

ACTS OF HEAVEN

ACTS OF HEAVEN: PRESENCE VS. PROGRAMS

In *Week 1* of our series we discovered the true meaning behind the word Jesus chose for Church, "Ekklesia". This was not merely a safe spiritual gathering but a world-changing force!

This week we will learn that Jesus has truly **EMPOWERED** His church to be His representatives on earth as it is in heaven. We have been given the **AUTHORITY** of the King to enact His will upon the earth. This is why we put our hope, not in programs, but in the Presence of God!

Let's briefly talk about Authority:

18 "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

19 "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them," (Matthew 18:18-20).

When we operate in this authority, God shows up! When God shows up, heaven invades earth and we "Heavenize" this world! What would it look like if we welcomed the **MANIFEST PRESENCE** of God into our homes, schools, and offices? What is the difference between His presence and His manifest presence? What does it mean to be empowered by His presence? And how exactly do we walk in the authority Jesus has given to us to make a kingdom impact to this world? This morning we will be answering these questions and wrestling with ourselves as to whether or not we are living in this kingdom reality.

First let's define the word Manifest. Manifest simply is when something is made clear or obvious to the eye or mind. So if God's presence is made manifest it is clear or obvious to the eye or mind. With that understanding, you might be wondering, is there ever a time when God isn't manifest and yet still present? A great resource I found to help us understand this idea of God's presence comes from our trusted friends at the Bible Project. They write,

God's omnipresence is His attribute of being everywhere at once. He is omnipresent even when we do not experience His presence; He is here, even if we do not recognize Him. God's manifest presence is, of course, His presence made manifest—the fact that He is with us is made clear and convincing.

God's omnipresence applies to each Person in the Trinity: the Father (Isaiah 66:1), the Son (John 1:48), and the Holy Spirit (Psalm 139:7-8). The fact that God is omnipresent may or may not result in a special experience on our part. However, God's manifest presence is the result of His interaction with us overtly and unmistakably. It is then we experience God.

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We see this concept of God's manifest presence throughout the Bible as well. In Exodus 3, God the Father spoke to Moses in the burning bush. When I first started attending NHCO and began serving the Lord, my prayer was that God would reveal himself to me like he did to Moses in the burning bush. I didn't want to simply accept God just as omnipresent. As awesome as this truth is, I want to experience HIS MANIFEST PRESENCE! God was always with Moses, but then, in Exodus 3, God chose to manifest Himself, God showed up! Turn to your neighbor and say, God showed up. When God shows up, powerful things happen!

Jesus made Himself manifest through the Incarnation. John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." And, on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was manifest to the believers in the upper room. This is what we will camp out on this morning. If you have your bibles, open them up to Acts 1, I will begin to read from verse 3 and it will come up on the screen:

"After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking about the Kingdom of God. While he was with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise. 'Which,' he said, 'you have heard me speak about; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days' " (Acts 1:3-5 HCSB).

Let's stop here for a moment. Because what Jesus is commanding them to do, not just recommending, but commanding them, is to wait and receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is not something we talk about often in church today because it can be highly debated. But, if Jesus commands the disciples to receive this, can we all agree it's important? Amen?

Here in this passage Jesus mentions two different Baptisms - "for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit". If we look throughout scripture, we would find there are three baptisms that are mentioned.

3 Baptism

- Baptism of John repentance - prepare to encounter the Lord (water)
- Baptism of Jesus - public declaration of following the Lord (water)
- Baptism of Holy Spirit (self empowerment and to disciple nations)

Don't take my word for it. Let's look at an account in the word talking about these various baptisms. This story is found in Acts 19.

¹ "While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior regions and came to Ephesus. He found some disciples ² and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

"No," they told him, "we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

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³ "Then what baptism were you baptized with?" he asked them.

"With John's baptism," they replied.

⁴ Paul said, "John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people that they should believe in the One who would come after him, that is, in Jesus."

⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began to speak in other languages and to prophesy. ⁷ Now there were about 12 men in all"(Acts 19: 1-7 HCSB).

Now, let's go back to Acts 1 and jump down to verse 8 which where Jesus speaks about this Baptism of the Holy Spirit. He says,

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8 HCSB)."

Remember, Jesus' commissioned his disciples to make disciples of all Nations (Matthew 28:16-20), and clearly his method of being with them and empowering them to do this was through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:8 tells us that you will receive power.

