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## Fire Up!

May 23, 2021

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TEXT: Acts 2:1-8,11-17,22-24,32-33,36-43,47 (ESV)

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ...we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell 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 Joel:

"And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh..."

"Men of Israel, hear these words: 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, as you yourselves know — this Jesus, delivered up according to the

definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. 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.

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and 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. 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.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

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Dear friends,

It was the end of halftime, and the team that had been losing in the first half suddenly came bursting through the locker room doors into the gym. They were yelling and giving high fives. They look different than the team that had trudged through those same doors at the end of the first half. Now you could see a spring in their step; a confident, determined look on their faces. As play began, they were energized, passing the ball with a snap to one another, sticking like gum to their opponents when playing defense, and scoring one basket after another until they'd pulled far ahead. Behind the announcer's table, giving the play by play, the announcer said to his audience, “I don't

know what happened behind those closed locker room doors, but one thing I do know: this is one fired up team.”

The same could be said of those disciples we just read about in the Pentecost story. They are fired up, literally. Tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. Now, fire in the Old Testament represented the purity and power of God's very presence. They're standing up publicly, outside, in the same city that just crucified their master, telling the story. They're fired up. They're different than before when they deserted and denied Jesus. Now they're courageous and bold. Nothing's going to stop them. They're unstoppable – on fire. They're even doing the miraculous, proclaiming the mighty works of God and Jesus Christ in other people's languages. And when asked in amazement by the crowd gathered around them, “What does all this mean?” Peter jumped on that. He didn't miss a beat. He gives a powerful witness, pointing first to Joel the prophet's promise of the spirit from God now being fulfilled and then telling them about Jesus: crucified by them and raised by God and now Lord overall.

And we see it's effective because now there are convicted people asking, “Well, then what must we do?” And Peter says, “Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” And guess what? Three thousand people receive Peter's word that day and got baptized. Three thousand conversions! Suddenly the church of 120 was now 3,120. And these disciples found themselves teaching and building community with 3,000 people who were now devoted to serving Jesus Christ. Quite a harvest on a Jewish festival which was gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate a harvest.

What happened? Well, it's not really a matter of *what* happened, but *who* happened, is the right question. The Holy Spirit was now on the scene, working, just as was foretold first by Joel the Prophet and then John the Baptist, who said, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” And then Jesus promised His coming as well: “I'll give to you a helper. Power from on high is about to come upon you and you will be my witnesses.” And now that same Holy Spirit who had been promised was empowering the disciples, using them, to move people towards a saving faith in Jesus Christ. He worked through their telling of the Gospel message about God's rescuing works through His son, Jesus; crucified, but now risen from the dead and sitting exalted at the right hand of God. I can't remember who said this, but I love the quote. It says, regarding Pentecost, “In the disciples time spent with Jesus, the wood had been laid,

but the fire was not lit until Pentecost.” And oh, what a fire was set that day and the days that followed. In fact, the fire never went out. If it had, we wouldn't be worshipping Jesus today on Christian Crusaders. Those that received Jesus that day received the Holy Spirit and later on were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria and the ends of the world, witnessing, leading others to Jesus. Just like Jesus said, he has been at work ever since, throughout the history of the church. And He still is working, still available, still as powerful to change the trajectory of a human life through the message of the gospel. The crowd's question to Peter, “What shall we do?”, Is still a good question then for us to be asking in 2021.

Well, first, if you are not a follower of Jesus Christ, a believer, Peter's answer to that crowd is aimed at you. Turn from your old ways of thinking that you can take care of yourself where you don't need a savior, and instead believe in Jesus Christ. Put your faith in what He did for you at the cross and the empty tomb, and you will receive forgiveness for sins and the Holy Spirit. Receive the gift God has provided for you and ask Jesus to take over your life. And if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then that means that you've been fired up by the Holy Spirit already. And so, the answer to the “What do we do now?” question is: fire up! Fire up! The same Holy Spirit that fired up those first disciples is in you. He's in you and He's ready to use you as His witnesses. The Pentecost story, you see, is not just a piece of history for us to commemorate. It's a word of encouragement from God for those who have lost their nerve, who are feeling intimidated at the thought of being a witness for Jesus, who have grown skeptical that telling the Jesus story will make any difference. It tells us nothing could be further from the truth. It still has power: the power of the Holy Spirit. This is meant to fire us up for witnessing, this Pentecost story. It reminds all of us as Christ followers to concentrate on God's faculties and not on your frailties. The power of the Spirit still works through the story about Jesus and still has the power to enlighten people and change lives for the better.

