

The Purpose Of Pentecost

by Todd Atkinson

This sermon on Pentecost Sunday emphasizes the significance of the church calendar in retelling the story of God's redemption through Jesus Christ. It delves into the life of Stephen, the first martyr in the Christian church, showcasing his unwavering faith and fullness of the Holy Spirit amidst intense opposition and rage. The message encourages believers to seek a deeper experience of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives, focusing on heavenly realities and the exaltation of Jesus, just as Stephen did.

Scripture: Acts 6:5, Acts 7:55, Romans 8:31, Ephesians 5:18, Acts 2:4, Acts 7:59, Acts 7:60, 1 Corinthians 6:19, John 14:16, Acts 2:38

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Faithfulness in Trials"

Description

This sermon on Pentecost Sunday emphasizes the significance of the church calendar in retelling the story of God's redemption through Jesus Christ. It delves into the life of Stephen, the first martyr in the Christian church, showcasing his unwavering faith and fullness of the Holy Spirit amidst intense opposition and rage. The message encourages believers to seek a deeper experience of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives, focusing on heavenly realities and the exaltation of Jesus, just as Stephen did.

Transcript

Well, good morning everyone out there watching online. What a great privilege to be able to bring God's Word to you on Pentecost Sunday. One of the great purposes of the church is the making of disciples, and one of the greatest tools at our disposal for disciple making is the church year or the church calendar.

I don't think this should surprise us. In the Old Testament, God instituted an annual cycle of feasts that retold the story of his dealings with his people and of his covenant with them. And in a very similar way, the New Testament tells the great story of God's redemption through his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And when the church retells that story every year through the church calendar, we enter more fully into that story and we become more like Jesus who is the very focus of that story. And so at Advent, we recall the birth of our Lord, which made possible our spiritual new birth. At Epiphany, we are reminded of a mission of our Lord, which has become our very own mission.

In Lent through Good Friday, we reflect on our Lord laying down his life for us, and we, in turn, offer ourselves back to him. In the Easter season, we enter into the Lord's mighty resurrection. Forty days after the resurrection, we recall the ascension of our Lord to the right hand of the Father, and our hearts and

our minds are lifted to him in heavenly places.

And at Pentecost, ten days after the ascension, the gift of the Spirit came from heaven. And here we remember that our Lord lived his earthly life full of the Spirit. Scripture says that he lived in the power of the Spirit and that he was led by the Holy Spirit.

At Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit was sent to the church so that we might become like Jesus in this way and also be full of the Holy Spirit. So the question I want to put before us today is this. What difference does this gift of the Spirit make in your daily lives as Christians? Some of you may have experienced a powerful presence of God in the service at some time, and you attributed that to the Holy Spirit, and you were right.

Others may have experienced a gift of the Spirit. Perhaps you received a word of encouragement for someone or from someone, and you saw that as the work of the Spirit, and you were right. And perhaps there was an occasion where you felt a very clear sense of leading or direction from the Lord, and you attributed that to the leading of the Spirit, and again, you're right, it was.

But I want for us to consider a story in the early church which might show us a grander vision of the Holy Spirit. A Spirit that is not just with us on rare occasion, but a Spirit who is with us daily, a Spirit who is with us hourly, a Spirit who is with us in the daily affairs of life. And so this morning we're going to look at the life of Stephen.

The first martyr in the Christian church. We first hear about Stephen in Acts chapter 6, where he is known by his community as a man full of faith in the Holy Spirit. Stephen is then made one of the very first deacons in the early church, and from the moment that the apostles laid their hands on him and appointed him to this task, the power of the Lord was flashing through his life.

This deacon, who started with waiting on tables, shortly became an anointed preacher of the gospel. When Stephen proclaimed Jesus to his own people, the Jewish people, some no doubt received this message with joy, but the Bible tells us that others were furious at his preaching. He went through the Old Testament history, and he showed them that they had a destructive self-repeating cycle, that when God sent messengers to his people that they weren't always well received.

And so in his sermon Stephen shows them Acts chapter 7 verse 9, how that they were jealous of Joseph and sold him to Egypt. Verse 35, how they rejected Moses. How verse 52, how they persecuted the prophets that God sent, and in the end how they put Jesus himself to death.

Have you ever tried to help someone see that they have a destructive and self-repeating cycle at work in their lives? Well, how did that go for you? My experience has been that if they want to see it, if they're at a stage of life where they are ready to see it, then they'll be mostly grateful if the right person says it to them and in the right manner. But if you're showing them a cycle that they categorically don't want to see or afraid to see, it can make them very angry. And Acts 7 tells us that this was the case with Stephen's congregation.

