

Series: A.D...THE UNFINISHED CHAPTER - May 15, 2011

DON'T TRY THIS ON YOUR OWN!

Acts 1-2, John 14, 16

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1. They're recently discovered the shortest unit of time known to humans. Does anyone know what it is? It's the **honk-o-second**-- the fraction of a milli-second between when a light turns green, and the person in front of you hasn't moved—so you honk your horn. This is not known in undeveloped countries—like Punxsutawney and Timmons.

-This lack of patience is quite strange—especially given where we live. Did you know that the 401 in Toronto is the **busiest highway—i.e. largest parking lot--in North America?** And yet, we are some of the most impatient people on the planet. I know—I'm one of them. Whenever I get stopped or held up, I'm **always** looking for a way to get **around** the blockage.

-But the truth is—sometimes all you can do is **wait**. When you're pregnant, you have to wait. When you send in your income tax forms and you're expecting a return you have to ...**wait!** When a surgeon is unsure about whether you're there for a vasectomy—or tonsillectomy—they have to...**wait**.

-Sometimes God asks us to...**wait**. We'd rather barge ahead. After all--it is easier to ask for forgiveness than permission, right? There's a point where Jesus tells his disciples to **wait**—when you think He'd want them plow ahead. Luke, author of the book of Luke and the book of Acts writes:

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, 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." (Acts 1:1-5 NIV)

- a. Jesus had made it clear to his disciples ever since rising from the dead that **they** would carry on His mission. They would start at the epicentre of it all—Jerusalem—and then move out from there; to Judea, Samaria—and then all the other nations.

-They would be history-makers! World-changers! But He was clear, "Don't try this on your own! Wait for the power of the Holy Spirit!" Now, part of that made **total** sense. Just 40 days before this, in Jerusalem, a hostile crowd had demanded Jesus' crucifixion as an imposter. My guess is that when Jesus said, "Wait!" some of his followers were **glad** to stay hidden!

- b. This was a brand new phase of God's mission—a mysterious phase. People thought that when the Messiah came, all things would be made new and right forever, heaven and earth would be joined—and the Messiah would run the world.

And God **was** going to make all things new—but the Messiah had just left **them**—120 scared, ordinary people to spread the Good News of the Kingdom. To the world. The **whole** world! And that would include the Roman Empire—this massive, bloodthirsty machine that crushed everything in its path!

-I mean, it was clear to Jesus followers that the Messiah **had** to suffer and die and carry the sins of the world. They **knew** that somehow all the nations would be blessed through Jesus, Son of David. They knew that Jesus had defeated Satan and death. They **knew** that the Good News of forgiveness and life they carried had the power to **transform** people—**they'd** been changed. But I'm sure they struggled to see how they could **possibly** fulfill this mission handed to them.

- c. I can't even **imagine** how I would be feeling if I was in that group. But from our perspective now--it's quite clear. The first era of history is dominated by God the Father. Jesus comes, splits history in half—and at the cross conquers Satan and the powers of darkness once for all—and clears the way for his Kingdom. Then **He** goes back to the Father—and sends the Spirit to complete the plan. And it's in that short gap of time between Jesus leaving...and the Spirit coming, that this tiny group of 120 people find themselves. How many of you think their mission seemed **do-able**? "Sure, no problemo! We'll pull this off!" Maybe not.

2. Let's talk about the Holy Spirit—because He is the **Only** One who can do something to/for/in these people to complete the Mission of God. Who **is** He? How many of you find Him a little mysterious? Well, He **always** seems to be bringing life and power wherever He goes.

-The Bible tells us that He was right there at the beginning of everything.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. (Genesis 1:1-2 NIV)

-The Name Spirit, **ruach** in Hebrew, **pneuma** in Greek, means "breath" or "wind." Anyone remember what God did when he created humans? He **breathed** into them the breath—or **ruach** of life. We get that. If someone isn't breathing—they're in deep trouble.

