

In 2010, the rapper Kanye West released a teaser for his song “Power”. In it, West stands in the middle of the promo video in a black shirt with pillars lined behind him and a gold chain around his neck. He talks about how he’s trippin’ on all the power – he had been topping the music charts for some time, and the video portrays him as in a temple with all the power that anyone could ever imagine.

Yet that power was not enough for West. Fame and power would result in all sorts of struggles that would see his marriage to Kim Kardashian end in divorce and his attempt to run for President of the United States would result in many mocking him after a spiritual search for meaning.

Power is incredibly tricky. Channel it well, and it will serve you well. It will strengthen you and help you to flourish. Use it incorrectly and it can kill you. Evangelicals have had a tricky relationship with power. From the rise of the Moral Majority in US politics in the 1980s to bring God back into the picture to the struggle to understand our cultural position as people perceive evangelicals to be increasingly detrimental to the good of society, we need to have a better understanding of power. And that is precisely what Acts 2 is all about.

After ascending to heaven, Jesus sends the promise of the Father, the Spirit of power, to enable his disciples to live in his power. What does his power do?

Receive the Restoring Power of God

What happened at Pentecost is one of the most significant events in the Bible. Yet if Jesus had not gone into heaven, this great day would not have happened. Jesus had promised that because he would go, he would send another Comforter and his disciples would receive power to be his witnesses. Because Jesus has been exalted, he can now give good gifts to his Church. As much as Pentecost is about the Spirit, it is about the continuing work of Jesus through his Church.

When Jesus ascended to heaven, he told his disciples to wait for the promise of the Father, the power to be witnesses. Ten days after his ascension, the Jewish festival called Pentecost was happening. In Leviticus 23:15-22, the Lord had commanded the people to celebrate the Feast of weeks. Fifty days after Passover, the people would begin to bring the first of the harvest in. Numbers 28:26 would also call the beginning of this festival the day of firstfruits. The people would recognize that the Lord was the provider of the harvest and the One who would receive the first offerings.

So Jews from North, South, East, and West had gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost. They would celebrate this festival. But the believers were gathered together in a room, probably within the outer court of the temple when the sound like a rushing wind filled the entire house

where they were. Divided tongues like fire appeared and rested upon each one of them, and they were filled with the Spirit and began to speak in foreign languages (2:1-4).

What is going on here? Three things tell us that God is sending his power to remake a people for himself. First, there is the sound like a mighty rushing wind. We don't see this in English, but in both the OT Hebrew and the NT Greek, the word for wind is the same as the word for Spirit. What Luke is describing is not unlike the opening of Genesis, where God sends his Spirit/wind to hover over the face of the waters to create (Gen. 1:2). Later, God had shown the prophet Ezekiel a valley where nothing remained of an army except their dry bones, and Ezekiel had been told to prophesy to the bones the words of the New Covenant. And what Ezekiel heard was the sound of the wind bringing the bones of the slaughtered army back together and breathing life into them, remaking the former Israel into something new. Now Luke describes the 120 believers receiving the Spirit/wind of God, making them a new creation.

Second, Luke says that tongues like fire descended upon each one. In this shocking moment, you would expect that the divided tongues like fire would come and singe or burn them when it would descend upon them. Yet in an amazing moment, instead of burning up the disciples, it rests upon them. Why tongues of fire? Fire was the way that God had led his people through the wilderness by a pillar of fire (Exod. 13:21-22). When Israel arrived at Mt. Sinai, the law was given in the midst of smoke and fire (Exod. 19:18). God was present at the tabernacle by a pillar of fire (Exod. 40:38). His presence among his people was symbolized by fire. But fire was also a sign of God's judgment. When God would speak with tongues of fire, Isaiah says that for the sin of disobeying his law he would speak with fire (Isa. 30:27-30). But now, as the people are baptized with fire, it does not scorch them. Rather, the fire that should have consumed them rests upon them! The presence of God is with his people, and it does not destroy them, but it functions like a purifying fire so that the words of God come from their mouths!

Third, the people begin to speak in many foreign languages so that those who are there from other places understand what is being spoken! Back in Genesis 11, the nations had tried to make a name for themselves by building a tower that would reach to the heavens. God, in his judgment, had come down and brought confusion to the people by dividing them and giving them all different languages. But now, in a moment of great reversal, God does not scatter the nations, but he brings them back from north and south, east and west (Acts 2:9-11). They have come to celebrate Pentecost, and now he gathers in his own people as the firstfruits of the harvest of Pentecost by reversing the curse of Babel! Israel was to be a light to the nations; now God's people who receive his Spirit take the light of his presence into the world by speaking his Word!

The gift of the Spirit, you see, is God's great reversal of the curse. Dead people come alive by the breath of God. His presence doesn't destroy, but rests on his people. And the confusion of Babel is overcome by purified words!