That when he preached to them, it says they were more than angry, they were enraged. The word here literally means to be sawn through. It's talking about deep anger at the very deepest level.

It means anger to the point of rage. Scripture also says that they ground their teeth at him. This means they looked at him like a pack of animals would look at a prey.

I mean, this is severe anger. Have you ever experienced a really angry person or been in a really angry situation? Well, it's not my favorite place to be because really angry people are unpredictable. You don't know what they'll do and you never know how far they will go.

Really angry people are irrational. They genuinely believe that their way of seeing things is the only possible way of seeing things. And really angry people are adversarial.

They don't look for win-wins. The person they're angry with becomes their enemy and the goal is destruction, whether to destroy a reputation, to destroy self-esteem, to destroy their future, to destroy their family. Anger seems to know no bounds.

And our world, sadly, at this present moment is seething with anger. From violence in the Middle East to the cancel culture of North America, anger in every form seems to be on the rise. An article I recently came across said, and I quote, our contemporary culture, our contemporary moment, excuse me, is a culture of meanness.

A few years before that article, the New York Times published an article entitled The Culture of Nastiness. A psychological journal I saw this week used similar language, but they referred to it as a culture of bullying. I'm not terribly familiar with TV, but I like watching the news feed each day.

And this last week, Ellen DeGeneres, I hope I'm saying her name, came up. She's the most popular daytime show in the US. She has recently retired.

It was a popular show, won 61 Daytime Emmy Awards at its height, had 2.6 million viewers each episode. But she cites that one of her reasons for retiring is because of this present culture. She says it's a culture now where people are just mean, where no one can make mistakes, where you can't learn and grow, which is, as human beings, what we're here to do.

And the word that she used at the end is that she said she felt destroyed by this culture. What is interesting about Stephen in this story is that he faced so much anger than Ellen has ever faced, or I've ever faced, and probably the majority of you have ever faced. And yet he didn't feel destroyed.

He didn't feel crushed, and he didn't even feel disheartened by it. He's with a level of anger, of rage that is against him, seething destructive tendencies directed against him. And yet the Bible says that his face in the midst of this was like the face of an angel.

And if we were to ask him, Stephen, how could you be so calm? How could you be so serene? When facing that level of rage, his answer was found in chapter 7 verse 55. But he, full of the Holy Spirit. Stephen wasn't even there on the day of Pentecost.

But those who were there on the day of Pentecost received the gift of the Holy Spirit so fully, and taught their people, the converts that were to come to Christ after that, they taught them to expect and believe and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And here's one of those converts, wasn't there on the day of Pentecost, but he had received the gift of the Holy Spirit as fully as anybody who was present. Let's unpack that.

What does it mean that in this setting, full of rage, he was full of the Holy Spirit? Well, it means that Stephen is facing the very worst in human nature, but he isn't facing it alone. He's not alone. The Holy Spirit of God is with him.

And not simply in theory. No, the Holy Spirit is strongly with him in a way that is making a marked difference in his life. A real difference.

Some of us may experience the Holy Spirit in the service, but we might go out to life after that. And life might be tough. Life could be hostile.

Life could be tumultuous. And do we bring the Holy Spirit with us? Do we experience the Holy Spirit in the midst of that tumult like we did in the midst of a service? This is precisely why the Holy Spirit was sent. That the presence of Christ would be with his people day in and day out and when it matters the most.

And I might add, God is not with Stephen just a little bit. He's not with him barely. He's with Stephen fully.

That's the word. He is said to be full of the Holy Spirit. The word here means to be completely occupied by something.

It means to be in a state of abounding. What a testimony. Full of the Holy Spirit.

And notice how the Holy Spirit was affecting Stephen. He was directing his attention heavenward. The Bible says and full of the Holy Spirit he gazed into heaven.

Notice they're in the same verse. There's a relationship between the first part of that verse and the second part. What we might call a causal relationship.

The cause is the Holy Spirit. The effect is he gazed into heaven. His focus was not on the rage.

It wasn't on the opposition. It wasn't on the difficulties. It wasn't on the tribulation he was facing.

His focus was on heaven and it was the Holy Spirit that was directing his focus there and that is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives every day. He is present. He is with us and if we will hear him he will always be directing our attention heavenward to where our Lord is ascended and exalted.

In fact his attention wasn't even just on heaven but it was into heaven. Scripture says that he gazed into heaven. He gazed into another reality.

A reality that is over and above our reality. The reality that we know as heaven. Stephen gazed into heaven as one would look behind a curtain and it was the Holy Spirit pulling back the curtain for Stephen to see.

This beloved is what the Holy Spirit does. He takes heavenly truth and he makes it personally true to you because what he saw about Jesus was true all along. This has been true of Jesus since his ascension but on this moment the Holy Spirit ministers that truth to Stephen.

