

1. How?
2. On whom?
3. Through whom?

²⁸ ‘And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. ²⁹ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

God Still Gives the Gift of the Holy Spirit!

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3

What a great time of year this is! The lawns are green, the trees are budding, tulips and daffodils are everywhere you look. I’m sure many of you enjoy, like I do, watching how fast things green up and sprout up in spring. But what if it all went away even faster than it came? What if swarms of insects came and ate up every flower in the ground, every bud on the branch and every blade in the field? It happened. The prophet Joel wrote all about a situation like this. God sent destructive hoards of locusts on his stubborn people Israel. Israel had refused to listen to God’s prophet Joel. They had refused to repent. So armies of locusts invaded, and literally ate up everything. This caused widespread famine and drought. And lack of food and water weren’t their only problems, because where there is *drought* there are also wildfires. The prophet, Joel, inspired by the Holy Spirit, describes all these things in his book. But he also describes what the Lord’s answer was when the people repented of their sinful ways. When they were brought to their senses, God brought the rain again. How the people must have rejoiced to finally see fields of green again and not a single locust in the sky! The people and their flocks and herds could eat again, the granaries could be rebuilt and the vineyards refurbished. It was a great outpouring of life-giving rain on God’s people. But the pinnacle of Joel’s prophecy is not about God’s outpouring of rainwater. It’s about an even greater outpouring that would come later on.

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Sometime after the spring and autumn rains restored life to the land, God would pour out his Holy Spirit. And, as Joel says, he would pour it out on *all* people? What would that mean? Joel describes it by saying that all kinds of people would prophesy and dream dreams and see visions—men and women, young and old! The Holy Spirit would fill them.

When my in-laws go camping, they bring with them a milk jug with a hole in it. They fill it with water, hang it from a tree, and let it drip onto a plate or a bowl somewhere near the campsite. It’s supposed to attract birds, and I’m sure it does. But whenever I see *and hear* the water-dripping, part of me wants to go over there and just pour it out all at once or poke a big hole in it just to get it over with. In the past, God gave the Holy Spirit in little drops here and there. Only his few select prophets saw visions and interpreted dreams and spoke on behalf of God. And there were specific qualifications for being a prophet back then. Moses, in the book of Exodus tells us that to be a true prophet:

- You had to be an Israelite,
- You had to speak in the name of the one true God,
- You had to had supernatural knowledge of the future and be able to perform other miraculous signs,

- And your message had to be in strict conformity to all of God’s prophets who had come before you.
- Prophets didn’t only tell the future. Most often they simply told people what God wanted them to know about the present-time. Sometimes we say it this way: The job of a prophet was not just to *fore-tell* but also to *forth-tell*. In its barest essence to be a prophet of God meant to be an authorized spokesman for God.

So this list of authenticating qualifications and signs—this was how the Israelites were to verify that a person was a true prophet of God. This confirmed for them that the prophet’s message was from God and not made up—it was of divine origin, not human.

So, through God’s prophet Joel, God says that the sporadic dripping of the Holy Spirit only on certain chosen people will soon become a gushing waterfall on *all* people. All people would do what only a few people had done in the past. Soon, all people would prophesy.

But when *would* this happen? This fore-told and forth-told prophecy would be fulfilled on the day we’re here to celebrate today: Pentecost. We read the account in our second lesson. The original day of Pentecost was like the Jewish version of our Thanksgiving Day. And people from all over the known world were in Jerusalem for the holiday. The 120 disciples at that time were all gathered in one place, when the sound of a strong wind filled the house. Then what looked like tongues of fire separated and came to rest on each of them. And they started speaking in the languages of all the different kinds of people in that had come to Jerusalem. The sound of the wind had attracted all those visitors and to their surprise, they were hearing uneducated Galileans proclaiming the wonders to God in each of their native dialects. When some in the crowd joked that they were drunk, Peter got up and preached a sermon on this very Joel passage about God pouring out his Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit worked through Peter’s message and the message that they all were speaking that day. And 3,000 people believed and were baptized. So, through the message and Sacrament of baptism, the Holy Spirit was not just poured out on the 120 disciples, but also on those 3,000 that day—people from all over the world. And this kind of growth continued as all kinds of people kept hearing the gospel message. And it continued as they saw the miraculous signs which confirmed the message. Notice that it wasn’t the miracles that converted the people, it was the message. Just like the Apostle Paul writes under the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, “**faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ**” (Ro 1:17).

