

Church 2.0

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
(Acts 1:8 ESV)*

“Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” (Acts 28:28 ESV)

Tongues As Of Fire

October 2nd, 2022

Acts 2:1-13

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Acts 2:1-13. For the last couple of weeks we have been working our way through the Book of Acts in a particular way. We are revisiting these foundational narratives looking for resources, insights, corrections and encouragements that will help us rebuild and renew the church on the other side. For the last two weeks we were looking at the PREAMBLE in the Acts of the Apostles – PREAMBLE of course refers to things that had to happen before the MAIN ACTION of the story could take place. Preamble is about FRAMING and SET UP. So we talked about the ascension of Jesus Christ. That HAD TO HAPPEN before the Holy Spirit could be poured out on the church. Jesus had to be SEATED. He had to ASCEND the throne and he had to RECEIVE HIS CROWN. It is the VICTORIOUS CONQUERER who gives out gifts to his people. It is the REIGNING MONARCH who rewards and elevates those who have been loyal to him.

And then, as we talked about last week, the company of the Apostles had to be made WHOLE. A GAP had been created by the apostasy of Judas – and so a 12th Apostle had to be selected and affirmed. The church was to present itself as the renovated and restored Israel – and so the symmetry and the essential pattern needed to be preserved.

And so – with all of those things in place – with everything set up and framed the way it needed to be – we are ready now for the MAIN ACTION of the story to begin. And begin it does. The story we are about to read represents the official beginning of PART 2 of The Jesus Story. Part 1 was about what Jesus did in the flesh. Part 2 is about what Jesus did and continues to do through the church.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1.

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. ⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³ But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.” (Acts 2:1–13 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

As we have done for the last couple of weeks, I want to take a very straightforward approach today. We’re going to ask, and by God’s grace answer, 5 very simple questions:

#1. Why the Day of Pentecost?

#2. Why wind and fire?

#3. What does it mean to be “filled with the Holy Spirit”?

#4. Why did they begin to speak in other languages?

#5. What does the Day of Pentecost have to do with us today?

We'll begin with the first question:

1. Why the Day of Pentecost?

Of course when we hear the word “Pentecost” we think of the story that we’ve just read, but the Day of Pentecost had a particular significance long before the events of Acts 2 – and since Jesus told the Apostles to WAIT in Jerusalem for this precise moment, we assume that connection is significant. Jesus wanted the Holy Spirit to fall on the church on this particular day – why?

The Day of Pentecost – also known as The Feast of Weeks – was essentially the Thanksgiving of the Old Testament. It was a harvest festival. Then later in the intertestamental period it became associated as well with the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai and so it would seem that those are the TWIN themes that Jesus wants us to associate with the giving of the Spirit. He is giving the SPIRIT NOW – because now is the time for HARVEST!!!! Remember Jesus said:

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (Matthew 9:37–38 ESV)

So this is Jesus answering his own prayer!

And of course, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit leads to an immediate harvest! We’ll be talking about that in a couple of weeks. The Apostle Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit stands before the crowd of Jewish worshippers and he begins to preach – and 3000 people are saved and baptized in a single day!

Those people represent the FIRST FRUITS of the GREAT END TIMES HARVEST from among the Gentiles – as I said, we’ll be talking more about that in a couple of weeks.

So we’ve got a major HARVEST theme going on here – and there is a connection as well to THE LAW. Modern day evangelicals tend to see a separation between the LAW and the SPIRIT that is entirely FOREIGN to the Bible. In fact, one of the great prophecies of the New Covenant in the Old Testament has God promising:

“I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (Jeremiah 31:33 ESV)

The Old Testament depicts the giving of the Holy Spirit as God putting his LAW within the hearts of his people and Luke seems to be saying here: This is that. Praise the Lord!

