

West Valley Church
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Elemental Faith: Consuming Fire, Part Three

In 218 B.C. the Carthaginian king, Hannibal, stood atop the lofty Col de la Traversette pass in the Alps and looked down upon the mighty Roman Empire, the kingdom he had come to destroy.

Inflamed with hatred and a desire for power, he drove his tattered army down the mountainside. But before his quest for glory could be realized, he had to overcome the last obstacle blocking his path—an enormous rock, wedged into the valley floor that prevented his army's passage. It was impossible to move his chariots and wagons through the pass unless the rock was dislodged and moved out of the way.

Attempts to crack the rock with picks and hammers failed. They tried all kinds of incantations and sacrifices but as you'd guess those produced no results. Desperate and impatient, Hannibal ordered, "Burn it!" His half-dead troops thought he'd lost his mind—you can't burn a rock! Hannibal couldn't be serious.

Nevertheless, within a few hours they had chopped down and collected trees and placed them around the rock to fuel the fire that Hannibal had commanded. When the wood was laid, the soldiers lit the fire and watched in fascination as the flames formed an inferno around the rock. Finally, unable to withstand the heat, the rock yielded with a deafening "CRACK!" heard all the way down the valley. The impenetrable rock had split in two. Hannibal and his army descended upon Rome, and the course of world history was changed forever.

Why the history lesson? Here's why: because God is pursuing *you*; and he will move heaven and earth and all of creation, to be in relationship with you and to restore you to your original potential and purpose. With the fire of his white-hot love and holiness he will consume everything that stands between you and him. If you will relent and submit to his Holy Spirit's fire, the course of your life and history itself will be changed forever.

Next Sunday is the day of Pentecost, and it is the anniversary of the beginning of the Christian Church as recorded in the new Testament Book of Acts—the church that was inaugurated with fire; a fire that can burn in your heart and life and in our church.

Today we are in the third of our series on "fire," concluding our longer-term series called "Elemental Faith." We started this series thirteen weeks ago in March using the biblical metaphor of "earth," to first get a biblical view of ourselves—where

we came from. Then we learned about Jesus by using the biblical metaphor of “water,” concluding on Easter that only Jesus satisfies our deepest thirst. In the next series on “wind” we learned about the Holy Spirit—that He is a distinct part and person of the Trinity, and how He wants to and can work in our lives when we ask him to and let him. Today, we conclude our series on “Fire,” learning about the holiness of God in the person of the Holy Spirit and what he wants to do in us. If you are a follower of Christ—meaning you have put your faith in Him and what he did for you when he died on the cross in your place, and now you live for Him—if you are His follower, then it is important for you to understand about the Fire of God. It will not only help you in knowing how to relate to him, but also in knowing what he wants to do in your life. If you know that, then you can yield your life to him.

We are basing the emphasis of this series on a verse out of Hebrews 12: “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire’.” (Hebrews 12:28-29, niv)

In the previous two Sundays I’ve unpacked quite a bit of what fire represents in the Bible, but that’s only a fraction of what God has to say about his holy fire. If you are the self-motivated kind that wants to study God’s Word, you could get an index or concordance and look up all the references to fire in the Bible and you would learn a great deal. But for everything you would learn, you will find all of it *all fulfilled* in the Book of Acts.

The Book of Acts has sometimes been called “The Acts of the Apostles” because it tells the story about the Apostles and all the actions that they carried out for the sake of the Kingdom of Christ. But that’s a misnomer; it’s not the accurate title. Acts tells about the disciples and the church, to be sure, but they are not the center of the story. The center of the story is the Holy Spirit of God, and Acts is about the Acts or actions of the Holy Spirit, the Fire of God. Here’s what the Bible says: John the Baptist was the guy that God sent ahead of Jesus to prepare the way for him. He did that by calling people to repent of sin so that they can be ready to receive Jesus, and he did that by baptizing in water. John said, “I baptize you with water to show that you have repented, but the one who will come after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Matthew 3:11, gnb) Make note of the fact that Jesus would be the One who would baptize them, or immerse them, or dunk them, in the fire of the Holy Spirit.

After Jesus was crucified for our sins, he was buried in the grave and then three days later he rose from the dead. Then, the Bible says: “For forty days after (Jesus’) death he appeared to (the disciples) many times in ways that proved

beyond doubt that he was alive. They saw him, and he talked with them about the Kingdom of God. And when they came together, he gave them this order: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift I told you about, the gift my Father promised. John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. . . when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:3-5, 8-9, gnb)

So the disciples did just that. They stayed and waited, praying for a week and a half, gathered in an upper room above a home in Jerusalem. While they waited, they took care of a few administrative things—for one, they voted to replace Judas, who if you remember killed himself after he betrayed Jesus. But mostly they continue to wait and to pray. That's when they heard the wind of the Holy Spirit, followed by his presence in the fire. Let's pick up the story there of what happened on Pentecost:

"The day of Pentecost came. The believers all gathered in one place. Suddenly a sound came from heaven. It was like a strong wind blowing. It filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw something that looked like tongues of fire. The flames separated and settled on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to speak in languages they had not known before. The Spirit gave them the ability to do this." (Acts 2:1-4, nirv)

Watch this video: That was on the day of Pentecost. What was it they saw? Flames of fire. What was the fire? The Holy Spirit. The original language of the Scripture indicates that a fire began in the center of the room and then flames divided up out of that fire and rested on the heads of each of them gathered there. This event marked the birth, or the beginning of the Church of believers in Jesus Christ, and it is that same Spirit of Fire that God intends to set on fire in the lives of every one of Christ's disciples to this very day. Have you been baptized with the Holy Spirit and with Fire? If you aren't sure, then the odds are you haven't. But that could change for you today. If you are interested, then pay attention to what God tells you today. (Take your notes out and follow along with us, and pay close attention).