As the message spread, Joel’s prophecy continued to be fulfilled as the Holy Spirit was poured out on people of all different nations. And that’s really what it means that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all people. It’s not that every person in the world receives the gift of the Holy Spirit, but that all different *kinds* of people will receive the gift. That’s why Joel mentions old men and young men, sons and daughters, even servants. This would sound absurd to the average Jew. Everyone a prophet? Including women? Servants? Children? Even non-Jews? Absurd! But that was what Pentecost was all about. Salvation in Christ is for *all* people. The gift of the Holy Spirit is for *all* people. But, you know, even Peter was a little slow on the uptake. It took a few more visible outpourings for it to finally sink in for him. It took Gentiles—non-Jews miraculously speaking in foreign languages by the Holy Spirit for Peter to get it—the gospel is for ALL!

But what about us? Has the Spirit skipped over us? Why hasn’t he given us the gift of speaking in foreign languages at the drop of a hat? Well, to answer that question, you have to go back and ask, “What was the purpose of those signs?” Remember how the prophets of old had to meet those certain qualifications to prove that they were legit? These outward, visible signs of the Holy Spirit were intended to serve the same purpose for the New Testament church. They verified, confirmed and authenticated the truth of the message. Remember, at that time, Jesus’ life and words and how he fulfilled the gospel weren’t yet written down. They couldn’t go back to the Word and compare and say, “*Yep, this person’s message strictly conforms to the truth. They’re an authentic*

spokesman for God.” But now that we have God’s Word written down, we don’t need the visible miracles and signs of the Holy Spirit anymore. We have the benefit of those signs and miracles, those visions and revelations all written down for us, right here in Scripture. This is our authentication. This is where the Holy Spirit has promised to reveal himself to us. That’s why God’s Word is called the Sword of the Spirit. Once again, we go back to Paul’s inspired words, “**faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ**” (Ro 1:17). Through message of gospel in the Word and the gospel in the Sacraments, the Holy Spirit continues to be abundantly poured out on us and also on all different kinds of people. God still gives the gift of the Holy Spirit!

So, what does that mean for you? It means that you are, in a sense, a prophet. You are an authorized spokesperson for God. Does that mean that you should be able to tell the future or bust out in tribal languages at a moment’s notice? As we’ve said, no. When Joel speaks of prophesying, he’s using Old Testament language to speak of New Testament things. And remember, most of a prophet’s job was simply to speak God’s message as it applied to the present-time. You don’t need your message to be confirmed by foretelling the future or other signs and wonders. God’s Word is your confirmation. This is all the qualifications you need. Being a prophet in our time doesn’t mean foretelling what hasn’t been written down yet, but simply *forth*-telling what already stands written.

You might compare this to the way the Bible also calls priests. We are part of the *priesthood of all believers*. That doesn’t mean we make burnt offerings and sacrifices like Old Testament priests did. No, every believer is a priest in the sense that every believer has equal access to God through Jesus Christ. We don’t need a go-between to gain us access to God, because Jesus is our go-between. He’s our priest. And in a similar way, we don’t need someone to speak for God other than the Holy Spirit through the gospel in Word and Sacrament. God still gives the gift of the Holy Spirit—and he does it through you, his gospel-certified prophets who speak his Words.

With all the controversy over Warren Jeffs, the self-proclaimed prophet of the FLDS, perhaps we are a little reluctant to call ourselves *prophets*. But aren’t there other reasons for our reluctance to consider ourselves God’s authorized spokesmen? Perhaps we don’t *want* to see ourselves in that way. We often sell ourselves short. We run away from our Spirit-given gift like the prophet Jonah who ran in the opposite direction of his mission field. “*That’s what we created the Evangelism Committee for! That’s the Elder’s job to confront sin with God’s Word! That’s what we called our Pastor’s for!*” Certainly, these positions have their importance and place in maintaining good order along with what the Bible teaches about the public ministry, but they don’t negate the fact that God has called every believer to be his spokesman. But like Moses and Jonah, sometimes, we don’t want to be God’s prophet.

