

The Debt We Owe The Holy Spirit

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them,” Acts 2:1-4.

They ran the 142nd Kentucky Derby last weekend. But do you remember which horse won the race? He was a colt named Nyquist, named after the former Red Wings hockey player, Gustave Nuyquist. Do you know the name of the jockey who rode Nyquist? He was Mario Gutierrez. Most of you knew they ran the Kentucky Derby. Some of you knew the winner was Nyquist. Few if any of you knew that the jockey was Mario Gutierrez.

Look at the Christian Church. We see a lot of activity in the church. We can read its history and pray for its future. But I wonder if we approach the Christian Church like the Kentucky Derby. Most know of Christian churches. Less are active in their churches. But few if any remember what makes a church work. You see, the church is like a horse. Without anyone controlling it, it will quickly run off the track and never win. And that is where this text is good for us to study today. God’s Church has a jockey. He is God the Holy Spirit. We will see what he did back then, and what he does today.

I. What did the Holy Spirit do back then?

Timing is everything. A good coach needs to know when to bench his best player for a rest and when to put him back in. God is the master of perfect timing. Jesus was born and became a human like us when the time was right. Several times people wanted to kill him, but God did not allow it because his time had not come. When he entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, that was the same day people went to market to pick out their Passover Lamb. Coincidence? Never. When Jesus rose from the dead, the firstfruit of the resurrection, the Jews were suppose to bring to the temple the firstfruit or first stalk of grain from their fields. Forty days later he ascended into heaven, and then ten days after that God kept his promise and gave his Holy Spirit to his disciples.

That was perfect timing because that day, 50 days after Easter, was Pentecost. Only three times Jews had to travel to the temple in Jerusalem. One was Pentecost. You heard the list of countries earlier in our reading. Imagine how much time and money it took to go to church. It was over 1,400 miles from Rome to Jerusalem, e.g. You can fly it today in a few hours. It took them weeks to travel by sea and land. It would be like traveling from St. Peter to Gainseville, FL on foot and sailboat.

Acts tells us God-fearing Jews were in Jerusalem that day. Obviously, if you were a delinquent Jew, you probably didn’t take the time or expense to make the trip. You had God-fearing Jews who took God and his Bible seriously, and if they did that, this means they were hanging onto a promise God made, the coming of the Messiah.

I find that very encouraging. Despite all the immorality and idolatry of that time, some still believed. And despite the immorality of today, some still believe. Does this mean we can pray less for our children? No. There are many baptized people in hell because they let the weeds grow up around them, choking out their faith. This encourages me to pray harder for my kids because of the danger of falling away. This encourages parents to keep having family devotions. What an encouragement for a congregation to always ask, “How does this fit in with God’s Word?”

Now, look at what the Holy Spirit did that day. We are told there was the sound of a rushing wind, much like the freight train sound of a tornado, so that everyone ran into the streets to see what happened. Then the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples who unlocked their door and stepped out and started preaching sermons in languages they never studied before. After this some of the disciples performed miracles and sometimes others speaking in tongues when they came to faith.

Why did the Holy Spirit do it that way? He didn’t need wind or any special mircle. I want you to think about NASCAR. They don’t just start the race. There is all this hoopla going on before the race: special music, jets flying over head. Then come those most famous words, “Gentlemen, start your engines,” and then you finally get to the race, 500 monotonous laps punctuated by an occasional crash.

God began the New Testament like NASCAR. He did many miraculous things to get the people’s attention. He did this to give his church one good, big push. Our problem is we are right now in the 500 monotonous laps of the church. There are some who think we should be repeating all that happened on Pentecost. I don’t blame them. We would love to see God do something miraculous like that.

But I ask you, did that dramatic wind and those miracles make believers out of anyone? No. Look at that crowd. They were amazed, but they didn’t get it. Their only conclusion was that the disciples were drunk. No, the Spirit was getting their attention so they would listen to Peter preach a sermon about Jesus Christ, and then over 3,000 believed and were baptized, not by miraculous signs, but by the Word.

Next year you will be celebrating your 150th anniversary as a church. That is misleading. It should be your 2,035th anniversary, give or take, because your church began on Pentecost. That’s because the Holy Spirit is still active today, not just then.

II. What does the Holy Spirit do today?

Ever played dominoes? We have a domino set at home but we have never used it to actually play dominoes. Dominoes is when you set our pieces on a table matching the number on one domino with that of another. Instead, we would stand one domino on its side near another domino so when you tip one over, it bumps into the next which bumps into the next and so on. That is the domino effect.

What the Holy Spirit did then goes on today because of the domino effect. One of those 3,000 thousand who believed told someone else who told someone else who eventually told you some 2,000 years later. Peter quotes a prophecy from Joel, ***"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams."*** This made me think of the Kids Choir last weekend. We had kids standing up doing just this, prophesying! Someone told them and they told you.

But they didn't sing about Jack and the Beanstalk. The shared God's Word with us. That is how the Spirit is still working today. Peter preached a sermon that day. But he was guilty of plagiarism. It really wasn't his sermon. The Holy Spirit wrote it. Later, he would tell us, ***"For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God AS THEY WERE CARRIED ALONG BY THE HOLY SPIRIT."*** It was God the Holy Spirit who inspired Peter and Matthew and Paul and the others. He carried them along, giving them not only the words to say, but also the very thoughts behind those words.

We live in uncertainty. About forty years ago scientists told us how evil sugar was, causing many sugar beet farms to go bankrupt, but since then have come out and said they exaggerated how bad sugar is. Which is it? But there is one thing we can be certain of. The Bible is God's Word, not man's. No errors. Total truth.

So the Spirit still speaks to us today through that Word. He is also present in that word. I can imagine Peter. He preached one sermon and three thousand believed and were baptized. That is any pastor's dream. But Peter knew who couldn't take credit for that. He remembered Jesus' words, ***"When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt ... in regard to sin."*** When I mentioned how all those God fearing Jews traveled to Jerusalem over thousands of miles, I felt guilty. I hope you did, too. I felt guilty because sometimes church seems like such a burden. Would you have burned vacation time and spent all that money to travel 1,400 miles to attend one church service? Usually we can barely drag ourselves a mile or two in a car to church, and then can't wait for it to end.

That's just one example. You can pick any area of your life, and we will quickly find how we naturally don't like God. But that is a good guilty feeling because the Spirit is convicting us of our sin. He convicts us to lead us to our Savior in Jesus Christ. Paul preached a lot of sermons and started dozens of churches, yet he couldn't take credit for one believer. He understood that on one can say Jesus is Lord unless by the Holy Spirit. Understanding that our sins, even the times we didn't really want to go to church, are forgiven because Jesus died on the cross, well, that's how we are saved. But we believe it, trust it, love it because of the Holy Spirit. So, great sermon Peter, but those 3,000 believed because of the Holy Spirit.

This is my last sermon here, but I pray not my last sermon preached or heard. And over the years we got to know one another pretty well. That means you saw my faults. As Paul reminds us, we are merely clay pots; there is nothing appealing or fantastic about us. I like Luther's prayer before each service. He asked for God's help because he admitted he would have destroyed God's church long ago. So would have I or any pastor. But our Lord makes a promise. Faith comes from hearing the message. So despite our failings, the Holy Spirit still works through his Word. My mistakes are mine, but any success belongs to God the Holy Spirit alone. How else can you explain how water and the Word changes a baby's heart? And it applies to us adults, too.

Have this confidence the next time you listen to a sermon. Have this same confidence the next time you read a devotion to your kids or speak to a neighbor about Christ and salvation. Share it and let the Spirit do his work. INJ Amen.