

Jesus Sends the Holy Spirit Just as Promised

Acts 2:1-21 • 2020-05-31 • Pentecost Sunday



Lupita grew up in Kenya. For her high school, the concept of prom was a new idea. But she joined the student committee which was helping to organize the first prom ever for their school. She worked hard to make it happen and helped to organize the prom for the school. She even worked hard to design and make her own red dress. She was excited that she had a date with a young man at her school who she liked. Finally, after all the planning and work she wore her brand-new dress, showed up at the school, made sure everything was all set for the prom, and then waited for her date to show up. And she waited. And she waited. He never came. No excuses, no apology. He just decided not to show up. She was stood up. You might recognize her full name, Lupita N'yongo. She moved on in life and ended up famous. She has starred in several recent blockbuster movies from Star Wars to Black Panther. But she still remembers the time someone stood her up many years ago. When you are stood up by someone you aren't just left hanging in the cold; you are left alone with no real excuse or apology. That's why it is such a destructive feeling when someone doesn't come through for you. You feel belittled and unimportant. It may happen in the business world, the dating world, or with your friends. What about with spiritual matters and with our God? The Christian is someone who waits on God's promises. And there may be times when it might start to feel like God might fail to come through a promise. But today we see why we'll never have to worry about God backing out on and leaving us stood up. On Pentecost we share the incredible message that God always comes through on his promises.

Excitement filled the early church in the days right after Easter. You get a good glimpse of it when you look at how they reacted to the resurrection of Jesus. All the believers were filled with excitement as Jesus appeared for a period of forty days. We are told during this time they all gathered and constantly were joining in prayer at their home and in the temple courts. Life would never be the same. God had kept the promise of sending the Messiah and raising him to glory.

But they were waiting for one more especially important event. God had made an appointment with them. Before he ascended and left them visibly, Jesus had said, "Don't leave Jerusalem, but wait..." So, they waited in the city. Jesus didn't say exactly how long they were supposed to wait. He only said, "only a few days." God had promised something mysterious and wonderful. But it required waiting for his time.

Waiting is never easy, not even for just a few days. Do you think the disciples might have wondered, "How long are we supposed to just wait?" We get impatient when someone is five minutes later than expected. Jesus had left and the days passed. Was God running late? Day two, then three, and all the way to nine passed by. Should they continue waiting?

Waiting can wear on us. Certainly, the world isn't particularly good at waiting for the Lord. After all, at the very beginning of this world the Messiah was prophesied to come. How many years did it take before the world grew tired of waiting for him? Only a few years and some already gave up on waiting for the promised Savior to be born. They assumed God wouldn't keep that promise and forgot about it. Even Jesus' disciples can grow tired of waiting. His resurrection was prophesied to be on the *third day*. Couldn't Thomas have kept up his hopes and eagerly awaited the third day? Could the disciples gathered after Easter have begun to wonder how long they'd need to wait. Perhaps some began to wonder not just "how long until he keeps his appointment?" but to wonder "will he?" I don't know. But I suspect even the short few days were very anxious days for those who were waiting.

Thank God that he always keeps all his appointments. And when he acts decisively and swiftly. *When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the rushing of a violent wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw divided tongues that were like fire resting on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.*

God had come and kept his appointment with them on the day of Pentecost. There was no mistaking it. Though no wind was there, the sound of a violent wind came from heaven—a sound thousands around them heard. It was the announcement that the Lord was present to fulfill his appointment. You could not see or feel him, but he had come. There also appeared something which it seems was hard to fully describe. Something which appeared like tongues of fire divided and rested upon all the believers. God gave a visible sign that he was present to keep his appointment.

Firstly, notice how they didn't wait alone. They were all together in one place. It is never a good idea to try to wait alone on the Lord. When you are alone there is no one to encourage and remind you of God's promises. When you are alone you can't easily encourage others to hold to God's promises. The believers were gathered for encouragement and to join in prayer. God has always desired that his people gather for spiritual encouragement and support.

