Being a Spirit-Filled Church (Part 2)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 October 2023 Preacher: Jacob Ng

[0:00] I was telling Kevin and a couple of folks that I chatted with earlier, this feels like a really good church. I'm not just saying that because I want to be polite.

I'm here and I want to say nice things. But when I was looking at faces earlier, and we were looking at certain texts, I could see some of your faces were lit up as those texts were being explained.

And that is always a wonderful sign that people are responding to the Word of God. And just observing you guys praying together, that was a beautiful sign, really. I can really tell that the Holy Spirit is at work here.

So if you're expecting the Holy Spirit to be only at work when you see very spectacular signs, that often would be the wrong expectation. He is at work in your hearts, changing life.

And one of the sheer signs of a church that is filled by the Holy Spirit is a church that loves each other. It's a church that loves each other. By this, they will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

[1:05] It's the Word of Jesus. And I have just been, what's the word? Flawed by the hospitality here. Every person that I experience is so warm, so welcoming, so loving.

And looking at how you guys interact with each other, the Spirit of God is at work in this place. So Watermark Church, please don't take this for granted at all. This is the grace of God given to you.

Let's continue to guard this and build this. I'm going to continue from the first topic by talking about missions. Missions and purpose. The Holy Spirit doesn't just come so that we enjoy a life of comfort and convenience for the rest of our time on earth, but we experience a life that is purposeful, energized by Him, sent by Him to be a blessing in this world.

So earlier, I mentioned about fire. Fire coming upon every person. Do you remember that account where Moses experienced a burning bush?

The holiness of God. A fire that cannot be quenched. And what was the burning bush about? The presence of God.

[2:26] Moses was told that this is holy ground. As he stepped into the presence of God. And now in the book of Acts, every believer, you and I, we are burning bushes.

Do you know what that means? Let's pause for a while. Just to indulge in the awe, the profound truth of what it means.

It means that the way the world comes to know who God is, is through an experience with you and I. You God's people.

We are sent out into the world, filled by His Spirit, to testify, to proclaim, that we belong to Jesus, and Jesus is good. So, as we go along, in the book of Acts, let's turn back to Acts chapter 2, and read with me, from verse 5 onward.

Are we there? Acts chapter 2, verse 5. I'll try to keep this to half an hour, so that you don't end up, have to wait for your lunch for too long.

[3:34] Verse 5. Let me read for us, from verse 5 onward. Wow. So those tongues were language that could be understood.

And they were amazed and astonished, saying, Are not all these who are speaking Galilean? And how is it that we hear each of us in its own native language? Pathians and Midas and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Pergia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians.

We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God. And all were amazed and perplexed. They were perplexed. They were saying to one another, What does this mean?

But others mocking said, They were filled with new wines. So here is Peter, Peter coming into the stage to explain this. Peter standing with the eleven, he lifted up his voice and addressed them, Men of Judea and all who do in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give ear to my words.

For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Job. Verse 17, In the last days it shall be, God declares, I will pour out my spirit on all flesh.

[5:01] And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Your young men shall see visions. Your old men shall dream dreams. Even on my male servants and female servants, in those days I will pour out my spirit and they shall prophesy.

And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on earth below. Blood, fire, vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness and moon to blood before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Now what does this mean? Do you see some Old Testament reference here?

They are not that obvious. The obvious one would be the book of Job. This is a fulfillment of the prophet Job, declaring that the spirit will be poured out on all men. Every person will now be filled by the Holy Spirit.

The contrast is this. In the Old Testament, we see God's presence dwelling. Often in the place, we see that in the ark, we see that in the temple, we see that in specific men.

[6:07] And now, the fulfillment of the promise of God in the Old Testament is that it shall now be poured upon all flesh. The Holy Spirit coming upon all of us.

Now, in Pentecost, what was unique is they were uttering in different tongues, in languages that could be understood.

And each man were giving praise and glory to God in their own language. And everyone could understand. Let me just, I know that there are many ways that we can look at this text, right?

