

Day of Pentecost Part 2: The Spirit  
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September 21, 2008

Sometimes we need to go back to the beginning to remember who we are and what we're about. Sometimes we need to go back to the beginning to remember who we are and what we're about. In the Bible, the book of Acts, chapter 2 is the chapter that does that for us as a church. It takes us back to the very beginning of the church, and it makes very clear for us, as you read through that chapter, who we—the church—are and what we're about. As you go through it, it very quickly becomes apparent that the church is not a political action committee. Many of our people serve in the arena of public service, and many of our people are...in fact, all of us are called to be diligent citizens. But we're not a political action committee.

Neither is the church, as you read through that chapter, a relief agency. We may be engaged in all sorts of efforts and helps, but we're not a relief agency. Neither are we a community center—a place where people can gather, sharing common backgrounds, common heritage, common values, and connect and build a sense of community. That's not what the church is. Neither is it a school of theology, a gathering of the scholars to explore and to examine, and to ascertain all the details of God and His creation, and all the other religions. We're not a school of theology.

What we are is the people through whom the Spirit speaks of Jesus. We are those through whom the Spirit of God speaks of Jesus. And I'm not talking about the preacher or the evangelist. I'm talking about each and every one of those who names Christ as the Lord—the young and the old, the women and the men, the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, the wise and the simple, the sick and the well—each one of us are among those through whom the Spirit speaks of Jesus, in all our varied circumstances, in all our varied conditions, in all the varied situations we find ourselves in...we are the ones through whom the Spirit speaks of Jesus.

I don't say that with arrogance, and I don't say that with pride. In the Old Testament the Spirit spoke through a donkey. In the New Testament Jesus said He could speak through rocks if He chose to. I say it with a sense of wonder, a sense of mystery, and I say it with a sense of responsibility. We are the ones through whom the Spirit speaks of Jesus. Acts chapter two makes that evident, and I'll encourage you to turn there with me as we get ready to work through this chapter.

When you go there, we've already started last week looking at this; and we're gonna take three weeks in this chapter, because the chapter breaks down into three very distinct parts. And last week we took the center part of the chapter, and where we have the witness given by the Apostle Peter...when he stood in Jerusalem and proclaimed the reality of Jesus risen from the dead—the Spirit of God speaking through him, announcing that the Christ, who had been crucified fifty days before, was actually now risen and alive and exalted in the heavens. That's what we looked at last week. That's the witness to Jesus.

What we're gonna look at today is the role of the Spirit in that witness. In fact, when we look at that witness and we realize how...how dynamic it was, when he was done preaching that very first sermon, the first time a sermon was ever preached by one of Christ's followers, at the end of it 3,000 people responded. It says their hearts were pierced, and they responded and said, 'What do we do?' Now remember, he's right in the very city where Jesus had been crucified, right in the very city where He'd been rejected; and now, as he speaks, He's being accepted. And we wonder what is the dynamic behind that message; how could that have any effect in that city at that time? And the answer is the working of God's Spirit. And that's what we're going to be looking at as we go into this second chapter.

Have a little bit of background that we need to see before we move into it. And that is found in chapter one, just a little background before we start reading in chapter two. If you go back into chapter one, we're told how Jesus, after His crucifixion, after His resurrection, He spent about forty days with His followers...giving them, it says, "convincing proofs" that He was alive, evidence that He truly was back from the dead. He let them touch Him; He let them listen to Him; He spoke with them; He showed them His scars and His wounds; and He taught them. And over forty days He made sure that they really recognized that He is alive...this small group of eleven apostles that would become His witnesses.

And as He did that, He made a statement to them just before He left. He says, 'Listen, don't leave Jerusalem. Don't leave here yet, but wait for what the Father has promised,' He said. And then He's gonna expand on what the Father had promised, and that was that 'you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit will be poured out on you not many days from now.' The very Spirit that had been speaking through Jesus, He says, 'is gonna come upon you.' And He goes on a little later and says what the impact of that will be. He says, "You will receive..." in verse 8,

*"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you..."*

'There will be a new ability given to you...'

