

Day of Pentecost Part 1: The Witness
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Twelve men wait. Outside, the streets of Jerusalem are packed with thousands and thousands of people—gathered for the great pilgrim feast called Pentecost—that filled the streets of Jerusalem, filled the markets, filled the temple and the synagogues. And so the city is just overwhelmed with people. But these twelve men wait inside.

The narrative...as you read it you have a sense that there may be more than just these twelve, maybe up to a hundred, or a hundred and twenty in that home. But the strict grammar of the passage focuses just on those twelve...twelve apostles; that is, twelve men that Jesus had set aside, chosen specifically to bear witness to His resurrection. Of all the individuals that had seen Jesus, from the very beginning of His ministry to the very end when He ascended to heaven...among those individuals He had chosen twelve and He set them apart to be witnesses, to be the authoritative testimony to what He said and what He did. These are the ones that, if anybody wanted to know 'What did Jesus do? What did He say? What did He accomplish? What was He like?'—these were the twelve you were to check with. These are the ones that had the accurate record. And these were the ones that were waiting in that home that day.

They had been waiting for ten days. When Jesus had ascended to heaven He had told them to do that. He had told them that their mission and their purpose was to go out and bear witness, to give testimony, to His reality—in Jerusalem and Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world. But He said 'Don't start, don't go out, wait here until the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you are empowered to be witnesses—to give testimony, to give witness.' And so they wait. And they had been waiting for ten days.

And then, as the crowds are filling the city of Jerusalem, suddenly it happens—there is a sound of a violent, rushing wind. Think of the glacier winds that come off the Matanuska and the Knik River and go rushing down our valley, and they just overwhelm you with noise. That's what it was like! We're not told that it was an actual wind blowing, but we're told it was the sound of a violent, tremendous wind; and it was so sudden it caught 'em by surprise. And suddenly there's a flash of light, and over each man's head is this flame-like tongue above them. And then suddenly, we're told, they're filled with the Spirit—something moves within them, and they begin to speak in languages...languages that they've never learned before, languages that were understandable and people from other countries could hear and say 'That's my language!' And these men hadn't studied it, and suddenly they're speaking those languages!

It was probably one of the most foundational events in church history. And that's why it's probably best that we read the account of it than just hear me tell it. So let's turn in our Bibles to Acts chapter two, Acts 2, that written record that the gospel-writer Luke had provided. Not just he wrote the gospel of Luke, and he gave us the eyewitness records of what Jesus said and did; and then he comes into the book of Acts and he's gonna follow up and record what happened in the early church after Jesus left. And so we have this account. And last week we saw, when we looked at chapter one, how those twelve were set aside and told to wait. And now we come to chapter two, and we'll begin at verse one. And I'd like you to just read the account with me. It begins like this. It says

When the day of Pentecost [that feast] had come, they were all together in one place.

Most specifically, here, we're looking at the twelve.

And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues [or languages], as the Spirit gave them utterance.

And now we're told

There were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men, from every nation under heaven.

...people who had moved there and were residing there. And when they heard that sound, the sound of the wind had occurred, they came together; that is, they rushed to this place where the apostles were...

...and they were bewildered, because each one of them was hearing them [these apostles] speak in their own language. And they were amazed and they were sayin', "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And yet we are hearing them in our language."

And some of the people that observed and were watching, and they heard these languages being spoken, and sometimes at the same time for them...they looked at it and said, 'This is nonsense. These guys are drunk!' But others were saying, 'No—I hear my language being spoken. That man is speaking in my dialect!' And they're amazed, and they're in wonder.

Finally the Apostle Peter steps up, and he begins to speak to 'em; and he explains to 'em that this is what's happening. And he quotes an Old Testament prophet...an Old Testament prophet from the olden days, who spoke of the end times, and he spoke how, in the end, God would pour out His Spirit and people would speak from the Spirit, and that there would be signs and wonders, and we'd move to the final day. And Peter says, 'You know what? This is what Joel was talking about. We're moving into the final age, and this is the leading edge of it.'

And now he has their attention, and we're gonna skip down. We're gonna start reading at verse 22, that they've heard his explanation, and now he's gonna give them a message. He's gonna say to them, he says

"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

"But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power."

And then he'll go on, and he'll quote some Old Testament prophecies spoken by David, from the Psalms, that point to such a thing happening, and the Messiah being like this. And then he comes back at verse 32, and he'll say this. He says

"This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore, having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth that which you see and hear."

'This phenomenon you're seeing is what Jesus has poured out now that He's with the Father.'

And then he comes down in verse 36, after quoting David once again, he says "Therefore..." and I'm just following the main line of his thought-flow here; he says

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him [this Jesus] both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."

We're told that they respond; they're pierced to the heart. And they say to Peter, this crowd, they say to Peter, "Brethren, what shall we do?"

And Peter says to them

"Repent, each of you; be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."

And he continued such warnings. And we're told that...in verse 41...that

...those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

And 42 goes on to describe, then, this church as it was expanding and born in Jerusalem that day.