-All through the Old Testament, the **Spirit** is associated with powerful acts, with prophecy of the future, with the changing of hearts. It's clear that when the Spirit gets involved with humans—**powerful, life-transforming things begin to happen.**

- a. In fact, it's when the Spirit descends on Jesus at His baptism that Jesus started his ministry of teaching and healing and casting out demons. God became fully human—and **He** needed the Spirit to do what He did.
- b. One of the things that becomes **very** clear in Jesus' teaching—and all through the Book of Acts is, the Holy Spirit is a **He—a Person**; not an **It—an Impersonal Force**. Listen to what Jesus, Son of God, says:

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you...[T]he Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14:15-17,21 NIV)

-Notice how Jesus refers to the Spirit: As **HE--an Advocate**. You need to know that the Spirit is not the **mist** of God—who oozes around the planet. He is not **the Force!** He is a Person! He teaches, reminds, works, speaks and prevents. Jesus goes on to say:

But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. (John 16:7-11 NIV)

-Now, think about this; how could it **possibly** be a good thing that Jesus **go away?** Apparently, according Jesus—the Spirit can only come if He goes. And the only way Jesus followers will have the power they need—and the only way the world will respond to their message—is if **He comes**.

- c. As you read through the New Testament—something else becomes clear: These disciples have been given the responsibility of teaching the world what Jesus taught them. How will **that** happen? Well, Jesus tells them. He said,

The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14:15-17, NIV)

-This is **cool!** The same Spirit who had been behind the writing of the entire Old Testament—will be behind the completion of the entire library. And **then** the same Spirit who helped write the whole thing would help people understand it!

- d. But the **obvious** reason for Jesus telling His Followers to wait—was that the Holy Spirit was the **only One** who could empower them to pull off what He had

called them to do; fulfill His Mission on this planet and reconcile it's people to God through his blood. It makes sense, doesn't it? That the Spirit who caused Mary to conceive as a virgin, who empowered Jesus to heal everyone who came to Him—and who raised **Him** from the dead—would be the powerhouse behind bringing Heaven and Earth together again under God's leadership.

3. Now, I could go on—but do you **get** why Jesus told his follower to **wait**? With the Spirit's power, the mission was unstoppable. So—they did what they were told to do. The record tells us that on day 10, the Day of Pentecost, a day set aside for the Jewish people to present the first part of their harvests to, God—it happened:

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. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?...Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine." Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet 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. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. (Acts 2:1-8, 12-18 NIV)

-In that split second, 30-something A.D., the Age of the Spirit began. Some in this group remembered when John the Baptist had said, "I baptize you with water; the Messiah will baptize you with the Spirit and with fire."

- a. Now, there are religious groups develop a whole theology out of this scene—which is not helpful. First, notice what these followers of Jesus were doing. They weren't seeking, tarrying, fasting, begging or, to the best of our knowledge, even praying for what happened. They were simply doing what Jesus said to do. Waiting. And notice that the baptism of the Spirit did not descend on them one at a time—starting with the most sincere. This scene was **not** initiated by people; it was initiated by Jesus—and the Spirit baptized or came to dwell within **everyone** that had gathered. This is **not** a model for people who want to be baptized by the Holy Spirit.

-The rushing wind is symbolic of the Spirit; **pneuma**—or breath—or wind. He is the Giver of life. Like the wind, He can't be seen—but you can sure tell when He's around because life flows; things move. The flames of fire are symbolic of

how the Holy Spirit purifies and refines the lives of the people He baptizes and fills.

- b. What is **so** clear in this passage, though, is how the Holy Spirit is **immediately** on mission. He enables Jesus Followers to praise God in all the languages of the people represented in this crowd that's visiting Jerusalem. At first the people are just surprised; then they wonder if they've been partying all night. But as people listen, they recognize their own heart language being spoken supernaturally by at least one of these people.

-Then the Holy Spirit gives Peter the courage and power to speak boldly about what, in fact, is going on. It's a fulfillment of a prophecy made by Joel—that in the last days—the Spirit will be poured out on—men, women, young, old—not just special people. There will be dreams, visions, prophecies—and **power!**

-And then Peter talked about Jesus. He said, "God sent the Jesus, God's Christ—just as He promised. But you **killed** Him! Now, you didn't know what you were doing—and God raised Him from the dead—and He's **still** alive!" And these followers saw something happen that they hadn't even experienced with Jesus. The **Spirit** was at work—connecting **their** message about Jesus—with the hearts of everyone in the crowd!

-Well, people asked what they should do. Peter said:

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of 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 NIV)

-3000 of them did—and were baptized—and the movement of the Spirit grew 20X larger!

- c. The focus in this passage, friends, is **not** the tongues, the languages, the fire—or the ecstasy. See, the take-away, for some, has been that you need to seek and pray for the baptism, and the sign that you've received it will be that you'll speak in tongues. The point of this passage is that, on this day, the Holy Spirit broke down the barriers of language, gender, class, age and country of origin that separate people—and initiated a whole new era in history that day—and broke down the dividing wall of language, gender, class, age, and country of origin.