And even if we must wait alone, we know now that God won't ever abandon us. He doesn't overlook anybody. The tongues like fire came to each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Look at our bulletin cover art for today. We don't know in what manner the believers were gathered or exactly where in Jerusalem they were gathered. We have a general number of around 120 men, but we don't know the precise number there. We don't even know what gesture they used while praying. But this picture captures what took place. You'll notice the artist, Chris Higham, depicted

an undetermined number, and it included young and old, men and women, all the believers. *“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.”*

And since that day he has never failed in keeping his appointment with us all. God sends his Spirit to every believer. *You have the Holy Spirit.* Yes, God had poured out his Spirit on his prophets in the past. But now the Spirit fills each one of us. The Holy Spirit was promised and given to each one of us when we came to faith in Jesus. When you were baptized into the Triune God; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, God says you received the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:28-39) John the Baptist pointed to Jesus pouring out his Spirit to all believers. And you are included in Joel’s prophecy which we read earlier. All the Church has the Holy Spirit and is filled with that same Spirit. It doesn’t matter whether your faith is weak or strong, you have the Spirit along with every other believer. Paul even wrote the spiritually struggling believers in Corinth reminding them, *“Don’t you know that the Holy Spirit is in you?”* God doesn’t hold back. He has promised and he delivers. He sends his Spirit and pours out his Spirit abundantly to every believer.

Finally, the Spirit comes with a purpose. He comes to encourage and equip every believer for their divine task. The immediate task at hand was for the believers at Pentecost was to spread the gospel. God has told his disciples, *“You will be my witness... to the ends of the earth.”* Notice being filled with the Holy Spirit didn’t show itself in convulsions, or gibberish, or other nonsense. The Spirit came for a reason. He equipped them. *“They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, since the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak fluently.”*

The disciples were a part of God’s great plan. They had asked Jesus, *“Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”* They hadn’t fully understood yet how God’s restoration had begun. Jesus has already won the day and defeated his enemies. He was already restoring the kingdom as the disciples trusted in him. The kingdom of God would continue to grow, and they were part of it. When they shared the message of Jesus that day the Lord added 3000 to his kingdom. The Lord did it and he received the credit. But he chose to use his people to bring that about.

Some believers might look at all this Pentecost fulfillment and wonder, *“How do I know if I have been given the Spirit like these believers?”* And to be sure many Christians have wasted away a life of doubt and wondering *“Why can’t I see visions or have some miraculous sign?”* God didn’t just give the Spirit to amaze and wow people. He gave the Spirit and sent the miraculous signs that accompanied the outpouring of the Spirit for a purpose: to equip his people to carry his message to everyone.

You see, we have all received the highest calling and purpose. We are called to get the gospel message of Jesus out to others. And we have this appointment put on our life calendars by God every moment. Our appointment? It’s with the whole world. It began with the first Pentecost. To fail to see that noble calling is to leave the world out in the cold. God hasn’t stood us up. But have we ever stood up a neighbor or friend who does not have the Spirit and needs to hear of the promises of Jesus?

Thanks to God he has already kept his appointment with us. God has kept his appointment for every one of us. He had promised this whole world a Savior would be born to destroy the devil. His promise of a Messiah went out from Israel to all nations. The Holy Spirit worked through the prophets to proclaim this message to all. And God kept that promise by sending his Son in the flesh. He kept that appointment as Jesus said, *“I must go to Jerusalem.”* There he waited for the longest appointment in history. The soldiers to come and arrest him. And he kept his promise to destroy sin and death by his death on the cross. He showed that promise kept by his resurrection on the third day. And spreads the Word of his forgiveness and eternal life by sending us his Spirit still today.

How long would the small gathering of 120 or so believers at Jerusalem have lasted if God had not kept his appointment with this Church? On their own, they would have slowly decreased in number. Their message would have been lost in the jumble of religious teachings of this world. Christians would probably be limited to some isolated island of people in some remote corner of the earth. You and I wouldn’t be here. Because like the people did at Babel, we would soon forget all the promises of God. In sin we would have quickly despaired of his keeping of any promise and forgotten all his promises fulfilled. We would not only have been stood-up by God, but we ourselves would be unable to trust God. We would remain forever his enemies –doomed to hell. This is a day to never forget! On Pentecost Sunday we celebrate the reason why we’ll never have to wonder if God has kept what he promised.

Don’t ever think God might fail to keep his promises. Continue to gather with others and encourage them. Because God has one more appointment to keep. Our time of waiting remains in a sense. We know that we are living in what the prophet Joel aptly called, *“the last days.”* We are living in those last days as we wait. Jesus said, *“I will come back.”* He will return as judge and as deliverer. He will welcome us into his eternal kingdom of glory. The waiting will forever be ended.

Until Christ returns, we remember how he has kept all his previous appointments. God will never fail to come through on his promises. And so, we will gather in his name until the sky grows dark on the day of judgment, a *“great and glorious day of the Lord.”* Until then we can gather in his name and with his Spirit. We say with confidence along with every believer: May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.