

## He Has Come: Characteristics of the Holy Spirit

Acts 2:1-4

May 15, 2016

Good morning again to everyone. So glad we are together in worship today.

You know, we are living in an era of incredible change. Things change so rapidly today. Old things and ways are gone, and sometimes, before we can learn the new ways, they are gone as well.

Take for instance, cell phones. I think I have missed out on not 1 but 2 iPhone versions during my current 2 year cell phone contract. Tell me the truth: are those 2 years in your contract the longest 2 years of your life, especially when you don't really like the service or your phone isn't very good or maybe has a cracked screen? It's just torture for a nerd like me who likes gadgets and sees ads for the newest and best to come on the market, and to know "I'm stuck in a contract." Ugh.

Now, change can be both good and bad, can't it? So many people have the notion, "I don't like change," but there is good change out there. People who have been diagnosed with cancer are living longer today than even 17 years ago when my first wife died... because of changes in treatment. Cars today are more reliable than 40 years ago. Remember back then; if your car hit 100,000 miles, it probably needed to be replaced; now today, I shoot for 200,000 in a car.

Other times, change can be bad. When you lose your job, when the character of a town shifts, when society decides that what you thought was morally wrong is not wrong anymore. It's times like these that changes don't feel so hot.

So change can be good or bad. Think about it: a change can be good, but it feels bad when so many changes are coming at the same time. A good change can feel bad if at the moment, it seems so big or we don't know where it will lead. Kind of like the presidential race – it will be a change, a pretty scary one either way.

Then you have those changes that come because you are starting a new path, a new journey. Maybe a new job. Maybe it's a new baby. Maybe it is retirement or a dramatic change in a loved one's health. Maybe it's a change that is being forced upon you, whether you like it or not, and the pressure, the expectations, and the uncertainty weigh upon your heart and mind. You are facing a change. You may not want to do it or would prefer to go back to the way things were before, but that is not possible.

Times, they are a changing, and whether you like it or not, you and I have to face them.

But imagine if you will that you have been at the crossroads of human history. You are one of twelve hand-selected persons who are called to follow an itinerant preacher, Jesus of Nazareth. You follow as He teaches incredible lessons about God, love, forgiveness, and sacrifice. You watch as He turns around the lives of the blind, the lepers, the widow, the hurt and the hungry. You begin to believe that He is the Messiah, the One promised. Then He is arrested, tried, condemned, and crucified on a Roman cross. After three days of intense soul searching and grief, news comes: He is risen. He appears to you many times over a 40 day period.

Then He says you not to leave Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father. He tells you,

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”<sup>1</sup>*

And then, He begins to levitate, rising up into the air, and disappearing into the clouds. You watch for Him, knowing that usually, usually, what goes up must come down. But He never does, and you go back into Jerusalem and wait. 10 long days you wait for something to happen, some mysterious promise from God. And then, finally, on the day of Pentecost, something happens.

Turn with me to Acts 2:1-4. It is printed on the sermon notes page.

*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.*

That’s change my friend. The birthday of the church. A transition in human history. Nothing is the same anymore.

Pentecost was one of three major annual festivals<sup>2</sup>, a festival of thanksgiving for the first harvested crops. Jesus was crucified at Passover time, and he ascended 40 days after his resurrection. The Holy Spirit came 50 days after the Resurrection, 10 days after the Ascension.<sup>3</sup>

On that day, God made his presence known to this group of believers in a spectacular way: roaring wind, fire, and his Holy Spirit. But who is this Holy Spirit?

Many people are confused about the Holy Spirit. I want you to consider the statement on the sermon notes sheet. “My impression of the Holy Spirit is.” Let me offer you multiple choice. My impression of the Holy Spirit is:

- A. Who?
- B. Pretty scary. Isn’t He the “Holy Ghost?”
- C. Unpredictable dude, with all that speaking in tongues and stuff.
- D. Don’t really need Him. I got Jesus!

Many people are confused about the Holy Spirit. I’ve always loved this quote from Gordon Fee:

“The practicing creed for many Christians goes something like, ‘I believe in God the Father, I believe in Jesus Christ, but I wonder about the Holy Ghost.’ The Spirit has become God’s specter, if you will, an unseen, less than vibrant influence, hardly ‘God very God.’”<sup>4</sup>

But, my friends, it is the Holy Spirit who is the active divine force in the world today. You see, God sent His Son Jesus into the world to be the Lamb of God, the one who would take away our sins. Jesus is now sitting at the right hand of the Father, so who did He send to help the disciples and us to navigate the mountains of change we would face and accomplish the mission to go into all the world with the Gospel? That’s right, the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 1:8 (NRSV)

<sup>2</sup> See Deuteronomy 16:16

<sup>3</sup> Life Application Study Bible, Acts 2:1

<sup>4</sup> Gordon D. Fee, “Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God” (Hendrickson Publishing, Peabody, Massachusetts, 1996, page 37).

In fact, whether you know it or feel it or experience it, the Holy Spirit is right here, in this room, right now.

And let me tell you something else. I want you to fill in the blank in your sermon notes:

If I have given my life to Christ, then I have the Holy Spirit within me. Write that down: I have the Holy Spirit within me. You don't receive the Holy Spirit once you become a super Christian; you receive the Holy Spirit when you become a new-born Christian. Let me repeat that: You don't receive the Holy Spirit once you become a super Christian; you receive the Holy Spirit when you become a new-born Christian.