*"...and you shall be My witnesses..."*

'You will go out and testify to the reality of My resurrection. You will testify of Me. You will speak of Me.'

That's the background. Now we move into chapter two, and I wanna approach this a little differently today. I wanna put a lot of the text, in fact I'm gonna put most of the text, up here on the Powerpoint. And we're gonna just be walking through it. This is a passage where I don't need to add much drama...there's plenty in there. Likewise, there's a passage where there's a lot of debate and, at times, confusion; and I think it is best when we work through this chapter that we let the text speak for itself. And so I'm gonna attempt to do that. So this is gonna be one of those sermons that kinda presses you a bit to concentrate and just go through, verse by verse, and word by word, and let the text speak for itself.

As we move into chapter two, then, these men have been waiting now for ten days. After Jesus had said to them, 'Wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit to come upon you, and you be empowered to be My witnesses,' then He ascended to heaven. And they've been waiting for ten days. We know that at least when it says they were all in one place on the day of Pentecost, that special feast fifty days after Passover, it says

*And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.*

Now we know that includes at least the twelve apostles that had been appointed to be witnesses. There were others that had been meeting with them; up to 100-120 others had been meeting with them. The text doesn't say that it was the full 120. We know at least it was the twelve. As we go through the narrative you'll sense it was more than them, but the strict grammar...we're simply limited to say we know for sure it was the twelve, and maybe others. But they're all in one place, gathered in one home. And it says this:

*And suddenly there came from heaven a noise...*

...a noise...a noise...

*...like a violent, rushing wind...*

Now, it doesn't say there was a wind. It simply says there was a noise. Now, I kinda try to picture this. It was a rushing wind

*...that filled the whole where they were sitting.*

And I try to imagine this. I can't visualize it, but I try to imagine this. It's kinda like when you're in a home, and a huge vacuum cleaner starts up, you know, and you just hear the noise of that suction, ok, only this is kinda the reverse. It's not suction, it's the sound of wind rushing in. You don't necessarily feel anything, but *there's this sound.*

The context moves on. We have a sense that others heard it, too, beyond the house, but it sure...that sound filled the place where they were in. You can imagine the wind howling down our glacial valley, and it's that kind of howling sound.

Now, with the audio effect there's a visual effect, and that comes in the next verse. It says, "there appeared to them..." There was something they now saw; and what they saw were tongues as of fire. These weren't fire...it was "as of" fire; it was tongues that looked like they were flames. And these tongues were distributing themselves. It wasn't just one tongue in the midst of them, one flash of light. It was all these lights, just suddenly appeared, distributing themselves. And they rested—it's important here—on each one of them. Not just on one, not just on two, but each one of them had one of these tongues upon them. What was happening here is the Spirit of God is doing just what Jesus said He would do. He's coming upon Jesus' followers.

Then there's a next thing that happens. The Spirit has come upon them, and suddenly they're all filled with the Holy Spirit. That means the Spirit takes control of them. Picture a wind blowing into the sails of a sailboat and filling it, and moving that sailboat forward. That's the kind of sense here. And we're gonna see this word more as we go through the book of Acts, and we'll gain our perception and understanding of it as we keep going. But the Spirit had come upon them, and now it fills them. It begins to move them.

And the first thing it does is they begin to speak in other tongues, in other languages. These are known languages, but they had never learned them. These are languages other people spoke and understood, but these people had never been taught them. These were common Galileans from northern part of Israel. And suddenly they were speaking other languages, and the text is very specific—they were speaking "*as the Spirit was giving them utterance,*" as the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak.

The text'll go on from here and it'll describe the reactions of people, because they heard this sound of the wind and they began to gather around. And it must have been a huge crowd, because we know later that thousands responded. But they gathered around this assembly of people, and they're coming out into the streets, and they're talking in these other languages. And people are coming and they're hearing...they're hearing these Galileans speak in the languages that they have known from birth. See, there are people living in Jerusalem that came from all over the Roman empire and scattered beyond, and they had come and they were residing in Jerusalem. And as they gathered around this sound they could hear these common Galileans speaking in their...the languages they had known from birth.