Does that mean that the feeling of the Holy Spirit will lead to us breaking out in tongues and languages? It's 1 Corinthians 12-14 that talks about tongues and prophecy, language of angels, and how, when the church gathered, Paul encouraged us to prophesy so that it can build up, edify the church.

And there's a place for tongues in 1 Corinthians 12-14 which was implied there and in fact written there quite clearly. in this text, in Acts chapter 2, there are reasons, there are levels of clarity.

[7:14] Again, it just describes to us what happened. But I found it very, very interesting that this seems to in some ways paint a contrast to another incident in the Old Testament.

In the book of Genesis, chapter 11, there was a verse that says, the Lord came down.

Genesis 11, verse 5. And when that verse talked about the Lord came down, it was not a good thing. It was not in a good way. Let me share with you the context.

The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of man had built. That's the famous story of the Tower of Babel.

The Lord came down. The transcendent supreme God of the universe descended to take a look.

[8:12] And there's some kind of a condescension in the language. It's almost like, wow, these folks, they were trying to build a tower to reach me. Let me come down to look at how tiny it is because I actually have to come down in order to see it.

They think they can build this tower to reach me. I had to come down to take a look at that. The Lord came down. It was a form of mocking in some ways, saying that there's no way men can reach God by their own efforts.

So let's contrast that to Acts chapter 2. This time, when the Lord came down, it is good news. Holy God who made a way so that sinful men can now reach Him.

Not by their own efforts, but by what He has done for them through Jesus Christ. And now, as a sign of that, the Spirit being poured out upon every believer. Now, often we look at Acts chapter 2 and we get distracted by the signs of the tongues, right?

But again, recall Genesis 11, that building of the tower when God came down and He exercised some form of judgment upon them by scattering them through the different languages, confusing the languages, dividing them.

[9:36] Friends, this is a form of grace. What do I mean by that? Remember in the book of Genesis, in I think chapter 6 or 7, you have God having to destroy the earth because the earth was filled with pride and evil and wickedness that the Lord almost pressed a reset button, a great flood and only Noah and his household were saved.

And now, just five or six chapters after that, we see that humanity once again fall back into sin and evil and pride. And when God dispelled men, it is actually saying that I'm going to control that evil.

I'm going to control those evil by scattering them so that they cannot do further atrocities and commit further sins against me. So in Genesis 11, the Lord came down to judge and to scatter.

In Acts chapter 2, he comes to restore and to unite. Now there are many ways that the Lord could have done this, right? He could have come among the people and unite them back to one language.

But no, something far more beautiful is happening here. In the book of Revelations, you have almost like a picture of Watermark Church. Different nations, different tribes, different people group, gathering.

[10:59] I think right now we have the English language that unites us. We all understand each other because of that one language that we are using. But I so look forward to the day that will come when we will hear the multitudes singing in different languages, different tongues.

I often enjoy attending Mandarin services and singing Mandarin worship songs. For some reasons, because I speak two languages, English and Mandarin, there's something about the power of language where it brings out certain things more beautifully, right?

So if you have, if you speak more than one language, I assume most of you are, and worshipping God and reading about Him in your other language often brings about different kind of emotions and understanding.

That's something beautiful. That is something that God has gifted us. and we see here in this text, in Acts chapter 2, there is a picture that points us forward that when God redeemed and saved the world, it is not just to reunite us back to what it was, but to point us in a new direction so that everything that is broken will not just be restored, but be turned into something far more beautiful.

Far more beautiful. Can you imagine? Can you see this picture, this image here? huge sin and transgression. Genesis 11. Acts chapter 2.

[12:32] Redemption and restoration. And the outcome, the angle of that redemption and restoration is something far more beautiful than the original picture. Friends, that is the gospel. That is the good news of Jesus Christ.

Let me just pause for a moment to say this. One implication of understanding God's redemption power through the good news of Jesus coming and the Holy Spirit dwelling among us is that your scars will be turned into glory.

I can probably guess just now when some of you are gathered to pray, gathered as you long for God's intervention in your life, God's presence in your life, as you long for restoration, healing, breaking of bondages, there is a sense of pain, right?

