

# Prayer, catching the wind of God

Acts 2:1-13

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When we work, we work. When we pray, God works.

As a church we have a choice. We can either serve Christ in our own power, or we can follow Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Scripture at times differentiates this by talking of the flesh and the spirit. Are we serving God out of our own power and our own resources, the flesh, or are we serving God trusting in His power and His resources? This would be serving in the Spirit. One key indicator is how much we pray. Those who serve God in the flesh will be very busy doing the work of the church, but will spend little time in prayer. Those who are serving God in the Spirit will also be working diligently, but their main work will be that of prayer.

Imagine a boat in the middle of the ocean. You see two people in the boat rowing as hard as they can to make progress and reach the other shore. Fatigue is setting in and yet all they see on the horizon is endless water. How futile must that feel. They are working tirelessly, trusting in their own strength, with very little results. But what if they put up their sail and catch the wind? They would still need to discern the direction of the wind and steer the boat, but how much greater would the result be as they catch the wind and are carried along by it.

The Holy Spirit is to the life of the Church as the wind is to a sailboat. The sailor does not create the wind, he merely puts up the sail and is driven along by the wind's power. Prayer is how we put up our spiritual sail to catch the wind of God. If we are going to be the church that God desires us to be, we must be a church that prays.

We even see this truth in Jesus' life. Only Jesus had seen prayer from both an earthly and heavenly perspective. With this complete understanding, He prayed, continually. If He, the Son of God, needed prayer that much, how much more do we.

In Acts 1 we see this same truth lived out by Jesus' closest followers. In Jesus' final instructions to them, before His ascension, Jesus had instructed them to return to Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. They would be returning to the city, the people and the religious leaders who had arrested and crucified Jesus. It was not an easy place to go. It was not a safe place to go. They faced a situation that was more than they could handle or control. But yet they returned as Jesus had instructed and they waited.

But as they waited what did they do? This group of 120 followers, including the apostles and even Jesus' mother and brothers, did what Jesus had taught them to do: *"In one accord they devoted themselves to pray"* (Acts 1:14).

Jesus had been crucified during the Passover celebration. He had been raised from the dead and had spent 40 days with His followers before His ascension. Now the disciples were waiting and praying as the Jewish celebration, known as Pentecost, approached.

Pentecost is the Greek name of an Old Testament festival known as the "Feast of Weeks" (Leviticus 23:15; Deuteronomy 16:9). The celebration commemorated the giving of the Law to Moses at Mt. Sinai and was also a celebration of gratitude to God for the harvest. It was a "week of weeks" or 7 weeks after Passover. Seven weeks add up to 49 days. The day after was "the Fiftieth day" or Pentecost.

Each year Pentecost fell at the end of the spring. At this time of year traveling conditions were at their best. This meant that large crowds of Jews from many different countries would make the journey for this special religious celebration. In addition, by Jewish law, every male Jew living within 30 kilometers of Jerusalem was required to attend the Pentecost celebration. On Pentecost it was also against the law to work. Because of all these factors Jerusalem would have been very crowded during the Pentecost events that we find in Acts 2.

The disciples had been praying and waiting for ten days. Not knowing what the future held, they just stayed faithful to the last things Christ had told them: "Don't leave Jerusalem. Wait for the Holy Spirit. Be my witnesses." And on the tenth day, Jesus' promise was fulfilled. Acts 2 records this event:

*When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.<sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.<sup>3</sup> And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.<sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

Can you imagine what it must have been like? A sound like a mighty rushing wind. Tongues of fire resting on each one of them. Filled with the Holy Spirit. Speaking in foreign languages.

This coming of the Holy Spirit had been prophesied by the prophet Ezekiel centuries before (570 B.C.):

*"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 and be careful to obey my rules." (Ezekiel 36:26-27)*

This is what we see occurring in Acts 2. As Christ had proclaimed in John 16:7, *“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.”*

Christ had walked with them, but now the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, had come to live in them.

*<sup>5</sup> Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup> And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, <sup>11</sup> both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” <sup>12</sup> And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup> But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”*

In response the disciples seemed to flood out into the crowded streets. They began to preach and were speaking in languages that they did not even know so that the diverse crowd of Jews could understand. Something supernatural was taking place that demanded an explanation. God had brought together Jews from every nation, and now His followers were presenting the gospel to them in their own language.

How loving is God that even in the midst of their lostness, that He would still draw them to Himself in the most creative of ways. Even to the point of bridging that final gap of language so that they could hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

It was the opposite of what had happened at the Tower of Babel, where different languages had been given to divide. Now the Holy Spirit was gifting the Apostles with foreign languages so that people could be united in Christ.

The works of the Spirit and the speaking in tongues caused curiosity and brought attention to the Spirit’s coming. It allowed people to understand the message, people who normally would not have been able to. By the end of the day many people put their faith in Jesus.

All of this story flowed out of the fact that God’s people waited for God in one accord, devoting themselves in prayer. They put up their spiritual sail and were carried along by the Spirit of God. That was the way that they prepared for the working of God in Acts 2, and it continued to be the way that the early church prepared for the working of God throughout the book of Acts.

