

Being a Spirit-Filled Church (Part 3)

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[0 : 00] I want to just begin by asking a question. How many of you, you came to faith in Watermark Church? Can you raise your hands? Wow! Wow, look at that.

Kevin, those who came to faith in Watermark Church, do you see their hands? Kevin, you want to take a look? Quite a lot. Wow, so wonderful, so wonderful.

You know, when we were worshipping just a moment ago, I was like singing those songs and praying and asking God for this session, the things that He will accomplish.

And one of the things that weigh upon my heart is if there's someone here in this crowd, and I don't want to embarrass anyone here by calling them out, but if you are not a Christian, you're here because someone invited you, someone loved you, someone who feels that you matter so dearly to them, and you're here with us, my greatest prayer is through this time, through this retreat, through an encounter with Christians in Watermark Church, that God will impress His love upon you, that you come to know Him.

And that, by the way, is one of the features of a church that is filled by the Spirit. Because in Acts chapter 2, we see at the end of that chapter, the Lord added to their number.

[1 : 20] The Lord added to their number. Non-Christians were part of the group that were attracted to the beauty of Jesus. So that is one feature. I wanted to, initially I wanted to address that at the end of the message, because that's the last verse of Acts chapter 2.

But I thought I was just front-loading that at the beginning, so that I'm clear that this message is for non-believers as well, in case there's any one of you here. Let me just, why don't we open our Bible, instead of Acts chapter 2, can we go to another passage?

Similar to yesterday, we started with a letter, a New Testament letter. We're going to go to 1 John. Sorry, yesterday I think we started with a Gospel, John 14. And today we are starting with 1 John.

1 John chapter 4, just one verse, verse 13.

Are we there? 1 John chapter 4, verse 13. By this, we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us His Spirit.

[2 : 41] So this whole retreat, the topic is on the Holy Spirit. We've been talking about the person of the Holy Spirit yesterday. Last night, there was a sense of worship, abiding in Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

And if you have felt the Lord speaking to you, encouraging you, ministering to you, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works in a way that are mundane, ordinary.

The Holy Spirit moves in supernatural, spectacular ways that we see in the book of Acts. And when you look at 1 John 4, verse 13, by this, we know that we abide in Him, because He has given to us, He has given us of His Spirit.

Now, the this refers to the symptom, right? By this symptom, we know the desired outcome of abiding in Jesus, which is something that we all long for.

We all pray, we all want to be drawn near to God. We long to be where He is. He dwells in us and we long to draw near to Him, to dwell with Him. And the reason why we can do that is because He has given us His Spirit.

- [3 : 51] Now, you know, 1 John focuses so much on love. So, the symptom of being filled by the Spirit, the symptom of God abiding in us is love.
- It's love. I'll just read the top few verses before verse 13. So, I'm going to read from verse 7 to verse 12. Follow me as I read 1 John 4, verse 7 to 12.
- Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.
- Verse 8. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. Now, this is one of the most alarming statements in the Bible.
- God is love. Now, there are many ways that if the Bible is simply trying to tell us that God is a loving God, you can use like a descriptive word, right?
- [4 : 51] God is loving. God is the most generous when it comes to giving love and dispensing love. But this is how the Scripture describes God. God is love.
- God is love. He is love itself. Love is defined by Him. And then verse 9, it gives us an even narrower description of love.
- In this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this, His love, not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
- Verse 11. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us.
- Now, isn't it amazing? The Spirit of God is the reason why we can abide in Him. And then in this, we know that we abide in Him. And then this refers to love.
- [5 : 59] Loving of one another. And this love is narrowed down through a vision of the cross. In this is love.
- God sent His Son so that we may live through Him. And then through that, we are called to love each other. If you were to summarize the mark of a church filled with the Holy Spirit, full of the work of the Holy Spirit, evident of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, it would be a church that abides in love.
- It would be a church that truly loves. A church that put God on display is a church that put love on display. And I didn't make that up.
- Because God is love, right? God is love. So if you want to put God on display, you put love on display. Now, here's the tricky part.
- The world that we live in often defines love very, very loosely, right? Love is a feeling. Love is the sensation that you get when you listen to a love song.
- [7 : 09] Love is, you know, the fuzzy emotions that you experience when you watch a really warm and nice romantic movie. That is how we often relate with love.
- But the love in scriptures is defined for us pretty clearly here in this text. And this is love. Not that we love God, but He loves us.
- And in this text, we also see that no one has seen God in verse 12, but if we love one another, His love abides in love.
- His love is put on display through us, in us, to the whole world. So let's come back to Acts chapter 2. I thought that would be quite a good introduction to this portion.
- Because if we dive in, into a passage that is descriptive, as I mentioned yesterday, Acts is descriptive. It describes for us what happened.
- [8 : 08] But it doesn't explain to us exactly the rationale and what exactly was going on there behind the seat. It just tells us this was what was going on, on the outside. And 1 John 4 helped to frame Acts chapter 2.

