

The Purpose of Pentecost

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, May 19, 2024
PASSAGES	Ezekiel 36; Matthew 3; Acts 2; Galatians 3; John 7
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:18:27 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The Spirit fell at Pentecost because Jesus had been raised and exalted — not because the disciples had prayed long enough, fasted hard enough, or crossed some invisible threshold of worthiness. The Spirit is a person given to every child of God, and the whole thing was God's initiative from beginning to end.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ The Spirit is not an *it*. He is a him — not a tool, not an inanimate power to be grasped, manipulated, or earned with piety.
- ◆ You can no more earn the Spirit's presence than you can earn forgiveness for your sins by righteous deeds. Both are the work of Christ.
- ◆ Ezekiel 36 gives the grammar of the whole thing: *I will* take you, *I will* cleanse you, *I will* put my Spirit within you. Judah bought none of it with their goodness.
- ◆ Pentecost is a purpose, not a paradigm. It was an inaugural event tied to Christ's exaltation, and Christ does not need to be humbled and exalted again for every new generation.
- ◆ Peter's answer to "what shall we do?" was not "go back to start and repeat what we did." It was repent, be baptized, and receive the gift.
- ◆ Careless preaching does real damage here — testimonies that say "that's when I got the Spirit" teach listeners that a Christian can belong to God and still be waiting.

- ◆ Charismatics are right that most Christians leave far too much on the table. The fix is to ask for the gifts, not to doubt whether you have the Giver.

► 1:18:27

Hope paused its survey through Hebrews for a Sunday, because the Western church was keeping Pentecost. Matt gave the quick orientation — the Jews called it the Feast of Harvest, or Weeks; fifty days after Passover, which is where the Greek name comes from — and then admitted the difficulty of the subject. “When you talk about the Spirit of God, words fail.” He said he would stumble through it and do his best.

The Spirit is a him, not an it

► 1:19:36

Everything downstream depended on this. The Spirit is not a tool or an object for us to grasp or manipulate or earn with our piety. “You can no more earn the presence of the Spirit of God in your life than you could earn forgiveness for your sins through righteous deeds.” You cannot pray loudly enough to obtain a spirit of adoption. It is a work of Christ — and Matt said that if the room zoned out at any point, that sentence was the one to keep.

He also named who is at fault when people believe otherwise, and it was not the people in the pews. It is preachers like himself who get lazy with their words.

Ezekiel 36, and who the active agent is

► 1:21:02

An odd place to start a Pentecost sermon, but it does something the Acts narrative assumes. Ezekiel was a priest of Judah whose life’s work was predicting the captivity in Babylon and the return that followed it. God’s opening line to him lands as an insult until you sit with it:

“It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.”

EZEKIEL 36:22 ↗

Matt read it as comfort. This is not a neutral people who merely failed to earn something — they had actively profaned God’s name among the nations, and he moves anyway, on his own initiative, for his own sake.

► 1:22:35

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses... And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.”

EZEKIEL 36:25-27 ↗

“Do you see, just even by the grammar alone, who’s the active agent?” Matt asked. I will take you. I will sprinkle. I will cleanse. I will give. I will remove. I will put my Spirit. Judah had not sufficiently repented; their track record deserved nothing. God goes on to promise grain and the end of famine — and as far outside their control as the harvest was, that is how far outside their control this was too.

How does it work? Lucky socks and rabbits’ feet

► 1:25:09

Naturally we want the mechanism. Matt compared it to athletes and their superstitions — the lucky socks, the rabbit’s foot, the unusual breakfast on the day you scored the most points. Maybe it’s the chicken. We laugh at that, and then do exactly the same thing as Christians: how do I get the Spirit, how do I make that happen.

The Bible’s answer points at a person, not a procedure. John the Baptist, the most popular preacher of the day, drew the line himself:

“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

MATTHEW 3:11 ↗

That is not church filler to pad out Matthew’s book, and it is not an honorific. If you wanted baptism for repentance, you went to John. Jesus is the baptizer in the Holy Spirit. So where do you go now?

Acts 2 — and Peter's explanation of it

► 1:27:01

The sound like a mighty rushing wind, the divided tongues as of fire, the disciples speaking in other languages as the Spirit gave them utterance ([Acts 2:1–4](#)). Parthians, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Egyptians, Judeans, Greeks, Arabs — all hearing the mighty works of God in their own tongues. Some in the crowd concluded they were drunk. Peter stood up with the eleven and made the case that this was what Joel had said: God pouring out his Spirit on all flesh — sons and daughters, young and old, male and female servants alike. Note the agent again. God pours out his own Spirit.

► 1:32:50

Then the sermon turns, and it turns toward Jesus — attested by God with mighty works, delivered up by God's definite plan, crucified by lawless hands, and raised because death could not hold him ([Acts 2:22–24](#)). Peter quotes David — “you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption” — and then points out the obvious: David died, was buried, and his tomb is still down the road ([Acts 2:25–31](#)). So David was speaking as a prophet about a descendant he would also call Lord.