I noticed some of you, you had a very serious expression. A couple of you, you were tearing up as you were praying. I don't mean to use this phrase in a loose way when I say your scars will be turned into glory, just as some kind of Bible plaster over your wounds.

That's not the intention. But I just want to remind you that you have a wounded Savior. Notice that when Jesus appeared before his disciples, this is the Lord God that we are talking about, right?

[13:49] He could have restored his nail pierced wounds, but that was not the case. That was his way of identifying himself as the Lord who went to the cross for his people, that they could verify and see that his hands were scarred.

And you know how that's going to be turned into glory? We see in the book of Revelations when the tribes, the nations, the people from different tongues gathered to worship him. If you go to the book of Revelations, this is the way they describe Jesus, the Lamb that was slain.

They were looking at him and they knew from how he looked like that this was the Lamb that was slain for us. And therefore, he is worthy of all praise and glory.

Now what it means for you and I is that if you are part of this redemptive story, restoration will come not in a way that simply return you to what you have lost.

But because of what you have lost, because of the scars and losses in this world, what you will receive will be far more glorious. Now this is another topic that we can go into, but I really want to honor our time and not dwell here for too long.

[15:08] Acts chapter 2 gives us a picture of the multitudes, of what is to come. And then we have verse 22. Let me continue reading. This is what Peter said.

Man of Israel, hear these words. Verse 22. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst.

You yourself know this Jesus deliver up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. You crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

And God raised him up, losing the pain of death because it was not possible for him to be helped by it. So, Peter, filled by the Holy Spirit in the context where the Spirit was being poured out upon every flesh, notice that this is his message.

Jesus crucified. Jesus raising from the grave. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. And if you were there as one of those receiving this message of so-called good news, it really isn't that pleasant to receive that, to be honest.

[16:21] Because look at the language here. You crucified and killed him. He is revealing that when God came down this time, instead of honoring him, instead of worshiping him, we nailed him on the cross.

Now, I don't know how much you want to cover that in your workshop later on reform and charismatic, because this verse, if you just came on verse 23, according to the definite plan and form knowledge of God, and the next time you crucify and kill him.

So the question is who killed Jesus? According to the plan of God, definite plan, you know, and the form knowledge of God. God actually planned for this to happen, but look at the responsibility.

He fell on you. You crucified him. Okay, we are not going to take five minutes to resolve this, and I don't think the workshop is going to resolve this for you. What it means that God is completely sovereign, understanding him and appreciating reformed theology, and then that active participation, that active yearning, that active walking in the spirit of what the charismatic churches are really good and strong at.

And I think it's not either or. The book of Acts shows us it's both trusting in the sovereign plan of God and knowing that the spirit of God dwell and abide in us and us pursuing him.

[17:45] So the spirit power, as is revealed, point us to the word of God. And as the word of God is preached, the spirit exercises his power, demonstrate his power to the conviction of hearts.

A few verses later on, they were cut to the flesh. The spirit convicted their heart. And more than 3,000 souls were added to the kingdom that day. And it became a faith community. Now let me just pause here.

You don't have to go back to John 14, but I'm just going to read out a few more verses from John 14 and tell us his implication. I started at John 14. I'm going to read selected verses from John 14, 15, and 16.

John 14, verse 26. The helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to remembrance all that I've said to you. So the Spirit's role is to take whatever that you know and have it to remember and apply.

Friends, why do we need that? Because you and I, we are forgetful. You're forgetful this morning that you are loved by God, that He speak, that your sins are forgiven.

[18:52] I pray, I hope, that by now you're reminded of that and you will continue to forget and you need reminder. That's why we need one another. But the Spirit is the one that helps us to do that.

John 15, 26. When the Spirit comes, whom I send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about me.

The Spirit bear witness about whom? Jesus. Jesus. The Spirit make much of Jesus. John 16, verse 13 to 15.

When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth, all the truth, the full truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, or whenever He hears, He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come.