Martin Luther understood that, many, many years after Pentecost. He wrote these words in his small catechism about the Holy Spirit. “I believe that I cannot, by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ to come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith.” Luther knew he would not have the power to believe unless the Holy Spirit had done His work. The Holy Spirit convicts and converts, and we sow the seeds

of the gospel story, friends, as Jesus says in his parables. And the Holy Spirit does the work.

Billy Graham tells a marvelous story about a man that he looked up to from Soviet Georgia. He had earned three doctoral degrees and held a position at a prestigious university. But in spite of that, he felt depressed and unhappy. One day he stopped at a shoeshine stand and asked the man polishing his shoes why he was always so happy. Humbly but boldly, the man replied that it was because he knew Jesus loved him and that it was because of Jesus that he was happy. The professor scornfully dismissed his words, but found he could not escape them. As a result of this man's simple witness, he began searching for God, a search that led to his commitment to Jesus Christ. "Later, he left his post and began to teach at a Christian college Ruth and I attended, and his life influenced me greatly," Billy Graham says. And it all began because the Holy Spirit gave an uneducated man the courage to witness to someone with a brilliant mind but an empty heart. There you have it.

Listen, you have that same kind of power. You have a story yourself of, for instance, of what you've witnessed in your own life following Jesus. Write it down, memorize it so you can have it in your heart, ready to share with someone else, because it has powerful possibilities. The Holy Spirit works through that story. And, of course, tell Christ's story of what He's done for us, that all of us were sinful before a holy and just God, perishing, but God in His love for us provided the solution for sin and its deadly consequences. Jesus Christ, His son, who went to the cross and paid the penalty for sin and rose from the grave and purchased the place in God's Heaven for you and me. And we received the gift, trusting in what He's done for us, trusting in Him.

And as you tell your story and you tell his story, you are not alone. That's the message today. You are sealed with the power of the Holy Spirit. Keep that in mind the next time the door of opportunity opens for you to tell someone about what God has done for you and done for them in Christ Jesus. Whether it be that golf partner who doesn't have a church and isn't sure what he believes in or someone you know who is seeking encouragement for facing a tough situation in life, who will tell them if you don't? It's time to get fired up with the gospel and let others in on the good news.

Now, I know this sounds like an impossible task and you're feeling hesitant about it. The world can be intimidating and the thought of doing this scares us a bit. But let me

remind you that God specializes in the impossible, doesn't He? You just read your Bible to confirm that truth. So, trust in the power of the gospel story. The Apostle Paul himself said, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel. It's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." So don't you be ashamed and don't give in to the myth that the Gospel no longer has power, or buy into the lie that the first order of business for the church is no longer a proclamation of the gospel. Satan loves to nurture that kind of misguided thinking, and it renders us harmless. Instead, remember Christ's promise when He said "Truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the work that I do and greater works than these will he do because I'm going to the Father and sending the helper." And that's what happened on Pentecost, isn't it? The Pentecost story is given to us to fire us up for ministry. The spirit is ready to do great things through you, it tells us, and so we can believe that God can do extraordinary things through you, like leading someone to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

How do we stay fired up? Because I know, like D.L. Moody says, as a Christian, we leak the spirit. Well, Corrie Ten Boom said one time, as she held up a glove for her audience, "I have a glove here in my hand. The glove cannot do anything by itself, but when my hand is in it, it can do so many things. True, it's not the glove, but my hand in the glove that acts. We are gloves. It is a Holy Spirit in us who is the hand who does the job. We have to make room for the hand so that every finger is filled." So how do we make room for the hand of the Holy Spirit get filled? First of all, we make room for Him as we open up our Bibles and let him teach us the mighty deeds, the wisdom and direction and the promises of God. That builds us up in faith and grace and knowledge. And of course, we make room for Him by praying, by asking him to fill us up and to use us to the glory of God. We need a fresh filling of Him each day, and so we ask for that. As the apostle Paul said in Ephesians, "Keep on being filled with the spirit."

So brothers and sisters, good news: you're not on your own. Believing in Christ, you've been fired up by the same Holy Spirit we just read about. May this Pentecost story today serve to get you fired up, to burn brightly for Jesus Christ in this world. So let's ask the Holy Spirit right now to use us. I invite you to sing this little prayer song with me.

Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me. Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me. Melt me, mold me. Fill me, use me. Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me. And now go, go with the Gospel.  
Amen.