

What's It Gonna Take?

It's Pentecost Sunday, the day that Christians around the world regard as the birth of the church. While Pentecost was originally one of the Jewish feasts, Shavuot, and celebrated a harvest, it also became the time when Jews celebrated the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai. Christians celebrate Pentecost (the word actually means fifty) because fifty days after Passover and Jesus death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the followers of Jesus that had gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem. Look with me at **Acts 2:1-21**.

The Holy Spirit is poured out upon the believers. Jesus had instructed them in Acts 1 to wait in Jerusalem until they were "baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:5). This event, this experience, was an endowment of power which also resulted in those gathered speaking in other tongues as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance. This too is what Jesus had promised. **"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."** Acts 1:8

The day of Pentecost was the fulfillment of a promise. This was the gift Jesus had promised. It was the gift the prophet had spoken of. It testified to the beginning of a new era in God's timetable. Barriers came down that day as the Spirit's power prompted spiritual language that announced God's grace and salvation to the nations. Other barriers came down as both sons and daughters, men and women were baptized in the Holy Spirit. A powerful anointing and commission was issued that day. Empowerment came to the followers of Jesus to take the message to the world. Empowerment to go, to teach and preach and make disciples. This was spiritual empowerment to birth and build the church. Jesus said **"I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."** Matthew 16:18. This is how he would build his church, with the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Approximately two thousand years later, here we are on Pentecost Sunday, fifty days past Easter and our acknowledgment and celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus, gathered as followers of Christ, facing circumstances not totally unlike those faced by the first followers of Jesus. They were facing a population that knew little about Jesus or were openly antagonistic towards him. As they moved beyond Jerusalem and the borders of Israel, they found themselves trying to share the gospel with a wicked and pagan culture – a culture given to indulging itself in every kind of excess and every kind of sexual immorality, celebrating violence of all kinds. They were going to try to advance the kingdom of God and share his good news with a culture

intending to squeeze Christians into its' own mold, to water the message down in compromise, or marginalize and silence the message and the messengers by means of persecution and death.

Here we are, facing a culture that is antagonistic toward the gospel, a culture that is indulging itself in every kind of immorality, celebrating and glorifying violence, celebrating the killing of the unborn as a human right while labeling preaching against immorality a hate crime. It's an upside down morality and an upside down world. As I approached this day, knowing we've been talking about the church, I found myself asking this question, What's It Gonna Take? In Acts 17 Paul and Silas come to Thessalonica and some of the people drag them before the civil authorities saying, **“These people who have turned the world upside down have come here also.” Acts 17:6** What's it going to take to be the church that turns this upside down world right side up? What's it gonna take? Let me suggest a couple of things we will need.

It's going to require courage. I'm going to tell you something you may not hear from other preachers or in other churches, but if you are going to live for Jesus, if you're going to be part of his church and part of what God is doing in this world today, it's going to require courage. This isn't for the weak and timid. When the Israelites were preparing to enter the promised land, Moses had died and Joshua had become the leader. God spoke to Joshua and said, **“Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left that you may be successful wherever you go...Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:6-9**

Three times God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous. He promises to be with him wherever he goes. He commands him to carefully obey the word of God, don't veer off in one direction or another but obey God's word and be courageous. We need this same instruction! He is calling us to be courageous and serve him, obey his word, live as he calls us to live.

Let me tell you, it takes courage to live a holy life. It will take courage as Christian parents to raise your children to make holy choices and live a holy life, pleasing to God, obedient to God's instruction and to his word. It takes courage to live counter-culturally, going against the grain, against the tide, against the popular culture of peers and the pressure of social media.

You're going to have to grow thicker skin to be a courageous Christian in this culture. We are studying 1 Peter on Sunday nights this summer. Peter says **“In your heart set apart**

Christ as Lord...Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” 1 Peter 3:14-15.

What’s it gonna take to build up his church, to live as he called us to live? It’ll take courage and we see courage on that first Pentecost as Peter stands with the other disciples and boldly preaches the gospel, calling the people to repentance, calling them to change the way they live. “Repent and save yourselves from this corrupt generation” Peter said. Courage comes with Pentecost and it’s going to take courage for us to be the church he calls us to be.

It’s going to require determination. There were immediate problems that tried to sidetrack the disciples. Disputes among new converts that led to appointing of deacons, early persecution from the Jewish leaders, the Sanhedrin. Stephen is martyred, then James the brother of John is executed and open persecution begins. The church is scattered and in the midst of the growing persecution, rather than defeating the church, the missionary heart of the church grows and blossoms. The gospel reaches beyond Jews to the Gentiles, but once again, it gets messy. You’ve got Jewish followers of Jesus now embracing Gentile followers of Jesus whose cultural background is entirely different. They didn’t eat the same, dress the same, look the same, but they loved the same Savior and Lord. It was messy being the church. There were growing distractions, so many issues that could draw their attention away from Jesus, away from the mission to take the gospel to the whole world. What did it take to stay centered on Jesus? It took determination.

Church, it’s going to take courage and determination if we are going to live for Jesus, if we are going to keep on serving him and keeping him at the center of our focus, the center of our lives. If we build a church centered on anything or anyone other than Jesus, we’ve built on sand, we’ve built a house of cards. We have to be determined to keep our eyes and our focus on Jesus!