This is probably one of the most foundational passages of scripture related to the church—its formation, its direction, its purpose, its mission. So we're gonna take our time with this particular chapter. It's so important that we spend time in it and we understand it. And so what we're gonna do over the next three weeks is we're gonna take one...this week and the next two...we're gonna devote to looking at this chapter of scripture. We're gonna break it into three parts because the chapter breaks easily into three parts.

The first part is about the Spirit, and the phenomenon of the Spirit of God coming upon these people. And you'll find it in verse two and four as the one that really catches our attention; and that's the section that everybody is drawn to as they read this chapter of scripture—where we're told there was that noise, and there's tongues as of fire that appeared over these individuals. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And picture there a wind filling sails on a sailboat and moving it forward. And then they begin to speak in other languages, in other tongues. And that's one of the things we're gonna be looking at. We're gonna look at it next week, that particular portion of the passage.

The chapter ends by looking at the church, this phenomenal group of people that God began to gather together and work in and among. And as we work in that particular passage, beginning at verses 41 and 42, and on through the end, you'll have one of the earliest descriptions we have of the church in action—what it was doing, what were they...what were they doing as people? And I think we'll see a paradigm of what church should be doing. And so we'll be looking at that, but that's gonna come in two weeks, alright? After those three thousand were added, and they began to devote themselves, we're gonna see what it was they devoted themselves to.

What we're gonna look at today is the witness that was given, the testimony that was given—Peter's message, that begins at verse 22 and follows on through the verses that follow. And there's a specific reason that I want to focus on the message and make it the centerpiece, and that's because it's in the message that we see the glory and the wonder of our God. When you go through this message, and you see the culmination point of it all, you will see the glory and the wonder of our God. And that's really the most crucial thing, is that we see God in these pages.

Had an interview talking to me, and they were trying to figure out why we spend so much time reading scripture, and why I don't make more policy statements and give directives of what people should be doing, and how they should be voting, and so on and so forth, and why we spend so much time reading scripture. And I tried to explain to this individual that, to me, it's kind of like having someone come to Alaska...a wonderful, beautiful state. The last thing for me to do is take them out into the Valley, stand in front of them, and describe Pioneer Peak to them in beautiful, poetic terms, and tell 'em what they need to do if they really want to see it, and where they need to go if they really want to get a glimpse of its wonder, and how they need to approach it if they want to climb it to its heights. The last thing they need to do is have me stand between them and that mountain. The most important thing I can do is get out of the way and let them see it.

That's what we have to do with scripture. The most important thing I can do is to get out of the way and let you see God in these pages. Then you'll go out there, and you'll address the issues you have to address out there in the community, and in your lives, and in your families, and everything else. You'll deal with that. You're competent people! You've got God with you! You can deal with it. The important thing here is, as we go into scripture, you see Him in His glory. And so that's why we spend time walking through scripture.

And when you go through this message, and we already read the main line of it, the main force of it, the main logic flow of it, there's one major thing that zeros in—the repeated message, the thing that Peter stands and declares, and it's this. It's found in verse 24, the first statement of it. He says "God raised Him up again." He says 'He was put to death right here in this city. You put Him to death,' he says to these people living in Jerusalem. He says, 'You put Him to death, *but God raised Him up again.*'

He'll come back to that very same theme a little later when he comes to verse 32, and he says, 'This Jesus—God raised Him up again.' And he says, "...to which we are all witnesses." That was the apostolic witness; that was their mission, was to go out and declare the reality of Jesus Christ risen from the dead. That is the foundational, central message of the church. Everything else we say is secondary to this. If there's one sound bite we want out there in the world, it is this—*Jesus is alive! Raised from the dead!* In fact, if that is not so, we should just give up and go home.

The Apostle Paul, dealing with a church that was all caught up in a lot of things and competing with one another, one of the most difficult churches he worked with...the church of Corinth. And near the end of that letter he's writing to 'em, and he's correcting 'em on some issues, and he makes this statement. He says, 'Listen, if Christ has not been raised, if Jesus Christ was not brought up from that grave, if He's not alive, then...' he says that, '...our preaching is vain, it's empty, it's useless, it's futile, it doesn't accomplish a thing. We oughta be quiet.' And then he adds this. '...and your faith also is vain; it's empty, it's futile. Give it up if He's not alive.'

Everything about us hinges on that one central claim—Jesus is alive. Everything else flows out of it, and it brings consequences to our lives when we say, "Yes, He's alive." It brings logical conclusions that we must grapple with and wrestle with, as it did on that day. When Peter declared that Jesus is alive, it led to a natural conclusion that had to be dealt with right then and there. And that conclusion was this, verse 36, where Peter says, "Therefore...

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ."

'God raised Him from the dead after you killed Him, after you said you did not want Him. God raised Him from the dead.' That confirms He is who He claimed to be—Lord, the King of Kings, or the great Hebrew term "The Anointed One", the Messiah, the One the prophets had promised would set all wrongs right, the One God has appointed to be ruler over all mankind for eternity. He says 'That...God has made Him that, this Jesus whom you crucified.'