He will glorify me, me referring to Jesus. Wow. When the auditions, the Spirit will glorify me, Jesus declaring that. They are equal. For He will take what is mine and declare it to you.

[19:53] All that the Father has is mine, and therefore, I say that He will take what is mine and declare it to you. Whatever the Father has belongs to Jesus, and the Spirit will take what is Jesus and declare it to us.

Now, I'm just building a case for us to see, very simply, that the Spirit serves to magnify, to point to Jesus.

And you and I, going back to the image in Acts 2, little burning bushes, right? The fire of the Holy Spirit now rests upon all of us. You are filled by the Spirit as God's holy temple.

And our role is to go out into the world to keep pointing to Jesus, to keep proclaiming to the world about the redemptive, powerful, wonderful, marvelous story of Jesus Christ.

Now, what it means is that a Spirit-filled church will never get bought of Jesus. We must never get bought of Jesus.

[21:02] The cross, the good news of who Christ is, it is always real, it is always relevant, it always speaks, it always ministers to us.

Whenever I hear any kind of notions that we have to go beyond Jesus, to go into something greater, I often feel a little bit discouraged in comments like that, because what can be greater than the most precious gift of Jesus himself?

The Spirit points to Christ. Friends, do you have the Holy Spirit in you? If you have two monks that we will see, even from the text that we have been going through so far, a high view of Jesus, deep appreciation of him, we keep going back to him again and again.

It means we belong to Jesus forever. Now, Acts chapter 2 is the biggest miracle, because God pours his Spirit upon us. Because you and I, unworthy of who God is, now is able to receive the Spirit.

And the agenda of the Holy Spirit is to keep reminding us of that. And because of Jesus, we belong to God and we are now developed by him. I know I'm repeating myself a lot here, but repetition is part of communication.

[22:20] I'm just repeating to you the same things in different ways so that it gets true. The Spirit dwells in you because of what Christ has done for you and the Spirit will compel you to keep talking about Jesus.

I never get bored. I'm tired of that. We can never get bored and tired of that. Now, one thing to say is, I don't know how common it is in Hong Kong, but in Singapore, where I come from, many Christians use a language that needs to be a balance between the Word and the Spirit.

I really find that to be an unhelpful false dichotomy. We really don't see the Bible talking about that. Because I mentioned that we are a church that is big on doctrines and theology and gospel centeredness, sometimes I get folks giving suggestions like, can we maybe move on from that a little bit?

Because keep going back to doctrine and theology is really dry. It's dry and it gets boring if we just keep going to the Word and keep teaching and making clear about theology and so on.

And I just want to present a thought experiment here. If you have this idea that there shouldn't be too much Word, we need to have more spirit and we need to have that balance, try going without the Word for a season.

[23:36] Don't read your Bible, drop that from the radar and try going without reading the Word for a season. And you realize that the dryness, the sense of not walking closely with God, it's not a problem of having too much Word in your life, really.

It's actually an issue of sin. It's actually an issue of us constantly straying away from God because our hearts gravitate away from Him. And the thing that is surest and clearest that speaks to us all the time is the Word of God.

And when we go to His Word, the Spirit of God uses the Word to convict us and point us back to Him again and again. I'm going to close with this.

In your witnessing, the Spirit is going to move powerfully through Watermark Church by helping us to move in the supernatural. Kevin is like, wow, what am I?

Supernatural. No, I'm completely serious here. You should expect the supernatural in our midst as the Holy Spirit work in us. Let me explain what I mean by that, just so that we can build up some context instead of just applying that without clarity of what I mean to the Word.

[24:55] I'll use this testimony of someone that I've been pastoring for the past few years as an example and also many other folks back in Singapore that I walk with.

I wish I can use some examples here. Normally, when I preach at Redemption Hill Church, I would mention things that the Spirit of God is doing in the life of the members.

Anonymously, of course, especially if it's something that's uncomfortable for them to share and just highlight and encourage the church that God is with us and doing His work. And over the years, I've had the privilege working with many folks in how God has been working in their life.

Just before the lockdown, that was early 2020, I had the privilege of marrying a couple in my church. And that was during the time that she was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer.