The writer of Hebrews tells us, **“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” Hebrews 12:2-3**

Keep looking to Jesus. He endured scorn and shame, he suffered and endured the cross for us. Keep looking to him so you won’t grow weary and lose heart. Fix your eyes on Jesus and don’t lose sight, don’t let go. It’s about completing the race, running after him, serving him, living for him, pursuing him for a lifetime and then someday, when we finish the race, we will stand in his presence and hear him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Come sit here

with me. Enter into the joys of the Lord's house." It's gonna take determination. Keep your eyes on Jesus.

On that first Pentecost, if the disciples didn't already know what was at stake, they would quickly find out. It would cost them everything, including their lives, but they were determined. Nothing would turn them away from following Jesus. They were eyewitnesses to his death and resurrection. They knew he was the son of God and Savior of the world and they were determined to live for him and serve him, regardless of the cost. The experience of Pentecost solidified that determination and resolve. The Spirit of God with them, within them, empowering them, kept their focus where it belonged.

It's going to require sacrifice. There is no getting around it. Courage, determination, ultimately it means sacrifice. We shouldn't be surprised, after all, Jesus said, **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."** **Matthew 16:24-25**

If you want to follow Jesus, it's a call to self-denial and sacrifice. Deny yourself and take up your cross. You don't take up a cross for any other purpose than to die on it. Deny yourself. That flies in the face of a culture that says, "find yourself and embrace your true self, your true nature; follow your own desires and God will just have to be happy with that." That's not what Jesus said. If you want to find your life, you'll need to lose it in Jesus, in serving him and living for him and obeying him and his word. That's where real life, true life is found.

Is it easy? Of course not! It's sacrifice. It's courage and determination. It's denying self and taking up a cross and following him. But that's what it's gonna take to live for him in 2019. It's what it's going to take to be the church he has called us to be. It's going to require sacrifice but remember, it requires sacrifice, it requires all this hard going, because it's about eternity. It's about overcoming because it is also about reward! Jesus' word to the churches in Revelation all end with a promise of reward. "To him who overcomes I will give the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God." Revelation 2:7. "He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death." Revelation 2:11 "To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna...to him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations...I will also give him the morning star. The list goes on. What's it gonna take to be the church he calls us to be? It's gonna take sacrifice but it will be worth it all. We will stand in

his presence someday and the reward of heaven will outweigh any sacrifice you make in this life. Finally, what's it gonna take?

It's going to require power. That's what Pentecost was all about. Jesus said "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses..." Everything I've said we need, the courage, determination, the willingness to sacrifice, it comes as a result of the empowering presence and anointing of the Holy Spirit. His power is what made the difference in the lives of the disciples. Think about it. They had spent 3 ½ years with Jesus, sitting at his feet, listening and learning. 3 ½ years in the greatest seminary and school we can imagine, but Jesus said that wasn't enough. Knowledge is good, but it isn't enough. Training is good, but it isn't enough. The disciples had knowledge and training from the master himself, but it wasn't until Pentecost and the baptism in the Holy Spirit that they really got it. The eyes of their understanding, the eyes of their heart were opened as the Holy Spirit brought it all together for them. "That's what Jesus meant! That's what he was talking about! That's why that was so significant! That's how the pieces of the puzzle fits!" It was the Holy Spirit's anointing and presence and power that made the difference for the disciples and it is and will be the Holy Spirit's power and presence and anointing that will make the difference for us as a church.

A change came. The disciples had courage and determination but it disappeared that night in the garden when Judas and the soldiers came to arrest Jesus and they all ran like frightened children. Peter had courage and determination, but it disappeared that night in the courtyard of the high priest when the servant girl accused him of being one of Jesus' disciples and Peter swore an oath that he wasn't and then he denied Jesus. But on the day of Pentecost, just fifty days after their cowardice, on this day they stood together and with courage and determination and sacrifice, boldly proclaimed that Jesus, the man that had been crucified fifty days before, was both Messiah and Savior and Lord, that he was risen from the dead and had ascended to the father and if the people repented of their sins and called upon him, he would save them from their sin! You talk about a change! Courage! Boldness! They had heard from God by His Holy Spirit. There was power to live, power to witness, power to serve, power to sacrifice, power to even lay down their lives when the time came! What's it gonna take to be the church he has called us to be in 2019? It's going to require spiritual power, the power of the Holy Spirit!

How do we receive this power? The same way they did on that first Pentecost.

"Repent... every one of you, and believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.” Acts 2:38-39

Ask. We need that power. We need that anointing. We need a fresh wind from heaven to blow upon us and fill us. We need that spiritual empowerment now just as they did on the first Pentecost. We can't be his church without his Spirit, without his power. We can't build the church, we can't advance the gospel, we can't be his witnesses, we can't remain courageous and determined and strong, willing to sacrifice, without the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit! We need a Pentecost in 2019. The life of the church, the future of the church, our future depends upon it. What's it gonna take? It's going to require the help of the Holy Spirit. Let's ask for that fresh Pentecost and power today!