

Text: Acts 2:1 (Pew Bible, pg.1078)

Title: “Prelude to Power”

INTRODUCTION

Take your copy of the Scriptures and turn to Acts 2:1. Let your eyes focus on just that one verse:

Acts 2:1 - When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

ILLUSTRATION – Gatherings can be powerful things. They can be powerfully destructive. Just a few days after our mission team left the UK about a month ago riots began springing up in certain neighborhoods in London after police shot a local man. The riots with looting and arson soon spread to other cities in Britain. In the end over 3000 people had been arrested. Five people died and at least 16 others were injured. Hundreds of millions worth of property damage occurred.

Gatherings can be powerfully destructive. But gatherings can also be powerfully positive and profitable. Such was the case when the early church gathered in preparation for something great God was about to do.

You see, great things happen when God’s people gather with a sense of expectancy. This week and next week my goal is to prepare us for nine weeks of meeting together that could forever alter the course of our lives, of our families, of our church and of our community. On Sunday, September 11 we will begin nine weeks of what we are calling “Greater Things.” We are not seeking greater things for us. We are seeking greater things for the glory of God and for the Kingdom of God.

We are changing our schedule for those nine weeks ... Sunday School at 9:00am and one worship service at 10:30. Since we normally have two worship services, the fairest way to do this is for us all to change our schedule so we can enjoy the benefits of being together in one worship service. On the first Sunday of “Greater Things,” September 11, I have asked Dr. Roy Fish to preach for us. Roy and Jean are members here at Travis, but he is one of the most knowledgeable men in America when it comes to revival and spiritual awakening. The weeks following that I will preach a series of messages from Revelation 2-3 entitled “Radically Faithful.” All of this is building toward the celebration of our church’s 100th anniversary, November 6. As we enter our second century of ministry in this city, we need to do so with our hearts recommitted to being radically faithful to our Lord.

It was with a great sense of urgency and expectancy that the small band of disciples gathered that day in Jerusalem. Let’s just remember for a moment what happened *after* they gathered, as it is recorded here in Acts 2:

The Day of Pentecost was one of the most important festival days for the people of God. The population of Jerusalem had swelled dramatically as pilgrims came from all over the world for the festival. But gathered in a non-descript house were the remaining followers of Jesus. Suddenly a sound shook the room, a sound like some on the east coast must have felt yesterday when Hurricane Irene blew ashore. As the disciples looked around they saw what looked like flames of fire dancing over the heads of each person. In a way that had never occurred before the Holy Spirit actually came

to take up residence in the hearts of the disciples. They were filled with the Holy Spirit for the first time.

Then the Holy Spirit gave them the ability to speak in other languages. Why? Well remember I said that the population of Jerusalem had swelled dramatically because Jewish pilgrims had come from all over the world of that day to participate in the Feast of Pentecost. Well they came rushing to see what was happening. Amazingly, these thousands of people could hear the disciples speaking their language. They were speaking of the wonders of God in such an enthusiastic way that the people thought they must be drunk. But the leader of the disciples, the Apostle Peter, stood up and explained what was happening and then He preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them.

Well immediately the crowd was gripped with conviction and asked, “What should we do?” Peter answered:

Acts 2:38 - “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.

And when the dust had settled Luke tells us in Acts 2:41 that 3000 new believers were added to their number in that one day.

Amazing! Powerful things happen when people gather for the purposes of God.

Note: We are not seeking God for another Pentecost. Pentecost was part of the great work of God in the Cross of Jesus Christ, which included His crucifixion, His resurrection, His ascension into heaven, and the giving of the Holy Spirit. That event is never to be repeated. It accomplished everything in the redemptive plan of the Father. Everything necessary for our sins to be forgiven and the new life to be received occurred in that event.

So since then whenever a person is saved ... their sins are forgiven through the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross; they become a new person through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; they are seated with Christ in heavenly places and blessed with every spiritual blessing in Him; and they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who empowers them to a new life. All of that happens when a person is saved. We don't look for another Pentecostal experience just like we don't look for another crucifixion or resurrection of Christ. He did that once and for all and for always.

But there's another way we can look at the events of Acts 2. The great Bible scholar John Stott, who passed away about a month ago, says that “Pentecost has been called – and rightly so – the first revival.” He used the word “revival” to describe one of those altogether unusual visitations of God, in which a whole community becomes vividly aware of God's overpowering presence.

So we are shown here some timeless principles for how God's people prepare themselves, and how God moves in a mighty way among them, and what the results of that movement are. I want you to notice that Jesus showed His followers how to be ready for when God was about to do something remarkable in their midst ... the prelude to power.

We cannot organize or orchestrate revival, but we can set our sails to catch the wind of heaven.

Acts 2:1 - When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

I want to ask just three questions of this simple verse:

QUESTION # 1 - WHO WAS PRESENT?

“They” means the company of the disciples. Luke numbers them.

Acts 1:15 - In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)

I find this number interesting. At one point there were several thousand who came together to hear Jesus teach. Remember on one occasion He fed 4000 and on another occasion He fed 5000, all of whom had come to hear Him teach.

