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SERMON OUTLINE FOR PASTORS

STOP SETTLING FOR SUBSTITUTES

The Pentecostal Experience Must Come from Jesus and Point to Jesus

> The real Pentecostal experience cannot be bought, earned or produced on command. It comes from Jesus, it keeps Jesus highest, and it calls us to walk with Him as friends, so stop settling for substitutes.

MAIN TEXT
Acts 8:14-24

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SERIES
We're Openly Spirit Filled, Week 1 of 5

BY
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AT A GLANCE

THE MESSAGE

1. The foundation comes before the Pentecostal ministry. Paul decided to know nothing among the Corinthians except Jesus Christ and him crucified, and Pastor Jason made the same decision for this season of the church.
2. The church trades the authentic move of the Spirit for what it can have more frequently, conveniently and predictably. Instant has the form of the thing without the substance.
3. Jesus must be the source. Simon wanted the power, was responsive when corrected, and still never looked toward Jesus. He looked at his own ability to obtain it.
4. You cannot earn the Pentecostal experience. The standard Pentecostal solution of trying harder, pushing, praying through and sowing does not produce it. It has to be received.
5. Jesus must be the highest. The gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity is a Jewish idiom for idolatry, and a church can make an idol out of its own Pentecostal expressions.
6. The bronze serpent shows the pattern. God used it, Israel worshiped it, and they called it just bronze while bringing it offerings. Its actual purpose was to point to Jesus lifted up.
7. Jesus must be our friend. We participate in the process. Receiving is not passivity, and refusing to fake it does not mean refusing to respond.
8. The supernatural experience comes from Jesus so that it magnifies Jesus. When Pentecost falls off in the parking lot, either Jesus is not the source or he is not the highest.



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youtu.be/zJY6gH3z5ow



READ THE ARTICLE

jasonmayfield.com/messages/stop-settling-for-substitutes

PREACHING NOTES

Before You Preach

This message opens a five-week series on the church's fifth value: we are openly Spirit filled. The congregation has spent months on the cross and the finished work of Jesus, and some are wondering whether their pastor is Pentecostal at all. Answer that question plainly at the start: yes, fully, and the cross came first on purpose.

The tone is celebration with a warning. Celebrate the power of God, the altar, the laying on of hands and the gifts. Then warn, with a smile and without backing down, against the substitutes: what we can do on command, what we can have every week, what feels good and changes nothing. Keep coming back to the controlling image: homemade mashed potatoes or instant.

The three points come out of Acts 8 and build on each other: Jesus must be the source, Jesus must be the highest, Jesus must be our friend.

Introduction

We are a church that believes in the power of God. Have the congregation say it with you.

Illustration: the pedometer. A friend's father-in-law, a retired coal miner and one of the dearest men you will ever meet, could not pronounce anything. When his doctor told him to walk more, the family bought him a treadmill and a pedometer, and one day he was heard shouting across the house, "Where's my peter meter?"

Share a recent testimony of God moving in the church. (When this was preached, someone who had heard the previous week's message on the anointing for favor saw a stalled business deal break open, a $50,000 miracle by Monday afternoon.)

WE ARE OPENLY SPIRIT FILLED

This series takes up the fifth value of our church: **we are openly Spirit filled.** This will not be a closeted Pentecostal church. We are not going to lock the Holy Spirit in the attic like a crazy uncle we only let out at Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Some have wondered why a Pentecostal preacher has spent his first months teaching instead of running Pentecostal ministry. Here is the reason. When the Lord sent me to this church, He said, "Make sure the foundation of that church is strong before you do any Pentecostal ministry."

I am a Pentecostal preacher with a Pentecostal ministry. I enjoy all of it. But I followed the Apostle Paul's lead. The Corinthian church was the most dysfunctional Pentecostal church in the Bible, and this is how

Paul addressed it:

> **1 CORINTHIANS 2:2** ESV
>
> [2] For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Notice the words "I decided." It was a decision. We could preach any topic in the Bible, and we could run around the room and shout our heads off. But in this season the decision has been to lay a foundation on the finished work of Jesus Christ, so that we can move forward into real Pentecostal power: the power of God touching your life. The cross, the cross, the cross, and from here on out, still the cross.

HOMEMADE OR INSTANT

Illustration: the KitchenAid mixer. Most of us have put off a purchase for years, finally bought it, and wondered why we waited. For me it was a KitchenAid mixer. (When this was preached, a mixer was given away on the spot to someone in the congregation who did not have one.)

The mixer changed one thing in our house in particular. My daughter is a very picky eater who eats about seven foods. I love potatoes, and once I had the mixer I started making homemade mashed potatoes: Yukon Golds, butter, heavy whipping cream, maybe a few chives. She tried them, and you could see the change in her. I have seen the same effect on people when they receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

The problem is that homemade mashed potatoes take work: peeling, washing, two pots, a mess. You cannot make them every day. So my daughter found instant mashed potatoes, and now she eats them all the time. But we can all agree that instant mashed potatoes are an insufficient substitute.