In Acts 1:24, they prayed and God led them as they chose a new apostle. In Acts 4:31, in the face of persecution, *“They prayed, and the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”* In Acts 6:6 they prayed as they chose the first deacons. The deacons would now take over the physical needs of the

church so the apostles could devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. That is how important prayer was to them . . . *“As a result, the word of God increased and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.”*

In Acts 9:40, Peter prayed over the body of a woman named Dorcas, and she was miraculously brought back to life. In response, *“It became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.”*

In Acts 10-11, prayer played a key role in Gentiles coming to Jesus and being admitted to the church. In Acts 12:6-19, the church prayed for Peter’s rescue from prison and God sent an angel who miraculously freed him.

In Acts 13:1-3, the church prayed before sending out the first missionaries, Paul and Barnabas. In Acts 14:23, they prayed as they appointed new elders to the church. Prayer is essential in the life of the church.

Their prayers changed them from a small group of simple, intimidated people, who had fled at Jesus’ arrest, to those who would eventually stand before the most powerful leaders of all Judaism and proclaim the name of Jesus fearlessly. They would rejoice when they were counted worthy to be beaten for the sake of Jesus. Through their prayers God would heal the sick, raise the dead, and bring thousands to faith in Jesus.

From this small band of believers, Christianity would grow to become the main religion in the Roman Empire by 325 AD.

This pattern of prayer in the church continued all the way through Paul’s writings. Prayer was the lifeline for the church in biblical times and has continued throughout church history. A church, ministering out of the abilities of man, can at best be well organized with quality programs and pleasing to the eye, but in the end it can bear no lasting fruit. Only the fruit that is born of the Spirit will truly last and advance the kingdom of God.

If we are to be a church that reaches the lost for Christ, we must be a people who pray. Sidlow Baxter wrote, *“Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons, but they are helpless against our prayers.”*

Whether it be the church or our personal lives, we must come to the point where we realize our desperate need for God. Prayer ushers the presence and the power of God into each situation for which we pray. How many areas of our church need the presence of God? How many areas of your life need the power of God? Your marriage, your children, your finances, your future, your job, your studies, your attitude, your health, or even your temptations. May we raise the sail of prayer and catch the wind of God.

Samuel Chadwick said, *“The one concern of the devil is to keep saints from prayer. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.”*

As a church we would like to take this to heart. We know there are people in our church who pray often. We know that there are small groups that focus on prayer. We believe that God has and is working in the life of our church, but we long for more. With this in mind, I would like to suggest two prayer opportunities for you. First, if you are not praying regularly with someone from the church, let me encourage to start to do so. Ask God to lead you to a person or two who could be your prayer partners. On a regular basis begin to share your prayer requests. Then together begin to pray for each other and for our church. Imagine what God could do in our church with 150 or 200 groups of people who pray with their prayer partners regularly.

Secondly, I would like to let you know about our new Wednesday night online prayer meeting. It will begin at 20:00 h. and will last until 22:00 h. It will be broken into 30-minute segments. The prayer time will be led by several different prayer leaders. It is designed to work with your schedule. Some may choose to pray for 30 minutes, an hour, or even longer. You are free to come and to go as needed. Join us anytime between 20:00 h. - 22:00 h. To protect the privacy of the prayer meeting we will send out a sign up form for you to fill in. We will then send you the zoom information so that you can join the meeting when you can.

Let me encourage you to take the initiative and begin to make prayer a larger part of your life. As you continue in this discipline, I believe you will begin to experience the Spirit of God working in your life like never before.

I would like to close by turning our attention back to Acts 12. James, the brother of John, one of the apostles, had just been killed by King Herod:

*<sup>6</sup> Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. <sup>7</sup> And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. <sup>8</sup> And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." <sup>9</sup> And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. <sup>10</sup> When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. <sup>11</sup> When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."*

*<sup>12</sup> When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. <sup>13</sup> And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. <sup>14</sup> Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. <sup>15</sup> They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!" <sup>16</sup> But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed.*

The reason I close with this story is that we see that the church was praying, but when God answered their prayers their response was, “you are out of your mind.” They prayed, but they did not fully believe that God could do what they were asking. Even in their limited faith, God worked a miracle anyway. I show you this to be encouraged. Maybe you are here today longing to be strong in prayer, but you lack desire, discipline or faith. Today, start from where you are. 1 minute of prayer. 5 minutes of prayer. With minimal faith. Raise your sail and ask God to come. He will meet us in our prayers and guide into His presence and into His power like never before.

### Discussion questions:

1. What about this sermon did you find interesting?
2. How is prayer like putting your sail up?
3. Why do you think people don't pray?
4. Have you ever experienced God answering your prayers? If so, please share.
5. What can we learn from the early church and how they prayed?
6. What areas of your life do you need more of God's power and presence?
7. What about this sermon do you think you are supposed to remember?
8. What do you think God wants you to do about that?
9. How can we pray for you?