Why is that? Why do we need the Holy Spirit? For times like these, when the world is falling apart, when your world is changing, and you don't know if you can face it, deal with it, manage it, make it through. When you have been given a monumental task, far beyond anything you think you can ever handle. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to you for times like these. And you want to know a secret? Every day is times like these.

So what does the Holy Spirit do for us? Consider these 8 Characteristics of the Holy Spirit:

### **1. The Holy Spirit testifies about Jesus.**

John 15:26 reads:

*But I will send you the Advocate – the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me.*<sup>5</sup>

It was the Holy Spirit that reminded the Gospel writers of the things Jesus said. It is the Holy Spirit that brings a Scripture verse to mind when you are dealing with something hard or too big for you. He is the Spirit of truth who tells us on the inside about Jesus.

### **2. The Holy Spirit tells us what to say.**

Jesus said in Mark 13:11:

*But when you are arrested and stand trial, don't worry in advance about what to say. Just say what God tells you at that time, for it is not you who will be speaking, but the Holy Spirit.*<sup>6</sup>

Now the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, who tells us on the inside about Jesus, He helps us testify to Jesus when you are talking and counseling someone. It is not the some unknown little voice in your head that tells you to call someone and check on them, or to turn this way or that, or what we call "intuition" that tells you what to say to someone. It is the Holy Spirit.

And notice what Jesus said. When you are up against the wall – arrested and standing trial for your faith – right in the midst of what seems the worst situation you could be in, the Holy Spirit is there speaking through you. In the midst of chaos and trouble and change, the Holy Spirit is there.

### **3. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin.**

Jesus told us in John 16:8:

*And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John 15:26, NLT

<sup>6</sup> Mark 13:11, NLT

<sup>7</sup> John 16:8, NLT

It is the Holy Spirit that tells us when we have sinned, when we need to apologize to someone for something we have done or said, when we have harbored a grudge or disobeyed God. It is not some inner conscious that tells us we are wrong; it is the Holy Spirit reminding us of our sin and God's righteousness.

#### **4. The Holy Spirit comforts.**

Jesus knew that the road ahead for the disciples would be difficult. Just like the roads we face in our lives, be it cancer or loss or disappointment or rejection or trials. So Jesus said in John 14:16

*And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever.”<sup>8</sup>*

It is the Holy Spirit that comforted me when I lost my first wife. It was the Holy Spirit that comforted Myra when she learned her first husband was cheating on her and left her and her sons for the other woman. It was the Holy Spirit that is there to comfort you when you are hurting, helpless, hopeless.

And this Holy Spirit will never leave you. Your parents will eventually die. I wish I could talk to mom or dad again, but they are gone. Yet the Holy Spirit is always there to help me through the changes of life and the path I am walking.

#### **5. The Holy Spirit helps our weaknesses.**

Have you ever faced a challenge, a trial, a crossroads that you knew that you could not handle yourself? Sure you have. What do you do in those situations? Rely on the Holy Spirit.

Paul wrote in Romans 8:26:

*“And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.”<sup>9</sup>*

You know, there have been times when there was something so painful, so difficult, so big, that I didn't even have words to pray. “Oh, God,” would be the only thing I could get out through my anguish, my fears, and my tears. You may have been there too. The Holy Spirit takes over for us and prays for us. What a comfort to know that the Third Person of the Trinity is praying for us when we cannot pray ourselves.

#### **6. The Holy Spirit teaches.**

Jesus said in John 14:26

*“But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit – he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.”<sup>10</sup>*

The disciples had Jesus to teach them. But when He was about to leave them, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would take up the teaching position when He was gone. So we have the promise that we will continue to be taught, not just by people learned and mature in the faith, but by the Holy Spirit himself.

#### **7. The Holy Spirit guides.**

When you are in the midst of change, when you have something too big for you to handle, the Holy Spirit is there to lead and guide us.

Jesus said in John 16:13

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<sup>8</sup> John 14:16, KJV

<sup>9</sup> Romans 8:26, NLT

<sup>10</sup> John 14:26, NLT

*“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future.”<sup>11</sup>*

### **8. The Holy Spirit sanctifies.**

Paul wrote in Romans 15:16

*“I am a special messenger from Christ Jesus to you Gentiles. I bring you the Good News so that I might present you as an acceptable offering to God, made holy by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>12</sup>*

The Holy Spirit sanctifies, or makes us holy, and therefore acceptable to God. You and I don't deserve God's righteousness upon us; it is the Holy Spirit that makes us righteous before God.

Now, folks, that's a long list, which is why you have a sheet for notes this week. I want you to take this home and review it over the week. I want you to think about the times when the Holy Spirit was the guiding force in your life, whether you knew it or not. I want you to realize how important the Holy Spirit is in your daily life.

You see, it is my observation of being a Christian for 45 years and a pastor for 30, that so many believers are trying to live their lives without tapping into the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Though the Holy Spirit may be in your life since the moment of your conversion, He is not a pushy, demanding resident. You must allow Him to be more of a guiding force in your life. You must relinquish control to the Holy Spirit in order to have a more faithful and effective life.

Let me share with you an illustration to help you understand this.

#### **BATTERY DYING IN GEORGIA.**

You need the Holy Spirit to get through this life. That's the only way your car will run. You have pushed and pushed on this thing called life, going uphill both ways. All you ever needed was the Holy Spirit.

Which life will you choose: dead on the side of the road, or speeding wherever the Spirit leads?

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<sup>11</sup> John 16:13, NLT)

<sup>12</sup> Romans 15:16, NLT