-Anyone remember what happened at the Tower of Babel thousands of years before?

A rebellious, arrogant society said, "We don't need God! In fact, we will unite against Him and get into the heavens on our own and do it our **own** way!" And **that** was the day that God confused their speech, they spoke different languages—and their unity against God was disrupted. When the Spirit came into the context of **all** these differing languages, the curse was reversed. And

now the Spirit would begin to unite all nations **through** Jesus—to accomplish **God's** mission! Not man's.

-God's original Mission has **always** been to restore shalom, bless all the nations—and bring everyone back to Himself. Jesus made it possible by paying for everyone's sins and offering all people a relationship with the Almighty. And the **Spirit** initiated it by His coming—working through ordinary, flawed people. People like you and me.

- d. And that's precisely what continues through this entire book of Acts. The Holy Spirit forcefully but graciously drives the Good News of Jesus, grace, and forgiveness through every barrier. Remember how Jesus, in his last words to his disciples, had told them how it would work?

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 NIV)

-That's **exactly** how it happened. You find that the Spirit presses the good news in Samaria through Philip. When Peter and John show up and lay hands on these people—the Holy Spirit comes on the whole group. They too speak in other languages—so that everyone will know that Jesus kept his promise. The same thing happens when Peter reaches into the Gentile world through Cornelius' household—and when Paul reaches some disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus.

-What's fascinating as you read this is that these breakthroughs are **not** initiated by the disciples; the **Spirit** is driving this mission—and pushes the Good News right through the prejudices and hang-ups and natural barriers all these people had with each other.

-Know why? Because God wants **everyone** to hear the Good News of Jesus, that God is retaking Planet Earth—and He is going to end all the sorrow, the mess, the disease, the hatred—and bring people back to Himself! Jesus said, “It's a **good thing** I'm going to the Father. Right now, there's just one of Me! When the Spirit comes—there will be an unlimited number of **little Christ's**—with the power of God to make an **amazing** difference! And **that**, friends, is **exactly** what is going on in our world right now!

4. I want to spend a few minutes in closing—talking about this community—The Olive Branch—and the Holy Spirit. We've made it clear that the **driving force behind us** is the Mission of God—the same mission the Holy Spirit initiated with the Church on Pentecost. And that mission is to **seek and save the lost. Every one of them.** The way it works is that when we live out and share the Good News that Jesus has come and is making all things right—the Spirit works **through** us—and prepares the hearts of people to be transformed.

And as we are transformed, we have a **transforming influence on the world.** People are transformed, and through them—organizations, systems, neighbourhoods,

governments, the environment—what they touch is transformed by the power of the Spirit working through us. Let me say it again so it's clear; the Holy Spirit lives in, fills, renews, transforms, works through **people**.

-I think I can say with utmost confidence—the Spirit has **not** changed either in how He works—or in His mission. His mission is **still** to press across the final boundaries to seeing this world and all of it's people come **fully** under the influence of God—i.e., **His** Kingdom come, **His** will be done here on earth like it always is done in heaven.

- a. My suspicion is that some of you may be **scared to death** of the Holy Spirit—mainly because He's been misrepresented by some **very** strange things that go on in religious circles. People say things like, "The Holy Spirit came....!"—and then tell some weird God-story about people falling over, barking, babbling. Does the Spirit sometimes work in strange ways? Yep. But it's because He works in some pretty broken, weird people. **He...the Holy Spirit**—is not the official sponsor of weirdness on this planet!

-When the Spirit came at Pentecost and all of those there spoke in different languages—**it was not about them!** It was about a crowd of people God loved and wanted for himself—so He broke down all the barriers to reach them. It was about the **mission**—not the already gathered!

-And the Spirit of God has not changed his mind about this. He doesn't show up in religious meeting and do strange things, a) so everyone knows He's there and, b) so everyone knows who's spiritual and who's not. The Spirit's work is not about making us feel really, really good. The **Spirit** is about giving us power to be salt and light in a rotting, dark world—**not** about impressing people with how spiritual we are!

- b. Let me say a few things about the Holy Spirit. First, the **baptism** of the Spirit. You are **baptized** in the Spirit when you repent and put your faith in Jesus. He takes up residence in you—and begins to change you and empower you to live for Jesus and carry out His mission. Paul, an early leader, says to the Roman believers that if they **don't** have the Spirit, they don't belong to God.
- c. One of the phrases you see several times throughout the book of Acts, is **full of the Holy Spirit**. What does that mean? How many of you think that when the Spirit gets **poured out**, we have a **Spirit tank**--kinda like a gas tank that's ¼ full, ½ full—or running on empty?