2. This is how a loving church looked like. This is how what happened when people are filled by the Holy Spirit. And the flow of the Spirit is love, right?

Love, joy, peace, goodness, kindness, and the rest of those things. But love is put on display here. I'm going to read for us Acts chapter 2 from verse 37 onward.

The focus is on verse 42 onward, but I'm going to read the first few verses so that we can set the context of this passage. Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart. The gospel, they heard the gospel and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, brothers, what shall we do?

And Peter said to them, 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.

[9 : 11] So listen to this. There's a promise and what is the promise? The gift of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit you receive all three members of the Godhead. Father, Son, Spirit.

So the promise here is not in a successful life, a life that is smooth sailing, a life that is good and comfortable in the way the word defines it, but they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And verse 39, for the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord, our God, calls to Himself. So the Lord calls to Himself.

And with many other words He bore witness and He continued to exhort them saying, Save yourself from this crooked generation so those who received His words were baptized and there were added on that day 3,000 souls.

3,000 souls. It's not a small numbers, right? Have you ever run an organization of 3,000 people? I don't know.

[10 : 14] Do you have any like some guys who manage I don't know. There are churches that are probably in numbers of a few thousands. We, back home in Singapore we have a church that is about 1,000-ish maybe 1,002-ish regular attendance 1,002, 1,003.

It's a nightmare to be honest. It's a nightmare. I was talking to Simon earlier right, he moved to Singapore a while back and then he moved back to Hong Kong which is telling us it's too big in some ways.

And as a pastor I struggle. I struggle to remember the names of people. I really do. So when the invitation came from Kevin to come to Watermark Church and I knew that this is a church of like 100 plus close to 200, right?

1,002, that is like the size that in my mind that's the ideal size for a church where people can be known you can come for a retreat it's cozy, intimate. It is really possible to know everyone really.

It still takes much effort but it is possible to know everyone. But we're talking about here in Acts chapter 2 3,000 souls. 3,000 souls. And friends this is how it looks like in the way they do life because often we look at this 3,000 the church in the book of Acts we assume that it's like a small community church.

[11 : 35] No, 3,000 souls yes they be in their homes they gather for big gathering and this is a description of everything but let's bear in mind that 3,000 souls verse 42 they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching the fellowship to the breaking of bread and prayers verse 43 and all came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles and all who believed were together and had all things in common and they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need and day by day attending the temple together breaking breads in their homes they received their food with glad and generous hearts praising God and having favor with all people and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved so this is only accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit that's my main point and can you see here on display is a church that is full of love breaking bread coming together having things in common helping each other no one is poor here in this community because they were sharing their belongings supporting each other and through that the love of God is being put on display and the Lord added to their number day by day those who have been saved