It was amazing! It was astounding! They didn't...they couldn't figure it out. In fact, their response was this. It says they, speaking here of the crowd that gathered,

*They all continued in amazement and great perplexity.*

How did these ordinary Galileans know how to speak all these various languages?

They raise the question. And they begin to say to each other, "*What does this mean?*" And that's really the most important question of this chapter, at least the first part of it. What does this phenomenon mean? It's a question that we wrestle with even to our day, as people pour over this text and try to say, 'What's the significance here? What does that mean for us? What's goin' on?' The text'll give an answer. The passage will speak for itself at this point. What does this phenomenon mean? What does this event indicate?

And Peter provides the answer as we go on in the text. There's others that hear the noise, and they just say, 'These guys are drunk.' But Peter stands up, and he begins to declare them and explain what it is that's goin' on. And he puts it this way; his explanation begins at verse 16. He stands up, he calls to the crowd to listen to him, and he says, 'Listen...'

*"This is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel..."*

In other words, what he's sayin' is 'What you're seein' right now, this event, this phenomenon, is exactly what the ancient, Old Testament prophet Joel was talking about. It's something that the prophet spoke of hundreds of years ago. This is a moment of prophecy being fulfilled.' And he goes on to be specific about what that prophecy was. He says, speaking and referring to Joel's prophecy written and spoken hundreds of years before, he says

*"It shall be in the last days,' God says, 'that I will pour forth My Spirit on all mankind.'"*

Peter's sayin', 'Listen, this is just what Joel was talking about, that in the last days God would pour out His Spirit on all mankind.' Now, don't take this in terms of universally every individual person. It's more of a distributive sense—every type and condition of person. That becomes clear as he goes on from here. He says further, he says, 'Listen,'

*"Your daughters and your sons will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams."*

And then he goes on in verse 18 to build on that same idea. He says,

*"Even on my bondslaves," God says, "those who are My servants, both men and women, I will in those days the last days pour forth My Spirit and they shall prophesy."*

Peter says 'That's what's happenin' right now. That's what's goin' on. That prophecy is right now becoming history, at this moment. The Spirit of God is coming upon His people—men, women, children, adults, all different types—His Spirit is coming upon them and they will prophesy.'

Now, we wanna give that the broadest definition it can carry, because that term has a very broad definition in the scriptures. We can paint it very simply this way—it means to speak as God moves. When we hear the word 'prophecy' we think of authoritative pronouncements of the future. That's included in prophecy, but a word of encouragement spoken at the right moment, in the right way, at the right time, to a friend in the hospital, speaking of Jesus—that is also God moving. These individuals speaking in different languages...it says they were simply declaring the great deeds of God. They were declaring...they were talking about the great things God had done. That was prophecy in the broad definition. And as this text unfolds, and Peter simply takes his stand in Jerusalem and he begins to speak of the reality of Jesus crucified, buried, rose again...that also is prophecy in this broad sense. It is simply God's Spirit speaking through His people. And Peter says, 'It's happening right now. And it just isn't the elite prophet, it isn't this special priest, it isn't the arisen king...it is *all* God's people. The Spirit is speaking through them.'

Now, he goes on with that prophecy, because there's more to it than that. He'll go on, and he says, verse 19, he goes on and he says, speaking of God speaking here, he says

*"And I will grant wonders in the sky above, and signs on the earth below."*

And he describes this as clouds and smoke, and the sun going dark and the moon turning red, and he describes that, and he says, 'There's going to be great signs and wonders in the earth below.' And he goes on and he says, 'And all this will take place...'

*"...before the great and glorious day of the LORD shall come."*

And then finally he closes it with a statement that's all-important. He says

*"And it shall be that everyone who calls upon the name of the LORD will be saved."*

Peter's sayin', 'That prophecy's now becoming history.'

