just so happened that in this same city where Philip came there was a magician who billed himself as “Simon the Sorcerer.” He called himself the “Great Power” and he went around amazing people with his magic. I don’t know if he was sleight of hand magician—like Penn and Teller--or if there was something more sinister going on and he was using demonic power; but when the good news of the gospel arrived and started to draw away his crowd, he was at first annoyed and then he saw a business opportunity. He offered money to the apostles and asked them for the ability to lay hands on people and give them the Holy Spirit. He recognized the real power that was on display, and he wanted a piece of it.

The Apostles’ response to him was **blunt and direct:**

“May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! **21**You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.

I’ve talked about my concerns with the so called “health and wealth” gospel from this pulpit before. Ministries which major in spectacular promises of healing or other displays of supernatural power often remind me of Simon the Sorcerer. Their concern seems more with what they can gain from the Holy Spirit than with the actual message the Holy Spirit wants to convey.

So yes, the Bible describes the Holy Spirit working in powerful and spectacular ways. And if we believe in God, then we need to believe He can still work in those ways today. But there is a temptation to be so caught up in the flashy and miraculous ways the Spirit works that we can overlook some of the more—quote, unquote—“ordinary” ways the Spirit empowers us.

***Inspiration and Illumination***Let’s look at a second way the Spirit empowers us: **The Holy Spirit Guides us into truth.** The Holy Spirit is poured out so that we will know God’s will. A key verse here is **John 16:13**:

**13**But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

This is important, and this is what we want so badly. How often have you said: “I wish God would tell me what to do”? Or “I wish I knew what God’s plan for me is”? We are looking for guidance. We’re looking for direction. And if the Holy Spirit is poured out on us, then doesn’t that mean God can tell us directly what He wants us to be doing?

In fact, we often hear Christians say things like: “The Lord told me…” or “I know this is God’s call on my life…” or “We know this is where the Lord wants us to be…” And, if you’re anything like me, you’re probably thinking: “I wish the Lord would communicate that clearly with me. I wish He would send a burning bush or an angel my way.”

But I think if we are caught up expecting some sort of audible voice or miraculous sign, we might be trapped in the same sort of hang-up on the special effects that we talked about just a minute ago. When we think about the Holy Spirit guiding us into truth, we should think more in terms of relationship than revelation. That is to say, I think the Spirit wants to communicate with us as we keep in step with Him through God’s Word, the Bible.

Think about this verse in John. When Jesus first said these words, the group of people He was most directly talking to where His disciples. These were the people who would go on to write the New Testament; or, at the very least, it was on the basis of their testimony that the New Testament would be written. So when Jesus says the Spirit of truth is going to guide them into truth, part of what He is promising is that the Spirit is going to help make sure they have an accurate record of what Jesus said and did.

Theologians call this the doctrine of **inspiration**. You can kind of see the word “spirit” in there. Spirit and inspiration come from the same root word. And it is our belief that the Bible is “inspired” by the Holy Spirit. It is our confidence that the words in scripture are the words God wants to be there.

Somehow, the Holy Spirit superintended human authors so that using their own individual personalities, experiences, and word choices, they composed and recorded–without error–God’s exact revelation to us! This is **what 2 Peter 1:21** says:

21 For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The Greek phrase there—“carried along by Holy Spirit”—is the same wording you would use to describe the wind filling the sails of a ship. The Bible writers were “carried along” by the wind of the Spirit filling their sails and taking them where He wanted them to go with their writings.

And so we have the Bible. And if you want to know God’s will for you, the place to start is with the Bible. He’s not going to reveal anything new to you that isn’t in keeping with the things already in Scripture. The way He wants you to be in relationship with Him and know the truth is through the words He has already inspired in His Holy book.

Look at Jesus’ words in **John 16:13** again. The secondary audience (if you will) for these words is us. Those of us who believe in Jesus on the basis of the disciples’ testimony. And while the Holy Spirit is not going to be guiding us to write new scripture, He is guiding us into truth through the basis of scripture.

The theological term for this is **illumination.** Illumination. Like turning on a light. One of the ways the Holy Spirit is empowering us is by turning on a light while we read scripture so that we will identify it as the truth about God and understand it better. The Spirit has a teaching ministry.

In fact, elsewhere in the Bible, we are told that is impossible to fully understand the truth of Scripture without the Holy Spirit’s ministry to us. Spiritual truths must be revealed by the Spirit (1 Cor. 1:10-14).

If you have become convinced of the truth of the Bible. If you have read the Bible and been convicted about patterns of behavior in your life. If you have heard the Bible proclaimed and have been inspired to take action in obedience to God… all that is by the power of the Spirit. That is the ministry of the Holy Spirit guiding you into truth. That is the Holy Spirit illuminating the inspired Word of God for you.

***Under the Influence***A third way the **Holy Spirit gives us power is by influencing us to live Holy lives.** The Holy Spirit gives us the power to live more like Jesus. One of the goals of the *Holy* Spirit is right there in His name: He wants to make us more Holy.

There are a lot of verses that talk about this ministry of the Holy Spirit but I want to take you to **Ephesians 5:18:**

**18**Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit,

Do you see why I used the word “influence” in the heading for this point? Paul says: “Don’t get drunk on wine.” What do we call it when someone gets drunk? We say they were “under the influence,” right? Paul’s point here is that when we get drunk on wine, we are under the influence of spirits and that leads to debauchery—another word for sin.