I worry that in the Pentecostal church we trade the authentic move of the Holy Spirit for something we can have more frequently, more conveniently and more predictably. It looks like mashed potatoes, but it is not mashed potatoes. It has the form, but not the power.

In churches like ours, we can accept the things we can do on command. I can shake on command. I can fall on the ground without anybody's help. The question is whether that is the instant response or the homemade one. Was the Holy Spirit on it, or was I just doing what I thought I was supposed to do?

This is not a young preacher who dislikes Pentecostal expression. I want it all. I love seeing people touched by God. But I have seen the difference between someone who fell on the ground and someone who got knocked on the ground, and that trade is unnecessary.

If you want the real thing, say, "I want it."

The Text

> ACTS 8:14-24 ESV
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> [14] Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, [15] who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, [16] for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. [17] Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. [18] Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, [19] saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." [20] But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! [21] You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. [22] Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. [23] For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." [24] And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

1. Jesus Must Be the Source

When it comes to the Pentecostal experience and Pentecostal expression, Jesus must be the source.

Give Simon the benefit of the doubt for a moment, because Simon did a lot of what we do. Some of us have read this passage thinking we are Peter, when we are actually Simon.

- **He saw the power of God and wanted it.** Most of us would never have been touched if we had not seen it and wanted it. That is part of the process.
- **He offered something.** Scripture does teach that we can sow and reap, so even that is not completely out of bounds.
- **He was responsive.** When he realized Peter did not like what he said, he asked Peter to pray for him (Acts 8:24). Insincere people do not usually do that.

But here is what he did: **he never looked toward Jesus.** Jesus was not in the equation. Simon looked to his own ability to obtain it. He was not trying to receive the Pentecostal experience; he was trying to write a check for it. The story ends with Simon standing there with a pen in one hand and a checkbook in the other, and Peter's words could not be sharper: "May your silver perish with you" (Acts 8:20).

You cannot earn the Pentecostal experience. You cannot work your way into it.

I struggled to receive. And the most common Pentecostal solution I was given was to try harder. We push, we pray until something happens, we fast, we sow, we dance, we shout, we clap, we run and we march, all trying to make something happen. But Jesus has to be the source. You have to receive it.

2. Jesus Must Be the Highest

Look again at Acts 8:23. Peter tells Simon, "For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:23). It sounds like a simple insult, but the phrase carries meaning. It echoes Deuteronomy 29, which warns against a heart turning away from the Lord to serve the gods of the nations, "a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit" (Deuteronomy 29:18). The bitterness is the fruit of idol worship.

We can prize the Pentecostal experience, the effects of a church like ours, the activity and the expressions, until we ignore Jesus altogether. People have said to me, "We know you like to preach on Jesus, but..." and then filled in their favorite expression: altar calls, tongues and interpretation, prophecy, longer worship, flowing in the Spirit, shofars, tambourines, flags. Jesus becomes a side note.

He is the King of kings, and we treat Him like an option. He is the Lord of lords, and we treat Him like a mascot. He is the Creator of heaven and earth.

I am all about the altar call, laying hands on people and the supernatural experience, as long as something follows it. **Too many of us have Pentecost that falls off in the parking lot.** Usually the reason is that Jesus is either not the source or not the highest.

THE BRONZE SERPENT

> **NUMBERS 21:4-9** ESV
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> 4 From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. 5 And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." 6 Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 7 And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. 8 And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." 9 So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

In the wilderness, fiery serpents bit the people and many died. Moses prayed, and the Lord told him to make a serpent of bronze and set it on a pole, and whoever looked at it would live. In the language of the Assemblies of God's Fundamental Truths, this is divine healing: a supernatural effect of the power of God.

Fast forward to Hezekiah's day:

> **2 KINGS 18:4** ESV
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> [4] He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan).

In one moment the serpent was a conduit of the power of God. Later, Israel was making offerings to it. God used it, but it was not God, and the people worshiped it anyway.

The bronze serpent was never the point. It was a prophetic symbol pointing to Jesus: "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (John 3:14).

Everyone bringing offerings to the serpent would have told you it was not God. The name they gave it, Nehushtan, sounds like the Hebrew word for bronze. "It's just bronze," they said, while they bowed before it. Out of one side of our mouth we say Jesus is the most important. Out of the other side we say what we really need is X, Y and Z every week, this kind of service, this expression.

Across American Pentecostal churches, people often judge whether the anointing is on a church by how often they see tongues and interpretation. Is Jesus being preached? Is Jesus the highest? Churches have fought "worship wars" over guitars and hymnals. It is always something else.