We're told that when Peter said that, something happens to this crowd. And remember, this is a large crowd, because at least three thousand of them responded when Peter was done. This is not a small gathering. And we're told when they heard this that they were 'pierced to the heart.' They were moved within. And they looked at Peter and the rest, and they said, 'What do we do? We killed the Messiah! What do we do?'

And Peter responds; and what a statement! First of all he says, 'Repent; change direction; turn around. And each of you, not just waiting for somebody else, each of you personally...this is a personal thing, an individual thing...repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.' In other words, he's sayin' 'Turn to Jesus. Commit to Him so you can be forgiven; so you can be forgiven, and all your past failures wiped out. Just turn to Him.'

Now notice, it's not enough to just have a pierced heart, to feel horrible about something you've done. It's to move from that pierced heart, to turn away from the direction you're headed, and turn *towards* Jesus. And theologians can get a little more careful with this statement, and they'll make it very clear, as Peter does in one of his other letters, that it isn't the water of baptism that washes away the sins. That isn't what saves you in this scenario. It's the pledge of a sincere heart that turns to Jesus and acknowledges Him for all that He is...marked by baptism. It's that pledge of a sincere heart that God responds to with forgiveness.

And then he adds this promise, and boy, pick up on this promise. Not only does he say 'will wipe out your past record,' he says this. He says, *"...and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* Don't run by that fast. God's talking to ordinary people like you and I. And as Peter gives that promise, he says 'it's for you, for your children, and for as many as God would call.'

God says, 'I'm not gonna just give you My commands. I'm not just gonna give you My instructions. I'm not just gonna give you the testimony of what I've done. I'm not gonna give you just warnings and promises. I'm not gonna try to just give you a new attitude, a new perspective.' He says, 'I am gonna give you My Spirit as a gift. The very Spirit that moved within Jesus is gonna move within you. That's a promise,' He says.

Now I think we're ready to stop a moment and recognize the glory of our God. When you read through this and you stop for a second, and you hear that promise made, recognize that what we have going on here is that *the very people who killed Jesus were the very first ones offered the grace of Jesus*. Can you absorb that a second? As Peter's delivering this message the very people who, fifty days before Pentecost, demanded that Jesus be crucified, the very people who spit on Him, the very people who jeered and mocked as He was dragged, pushed through the streets by the Roman soldiers, the very people who sat under the cross and laughed at Him, the very people who said 'He's a blasphemer', the very people who, when Pilate said 'What shall we do with Him?', cried out, "Crucify Him!"—the very people who killed Jesus were the very first ones offered the grace of Jesus.

Now, it's not that others don't need that grace. There is not a person that doesn't desperately need that grace, that forgiveness and that renewal of His Spirit. There isn't a person that doesn't need that. But the very first ones God said, 'I have...I'm gonna offer this' to those who killed His Son. That's our God. He's a God that will not ignore sin. He will not push it aside and pretend it hasn't existed or happened. He's not a God that will simply let it go.

But He is a God of compassion and grace that will meet the repentant with forgiveness and with His Spirit. That's the glory of our God.

I had one interviewer...you're probably gonna get a number of interviewer illustrations over the weeks ahead, because there's a bunch of 'em...but really, I had one interviewer and it caught me a bit off guard. I'm slowly figuring out how this works, and I'm way too late to figure out how that happens in the press, how you handle interviews and stuff. But she had a little hand-held recorder. We're talkin' network person, and she's got this hand-held recorder, and she's talking to me and stuff. And she made a comment as we talked, and she made this comment; she said this. She said, "You know, I wanna make sure that people don't just get a clip or a sound bite. I wanna make sure they see the person, and they know not only what he said, or she said, but they have a sense that they know that person." And she's the one that gave the longest, most extended interview...as I bumble around. And she does it with others also.

See, you can run through scripture tryin' to get the little sound bites, saying "I know what God said." You gotta slow down, and you gotta know this person. And you wanna know...you *need* to know that when Peter said 'Repent, commit to Jesus, and you'll find forgiveness and the Spirit,' that was God speaking to the people who had put His Son to death. And they were the very first ones He was offering grace to. When you recognize that, you recognize the person and the nature and the character of our God. He's a God of compassion and grace, and there is not a thing you have done—there is not a thing you have done—that He will not meet you with grace if you turn to Him.

For some of you right now, that doesn't mean a whole lot...little bit of Biblical theology. But listen...in the day of a pierced heart, a day when, like you who were in the streets of Jerusalem that day...recognize that there's a right and a wrong, and you've done wrong and it's not ok, it's not excusable, it's not forgettable; there's a right and a wrong, and you've done wrong, and it's not ok, and your heart is pierced—not because people have made you feel guilty, not just because people have criticized you, not because you feel like 'Oh, boy, I'm a little bit inadequate,' but because you know at the very core of your being you are a sinner...there's a right and a wrong, you've done wrong and it's not ok—listen. At that moment of a pierced heart you need to know that the God we deal with is a God who offered grace first to the very people who killed His Son. That's a God you can turn to when your heart is pierced.