We'll start first by noting that Pentecost was the

1. Fire realization -

Let me explain what I mean by describing what the Day of Pentecost was. "Pentecost" is the Greek word for "fifty." It was called that because it came after the seven week festival called the Festival of Firstfruits, which was a 49 day harvest festival. You'd start with the Passover celebration, then the festival of weeks, then the Feast of Weeks, the culmination, also called Pentecost, ending on

the fiftieth day.

There were three main religious feasts or festivals that every adult male Jew was required to attend according to God's Word in the Old Testament: The feast of Unleavened Bread, or what's been called "Passover," the feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles. For the Jews who lived near Jerusalem, the biggest and most well attended was the feast of Passover, which commemorated the start of their national life and also marked the beginning of their religious calendar. But many Jews had been scattered abroad as a result of centuries of being taken over by foreign countries and sent as slaves to those countries. This was called the "Diaspora" (or "dispersion") and came because of God's punishment against Israel's unfaithfulness centuries before. So for *those* Jews living away from Jerusalem, the most well-attended religious event was the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost. The reason that one was most well-attended by Jews outside Jerusalem was because it took place in what we know as late May or early June. The weather during that time made it the optimal for travelling across the seas and lands to get to Jerusalem from all over. The other holy days took place earlier in the year when weather made it difficult to travel, so the Jews were allowed to recognize those holy days and feasts right where they lived. But for Pentecost they were expected to come from all over the known world to Jerusalem. That's why Pentecost would have had Jews gathered in Jerusalem who spoke different languages, because they had travelled from all parts of the known world. Also, because the feast of weeks started with Passover and ended with Pentecost, it was understood that Pentecost was the end of Passover, so it all culminated then. There was also a tradition among the Jews that the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, commemorated the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. Remember that story? That's when God gave Moses the law by inscribing it into stone with his own finger (Exodus 31:18) That was the same place where Moses first encountered God in the burning bush (Exodus 3). So at the beginning of the community of God's people, Israel, led by Moses, God called Moses with fire in a bush that didn't burn up (remember that God can dwell in our lives without burning us up as well). Then God gave the law by fire inscribed on the rock. All this is really amazing, so stay with me and you'll understand why.

Passover was the event that marked the Jews' deliverance with the sacrifice of a lamb, remember? Its blood was spread over their doorposts of their homes so that the angel of death would Passover their home and spare their children. That was what allowed the Jews to finally be set free from slavery in Egypt and to go to the Promised Land.

Pentecost marked the giving of the Law after that Passover event. The law was the standard by which God's people were expected to live. Passover established and

celebrated the Jew's freedom from slavery to Egypt. Pentecost recognized the giving of the law by which they were to live. Got it?

Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb, was killed and his blood was shed on the day of Passover. Now, in Acts we see that fifty days later on the date that commemorated the giving of the law, the Holy Spirit is given to the disciples. By the Holy Spirit being in their lives, they now had the power to obey and live the law. So the Old Testament Passover was a prophetic event, foreshadowing Jesus' sacrifice so that death wouldn't have any hold on us, setting us free from slavery to sin. The Old Testament Pentecost was a prophetic event, or foreshadowing, regarding the law and our ability to obey it.

Do you see this so far? Most of you, I think, understand what Jesus' death did for you. You simply must put your faith and trust in Him and accept His sacrifice for you. Now, let's see what Pentecost has done for you:

God has always understood that you and I would never be able to obey completely the law. We would always fall short of it. That's what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote in the Bible, "The very command that was supposed to bring life to me, instead brought death." (Romans 7:10, cev) God has always wanted to give us the ability to obey his law, but he knows that's against our nature. We always end up sinning. The Bible says, "So people become enemies of God when they are controlled by their human nature; for they do not obey God's law, and in fact they *cannot* obey it." (Romans 8:7, gnb, italics added) So God needed to give us a *new nature*, a *new character*, a *new spirit*—one that could actually obey the law. That's why he promised, "I'll put my Spirit in you and make it possible for you to do what I tell you and live by my commands." (Ezekiel 36:27, the message)

It's what God has always dreamed of for us. That's why he said, "I will give them (*that's you and me!*) a new heart and a new mind. I will take away their stubborn heart of stone and will give them an obedient heart. Then they will keep my laws and faithfully obey all my commands. They will be my people, and I will be their God." (Ezekiel 11:19-20, gnb)

Again, He promised through the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah: "The new covenant that I will make with the people of Israel will be this: I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people." (Jeremiah 31:33, gnb)

So now you understand why the Bible says in the Book of Acts, "when the day of Pentecost was *fully come*. . ." (Acts 2:1, kjv, italics added) What that means literally is "When the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled". If Jesus was the fulfillment of Passover (right?), then the filling of the fire of the Holy Spirit is the fulfillment of *Pentecost*—when the giving of the law was finally fulfilled.