> **ISAIAH 29:13** ESV
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> [13] And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men,

We are an openly Spirit-filled church. We believe in the power of God. And Jesus must be the highest.

3. Jesus Must Be Our Friend

> **JOHN 15:15** ESV
>
> [15] No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Playing with the words a little: friendship means participation. On one hand, we receive. Jesus has to be the source, and Jesus has to be the highest. But being an openly Spirit-filled church also means we participate in the process with the Lord.

Illustration: a tap on the shoulder. John said of Jesus, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11). I was saved in an environment where I believed that, saw it and wanted it. I kept going to the altar to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit and kept coming back empty-handed for years. Most of the advice was "try harder, push harder," and I never wanted to fake it. If I was going to speak in tongues, it was not going to be me. I was getting the real thing or no thing.

What I did not understand was that I was waiting for the Holy Spirit to do something so overwhelming that I could no longer function, a kick in the chest. What I found was that **it is less of a kick in the chest and more of a tap on the shoulder.** There are kick-in-the-chest experiences, and they are the stories we love to tell. But often the Spirit taps you on the shoulder, and you know He is there. You have to turn around. When I learned that I had to participate, I was able to step in and receive.

Receiving is not passivity. Refusing to fake it does not mean refusing to respond.

On order. A preacher once told me he did not understand why Pentecostal churches keep preaching that "all things should be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40) in churches where there is no chance of anything ever getting out of order. In the pursuit of the real thing, if something goes a little too far, we will pull it back, and leadership will be clear when that is needed. But we are going to pursue the real thing.

The road ahead. Name the coming weeks: how to open a flow of Pentecost in your life, then speaking in tongues, then Vision Sunday, and after that prophecy and more. We are going into the deep end, and we are going after the real thing, a Jesus-magnifying thing.

TALK ABOUT JESUS

In many Pentecostal churches our language gives us away. We talk about God and the Holy Spirit, and we hardly mention Jesus unless He is in a song on the screen. But He is the One: high, holy, exalted, "the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Revelation 22:13). "His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze" (Revelation 1:14-15). They killed Him, and the grave could not hold Him. He is seated at the right hand of God, and He is coming back.

A Fern Fire or the Real Fire

Illustration: the church with the burning bush. Straight out of high school, in 2004, I went to work at a church in Pascagoula, Mississippi that had fallen on hard times and was recovering from some Pentecostal dysfunction. A former pastor of that church had rigged pyrotechnics inside a fern on the platform and set it off while he preached. Then he ran newspaper ads: revival has broken out, come to the church with the burning bush.

You may never have seen a fake fire on a stage. But have you trusted something as a fake fire? Have you accepted a placebo that felt good in the moment, maybe even cathartic, while you walked right back into the same thing?

We do not need a burning fern when there is a fire that can get on this house, what Jeremiah described as "a burning fire shut up in my bones" (Jeremiah 20:9).

THE WEIGHT OF THE REAL THING

Paul knew the tension of ministry. "Even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there" (2 Corinthians 2:12-13). Elsewhere he speaks of "a

wide door for effective work" (1 Corinthians 16:9). There can be an open door and a heavy heart at the same time.

Be honest about the pull to back off: to sing a little song, preach a little message and send everyone home. Then answer it with Paul:

> **2 CORINTHIANS 5:13-14** ESV
>
> [13] For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. [14] For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died;

When the fire of God is on you, there is an ecstasy with God that pulls on you, and there is a tether that keeps you in your right mind to serve and help people. The real thing is not just running around the room. It is coming under the weight of that balance. There is more than a little shindig and then off to the buffet.

Conclusion

You think you have seen the dividing line? Christ crucified is "a stumbling block" (1 Corinthians 1:23), and when the power of God breaks out, the line will be clearer still.

Jesus is not only the source of Pentecost. Like the bronze serpent lifted up, the supernatural experience is meant to point back to Him. The Pentecostal experience comes from Jesus so that it magnifies Jesus.

Ask the church to pray for their church, and to pray in the Spirit for it. The best is yet to come. After we have suffered a little while, the God of all grace will "restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish" us (1 Peter 5:10). Declare a heart for the harvest: souls saved, the church growing and the whole region changed.

RESPONSE

Have everyone stand and lift their hands. Invite them to do business with the Lord right where they stand. For some it is prescription level: ask the Lord to purge you of a tolerance for anything with a placebo effect in your life, anything that stands in the place of the real fire, anything you accept as enough when enough is no longer enough.

Pray:

- God, purge us of compromise.
- Touch us with a fresh fire.
- **We don't need a fern fire. We need a fresh fire. We don't need a pyrotechnic fire. We need a Pentecostal fire.**
- Let it get down into our bones, so that transformation, miracles and power are inevitable, and a sensitivity to Your Spirit rests on this church.



ABOUT

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