Stage 4 cancer. That was very serious. So in their marriage preparation, in the build-up towards the wedding, there was always a lingering thoughts of how long she would live.

[25:58] And it was the most moving wedding ever because when he came to the part of in sickness and in health and pledging his love to her, all eyes were wet at the point of time.

That was just before the lockdown, early 2020, when the wedding happened. And I remember experiencing at that point of time, seeing up front in front of me, how is it possible to have a couple who is going through such trials and difficulty and they were constantly praising God.

They were constantly making much of him. When they were making the covenant before us and before God, their focus is we want to glorify God. Even if this marriage lasts for three months, let's use three months to make much of God through this precious covenant that he has given to us in the picture of marriage.

One man, one woman committing themselves to each other. That's a picture of Christ and the church. I thought that was pretty supernatural. I was praying and knowing very clearly this cannot be natural.

This cannot be assumed. This cannot be taken for granted. The Holy Spirit accomplished something supernatural in their life. At the same time, we as a church were praying for them.

[27:16] The way I was praying for them is this, that God, disease and sickness, they are part of the fall. God, you are not pleased with that. Every time someone is sick, every time someone enters the grave, it's a reminder for us that this word is separated from God.

It's a reminder for us that this word is broken and fallen away from God. This is not something that God is pleased. In fact, he sent Jesus to address that, to redeem that, to restore that.

So God is not pleased with that. I remember when we were praying for her, often my language of prayer is I am full of faith in asking God to heal her. Even though the doctor is not giving very hopeful signs, we are trusting God, that he alone has the power to heal her.

And every time I pray for her, I remember I'm often asking God for this appetizer. What do I mean by that? So this is my theology. I'm just going to review a little bit of what I believe about signs and wonders and healings.

I believe that in the end, all of us will be healed. We will be healed. Every affliction, every brokenness, every scars, every wounds, every illness, we will be finally healed.

[28:33] The day when we are glorified fully in the presence of God. In the here and now, even if you experience a miracle like Lazarus, you know what happened to Lazarus after that? He went back to the grave, right?

He was resurrected from the tomb and he went back into the grave. So even that those signs and wonders, divine healings, resurrection, at the end of the day, we still have to go to the grave of physical death in order to experience the true resurrection, which is the good news that we're declaring to the world, applying to ourselves and declaring to the world.

So each time I ask for divine power and healing and intervention and miraculous healing, I often ask God to show us that appetizer. We are going to enter into a great feast in the book of revelations where there will be no more tears, no more sorrows in the here and now God, give me the appetizer.

It's like if you have attended a Chinese banquet, you know, the iPhone serves like those peanuts, right? Braised peanuts or pickles, it's not really enough to fill your tummy, right? But when you're famished, you're hungry, what do you do?

You eat them. It becomes really enjoyable. But what you're waiting for is not those peanuts. If you attend a banquet and those peanuts are the main dish, then you're missing a point there, right? They are not the main deal. You don't go there for those peanuts.

[29:50] You eat them as appetizer in anticipation of a greater feast to come. I'm pleased to announce that for Vinolia and Jun Yu, these are real persons, God has healed her miraculously.

She has been healed and we saw through this couple's testimonies that there are two supernatural things that happen. One is their heart and their faith. As we pray for God, the Holy Spirit, to move in the supernatural in their life through science and wonder.

One area that we mustn't take for granted is that their faith was strengthened as a result of the trials instead of falling away. Have you ever seen people going through real difficulties and instead of holding on to God, they begin to fall away?

And there are folks who go through similar things, maybe even worse things, and their faith strengthened. that was a real miracle there. As if that is not enough, I think for this case, God has exceeded my expectation by granting us that appetizer, that healing that we're looking for.

Two weeks ago when I saw her in church, I asked her about how are you. She's been going through remissions for the past few years, looking really good, healthy, radiant.

And he, the husband, joked that the last time when they went for the appointment maybe a couple of months back, the doctor was joking that he should look out for his health instead. Because he wasn't looking as good. He's tired from his job, very busy, and she's looking better than him.