Let's back up a second. Let's put it another way. Let's look at it just a little bit differently. The biblical picture, Old Testament and New, looks forward to a great and final day of the Lord. That was the day of that great and final end of all things that Joel and the other prophets of the Old Testament saw, and the New Testament speaks of—a great finish to human history, when God would come down and He would bring all human rebellion and resistance to an end, and He would establish His kingdom forever and ever and ever. It's called the great and final day of the Lord. It's a day of catastrophic events, and yet it's also a day of glorious beginning—the resistance and the rebellion of mankind will be brought to an end, and the establishment of Christ's eternal kingdom.

Now, what Peter is saying right here is that the day of Pentecost...at the day of Pentecost the flow of human history passed an all-important marker—an all-important marker, a definitive point, a milestone. On the day of Pentecost we entered into the last days. You say, 'Well, wait...that was two thousand years ago.' I know. All of history since then comes under the title "The Last Days," the last epoch in God's working with mankind. And Peter's saying, 'You know what? What you're seeing right now is what Joel prophesied; we're into the last days. And the key marker of that, the key thing that indicates that, is the fact that the Spirit has been poured out. And specifically, the Spirit has been poured out on all God's people, not just the elite, not just the individual warrior that's gonna stand up and rescue the nation, but on all the ordinary, common people that follow our God.' We're in the last days. The Spirit's been poured out.

Now yet ahead...yet ahead are wonders and signs yet to come. Those hadn't appeared yet. So Peter's sayin, 'We've passed into the last days, the Spirit's been poured out; and understand that there's signs and wonders yet ahead prior to that great and final day. The key issue, the key important thing in all of that is that people call upon the name of the Lord before that great and final day.' That's Peter's explanation.

What does this phenomenon mean? These people speaking languages that they'd never been taught, speaking of the good deeds of God, and Peter speaking forth the gospel—what does this mean? It means that we've passed into the last days. God's Spirit has been poured out on His people. And signs and wonders are yet to come. It may be another three thousand years from now—or it may be a matter of months. We're still in the last days.

Ok. What does that mean for us? Let me walk you through a statement. If I was teaching a class in a college classroom or something, I would kinda be summarizing it this way, kind of a long sentence, but it's the way I would put it. We know what it meant as Peter spoke there. What does that mean for us when we translate it for us as part of that church that began so many centuries ago? The first thing we'd say is that we live in the last days. We do. We do. And as followers of Jesus Christ, as those who name Him, we live in the last days with the Spirit upon each one of us. The promise that Peter made when he was done with his sermon was "Repent, be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, your sins will be forgiven, and you will receive the Holy Spirit." That is the promise given to each and every believer. We live in the last days with the Spirit upon each one of us. It is upon us for an effective witness to the reality of Jesus. He's not upon us simply so that we can experience new spiritual highs. He's not upon us so that we can do really wondrous things. He is upon us for an effective witness to the reality of Jesus Christ.

That's the way I'd put it if I was putting it in a class or something. If I was just summarizing it, I'd say exactly what I said at the beginning. We are the people through whom the Spirit of God speaks of Jesus. We are the people through whom the Spirit of God speaks of Jesus at a critical time in history.

The immediate question, then, is "Well, what do we do? What do we do?"

I'm gonna suggest three things here very quickly. Number one is we continue on through the book of Acts. We continue to read through here and we see how this unfolds, and how it plays out, because we learn so much by seeing how that happened, how it expanded, and how that first group of people through whom the Spirit of God gave witness to the reality of Jesus, and they began to witness...how He worked in them and through them. We wanna go through the book of Acts and see that, how it unfolds.