I don't know whether you've been to churches that often focus on growth strategy here's the way to multiply cell group here's the way to get to this number by the end of this year this strategy this method the strategy laid out for us in the book of Acts is pretty straightforward receive the gospel receive the most precious gift of the Holy Spirit treasure Jesus make much of him preach his word faithfully and through that the apostles they were demonstrating signs and wonders healings restorations life transforms and as love is put on display the church grew the church grew let me just highlight for us in the city context there are two implications for us you read this text and it's like wow this is like 2,000 years ago it's quite far off what is this going to do with like in 2023 in cities like Hong Kong and Singapore what is this going to do with us how does that look like for us one very very what I think is it can be quite shocking in some ways and quite surprising for us is about the features of the New Testament church is we actually don't get to choose who we hang out with in some ways notice the language here is God has chosen his people

I'll read for you verse 39 again the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself now notice that the initiative here is God has called and chosen a people now Kevin I don't know how much you guys have covered doctrine like election predestination being chosen yeah but here we see quite clearly here I mean when we come to the topic of the way of God who choose God choose or we choose we need to appreciate the divine mystery that God is God right we do see in the scripture God has chosen the people and these people they have chosen him as they were being chosen by God and we see that divine mystery of us choosing him moving to him longing for God to draw us to him and him drawing us by grace through the power of the Holy Spirit and we often apply that truth of election being chosen by God in a very individualistic way like this is for me this promise is about me being chosen but have you considered that this implication if this is true it implies that the body of

Christ we are all chosen by God now here's a thought experiment you look around you if not for Jesus would this be the folks that you choose to hang out with and this is not meant to be insulting to anyone really what I'm trying to highlight is that we are so different where is EJ is EJ here EJ is she somewhere here EJ yeah over there I cannot even pronounce her name EJ she has to shorten that to EJ for me and when I realised what's her last name that was a greater nightmare right you have so in my mind if this just happened naturally without the context of the faith we just happen to bump into each other and just by reading her name I couldn't pronounce it I'll move on to another person right this is not the person that I want to hang out with not for anything that is bad about her but just the difficulty of trying to relate to someone of a different culture whose name

I can't even pronounce right but look at what we have here isn't it beautiful isn't it wonderful I have more than once people coming to and we have a very similar church to you guys here at Watermark Church in RAC we have a church that's quite diverse in nationalities and there were more than a few times that people would come up to me and say one of the most attractive thing about your church is I cannot quite figure out how did you guys all end up together now guys we are meant to be perplexing to the world with this unity that we have in Acts chapter 2 nothing is mentioned about whether they belong to a specific social class specific types of people vocations and so on we do not know what kind of industry this is not a bunch of people in the same industry hanging out this is people coming together let me just make sure that we see that they were gathering to the process teaching to the breaking of bread let's come there for a moment when you break bread what do you remember you look around you there are people that you would not choose because if life just happens you would not hang out with them you hang out with people who are more similar to you you hang out with your people group people that you feel most similar to but here we are as we celebrate the bread being broken what was broken so that

[18 : 21] I can have this body now why don't we make it a commitment from this point on every time a leader stands in front to lead the communion to celebrate the breaking of bread let's take a look around ourselves let's not just bow our head and receive the communion element and consume it on our own but let's take a moment to take a look around us and remember his blood was shed so that I can have this body of Christ that I am a part of so God has brought us together as a people we did not choose him we did not even choose one another but here we are he loves us we love him and we are called to love each other now often when we talk about the miracles of the Holy Spirit we think about the miraculous healings the tongues the prophetic words but here is another miracle watermark church diverse people but love is what unites us the love defined for us in one job love love to love to say to you on the first day but