This week, for the first time as far as I know, a little kid called me Jesus. And I don’t really think I ever able to convince him otherwise. How does that happen? I guess Pastors so often are seen as the spokesmen of Jesus that kids begin to think they are him. But maybe there’s a related misconception even among adult Christians. Imagine this scene: a little boy comes into the pastor’s office and sees two fancy framed certificates on the wall. One is the pastor’s certificate of ordination and the other is his baptismal certificate. Pointing to the ordination certificate the little boy asks, “*What’s that for?*” The pastor replies, “*That’s the piece of paper that tells people that I’m a pastor.*” “*So that’s what lets you tell people about Jesus?*” Correcting the little boy, he says, “*Nope, it’s the other piece of paper is that lets me tell people about Jesus—the one that tells me I am baptized.*”

- Have we been guilty of leaving our prophetic responsibilities to the called workers of God’s kingdom? Or have we perhaps relegated that task only to only the extroverts?
- Have we fallen into the same trap Peter did, reserving the gospel for the upper-crust of American society, ignoring Christ’s commands to go to all nations, ignoring the fact that the gospel makes no distinctions of gender, age, race, or social status?

- Have we men especially let our pride prevent us from speaking God’s Word because we are afraid people might find out how clumsily we wield the sword of the Spirit?
- And have we all preferred the *false* sense of peace and calm as a result of ignoring sin, rather than the true peace that is given when sin is confronted gently and lovingly?

My Spirit-filled brothers and sisters, the Great Commission is given to every believer! The Keys of the Kingdom to confront sin and call it what it is are given to every Christian! You are God’s prophet—certified to speak for him. And, like me, you have not always lived up to your prophetic office. For this, God *should* remove us from this office and *should* remove us from this earth to the fires of hell. But let me remind you that someone else has lived up to this office for you. He never shirked his responsibility or let prejudice hold him back. Our perfect Prophet, Priest and King, Jesus has fulfilled his prophetic role as God’s spokesman. He has fulfilled his role as our priestly go-between. And he has fulfilled his role as our crucified, risen, and reigning King. That baptismal certificate tells us that he has *not* removed us from our office as his spokesman. What he *has* removed from us is our sins. What he has removed from us is the devil’s hold on us. With our sins forgiven and Satan in check, we have the freedom to be what God has called us to be.

Each new day is Pentecost all over again. It is day in which your baptismal grace is poured out again, and you begin with a clean slate. And with our ascended Prophet, Priest, and King still fighting for us from heaven, we can confidently live and speak and teach the Word of God. Whether you’re a pastor or an elder, a day-school teacher or a Sunday School teacher, a VBS volunteer or just the neighbor next door; young and old, rich or poor, American or not, God still gives the gift of his Holy Spirit to all kinds of people!

Today we celebrate, in particular, how God still gives the gift of the Holy Spirit to Christian mothers. They say that the closest thing to God’s unconditional love for us is a mother’s love for her child. We see that love not just in all the everyday responsibilities they fulfill for us, but on this day of Pentecost, we celebrate the way they have fulfilled their role to be authorized spokeswomen for God. Mothers so often beautifully reflect this Spirit-given role. Our mothers have read to us Bible stories and sung to us hymns. They have given their heartfelt godly advice and when we needed it, given their heartfelt godly admonition. They have made sure we hang out in safe Christian places. And they have simply modeled for us the fruits of the Holy Spirit: *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”* (Galatians 5:22-23). God still gives the gift of the Holy Spirit to Christian mothers. While today, we especially thank God for them, we thank him also that he makes no distinctions when he pours out his Spirit. Though we have not deserved it, he has abundantly poured the Spirit out on us through the gospel. He has made us his children, his heirs, and his prophets. By virtue of the faith given you at your baptism, you are an authorized spokesperson of God. God still gives the gift of his Holy Spirit! Amen.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 3:20-21