-Well, the Holy Spirit is a **Person**—you can't have just half of Him. You either have Him or you don't. There's a clue in Paul's letter to the Ephesian church:

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit... (Ephesians 5:18 NIV)

When a person is drunk they are under the control of alcohol, right?
When a person is filled with the Spirit—they are under the control of the Spirit.
Know how you can tell? Well, Paul tells us:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23 NIV)

-**That**, friends, is a full-orbed description of love—and Jesus, the most loving person who ever lived. Gifts, like tongues or prophecy or healing are about performance. How a person loves and treats others is a **character** issue—**very** different. Paul contrasts the fruit of the spirit with the **other** side of the equation; the works of the flesh:

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21 NIV)

-The Holy Spirit is the One who is behind the Mission of God going on right now in this world. His power is unbelievable. And the truth is, we can't do **anything** without His power. Anything. It's interesting. Whenever you hear about someone getting off of alcohol or drugs or out of some kind of addictive behaviour—they invariably—especially if they're in a 12-Step program, have to **humble** themselves and say, "I **can't help myself**; I need the help of a **Higher Power!**"

-Even if the people in our world don't know it or won't admit it—the **Spirit** is behind every occasion in this world when generosity wins and greed loses. When slaves get released, and children are snatched out of sex trafficking—He's there. To understand the Spirit—you have to understand that He is **relentlessly** and **forcefully**—yet **gently** moving everything and everyone toward God—toward reconciliation—toward all things—**all things** being made new—toward healing every broken relationship! But mostly, He is moving every heart toward Jesus.

5. I can guarantee one thing this morning. **Everyone** here in this room desperately needs the power of the Holy Spirit. You may not even know it—but you need Him to transform your life—and help you do with your life what you were created to do. You may be smart, competent and gifted—but you **need** the Spirit—whether or not you even believe in Him.

-See, I know this—we were **created** to have the Holy Spirit fully alive in us—transforming us, giving us life, helping us make decisions, comforting us, giving us power to love and to do what's right. But the Bible makes it clear that we humans have the power to **totally** put Him off and shut down His work in us when he is desperately trying to draw us into the power and blessing of God.

*We can **blaspheme** Him. This is the worst of them all—and it means that we can attribute his word to the Devil. It's one of the most spiritually disastrous things we can do.

*We can **resist** the Holy Spirit. See, the Spirit is always drawing us toward change; toward transformation.

He wants us to repent, to live with love and kindness and generosity—and forgive people who have hurt us. And we can just put our hand in His face; “I don’t **think** so!”

*We can **insult** the Spirit. We do this when we receive grace and mercy and forgiveness—and, like a pig going back to the mud, we don’t just go **back** and wallow in the mud, snack on it and smear it all over our bodies!

*We can **quench** the Spirit. We do this when we use Him or talk about Him a lot to make ourselves look super-spiritual—to meet some inner need for attention and status. Another way to do this is just shut down anything that seems supernatural—mainly because **we** want to be in control and can’t control **Him**. This has been done a **lot**.

*And, we can **grieve** the Holy Spirit. When we willingly put or indulge in bitterness and grudges; when we refuse to forgive; when we are hard-hearted toward those who are in need or oppressed; when we are selfish and arrogant and critical and judgmental—it **grieves** the Spirit—because it contradicts all He stands for. In some ways, He turns His back in disgust and sadness—and walks away. I’ll tell you—you **don’t** want that!

-The alternative—is to live with an open heart—and open arms—where the Spirit of God is welcomed in—every day. Where He is free to point out what needs to change; where we welcome Him into our minds to change our thinking and transform the way we treat people, the way we think about money and stuff; the attention we need, the praise we need. And open heart is one that says, “I’m just a little kid, God. That’s the truth about me. I don’t want to live in self-protective mode.

I want to be with you—where you are—**whatever it takes. Do what you need to do!** And I will fully, **fully** cooperate!

Q & A

I don’t know what this looks like this morning; but I want to invite us, both as a community—**and** as individuals—to throw our hearts open to the Holy Spirit. Would you join me—let’s let go of the garbage, resistance, the grudges—and **invite** Him in. The Mission is the same—and we **need** Him!