Secondly, is I find that in our time there's a lot of misunderstanding with respect to the Holy Spirit—who He is, what's He done in the past, what's He gonna do in the future, what's He like, those things, what's His relationship to the Father and the Son, those sorts of things. And what we're going to be offering, and it's in your bulletin, is we're going to be offering what we call 'Theology Units.' These are single-session classes. You come to one, and it's only an hour and a half. And during that hour and a half we will be giving you a comprehensive and concise overview of what the Bible has to say about the Holy Spirit. These are systematic theology-type classes. We'll be covering everything from beginning to the end of the Bible in a very comprehensive way, a very concise way, to give you a handle on how the Bible talks about the Holy Spirit. And we'll be offering these repeatedly throughout the school year as we work through the book of Acts. And I'm gonna encourage you to take one of those. We've got three coming up right away—three Tuesday nights in a row. And you can sign up...it's in the bulletin, and you can register for that. And you can come in for an hour and a half, one session, you'll have a concise and comprehensive understanding of the Holy Spirit.

Number two [should be three], and this is because not only do I find that we sometimes we are short on understanding the Holy Spirit and the biblical perspective of who the Holy spirit is, but even when we get the head knowledge we're not always real practical with it. How do we relate to the Holy Spirit? And so we're going to be offering what we call "Application groups," and these will be offered three times during the school year. And these are small groups, study groups of about eight people, that will be led by our elders and our staff. And you'll meet in small groups in the home and various venues, small groups here at the church or at homes; and you can sign up for. And we will be working on and coaching you in how to recognize and respond to the Holy Spirit in your life. This is one of those areas that I find Christians are kinda confused. "Boy, how do I know if that's the Spirit moving or not? And if so, what do I do?" It's not real complicated. And in these courses we'll just be teaching you some what are called spiritual disciplines that the church has practiced for centuries, on how to pick up on what the Spirit's sayin' to you and how to respond to it. We'll be running one of those here in October; we'll be running another one in January, and another one in the spring. And I'm gonna encourage you to take one of those this year. And the bulletin will have details on that.

And lastly, later in the year, we're gonna run some exploratories. These are...these are classes that will deal with some of the things that create more debate and more...sometimes even argument in the Christian community about "Boy, does the Spirit do that?" "No, He doesn't." "Yes, He does." Those kind of arguments. We'll talk about those later, but we wanna build a foundation first. We want you to see the Spirit working through God's people in the book of Acts. We want you understanding the big picture, and we want you practicing recognizing and responding to the Spirit in your life. And then we can deal with some of the more debated issues. That's where we're headed.

But actually the important thing when I go through the book of Acts is not so much what we do. It really isn't. Interesting thing later on in this chapter of Acts, the second chapter of Acts—Peter gives another statement explaining the phenomenon that they've just seen. He's explained it before by saying, 'You know what? We've just passed the marker. We're in the end times, and God's poured His Spirit out on all of His people. The Spirit is now speaking through us of Jesus.' But he gives another explanation for the phenomenon that had appeared, and this is another view of it. He says, in verse 33, speaking of Jesus having been raised from the dead, he says

*"Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God..."*

...speaking of Jesus being exalted to the right hand of God, the Crucified One now sitting next to the God of Gods, He's sitting at the right hand of God...He

*"...having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit,"*

...God said to the Son, 'You can do whatever You want with the Spirit.' And Jesus

*"...poured forth this which you both see and hear."*

Jesus did this. I love the sequence. He just tells His followers, in chapter one, "Wait." He doesn't tell them to do anything else. They pray, but He didn't tell them to do that. They replace the missing apostle; He didn't tell them to do that. The only thing He told them to do is 'Just wait here.' And after they waited, He poured His Spirit out. And they began to speak of Him. That's the pattern. We simply do what Jesus has called us to do, whatever it is in our point in time, and our place. He is the one who will pour out and accomplish what He desires, through us, by His Spirit. And He will take us further and further than we ever dreamed He would. But He will take us as those who speak of Him through the Spirit.

Let's stand.

I've just taken us slowly through this today. This is just kind of building groundwork as we move forward. And we're dealing with an issue that people struggle with a lot. But I wanna make sure we close by enjoying what it is that we have, and that is the blessing of God upon us as His people. And so let's close with our song that we close with each week.

[Congregation sings blessing song.]

Go in His grace.