Now, obviously we do not know when it comes to stage 4 cancer and remissions, it could come back any time, but we are really seeing this as God's divine miracles. And through their life, so many folks have been encouraged.

Can you imagine? So this is the power of the burning bush. The burning bush, and these two person testifying of Jesus, pointing, making much of him.

Now, Watermark Church, you are in a city where you have tons of opportunities. This city is built on, what do you call that?

When I come to this city, you can sense there's a great motivation towards wealth, achievement, accomplishment. People come into Hong Kong to get rich for their careers.

[32:13] They are building their life on sands, and they need to hear the good news. Any time when those things are pulled away from them, as their life falls apart, we are here to witness and testify of the good news.

And you know, before you can do that, you know what God is going to do to us, remember the part about the renovation of the house, the CSW is going to use your life as that beautiful, wonderful testimony first, that Jesus is enough.

And as you go out into the world, declaring that Jesus is enough, I want us to be also in full anticipation that He's going to exceed our expectations. He's going to heal. He's going to provide.

So don't just pray for someone who is in a job situation that is bad. Oh God, I pray for him to persevere through this dark time and come out safely, full of faith on the other side. That is good.

We can also pray for God to provide breakthrough in the circumstances. It shouldn't be mutually exclusive. I always pray for people in those two categories, circumstantially as well as for their hearts.

Yvonne and I, over the past years, we have many couples in our church that struggle with infertility. We have three boys and when I think about, because we don't struggle with that, when I think about that unique struggle, naturally I don't really feel it because I've never been through it before, but as a pastor, as I pray and cry with so many people who are going through that, I think over the years I've developed deeper empathy of how it feels like to wait, to wait, to wait.

And we have also looked back in looking through the number of people, couples that we have prayed for, and so many of them, at least 70-80% of them. Over the time of waiting, every time we see them, we are praying that God will provide a child, either through natural means or through adoptions.

And now looking at those lists, we were just talking about it the other day, most of them actually end up becoming parents. And what is precious here is not the prayers that were answered, but through the process of the waiting, we saw the Holy Spirit making much of Jesus through every life.

Whether desire met or unmet, Christ Jesus is lifted up and glorified. And through the process of that, notice this talk is actually about missions and purpose, I'm talking about this, because this is the news, this is the kind of testimony that the world need to hear, that Jesus is precious.

I don't think that the city that we live in is lacking in knowledge. Most people, if they just want to have a clear presentation of the Christian Gospel, you can go online, read a good book. But you know what is the most powerful?

[34:59] Life transformed through you and I. And that is the power that we have through the Holy Spirit to witness and to proclaim Christ to the world. So my point is very simple here today, the Spirit fills you so that we can do His work of witnessing to our city and making disciples for Jesus in Hong Kong.

Can I pray for us? Yes. Can I pray for us? Let me pray for us before I pass the time back to Kevin. Lord, I see these faces, faces that I love before even knowing them.

These are my brothers and sisters in Watermark Church and I know that my imperfect love for each one of them is nothing compared to your love for all of them.

You who created them, make them into your image, save them, redeem them, and is still right now conforming them into the image of Christ.

Every sorrow, every pain, every discouragement, every disappointment, every tear, God, you understand, and you're holding on to my brothers and sisters here.

[36:27] And I pray right now for the Holy Spirit to affirm, to let every wearish soul here know that you are near. Every anxious person, I pray, may we experience your nearness.

and through every longing in our life, both met and unmet, as we bring these longings to you, Jesus we pray for you to be glorified.

And we pray by the power of the Holy Spirit that we will witness to the world with clear proclamation of this message of salvation that Jesus is Lord. And not just through words, but through life transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Whether in riches or in poverty, prosperity, or in seasons of great afflictions, we pray that we will always make much of Jesus and keep pointing to Him.

And through that God, you will help us to be a church, help Watermark Church to be a church that testifies to the gospel in Hong Kong powerfully, with love, with conviction.

[37:33] I really pray for the Spirit to strengthen my brothers and sisters here. We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.