

Why the Church Had to Wait

The Days Between the Resurrection and Pentecost

By James Burke • May 16, 2026

One of the most overlooked details in the story of the early church is that Jesus did not send His disciples into the world immediately after the resurrection.

That delay matters.

Christ had risen from the dead. The disciples had seen Him alive. He had instructed them concerning the kingdom of God. He had commissioned them to bear witness.

And yet, before the church began its public mission, Jesus commanded them to wait.

"And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father..."

— Acts 1:4 (KJV)

Why?

Why not send them immediately?

Why delay the mission after the resurrection victory had already been accomplished?

The answer reaches into the very heart of what the church is.

The church could not accomplish its mission through memory, organization, zeal, or human strength alone.

The church had to wait because the church needed the Holy Spirit.

The ship had been built.

The crew had been gathered.

The risen Christ stood among them.

But the sails still hung empty.

1. The Strange Delay After the Resurrection

The forty days between the resurrection and the ascension are striking.

Acts 1 tells us that Jesus showed Himself alive:

"By many infallible proofs..."

— Acts 1:3 (KJV)

He taught His disciples concerning the kingdom of God.

The disciples were no longer confused about whether Jesus had truly risen. They had seen Him. Touched Him. Eaten with Him.

And yet Christ still does not send them out.

Instead, He commands them to remain in Jerusalem.

This command becomes even more striking when we remember the Great Commission itself:

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations..."

— Matthew 28:19 (KJV)

The mission had already been given.

But the mission had not yet begun.

The disciples possessed:

- the teaching of Christ,
- the witness of the resurrection,
- the apostolic commission,
- and the promise of the kingdom.

Yet Jesus still says:

"Wait."

That delay tells us something important.

The church is not sustained merely by correct information about Jesus.

The church lives by the power of the Spirit of Christ.

2. Knowledge Was Not Enough

It is easy to imagine that the resurrection appearances alone would have transformed the disciples instantly into fearless witnesses.

But Acts reminds us that the church needed more than eyewitness memory.

The disciples knew Christ had risen.

Yet prior to Pentecost, they are still gathered behind closed doors and waiting together in dependence.

This is not because the resurrection was insufficient.

It is because Christ never intended His church to operate merely through human courage, education, or enthusiasm.

The church was not meant to be an organization that carried forward the memory of a departed teacher.

The church would be the living body of a risen and exalted Lord empowered by the Spirit.

Jesus says:

"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."

— Acts 1:5 (KJV)

Then:

"Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you..."

— Acts 1:8 (KJV)

The mission required divine empowerment.

The disciples were not waiting for additional information.

They were waiting for power from heaven.

3. The Promise of the Father

Jesus describes Pentecost as "the promise of the Father."

That language reaches back into the Old Testament promises concerning the new covenant.

The prophets had long anticipated a day when God would pour out His Spirit upon His people.

Joel declared:

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh..."

— Joel 2:28 (KJV)

Ezekiel promised:

"And I will put my spirit within you..."

— Ezekiel 36:27 (KJV)

The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost was therefore not an isolated spiritual event disconnected from the story of Scripture.

It was the fulfillment of covenant promise.

This is why Jesus tells the disciples to wait.

The church cannot launch itself.

The church must receive what God has promised.

Pentecost is not human initiative reaching upward.

It is divine promise coming downward.

4. Why Pentecost Had to Follow the Ascension

Another crucial detail is that Pentecost occurs after Christ's ascension.

This is deeply significant.

In John 7, we read:

"For the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified."

— John 7:39 (KJV)

The Spirit had certainly been active before Pentecost. The Spirit moved throughout the Old Testament and throughout the earthly ministry of Jesus.

But the Spirit had not yet been given in the fullness connected to the exalted Christ and the new covenant mission of the church.

The order matters:

- resurrection,
- ascension,
- exaltation,
- outpouring.

Pentecost is inseparably connected to the enthronement of Christ.

Peter explains this directly:

"Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this..."

— Acts 2:33 (KJV)

The exalted Christ pours out the Spirit.

This means Pentecost is not merely an event about the Spirit in isolation.

It is an event about the reign of Christ.

The Spirit comes because the crucified and risen Jesus has ascended to the Father and begun His heavenly reign.

This also helps explain John 20.

In John 20, the risen Christ breathes upon His disciples and says, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." There Christ identifies Himself as the giver of the Spirit and the Lord of the new creation.

But Acts 2 is the public outpouring of the Spirit from the enthroned Christ.

John 20 is the breath before the wind.

Acts 2 is the filling of the sails.

5. Waiting as Dependence

The waiting in Acts 1 was not passive inactivity.

Luke tells us the disciples continued:

"With one accord in prayer and supplication..."

— Acts 1:14 (KJV)

They were gathered.

They were praying.

They were depending upon God.

This is profoundly important.

Before the church was sent outward in mission, it was gathered together in dependence.

Modern ministry often assumes that organization, strategy, charisma, or activity can substitute for spiritual power.

Acts says otherwise.

The disciples had walked with Jesus Himself.

Yet Christ still would not permit the mission to begin until the Spirit came.

The kingdom of God is not advanced by fleshly energy.

The church must be animated by the Spirit of God.

6. The Church Still Lives by the Same Principle

The church today is not waiting for another Pentecost.

Pentecost was a foundational redemptive-historical event.

The Spirit has already been poured out.

The kingdom has already been opened.

The church has already been launched into the world.

And yet the principle revealed in Acts 1 remains true.

The church still cannot fulfill its mission through human strength.

Programs cannot replace the Spirit.

Activity cannot replace prayer.

Information cannot replace spiritual life.

The church must still live in dependence upon the risen and exalted Christ.

This is one reason the New Testament repeatedly calls believers to:

- walk in the Spirit,
- pray in the Spirit,
- be filled with the Spirit,
- and bear witness through the Spirit.

The church was born through divine power and remains dependent upon divine power.

7. Pentecost and the Mission of the Church

When the Spirit finally comes in Acts 2, the church immediately moves outward in witness.

Peter preaches Christ.

The nations hear the mighty works of God.

Thousands believe.

Pentecost was never intended merely as a private spiritual experience.

It was the launching of the church's mission.

Jesus had promised:

"Ye shall be witnesses unto me..."

— Acts 1:8 (KJV)

That promise now begins unfolding.

Jerusalem.

Judea.

Samaria.

The uttermost parts of the earth.

The wind had come.

The ship had begun its voyage.

Conclusion: Waiting for the Wind

The days between the resurrection and Pentecost were not empty days.

They were days of preparation.

The church had been promised.

The disciples had been gathered.

The risen Christ had appeared.

The commission had been given.

And yet the church still had to wait.

Why?

Because the mission of Christ could never be accomplished merely by human effort.

The church needed the Spirit.

Pentecost was not an optional enhancement to an already functioning institution.

It was the public empowerment of the church by the exalted Christ.

The disciples waited because the sails could not fill themselves.

The wind had to come from heaven.

And when it came, the church was launched into the world bearing witness that Jesus Christ is Lord.