Which is not a bunny trail. It is the argument:

“Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.”

ACTS 2:33 ↗

Peter quotes David once more — “[The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand](#)” — the Father glorifying the Son, conquering the Son's enemies, entrusting the Spirit to him for his own name's sake. It closes where Ezekiel opened: not for your sake, but for mine.

A purpose, not a paradigm

► 1:40:03

Here is the version Matt was preaching against, and he did the voice: the Spirit was kept in abeyance until enough of the right people in the right place prayed long enough and hard enough and got their breakthrough. Were they fasting real good? Was there an invisible threshold?

No. The Spirit fell when he did because Christ was raised, ascended and exalted. The chronology and the purpose were both things Jesus was doing. And when the crowd was cut to the heart and asked

what to do, Peter did not send them back to start — no wandering, no being sent out, no years of cryptic sayings before the Spirit arrives:

“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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

ACTS 2:38-39 ↗

Far off covers us — generations later, half a world away. This was not a special occasion where everything was at discount price because Peter happened to be standing there.

► 1:42:15

Matt flagged the pastoral cost of getting this wrong. Men in his position tell their testimonies and, carelessly, convey that they were Christians who believed in Jesus but did not have the Spirit until they went out to the wilderness and camped and prayed and fasted by a river. What they mean is that they had a powerful encounter with the Lord. What the listener hears is “that’s when I got the Spirit.” The cautionary tale is Simon the magician, who tried to buy the Spirit with money. “Now, is it any better when we say in exchange for shouting Hillsong tunes in my closet? It’s not any better.”

► 1:44:30

Paul lands in the same place, and with visible heat —

“Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?” Peter denies the template by widening the promise; Paul denies it by asking one question. Same idea, different language: you have the Spirit because you believed the gospel.

And Jesus, on the last day of the feast, said it before either of them —

rivers of living water for whoever believes, with John’s own footnote that the Spirit had not yet been given *because Jesus was not yet glorified*. Matt let the room finish the syllogism: has there been a single day since Pentecost when Jesus was not glorified?

Don’t confuse the gifts with the Giver

► 1:47:45

Matt named this as the root error. The gifts are like power tools — things we employ in faith. The one who gives them is a person, and he does not arrive in percentages. There is no starter pack where the basic Christian plan gets you his pinky and singing the whole worship set gets you an upgrade. “Jesus Christ is your forty-day fast. He is your perfectly lived life. He is your absolutely flawless death and

resurrection.” Treating the Spirit as manipulable material — Play-Doh, Star Wars, Dragon Ball Z — is not a quirk to laugh off. It is a matter for repentance.

► 1:50:33

Then, having spent the message arguing against a charismatic misstatement, he handed the charismatics and Pentecostals their due. They are absolutely right that most Christians leave far too much on the table — saved, resigned to a moral life, and that is it. The correction is only in how we say it. If what you want is a power gift, ask for it; the Spirit distributes gifts according to his own will, and Paul still tells us to desire the greater gifts. Feeling powerless is not evidence that the Spirit is absent.

Be honest instead: you heard a missionary’s testimony about shouting at the moon, you want that too, and you do not feel what he described. Say so. “There’s no harm in asking. He’s super generous. He did all of this for free to us because of his own desire.” The idea that you might finally inconvenience God with one more request does not survive contact with the sermon’s own logic — the whole endeavor, start to finish, had surprisingly little to do with how much we have earned.

► 1:52:22

He ended by praying it rather than concluding it — asking not for the Spirit to come, since he is already in the room, but for confidence in his nearness, for gifts distributed generously among the body, and for eyes to see what is already there. He asked for all of it, in keeping with everything he had just preached, for God’s own reputation’s sake.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Ezekiel 36:22
- Ezekiel 36:25–27
- Matthew 3:11
- Acts 2:1–4
- Joel 2:28–29
- Acts 2:22–24
- Acts 2:25–31
- Acts 2:33
- Acts 2:34–35
- Acts 2:38–39
- Acts 8:18–20
- Galatians 3:1–3
- John 7:37–39
- 1 Corinthians 12:11
- 1 Corinthians 12:31

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Where have you quietly believed there was a threshold to cross before God would give you more of himself — and what did you think the threshold was?
2. Ezekiel 36 is a string of “I wills” addressed to people who had profaned God’s name. What does it do to you that he acts for his own sake rather than in response to yours?
3. Matt said the root error is confusing the Spirit’s gifts with the Spirit himself. Which of the two have you actually been pursuing?
4. Whose testimony shaped what you expected the Spirit to feel like, and has that expectation helped your faith or fed your doubt?
5. He said there is no harm in asking, and that God is generous. What are you going to ask him for this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8FgtXD5rZc&t=4707s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.