Instead, Paul says, we should be “filled with the Spirit.” In other words, be under the influence of the Spirit. Don’t drink spirits, but drink THE Spirit, and let Him take control of your life.

Paul tells us Christians to not be drunk with wine which causes debauchery, but instead to be filled with the Holy Spirit. To not be unduly influenced by alcohol, but to be rightly and mightily influenced by the Spirit of God.

This is another reference to the Spirit’s power. This is the power to influence how we live our lives. The power to obey His will. The power to carry out His commands. It’s the Spirit’s control of our lives, swaying us, shaping us, acting upon us from the inside-out, influencing us to live the Christian life.

In context, these verses in Ephesians come at the end of a larger section all about living as children of light. Paul has told us to take off old and sinful patterns of living and put on new and holy patterns of living. He’s telling us to step out of the darkness—where shameful and dishonorable deeds are done—and step into the light—where we never need to be ashamed of our behavior or hide our actions from others or from God.

The theological term for this is **sanctification**. That comes from the Latin word, *sanctus,* which means “holy.” The Holy Spirit wants to make us holy. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to turn away from sin and live lives fit for the Holy kingdom.

Here, too, there is a danger that we can get caught up in the desire for the miraculous and miss out on the “ordinary” ways the Spirit wants to work. Sometimes we think that if the Holy Spirit is so powerful then He is just going to free us from whatever temptation or bad habit has plagued us. We wish we could find the grace to forgive someone and let go of the bitterness, or we wish the Spirit would take away lustful thoughts and an addiction to pornography; or we wish the Spirit would fix our gluttony and give us the discipline to eat sensibly. But, we say, we’ve been Christians for years, and those same old problems haven’t got away.

Francis Chan, in his book about the Holy Spirit called *Forgotten God*, uses the analogy of a treadmill. He says, suppose you go out and buy a treadmill. Then, three months later, you take it back to the store and say you want your money back because it didn’t help you lose any weight. First question the person at the store is going to ask is: “How often did you use it?” Suppose you say: “Use it? I didn’t ever use it. All I know is, it’s been in my house for three months and I haven’t lost a pound!”

Chan writes:

Receiving freedom [from sin] in answer to prayer is generally not something that is done to you, a situation in which you are just a passive participant. Occasionally God works this way and simply heals or frees a person outright. He is certainly capable of this. But in my experience, He typically asks us to play an active role in the journey toward wholeness. He doesn’t need our help but invites us to participate. Often this journey to freedom takes time, sometimes a very long time. And it takes perseverance. It takes participation on our part. We have to get on the treadmill and run—merely looking at the workout machine doesn’t do a whole lot. (p. 128-129)

That’s another reason I think the word “influence” is the right one here. The Spirit influences us to live Holy lives. He gives us the strength to put off sin and put on righteousness. But we have to participate. Merely having the Holy Spirit in our lives isn’t enough. We must keep in step with Spirit and obey His lead.

***Witnesses***And then, a fourth thing the Holy Spirit gives us the power to do: **The Holy Spirit empowers us to witness for Jesus.** The Holy Spirit enables us to tell others the good news of the gospel. Let’s go back to the verse we started with, **Acts 1:8:**

**8**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.

This verse has been called the table of contents for the book of Acts. The first few chapters talk about how the church grew in the city of Jerusalem. Then, in chapter 8, as we’ve already seen, it spread to the surrounding area of Judea and Samaria. Then, in chapter 10 and beyond, it spread to the Gentiles and—through the apostolic ministry of Paul—it spread to the ends of the earth. Taken literally, this is the pattern that the spread of the gospel followed.

Taken figuratively, it also provides a pattern for us to follow when we think about our mission. We are called to bear witness for Jesus in our Jerusalem, right here in Spencer. In our Judea and Samaria—that is the region of Northwest Iowa as well as the upper Midwest. And the ends of the earth, supporting missionaries and taking mission trips around the U.S. and the entire world.

And the power to be effective in our mission—the way that we bear winsome and convincing testimony about Jesus—is through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Bible promises that when we are asked questions about Jesus, the Holy Spirit will help us know the words to say. The Bible promises that when we are persecuted for Jesus, the Holy Spirit will help us remain faithful even while undergoing trial. And the Bible promises that when it comes to people believing or disbelieving in Jesus, it will depend not so much on the eloquence of our speech or the persuasiveness of our argument, but on the power of the Spirit testifying in the hearts of those we are witnessing to.

Again, we have a big job as witnesses to Jesus; but we have a great power in the Holy Spirit in which we live and work.

And, here again, I want you to notice how much the Holy Spirit’s ministry is about calling attention to Jesus. The Spirit isn’t interested in calling attention to Himself. His ministry isn’t about wowing people with miraculous signs so that, like Simon the Sorcerer, we’ll wonder how we can harness such power for ourselves. He inspired the scripture and illuminates it in our hearts so that we’ll know the truth about Jesus. He influences us to live holy lives so that people will see the evidence of God in our life and turn to o Jesus.

This is the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This is what the Holy Spirit wants to do in and through us.