The Holy Spirit's coming is about receiving the power of God that restores you. We receive the power of God first so that we are restored to be his people and that he would be our God. And all of this happens because Jesus has come to bring fire on the earth, and yet he takes the fiery breath of God at the cross by being baptized with that fire (Lk. 12:49-50)! The reason we are not consumed by the fire of God is that Jesus took the fire for us so that we could be restored – from death to life, from judgment to presence, from confusion to purification!

Receive the Remaking Power of God

What Moses had longed for was that a disobedient, stubborn people would become prophets. "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" (Num. 11:29). Now God had put his Spirit upon his people!

But why would God put his Spirit upon the people? What is the point of all of this? Most people want to jump to how God had promised that the Spirit would be given so that his disciples would have power to be his witnesses. And that is true! But there is also something else going on here that is connected to being a witness.

The feast of Pentecost, the ingathering of the harvest, was also associated with the giving of the law. Moses had told the people in Deut. 16:9-12 that when the people gathered together to celebrate Pentecost, they were to remember the giving of the law. Israel had repeatedly failed to keep the law. But now, as a result of the Spirit being given, Luke tells us in Acts 2:42-47 that the people begin to keep the law.

While Israel had said that they would obey everything that Moses commanded them to do, the Old Testament story was the recalling of how Israel repeatedly failed to keep the law. But now, the first disciples are devoted to the apostles teaching! They want to obey everything that God has commanded. Second, the celebration of Pentecost was intended to be a time where the people would not gather all of the harvest, but leave the edges of the fields so that the poor would have something to eat (Lev. 23:22) so that there would not be a needy person among them (Deut. 15:4). Now, as God comes by his Spirit, we are told that the people shared and had things in common to help those who were in need among them (Acts 2:44-45).

And by his presence, God comes in divided tongues. No longer is God's presence localized and centralized to the temple. Now, God's presence rests on each person who has trusted in the Son of God who takes the fire of judgment for them! In other words, God's people are given the Spirit because now we all become temples of the Holy Spirit! Now we all become the places where God dwells, where God's law resides, so that we are remade to obey the commands of God because of the presence of God! For this reason, Paul could say that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19).



THE STORY OF *Everything* LUKE 24:27

What the Spirit of God does, then, is he remakes us. He reorders our desires. He reshapes us so that we want to be devoted to the Lord. His presence enables us to care for one another, to love one another. Pentecost is all about God's great work to put the law into the hearts of his people by his Spirit so that we would love him and love one another with all of our hearts, souls, minds, and strength.

Pentecost is the power to remake us into the people of God. It is God's gracious work to remake a people who love his ways and who love one another! And as Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:35). And when we love one another, we can...

Go with the Power of the Glorious Christ

One of my classmates, Patrick Schreiner, has said it so well: "Israel is redeemed by blood and brought out of Egypt. God meets with his people on a high place and establishes a new covenant community. They are then called to be a light to the nations by their distinct lives. In Luke's retelling, each element of the familiar story is amplified. Jesus's blood is better than the blood on the doorposts. The Spirit's presence is better than that at the tabernacle. And the mission to the ends of the earth is directed by God himself." (P. Schreiner, *The Mission of the Triune God*, p. 77).

What Pentecost does is it brings the power of the ascended Christ down to earth, to each one of us. And as we receive the filling of the Spirit, the tongues of fire are given so that we would be his witnesses, speaking the very words of Christ. More energy has been spent on how the Church spoke in tongues, but less emphasis has been given on why those tongues were given: to be witnesses! The people spoke in human languages in supernatural ways so that others would know about Christ! The curse of Babel that scattered and divided people by tongues is now overcome by the Spirit who sends us out to speak of Christ and bring people together in Christ!

We know that the Spirit gives power to speak about Christ. He gives you boldness and confidence. Peter said he could speak with confidence about the resurrected Christ (Acts 2:29ff). And the believers would pray that God would fill them again and again so that they would be bold (Acts 4:29). The power of the Spirit is what we need to be bold.

But we also need to know that the Lord has enabled us to be bold for him. He puts his tongue of fire upon us so that we would speak. And what happens when we speak about Christ? We are his messengers who are sent with his power to bring about the reversal of the curse. Because on that day, Luke tells us in Acts 2:41 that about 3000 souls were added to their number. At Sinai, when the people received the law, they did not follow the commands but broke the law by worshipping the golden calf. And the result of that was that about 3000 died for breaking the law (Exod. 32:28).

The Story of Everything – The Spirit: Acts 2

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THE STORY OF
Everything
LUKE 24:27

The power that God gives us is not for our benefit. The power he gives us is for the benefit of the world. We go with his power so that we might be a blessing to the world, to reverse the curse, to show that his love remakes us! When we have received his power, his power makes us love him, love others, and love the world because the fire of judgment that should have fallen on us has been taken at the cross and instead the fire of his presence goes with us so that we would go and be a light to the world!