He reveals it on a personal level to Stephen. He takes the truth of God and lets you see it for yourself. Let's you apprehend it.

Let's you assimilate it and make it your own. Nothing could have encouraged Stephen more in this situation than this vision of his Lord. And so the Holy Spirit showed him Jesus.

He showed him an ascended Jesus. He showed him a victorious Jesus. He showed him an enthroned Jesus.

Beloved a church full of the Holy Spirit is always going to be a church focused on Jesus and especially on his exaltation. A church full of the Holy Spirit is always going to have a high view of Jesus. A church full of the Holy Spirit is a church captivated by Jesus.

A church full of the Holy Spirit isn't focused, consumed by the things of this world. It's not preoccupied by the tribulations of life. A church full of the Holy Spirit is a church that is preoccupied with heavenly realities, heavenly truths that make a difference in the midst of earthly tribulation.

Normally when Jesus is referred to as being at the right hand of the Father, Jesus is spoken of as sitting there. Sitting at the right hand of the Father. Yet as the Holy Spirit enables Stephen to gaze into heaven and see Jesus, in this instance Jesus isn't sitting but he is standing.

What should we make of all this? Well first of all it's important to clarify that Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father isn't a statement about his eternal posture. He doesn't spend all of eternity in a single fixed position. Stay there.

Stay seated. That's not what's being conveyed by these verses. He's the God of the universe but you've got to stay seated there.

That's not what's being conveyed. Rather it's a theological statement that Jesus has completed his work. He has won his victory which makes the seated position a position of rest and a position of rule.

Kings are seated in thrones. Monarchs are seated from their place of rule. However there is something interesting happening in this story because the word stand is used three times.

Chapter 6 verse 9 it is said that the people Stephen is preaching to it says that they rose up and that word literally means to stand up and in this instance it means to stand against. They're standing up. They're standing against what he is saying.

Standing against Stephen. The very next verse it says that they were trying to withstand. Withstand Stephen's sermon.

Same root in that word. It means to stand against or to resist. So there are so many forces are literally standing against Stephen and on this moment when the Holy Spirit lifts his gaze to heaven do you know what he sees? The ruler of the whole cosmos is standing for him and suddenly all the people standing against him seem like nothing now.

Now it doesn't count so much because when the God of the universe is standing up for you then not all the people in the world who stand against you could prevail over that. Scripture says if God be for us who can be against us and I think that at some level we all believe that but the Holy Spirit takes that truth and he makes it pop. He brings it home.

He opens Stephen's eyes and let him see that glory is true for himself. That the Lord of glory was standing up for him. What courage must have filled his soul.

Oh for a filling of the Holy Spirit for every one of us. Jesus told his disciples lo I will be with you always and we take it on faith but you know what the Holy Spirit wants to do? He wants you to enter into that truth. He wants you to appreciate that promise every day to lay hold of that lo I will be with you always.

And so so many years ago when I heard stories about revivals amongst over nations it just absolutely captured me. Nothing wrong with that. Nothing more I wanted to see than that.

But what I've noticed over the last 35 years is one of the greatest ministries of the Holy Spirit to me is he has taken the truth of Jesus and made it mine. I haven't seen a whole nation changed by revival yet but I've seen this heart changed again and again and again and the truth that I preach is my truth. Paul who writes the epistles he used this phrase he calls the gospel my gospel.

Now when he says my gospel he didn't mean it originated with him. It's the gospel of God given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ but when he said my gospel because that message was written in his soul. That's what the Holy Spirit does.

Moves us beyond propositional truth and into the personal appropriation of truth. Where truth gets in us and owns us and defines us. Eternal truth becomes personal and intimate.

What a wonderful Holy Spirit. So when I first heard lo I'll be with you in faith as we ought to but over the years it is a living reality in my life every day thanks to the Holy Spirit. Oh so many things I'd like to teach you about the Holy Spirit.

There's a second possible reason that Stephen sees his Lord standing and that may be to welcome him home. Stephen was cast out of the city and later stoned to death but he died as he lived um was the first thing that is ever said about Stephen in scripture. A man full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit.

He died like that. He died as he lived full of faith full of the Holy Spirit and focused on his ascended Lord. Therefore his death was in so many ways like the death of Jesus.

Not a defeat but a victory. So I want to call you today to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit afresh. To live as your Lord before you lived in the power of the Spirit.