Four different Greek words are used in the Bible to represent the English word power. The word used in verse 8 is Dunamis. Of those words, dunamis is the most prevalent. It is used 117 times in the New Testament and has a distinct meaning apart from the other three power words. Dunamis represents the kind of power flows from a person to give them the ability to do supernatural things, like miracles or morally excellent acts of service.

This power is the same power that cast out demons, saw people healed like the woman with a long history of bleeding who touched the hem of Jesus' garment and he said power flowed from me. It's also the same power that raised Christ from the dead! Now that is powerful. How and why would the creator of the universe give us mere humans this kind of dunamis power? It is so we can be Christ's witnesses.

After Jesus commanded them to wait for this power, he ascended up to heaven. The bible says he was taken up by a cloud out of their sight. Now the Holy Spirit was also made manifest on the day of Pentecost which occurred 50 days after Passover and so just over 50 days after the resurrection of Christ. We will be celebrating Pentecost as a church at the end of May the weekend we will be having water baptism. How's that for God's perfect timing. Pentecost is considered to be the birthday of church, the Ekklesia. It is found in Acts 2:1-4, the word says,

Pentecost

"When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying. ³ And tongues, like flames of fire that were divided, appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different languages, as the Spirit gave them ability for speech."

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Now to really understand what's going on here, we have to look back at the old testament accounts of God showing up. One of the first times that God's presence manifested or appeared to the Israelites was at the foot of Mount Sinai in Exodus 19. The People had just been delivered and left Egypt and set up camp at Sinai. Here is where the Lord instructs Moses to consecrate the people and obey his commands. If they obeyed his commands they would be a kingdom of priest and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). Notice, as we read the passage from exodus, the similarities of the manifestation of God.

"¹⁶ On the third day, when morning came, there was thunder and lightning, a thick cloud on the mountain, and a loud trumpet sound, so that all the people in the camp shuddered. ¹⁷ Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.¹⁸ Mount Sinai was completely enveloped in smoke because the Lord came down on it in fire. Its smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain shook violently. ¹⁹ As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him in the thunder" (Exodus 19:16-19 HCSB).

God is powerful! So are we surprised that he comes in a powerful storm ("rushing wind") and is accompanied by trumpet blasts, smoke, and fire ("tongues of fire")? Unfortunately some hear these stories and like the Israelites are afraid and intimidated so they just don't ever pursue encountering the Lord in this manner. They leave it up to the priests, pastors, prayer ministers, or in the Israelites case, Moses.

I want to implore you to pursue all of God this morning. Don't be afraid of what God wants to do or how he wants to encounter you! The bottom line... he wants to empower you, or give you power for a purpose. This purpose is to create an entire people who would become a "'kingdom OF priests,' not just a 'kingdom WITH priests' (Bible Project).

You may be thinking, Pastor Theresa, why do I have to seek that out if God is always present? Yes, God is omnipresent. Present all the time everywhere at the same time. However, "the result of the manifest presence of God in the lives of the disciples was a world turned upside-down (see Acts 17:6)." And NHCO is a church that contends God will show up in your life and turn the world around you upside down, or should I say right side up. Amen!

Remember, Jesus commands all of his disciples to wait for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Why? So that he can give them POWER to bear witness to Him and His Kingdom! We as the Ekklesia are to be empowered. If we break this word down EM - to put into. Therefore, to empower is to put power into you, to give you authority to act on behalf of the kingdom, to give you power to complete the mission of the King - make disciples of all nations.

Before, in the old testament, the Lord's would put His Spirit on them, but now Jesus put's His Spirit in them! Hallelujah.

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BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF SPIRIT EMPOWERED LIVING:

PHILIP (His Story told):
Acts 6:1-7 (Phillip Selected)
Acts 8:5-40 (Philip in Samaria)

For more study on Spirit Empowered living:
Romans 8 - Life in the Spirit
Ephesians 5:15-20 Living By the Spirits Power

Ekklēsia (Unity in the Body of Christ - We are one)

"...You are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **In Him you are being built together** into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Church is not some weekend event you attend that has amazing programs, but rather a unified people being build together to be one by God's empowering presence through the Holy Spirit. Is the weekend expression important? You better believe it! God's presence is so tangible when we gather together corporately! But from the weekend of being filled up again and again, you carry that out into your circle of influence and allow the dunamis power of God to rock their world! Let's be that kind of church that seeks God's powerful presence over perfect programing. Let's make room for his manifest presence to take full control! Amen!