

“Taming the Spirit” **Acts 2:1-21**

Any attempt on the part of creatures to tame or control the Creator is a vain undertaking, but that has never stopped us from trying.

In Israel’s early history, the people came to the prophet, Samuel, demanding a king. The Bible tells us this was their way of rejecting the Lord God from being king over them (I Samuel 8:7). It was just like all the other times they had turned their back on the Lord to serve other gods.

The psalmist countered this unfaithful attitude in writing: *“Some boast of chariots, and some of horses; but we boast of the name of the Lord our God”* (Psalm 20:7).

There were those who did their best to turn Jesus around! Peter told Him, “No way you’re going to be killed” (Matthew 16:22).

With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, there was a man by the name of Simon who offered money to the apostles so that they might give him the power to bestow the Holy Spirit on others (Acts 8:18-19).

There was the time when some traveling exorcists, seven sons of the Jewish high priest Sceva, were trying to pronounce the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits. And a man who was possessed of an evil spirit jumped them all and sent them running into the streets, naked and bleeding.

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Never mind those ancient Israelites looking for a king to take over for the Lord God...or Simon Peter...or Simon Magus...or the seven sons of Sceva. Even the faithful leaders of the early church were guilty of trying to control the Spirit of God.

But it didn’t start out that way.

We read in Acts, chapter two and beginning with verse one, that the only one controlling anything on the day of Pentecost was the Lord God. The Spirit descended upon a very unsuspecting crowd.

Slide # 2: Acts 2:1-4 (text displayed on screen)

¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

The movement of the Holy Spirit did not impact lives based upon such things as race, nationality, class or gender.

Slide # 3: Acts 2:8-11 (text displayed on screen)

⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" ¹²Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

But the honeymoon period did not last long. Forget about the movement on Pentecost that was no respecter of persons. Trouble was brewing in Jerusalem, and it had to do with prejudice.

Slide # 4: Acts 6:1 (text displayed on screen)

¹*In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.*

The widows among the Hellenists, or Greek-speaking Jews...Jews who had adopted Greek customs...were being neglected by the Hebraic Jews who most likely spoke Aramaic and were probably more conservative. Luke gives no details about the nature of the rift; just that it occurred, and that when food was distributed to the widows who had no other source of nourishment...some were favored and others were not.

At Pentecost, everyone was amazed at how the Holy Spirit miraculously settled upon everyone, regardless of their apparent differences. Not long after the day of Pentecost, people had settled back into their appointed camps.

This oversight may not have been a conscious effort to “tame” the movement of the Spirit. It probably came as the result of some concluding, “Enough of this one-for-all-and-all-for-one Spirit.”

But hand it to the apostles. They realized this oversight was not pleasing to Christ.

Slide # 5: Acts 6:2-4 (text displayed on screen)

²*So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."*

The apostles would remain as the leading interpreters of Scripture. The apostles would remain as the leading proclaimers of the Good News and leaders in prayer. In other words, they would remain in control of the most prominent ministry responsibilities.

The names of the seven are given in verses 5 and 6. The number seven is not an arbitrary one. It reflects the Jewish practice of choosing seven members to provide oversight to local congregations.

And these seven would “wait on tables”; and they were from among the Hellenists; Greek-speaking Jews. Chief among them was Stephen.

This action gives evidence...

The Spirit of God was about to break out...a-a-a-gain...and no one had a clue.

Slide # 6: Acts 6:8-10 (text displayed on screen)

⁸*Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.*

⁹*Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen,*

¹⁰*but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.*

Taming the Spirit. It was OK for the Spirit to fall on everyone at Pentecost. But when it came to overseeing the ministry of the church...carrying out that which was most important...proclaiming the Gospel...well, certainly only a select few would be endowed by the Spirit for such work.

And yet, the Bible tells us here in Acts, chapter 6, that Stephen...a table-waiting-Hellenistic-Jew...did “great wonders and performed miraculous signs”...and possessed the God-given wisdom to proclaim the Good News to those who were hostile to the Gospel. Consequences did follow. Stephen was martyred, and a great persecution against the church broke out.

Slide #7: Acts 8:1 (text displayed on screen)

¹And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

The apostles remained in Jerusalem...and the rest were scattered. And among those scattered was one named Philip, who had been among the seven chosen to “wait on tables”. The Holy Spirit had more in store for him.

Slide # 8: Acts 8:4-6 (text displayed on screen)

⁴Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. ⁵Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. ⁶When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said.

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The Holy Spirit had no intention of keeping those Greek speaking Jews on the back of the bus, waiting tables. Through the witness of Stephen, the church’s first martyr, and Philip, the church came to understand that the movement of the Spirit is no respecter of persons.

The Spirit moves in places we don’t expect it.

The Spirit moves in people we don’t expect.

The Spirit of God cannot be tamed.

Graduates, where you will go in life is anything but certain. But you are all Christians. You are all filled with God’s Spirit. And the Lord has a plan for you.

It is never easy to discern.

The Spirit of God has gifted you to go places and to do things that will surprise you and surprise those around you.

Don’t underestimate what the Lord will do through you.

Don’t underestimate what the Lord will do in the lives of those around you.

God’s Spirit is never tamed. The apostles and the early church tried for a while, but were unsuccessful; the church and the world are all the better because of their failure.

Learn from their example.

Slide # 9: Acts 8:36-40

³⁶As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" ³⁸And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.