

Acts 2:1-13

A Church Set Ablaze

2015 was the worst year on record for wildfires in the US. In October of 2015, a report was released that indicated that over 11 million acres were burned by wildfires. To put that in perspective, Tennessee is nearly 27 million acres, a fire that has consumed 11 million acres has nearly scorched an entire half of the state of Tennessee.

Fire is one of the most destructive forces on earth but fire is essential for life. Think about it, where there is fire there is light. Where there is fire there is heat. Some of you because you are cold natured like my wife, know that fire is essential for life.

We are continuing our renew series here at Oxford and have seen that the supreme pursuit of our lives is knowing God; then we looked into Psalm 51 to check the condition of our hearts as we looked at repentance as the first step of being all that God desires us to be; then we looked last week at a stern warning from King Jesus to a church in Ephesus about the danger of not repenting.

This week I want us to look at the moment of inception for the church, the moment after redemption where the Spirit applied and effected the salvation secured by the Son - our Lord Jesus Christ. In this moment that we will behold with our eyes of faith as we listen to the Word of God, salvation is more complete than it has even been. On this day of Pentecost after Easter Sunday, the Holy Spirit of God resides in the hearts of men and forms the Church.

You must understand this point before we go forward - God forms the Church, the church does not form God. We are made in His image, He is not made in our image.

Let's turn to see the church set ablaze. (READ TEXT)

I have chosen to title this message *A Church Set Ablaze*. We are expressions of the church that was birthed that day. So the question that we must do is to look at Acts 2 and look for our memories to be stirred. This story that we just read is our story and the characteristics of that moment, though not completely the same, should remind us of what we experience as we gather as the church. The basis for our understanding this are these truths:

- Christ is building His Church (Presently and actively)
- Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for forever.

- The gospel is always bearing fruit all over the world no matter how greatly the gates of hell fight

Let's see if we can spot some characteristics of the church that are true no matter the time. What are the characteristics then that will be true now of a church set ablaze?

1. Has a Great Anticipation for God to Move - Always (1)

I can only imagine what must have been going through the minds of the disciples. Remember, these are disciples who are gathered so the call to follow Jesus has already been made clear and embraced by all of these who are gathered in Jerusalem. They knew what it was like to follow Jesus while he was on earth, but Jesus has left (Chapter 1). How will they now follow him? Soon Jesus will send the way - the Holy Spirit of God.

Jesus set them on this wonderful journey, gave them this mandate from heaven to make disciples, to serve as witnesses to the greatest message the world can ever hear. This life sent Jesus to the Cross but also sent Him alive from the dead!

Jesus commanded them not to leave the city until they were clothed with power from on high. They are gathered just for a moment in the greatest anticipation of their lives - salvation. Remember what the pattern was before Jesus told them they were to be witnesses? John paints the portrait of the disciples going back to fishing, going back to their lives after experiencing the Cross. But Jesus interrupts their lives by promising their salvation. This time is different. Instead of seeing them out fishing, they are together and making preparations to continue the mission. What made the difference? The assurance from the Word of God - what Jesus had told them.

Maybe your life looks more like the disciples before Pentecost but after the cross - looking to the Cross from a distance instead of experiencing the power of the Cross through the power of the Spirit. God's intention was for them to gather for only a moment and even when they gathered it was with great anticipation of greater things to come - both looking back but always pressing ahead.

I remember a time, a fantastic time in my life that was full of anticipation, when I thought that I had been left. When I turned 18, I left home and headed out to college. I went to college up North - North Georgia - and needless to say, I had never navigated my way around GA 400 until the day that I drove to Truett-McConnell College. There was one instance that I missed my turn. So, in my beautiful copper colored Mazda B2500 5 speed truck, I slowed down almost to a stop and put my blinker on and waited for my turn to get over. It was almost disastrous. No one is intended to sit still on the interstate and no one is intended to simply come to church, we are intended to be the church, to go as the saved and sealed Spirit-filled community!

2. Is Moved by the Holy Spirit - Always (2-4)

Look at the way the Spirit moves them. Look at the description of the Spirit's - *a mighty rushing wind*. This wind came *suddenly*. The Spirit came suddenly and with surprise. They were gathered no doubt reflecting on all that Jesus had told them. This was the moment that Jesus had been preparing them for:

John 14:12 - *Truly, truly I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father*

How can the disciples do greater works than Jesus? Only one way - the Holy Spirit empowering and effecting salvation.