Being full of the Spirit. Being led by the Spirit and to follow Stephen's example and in our day to be a church full of faith and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Before we start here I'd like to give you a moment to pray. The question in front of us these days is what is the Holy Spirit wanting to be to us in this hour? I thank God for all the ways in which you have experienced the Spirit in the past but I found that the way into more of the Spirit is not to look back and ask that he would repeat what he used to do for you as much as to ask him what does he want to do now? What does he want to be to you now? I thank God for the gifts you've received in the past. Beautiful life-giving gifts but behold he stands at the door of our heart and knocks and there are now gifts of the Spirit to receive.

Which will introduce you to new ministries of the Spirit. And new encounters with you. You who do truly and earnestly repent of your sins are reconciled and at peace with your neighbor and intend to lead the new life following the commandments of God and walking from henceforth in his holy ways.

Draw near with faith and make your humble confession to Almighty God. Right now right in your house please take a moment for private confession and it may be appropriate today to confess where we have tried to live on our own steam. Out of our own self-sufficiency where we haven't lived life leaning upon the Spirit of God.

Take a moment to pray. Now together let us make our confession. Most merciful God we confess that we have sinned against you in thought word and deed by what we have done and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves we are truly sorry and we humbly repent for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ. Have mercy on us and forgive us that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways to the glory of your name. Amen.

Almighty God our heavenly Father who in his great mercy has promised forgiveness of sins to all those who sincerely repent and with true faith turn to him have mercy upon you. Pardon and deliver you from all your sins confirm and strengthen you in all goodness and bring you to everlasting life through Jesus Christ our Lord. If you'll receive from Christ the full absolution of your sins then together we proclaim If you'll receive from Christ the full absolution of your sins then together we proclaim Thank you for you Thank you for you O Spirit Your presence We all go for you We all go for you No one knows No one knows That you only are That you only are One Our hearts set along these isles The sea of angels In your presence there is hope For the blessed you lead In your presence there is peace For the restless In your presence there is joy For the broken In your presence there is grace For the fallen In your presence there is hope For the hopeless In your presence there is peace For the restless In your presence there is joy For the broken In your presence there is grace For the fallen So open heaven's door Let your glory fall upon These hearts set along these isles We desire to see your presence We long for you Your sons and daughters Come meet with us We will dance, we will sing In the presence of our King We are free, we belong In the presence of our King We'll shout, we'll pray We'll shout, we'll pray So open heaven's door Let your glory fall upon These hearts set along these isles We desire to see your presence I pray that in the name of your blessed son Jesus Christ I pray that your Holy Spirit Be poured out upon our people Right now in their living rooms Their bedrooms, their kitchens I ask that the fire of heaven Would separate like tongues And it would descend upon everyone Lord I pray that you would make us Into your very dwelling place A place where the fire of your presence Burns perpetually day and night Come upon us this morning Pour out the gift of your spirit That you did at the beginning That we might have faith as they did Devotion as they That we might be a witness as they were And that the eyes of our hearts Would be continually fixed Upon our exalted Savior Lord light the beacons Light the cathedrals That from them your presence will shine And light up the darkness Beloved the ascended Lord be with you Lift up your hearts Let us give thanks to the Lord our God Holy and gracious Father In your infinite love You made us for yourself And when we had sinned against you And become subject to evil and death You in your mercy sent your only Son Into the world for our salvation By the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary He became flesh and dwelt among us In obedience to your will He stretched out his arms upon the cross And offered himself once for all That by his suffering and death We might be saved By his resurrection he broke the bonds of death Trampling hell and Satan under his feet As our great high priest He ascended to your right hand in glory That we might come with confidence Before the throne of grace On the night that he was betrayed Our Lord Jesus Christ took bread And when he had given thanks He broke it and he gave it to his disciples Saying take, eat This is my body Which is given for you Do this in remembrance of me Likewise after supper Jesus took the cup And when he had given thanks He gave it to them saying Drink this all of you For this is my blood of the new covenant Which is shed for you and for many For the forgiveness of sins Whenever you drink this Do this in remembrance of me We celebrate the memorial of our redemption Oh Father in this sacrifice Of praise and thanksgiving We offer you these gifts Sanctify them by your word and Holy Spirit To be for your people the body And the blood of your son Jesus Christ Sanctify us also That we may worthily receive this Holy Sacrament And be made one body with him So that he may dwell in us and

we in him In the fullness of time Put all things in subjection under your Christ And bring us with all your saints Into the fullness of your heavenly kingdom Where we shall see our Lord face to face All this we ask through your son Jesus Christ By him and with him and in him In the unity of the Holy Spirit All honor and glory is yours Almighty Father Now and forever Christ our Passover Lamb Has been sacrificed Once for all Upon the cross And so may the blood of the Lamb Atone for all our sins Known and unknown That we may stand pure And unadulterated in his sight Amen

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/4QB4Sg4KSGU.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/todd-atkinson/the-purpose-of-pentecost/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net