Do you understand this? Then what does that mean for you? It means that you can now obey God's law. You can be forgiven by Christ for your past sins, and you can be empowered by the Holy Spirit to NOT sin again. IF you will allow the Holy Spirit fire to fill your life.

Now, real quickly, let's see what it was that the Apostles did to prepare themselves for this—in other words, let's see what were the

2. Fire requirements:

First, you must understand that they were already Jesus' disciples. The passage says "when the day of Pentecost reached its fullness, THEY were all together . . ." (Acts 2:1) Who are the "they"? They were the disciples—it's referring to them as listed in the previous chapter. So they are *already Christians*. That's the first requirement: you must be a disciple. You've got to resolve that issue first. Then, notice what they were doing: they were doing what Jesus told them to: to wait. Remember? Jesus said in Acts 1:4-5— "he gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" (niv)

So they were practicing yielded obedience. You've got to demonstrate a desire to obey what Jesus has told you, just like the disciples did. In this case it means you must wait on him. Waiting is not doing other stuff and hoping something happens whenever God might get around to it. Waiting, to God, means that you actively expect him to do what he said he would, even if it doesn't happen right away. And you keep on actively expecting until it does. So when it comes to being filled, if it doesn't happen right away you wait until it does, continuing to pray for it, expecting it, waiting on him.

Now there's one last requirement that I want you to notice: the disciples were all in one place—they had gathered together and were pursuing God's promises together. "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place." (Acts 2:1, niv)

Here's what I believe that means: if you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit, you must be with believers in unity. That means that you've got to be unified with other believers; you must be a part of a group of disciples, committed to Christ with them for God's purposes in that church. You cannot be out on your own as a disciple, doing your own thing apart from other believers. But it also means you can't be causing disunity in the church. If you are a gossip, a negative person, or a sniper (you know what a sniper is, right? Someone who sits a safe distance away shooting at people. That's what you are when you gripe about others). So if you are doing anything that brings disunity in the body, not only you but the rest of us

in this church will not be in unity, and if we want the Spirit to fill us, we've got to be *together* in one place. The Spirit might still fill me, but he won't fill *us*.

I would strongly challenge you, believers in Jesus in the West Valley Church, to be unified, that we all might be filled with the Spirit. Confess and repent of the sin of disunity if you are not in agreement with the Word of God here. Because when we are unified we will see the

3. Fire ***results***:

First, the fire brought about a ***cleansing***. We've talked already in the other messages that fire is a cleansing agent, like burning the dross out of precious metals. That's what the Holy Spirit will do in you. The Apostle Peter, who was with the group of disciples on that day of Pentecost, later said this about that day: "He (God) knows what is in everyone's heart. And he showed that he had chosen the Gentiles, when he gave them the Holy Spirit, just as he had given his Spirit to us. God treated them in the same way that he treated us. They put their faith in him, and he made their hearts pure." (Acts 15:8-9, cev) You and I are the Gentiles!

When God gives you his Spirit, he will cleanse you and make your heart pure. You don't have to operate under the burden and condemnation of sin, nor do you have to keep committing sin. Your heart will be pure. You will have the power to not sin.

That ***power*** is an amazing thing, because you will have more than just power to obey—you will have power to tell others about Jesus and all he's done for them. Jesus said, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power. Then you will tell everyone about me in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and everywhere in the world." (Acts 1:8, cev)

And that was exactly what happened for the disciples: "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak. There were Jews living in Jerusalem, religious people who had come from every country in the world. When they heard this noise, a large crowd gathered. They were all excited, because all of them heard the believers talking in their own languages." (Acts 2:4-6, gnb) When God fills you with His Spirit, you will have power to overcome sin because you will be cleansed of it, and you will have power to tell others about God's love and the Great News of Jesus Christ (and your life will back it up!). Do you want to overcome sin? Do you want to tell others about Jesus? It's going to be tough for you, Christian, until you are filled with the Spirit. How? By being a disciple in prayerfully yielded obedience, unified with his Church. Then God's desire for you from the beginning of time will be fulfilled: you will be filled with fire from the Holy Spirit. That white-hot fire of his holy love for you will crack through the boulders of sin and resistance between you and

him and he will come through and take over. Make no mistake—it is a conquest he is after: all of you or nothing. It's got to be that way. If you let him, he will dramatically alter the course of your life, and even of history through you.

If you want to be filled with the Spirit, come forward and pray:

Are you a disciple?

Are you in yielded obedience?

Are your actions bringing disunity in the body? Confess and repent. Are you unified with the church or just out there doing your own thing? Commit yourself to God's purposes in this church—to the believers in the church together.