John 16:7 - *Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you....*

To our advantage? How can the Spirit inside of us be a greater advantage than Jesus beside us? (Greer, *Jesus Continued: Why the Holy Spirit Inside of You Is Greater than Jesus Beside You*, 2014)

John 20:21 - *Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you'.*

No doubt Jesus' words were fresh in their minds as they were anticipating with awe and wonder of all that was about to take place. In John 20:22 there is this difficult passage that says that Jesus breathed on them and said, *received the Holy Spirit*. I believe that this is there to show that everything that the disciples experienced with Jesus was but a foretaste of what life would be like when the Holy Spirit took the work of Jesus and applied it to their hearts.

Jesus spent his entire earthly ministry confined to just a few regions and a few miles. But by the ministry of the Spirit-filled Church, the fame of His name has been spread to almost every corner, and almost under every rock and dark place on the earth!

The Spirit-filled, blood bought community redeemed by Jesus called the Church is the plan of God to bring about the praise of God from all people. You see, ministry is not something that we do so much as something that God does through us. We fulfill His plan!

Consider this: The Father sent the Son. This means that the Son proceeded from the Father (we aren't talking about any essentials). From the Son (after the Work of the Son) the Spirit was poured out to apply the work of the Son to the glory of the Father. Who was the Spirit poured out upon? The hearts of men. The collection of hearts that the Spirit is poured out upon is known as the Church. The Church is now the sent ones. The Father

sends the Son, the Son and Father send the Spirit and then the Father Son and Spirit send the Church! Listen to this quote:

“For mission is not first an activity of the church; it is characteristic of the being and action of God. The church is called, equipped and sent by the triune God as a witness in the ongoing *Missio Dei*: ‘God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another movement: Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the Church into the world.’” (*The Community of the Word*, Husbands and Trier)

And look at the way the Spirit sends: *Like a mighty rushing wind* - like a tornado blowing through the landscape, so the Spirit sends the Church to the four corners to the earth to disrupt the systems of the world with the announcement that Jesus is Lord and salvation in no other name!

The one who were gathered would be sent. The work of God would continue through the loved by the Father, blood bought, Spirit empowered community - the Church. Wind is not wind unless it moves and the church is not fulfilling its purpose unless it is carrying the mission of God onward - fulfilling the Great Commission.

The church is not an institution to be maintained but a mission to be advanced. The church is not just for this culture or a culture of the past but for all cultures in each and every time and place until King Jesus returns and the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea.

We come and see as we gather ourselves through corporate worship and discipleship. Every aspect of our worship service bears the marks of redemption. From the songs we sing, to the sacraments we practice, to the prayers we pray, to the sermon that is preached, listened to and applied - everything we do bears the marks of salvation.

But we can't just gather. We aren't just the gathered ones, we are the sent ones.

We go and tell by being a personal witness, sharing Jesus with our neighbors, friends, and family. We also invite them to see our worship to the thrice holy God. Missions isn't some program that you and I can fix to our lives on a Tuesday night, our life is a mission! This church is an expression of that ongoing mission.

Look at the text. The rushing wind brought tongues of fire that declared salvation in Jesus!

Number three this AM: A church ablaze

3. Makes Disciples of All Nations - Always (5-13)

How providential that every nation was gathered? How providential that every nation heard the gospel in his own language?

God's desire for the earth is pictured here in Acts and in Revelation.

7:9 - After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, from all tribes and all people and languages standing before the throne and before the lamb...

How does this scene come about?

Romans 10:13-15 - For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?

If we looked at our church would we see it as an advancing movement or a maintaining institution? Are we a church set ablaze or struggling to fulfill our purpose? The purpose for us is the same as it has been since the beginning - fulfill the Great Commission, make disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit to the glory of God the Father!

Let me close with this quote by John Stott:

"His authority on earth allows us to dare to go to all the nations. His authority in heaven gives us our only hope of success. And his presence with us leaves us no other choice."

May our prayer be a prayer of invocation for our lives, for our church, asking the Spirit to empower us, to send us, to set our hearts on fire for Him and to use us to fulfill the purpose that he has for us - to worship him and to make disciples for Him. Would you pray that way today?