



**Acts: The Story Continues**

**Week 2: Rising Flames**

**April 14, 2024**

*Bring any notes you may have (Engage & Grow, notes from reading Acts 2-5, etc.)*

**Icebreaker:** What is the scariest thing that you have ever had to do?

**Opening Discussion:** What do you recall, or what stands out to you from Sunday's message?

**Digging Deeper:**

***Read Acts 2:1-13***

Acts 2 opens by telling us that fifty days (Pentecost comes from the Greek word for "fifty." See also **Leviticus 23:16**) after the resurrection of Jesus, the moment the disciples had been waiting for arrived! In a scene described as anything but tranquil (rushing winds and flames spreading across the room), the Holy Spirit was not just *with* them but was *in* them! The event was so boisterous that we're told a crowd was drawn. Yet beneath the chaos of the moment confusion was quelled as people from "every nation under heaven" heard the same story—the message of the mighty works of God in Jesus Christ. In this, the first evangelistic movement, God worked through His people to fulfill the first part of His promise in **Acts 1:8**—that they would be Christ's witnesses in Jerusalem. Fifty days after the Sabbath of the Passover celebration was a Feast, known as the Feast of Weeks. This feast was a time for the Jewish observers to thank God for the harvest and to present offerings of the new grain to the Lord, but God had the disciples wait until this moment to present a harvest not of wheat but of new believers. This foreshadows the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth and illuminates the power of the Holy Spirit, confirming the truth of the gospel. The same Spirit that empowered the disciples in this text resides in you!

- What do you think the disciples did during the 10 days between the ascension of Jesus and Pentecost?

- What events in your life have confirmed to you the truth of the gospel?

### **Read Acts 2:14-41**

Here we read “the first Christian sermon,” given to us by the apostle Peter. In this sermon, Peter references various Old Testament passages, most notably the prophecy regarding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in **Joel 2:28-32** that was being fulfilled in their midst. He bears witness to the life of Jesus known for the mighty works and wonders and signs God did through Him, the death of Jesus on the cross planned by God for them, and the resurrection of Jesus by God’s power. He testifies to this so that the people God has gathered in his midst might have certainty that Jesus is both Lord (equal to God the Father) and Christ (anointed and sent by the Father), the One they had all been waiting for.

The audience receives Peter’s message and asks how to respond appropriately. Peter answers with two prompts followed by a promise: “**Repent and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and **you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**” In this simple response, Peter (and by proxy Luke) is not just instructing followers of Christ to be baptized, but he is saying that there is forgiveness in baptism. But that’s not where it ends! Peter also adds “and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Essentially he’s saying, “when you repent and get baptized, your sins will be forgiven *and* you will receive the Holy Spirit.” This means that the forgiveness of sins and the reception of the Holy Spirit are linked together in baptism. That’s not to say that the reception of the Holy Spirit and forgiveness only come by way of baptism, but that in baptism these things are guaranteed to happen. After this moment, no one is told to “wait” for the Holy Spirit because baptism *is* Pentecost! Baptism of water is baptism of the Holy Spirit, which is baptism of fire (see **Ephesians 4:5**). Furthermore, we see in **Acts 2:39** that this promise is for them *and their children*. The promise of salvation and the forgiveness of sins is for adults and children, and so the effects and necessity of baptism are no different.

The people’s response to the power of the Holy Spirit working through Peter on the Day of Pentecost led the church to grow rapidly from 120 people (**Acts 1:15**) to around 3,000...all in a matter of a few hours or less!

- Imagine you were there on the day of Pentecost. How do you think you would have responded to an ancient prophecy being fulfilled in *your* midst?
  
- How does this passage change or support your views on baptism?

### ***Read Acts 2:42-47***

The growing church quickly became a tight-knit community, studying God's Word together, spending time together and sharing meals, and praying together. Setting a high standard for church communities across the globe today, the generosity, hospitality, and devotion of the early church point to the fact that Pentecost was the hinge upon which the people of God shifted from a place of waiting to a posture of prayer and action, being ignited by the fire of the Holy Spirit.

- How often do you pray out loud with other people? Is this a difficult thing for you to do? Why or why not?
- What are ways in which your Hope Group imitates the early church well? What areas of imitation would you like to see improved?

### ***Read Acts 3:1-16***

As the Church continues to grow, God gives people many more signs and wonders that give authority and credibility to the power of the Holy Spirit at work in and through His people. Peter and John walk past a crippled man begging for some provisions. Peter does not have the resources to provide for what the man thinks he needs, but Peter gives him what he has: provisions for his physical and spiritual needs through healing in the name of Jesus Christ. When people see this healing, they begin to marvel and try to glorify the works of Peter and John. Peter reminds the people of the resurrection of Jesus and attributes the healing to the power of Christ.

- Where are you prone to misguide your gratitude and give glory to the gifts of God rather than to God Himself?

### ***Read Acts 4:1-4, 23-31***

The Church did not spread without some serious opposition. As Peter and John were proclaiming the name of Jesus throughout Jerusalem, the religious authorities took note and

forbade them (and anyone for that matter) from teaching the story of Jesus and the resurrection from the dead. [Note: the religious rulers are described as being opposed to the Christians message and *not* their character] Yet in the face of persecution and opposition the apostles remain bold and confident, responding defiantly stating “we must obey God above man” (**Acts 4:19**). In exercising the power of the Holy Spirit through faithful prayer and bold witness, the Church continued to grow.

- In **Acts 4:13** the opponents recognize that Peter and John are simple, uneducated fishermen. Yet it was obvious to them through how they spoke that they had been with Jesus. Do you think people in your spheres of influence would hear you speak and recognize you as someone who has spent time with the Lord? Why or why not?
- What are cultural stereotypes of Christians today? Do you think Christians are opposed more because of our attitudes and judgments, or because of our commitment to sharing the gospel?

### ***Read Acts 5:1-16***

Immediately in this chapter, we see some internal opposition in the Church. Those in the Church were previously described as being remarkably generous, selling their possessions and taking care of each other’s needs. This kind of generosity was not a requirement, but a wilful and selfless act. Yet there was a couple in the Church who wanted prestige and praise without personal sacrifice, going against the purposes of God. In short, they were hiding behind a mask of generosity. In His judgment God shows His power against those who oppose Him. Yet in spite of this opposition, God continues to grow His Church (**Acts 5:14**).

- Where have you seen God causing the Church to flourish even in the midst of opposition?

### ***Read Acts 5:17-42***

Opposition continues as the apostles are jailed once again in **Acts 5:18**. But God sent an angel to break them out of prison so that the public proclamation of Jesus as the Christ might prevail and more and more people might be guided by the power of the Holy Spirit to faith and salvation. The apostles don’t hesitate to get right back to work preaching in the temple. While the power of God prevails even after they’re brought back in at the risk of their own lives, that

does not mean that the life of faithful disciples is always described as “pleasant.” Nevertheless, after they are severely beaten and freed, the apostles rejoice that they were counted worthy to endure the same kind of suffering that Jesus endured for them. And even in the midst of great opposition, the flame that the rulers tried to extinguish burned brighter.

- In what ways can you view hardships and suffering as a “stoking of the flame” in your own life?

**Moving Forward:** God lit a fire in the early church that was fanned into a flame through the boldness and faithfulness of the apostles. Look for areas in your life this week where God might be calling you to follow in their footsteps, boldly joining Him in His purposes and His power.

### **Prayer**

**Next Session:** *Bring your Engage & Grow notebooks from Sunday and read Acts 6-8.*