I forgot about this Ryan and Catherine say hi to all of you so I met them a couple of Sundays ago they are part of a mandarin plant so RAC planted our two churches and English plant Simon you visited led by Andrew purchase and then we have another plant a mandarin plant in our city it's fairly small right now it's quite new and right in the country they are part of that plant and when I went to visit the mandarin plant a few weeks ago they were there they were really excited I'm coming to Watermark church they were talking about how in their time here that was really formative I think writing came to faith here I believe so this is a very special place to them and because of the RAC never meets their standard it took them a really long time to find but now as the smaller mandarin plant was planted out they are now getting into community and doing life with other Christians so it's just a high from them and a short waiting that they are doing well they also wanted to send me some good places for sao er here in

Hong Kong roasted goose so it's really friendly and I really appreciate them another reflection that I have is do you realize that this environment is more precious than blood family in some ways Yvonne and I we are both from non-Christian families I have more things in common with you some of you I just met we just had small talks and very quickly I felt that connection this is how you came to faith and just a sense of fellowship and love and it's actually very challenging often when I'm back home back in my family my sister who is not a Christian my parents are not Christians there are just so many things happening in my life that I cannot share with them and most of the things I cannot quite connect as well and I begin to realize that it is so true that when we become Christians the relationships that becomes most significant to us is one that is bought by blood the blood of the lamb and it's thicker than blood in some ways when we a few years ago we said to the church at

REC we said that if we ever get knocked down by a car by the way these thoughts came when one night we were out late at night having supper so we drove out and there was a huge storm so the traffic was quite heavy and I was just saying what if we have a terrible accident and we don't get home what would happen to our car right talking about which family we want in REC to adopt our children and we were making a list this couple they are wonderful they are waiting for God to provide them with a child our kids will fit in so nicely with their family and we were working through our list and one Sunday when I got up to preach I said I just want to make sure it is registered in the

God has given us something very precious here a family bought by the blood of the lamb so that's the first part this is family now second thing I just have the first part we did not choose this family and second part being known notice how in this faith community that they share everything together I confess that I love my privacy very dearly I love my own me time and down time which by the way is not wrong but the gospel calls us to some kind of loss of privacy right we see clearly in Acts chapter 2 they were sharing life with each other there were people who were different from each other but they were sharing their possessions coming together and we see through the book of Acts that there were many examples of the believers laying down their life for each other sending helps whenever help is needed this is real bonds between a group of people brought together by the gospel and being known is part of it so my question is how known are you in this church family by others being known is a huge part of what it means to be a member in the household of

[24 : 48] God being known being real now one of the signs of a healthy church is people can come to the church not having to wear masks they can be real they can come and be weak they can come and be honest that I'm a mess and that's why I'm coming do you know that in a lot of churches the culture is not like that people have the assumption that church is for good well behaving people so if you behave yourself if you keep all these moral conducts that qualified you to come to church and hang out with the good religious people no Jesus is not like that it's quite opposite and the mark of a spirit filled church community is one that you can be weak we recently built a counseling ministry in our church and I'm the pastor that oversees the counseling ministry by the way a plug for CCF which some of you guys are taking online classes through the

CCF it's a really wonderful resource and we have a few counselors on staff right now in the team we built a counseling room near the office and about two years ago when I started the project of building a counseling ministry I started to contact different churches in Singapore that have counseling ministries and just interviewing them learning from them asking them tons of questions and one of the common responses from the churches out there is they would tell me if you build a counseling ministry and you have counseling rooms build it in a separate building from your church or from your church office and I was that part said why do I need to find a separate location to build a counseling room a counseling ministry why can't I have it in my own space and I said oh you know what because people feel a sense of shame walking into counseling room and being seen by others that they need counseling I mean I managed to compose myself and look like I'm neutral but I'm dying inside as I was dying inside every time when I hear that

I was really dying inside because what struck me is that are we saying that the Christian church has no space for those who are going through real difficulties real struggles real mental health challenges and they are coming in for help is that the kind of church culture that we are sending out now if that's the case I can see why non Christians don't want to be a part of this really I'll run away and the kind of church that attracts non Christians coming in is the kind of church where you and I receive the love of God and know that we can be weak and when we come into this pointing to the bread of life that is the kind of church community I want to be a part of a church community that is known people are known by each other that we can be weak that we keep pointing each other to our Savior and one way to do that if you are leading here some of the elders leaders in various ways if you are leading a small group let's model that have a church community that is known people are not afraid to be known so that is the two mark remembering that we are chosen by