Where were those thousands now? The Gospels tell us what happened to many of them. When Jesus began to make clear the full implications of following Him, when Jesus began to set forth the demands of the Gospel upon their lives, and when the hard teachings of Jesus began to soak into their minds many simply fell away.

John 6:66 - From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

So by this point the number of committed followers of Jesus was about 120. These were men and women who had responded to the clear call of Jesus to deny themselves, take up their crosses daily, and follow Jesus. These were men and women who persevered by the grace of God through the storm of the crucifixion and the resurrection. These are the ones who were gathered in one place when Pentecost came.

Acts 2:1 - When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

QUESTION #2 - WHY WERE THEY GATHERED?

They were being obedient to the Word of the Lord. Christ had commanded them to do something in preparation for what He was about to do. God was about to do something to them as individuals. But more importantly, He was about to do something to them as a group, as a Body.

It's interesting that this didn't happen to them while they were scattered throughout the city or the surrounding areas in their homes. What God did, He did when they were *together*. He was forging them into a body. God had a purpose for them being together. He stated it in...

Acts 1:4 - On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.

Note: The disciples did not know exactly the when, where, what or how of the coming of this “gift” from the Father. Jesus simply told them to *wait* for it. We see in a moment what this waiting meant.

Luke’s Gospel goes into a bit more detail about Jesus’ instructions.

Luke 24:49 - I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

This clothing of power from on high was the filling of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would be the indispensable *ingredient* to their life as a church. He would be the indispensable *source* of the power they needed to carry out the mission God gave them. He would be the indispensable *executive* of the church, guiding the church and growing the church through the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

So just before Jesus ascended into heaven He said...

Acts 1:5 - For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Remember, since the day of Pentecost, this baptizing with the Holy Spirit occurs when a person is saved. But then the challenge is for us to remain completely yielded to the control of the Holy Spirit in our lives, which is what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 5:18 – (Keep on being) filled with the Spirit,

This filling of the Holy Spirit is not optional equipment for the luxury models of the Christian life. It is the standard for each of us. It is the means by which we successfully live the life Jesus saved us to live.

The filling of the Holy Spirit is the only way we are energized to live the life of Jesus and to carry out His mission as the people of God. And this fresh anointing of the Spirit’s power came as the disciples “waited” in faith for the fulfillment of the promise.

Acts 2:1 - When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

QUESTION #3 - WHAT WERE THEY DOING TOGETHER?

How exactly did they spend their time together? Remember Jesus instructed them to “wait” for what the Father was about to do. Remember Jesus told His disciples to stay in the city until they were clothed with power from on high.

By what means did they lay hold of the promise of and claim the promise of God? We’re told in ...

Acts 1:14 - They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

The English Standard Version puts it this way:

Acts 1:14 - All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Now let's look at this carefully:

“All these” = All means all. There was total participation. Not just a few of them ... “all of these with one accord were devoting themselves...”

“With one accord” = That word tells us of the inner unity of the group as they engaged in something together outwardly. They did it with a singular mind. They were unanimous in what they were doing.

Church, I don't know about you, but I want to see what can happen when a whole group of people have a single mind in their pursuit of God.

“devoting themselves” = that means they basically stayed at it. They made the sacrifice to diligently pursue this without letting up. The tense of the verb indicates it was continuous activity, not hit-and-miss, not here-and-there.

Note: Now what happens so often is that we go a little ways down the path, then we get tired or weary or distracted and we turn back. It will be a test of our hunger and thirst for God to see if we can devote ourselves to this for an extended period of time until God breaks through.

So what were they devoting themselves to? Preaching? Singing? All those things have their place, but that's not what it says. They were devoting themselves...

“to prayer” = the word means to turn the face toward something. They were turning to God. They gathered together urgently crying out to God, laying hold of the promises of the Father.

The revival that we need will not happen without prayer. Prayer is the prelude to power.

QUOTE: Jonathan Edwards said in 1740: “It is God's will through His wonderful grace, that the prayers of His saints should be one of the great principal means of carrying on the designs of Christ's kingdom in the world. When God has something very great to accomplish for His church, it is His will that there should precede it the extraordinary prayers of His people...”

QUOTE: A.T. Pierson said: “God has no greater controversy with His people today than this, that with boundless promises to believing prayer, there are so few who actually give themselves unto intercession ... Wherever the Church is aroused and the world's wickedness arrested, somebody has been praying.”

QUOTE: Charles Spurgeon said: “Oh! men and brethren, what would this heart feel if I could but believe that there were some among you who would go home and pray for a revival of religion— men whose faith is large enough, and their love fiery enough to lead them from this moment to exercise

unceasing intercessions that God would appear among us and do wondrous things here, as in the times of former generations.”

Are we willing to pay the price to see God move into our lives, into our families, into our church, into our community in answer to prayer?

Acts 2:1 - When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

CONCLUSION

QUOTE: The great revivalist Leonard Ravenhill said: “As long as we are content to live without revival, we will.”

ILLUSTRATION – Matthew West has recorded a powerful song entitled “The Motions.” He gets at this issue of urgency when he says in his song:

I don't wanna go through the motions
I don't wanna go one more day
Without Your all consuming passion inside of me
I don't wanna spend my whole life asking
What if I had given everything?
Instead of going through the motions