God not by each other and then the second thing is being truly known how does that happen for us again to go back to the good news now if you think about family bonds family if you are known right where you see each other messes if I want to find out about Kevin's life all I need to do is sit down and interview his brother about things in his growing up years because family members the group of people that you cannot hide you cannot hide your dirt you can come out from your home looking polished looking like you are well put together but all your weaknesses most of the things that you struggle with those things will be really hard to hide from your family members now we see in the scriptures starting from Genesis chapter 4 that the family though we assume that it will be a place of love and unity and acceptance when the fall happened we see

Abel and Cain murdered and there was a line that is interesting that there was blood the blood of Abel cried out to me cried out to God from the ground and the metaphor came out a lot in the Bible that there is innocent blood spilled on the ground crying out for condemnation for the people who spilled it it cries out for vengeance and so Cain he was driven out he was put in exile now through Christ Jesus what happened was there was also blood his blood and he was driven out so he was Abel and Cain at the same time notice that he was cast out on the cross Jesus cried out my God my God why have you forsaken me so Jesus in some ways is a reflection of Cain and Abel at the same time the innocence of

[30 : 29] Abel a man who did not deserve that punishment at the same time he took on the punishment of Cain of you and I those who have committed atrocious sins in our life so he shed his blood and he was cast out so friends this is how we receive the Holy Spirit now earlier I really appreciate the time of singing and worship the song come praise and glorify and there was a moment that we read out 2nd Corinthians it's another reminder that God has given us his spirit in our hearts as a guarantee as a guarantee the spirit is given to us because of what Christ has the spirit to us the spirit now dwells in the spirit is like a guarantee that no matter what happened in this life we will persevere all the way to the end and one of the mark of a church is a loving community that we see in

Acts chapter 2 proclamation of the gospel they love God they love each other they truly love each other water mark church I really just I'm seeing some really positive signs of this church loving each other treasuring Jesus going back to the good news all the time you have some good things happening here it's just my hunch a church that you know just now when I asked who came to faith here there were a few hands quite a number of hands by the way and I think there could be non Christians among us I think there is and you guys probably have to find out ways of how you can prioritize health while you grow in numbers so the goal is not numbers by the way the goal is not numbers the goal is always health how can we be a healthy church as

God bring about the growth the growth is out of our control as we faithfully love each other growth will happen but when growth happens how can we remain healthy that would be your challenge I sense in the next few years if I ever come back here again it could be quite a different church because I trust that God will surely add to your people and when that day will happen prioritize health that will be my encouragement to you and keep loving each other with that I am going to can I pray for us first before I pass the time back to whoever that is leading this portion later on Lord I really want to pray for this church Watermark Community Church what a precious church that you have given to us and I use the word us because

I feel like I'm a part of this church too in some ways connected to this church because of Jesus and I pray that we as the body of Christ we will grow in love we will grow in unity I pray for all my brothers and sisters here that there will be a real sense of your presence the presence of the Holy Spirit the challenging us encouraging us pointing us towards Jesus again and again a community of real friendship and fellowship and love and concerns where when one member of the body is suffering the rest of the body weeps with them when one person is heading away from the faith making bad decisions in life and the rest of the body love enough to call them back to repentance a love that is genuine gentle a love that is gracious and patient and

God only you can produce such a love no technique no strategy can help us do that apart from the work of the Holy Spirit so Holy Spirit today we cry out to you grow us to be a church filled with love love for each other love for you and help us to be a blessing to the city in Jesus name we pray Amen for Thank you.

[36 : 45] Thank you.

Thank you.