That leads us to our second question:

2. Why wind and fire?

In the Old Testament WIND and FIRE are often associated with the experience of the Presence of the Lord. In 1 Kings 19:11 for example, the Lord told the prophet Elijah to go out and stand on Mount Sinai; he said:

“Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and **a great and strong wind** tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD (1 Kings 19:11 ESV)

So a great WIND preceded the coming and the appearance of the Lord. Fire also was a sign of God’s presence – we think particularly of the story of the Burning Bush. In Exodus 3:2 it says:

“And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.” (Exodus 3:2 ESV)

The burning bush was the SIGN of God's presence – it was the immediate LOCUS of God's voice – the Bible says:

“God called to him out of the bush” (Exodus 3:4 ESV)

God spoke to him FROM THE FIRE – so fire represents the Presence of God and the voice of God, and then of course, as we mentioned earlier, The Day of Pentecost was associated with the giving of the Law – which once again happened on the Mountain of God – Mount Sinai. That event also was characterized by certain powerful phenomenon. Exodus 19:18 says:

“Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.” (Exodus 19:18 ESV)

In the New Testament when they look back upon that event they mentioned:

“a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest” (Hebrews 12:18 ESV)

FIRE and WIND. These are the signs that are associated with the presence of the Lord in general and the giving of the Law in particular. Thus, when all of these phenomena reappear in Acts 2 the message would seem to be that because of the gift of the Holy Spirit every believer now is a burning bush – and the church is the mountain of God¹ - praise the Lord!

That leads us to our third question:

3. What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

We see that in verses 3-4. It says:

“And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. **4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit**” (Acts 2:3–4 ESV)

¹ An idea that is developed extensively in Hebrew 12:19-29.

So this is the event that fulfills the promise made by Jesus to the disciples as recorded in Acts 1:8. He said:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8 ESV)

We can trace this event even further back to the prophesy made by John the Baptist. In Matthew 3:11 he said:

“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Matthew 3:11 ESV)

Well, obviously THIS IS THAT! To be BAPTIZED with the Holy Spirit and FIRE is to receive the presence and power and guidance of the Holy Spirit of God! The covenant community didn't have that in Matthew 3, nor did they have that in Acts 1 – but HERE in Acts 2 they RECEIVE IT. They are baptized and FILLED with the Holy Spirit of God!

This is an absolute game changer! This is what the Old Testament prophets had been waiting for!

By the end of the Old Testament the prophets had become convinced that the people of God would never be able to live, worship and serve as they were originally created and intended to do. Sin and idolatry had ruined them. They were unable to do what they knew they should do and what they wanted to do in their better moments. They would make an attempt – they would occasionally make some progress – but it always went wrong in the end. They were broken! They were WARPED. They were ruined.

So they began to understand that before God could bless them and use them as he had promised to do, he would have to heal them and change them in some foundational way and so they began to speak about the gift of the Holy Spirit. Ezekiel 36:25-27 says:

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezekiel 36:25–27 ESV)

The prophet says that BEFORE God can bless them and use them the way he originally intended to do – he would have to heal them and fill them with his Holy Spirit. Only then would they be able to walk righteously and consistently before him.

Well, to state the obvious: THIS IS THAT!

The blood of the cross has provided a way for people to be cleansed, healed and forgiven – positioning them now to RECEIVE the long-awaited Spirit of the living God!

THIS IS THAT!

This is the last piece of the grace of God through the person and work of Christ for our salvation!

John Stott says helpfully here:

“It was **the final act of the saving ministry of Jesus** before the Parousia. He who was born into our humanity, lived our life, died for our sins, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, now sent his Spirit to his people to constitute them his body and to work out in them what he had won for them.”²

This is the last piece of the puzzle. With our hearts cleansed by the blood of the cross and filled now with the Holy Spirit of God – we can BE AGAIN the people we were created and intended to be – thanks be to God!

²John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, The Bible Speaks Today. Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 60.

Now – that raises an interesting question – this is definitely a once for all event – like the incarnation, like the cross, like the empty tomb, like the ascension - and yet, the Bible speaks about the church being “filled with the Holy Spirit” on an on-going, perpetual basis – what do we make of that? Because the Bible does speak about that – it more than speaks about it, in Ephesians 5 the Apostle Paul COMMANDS it, he says:

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18 ESV)

The Greek verb there is a present imperative so it really means BE EVER BEING FILLED with the Holy Spirit, so even though Pentecost is a once for all event, just like we need to keep going back to the foot of the cross, so too we need to keep going BACK to the WELL of the Spirit. The Pillar Commentary says helpfully here:

“Someone who is already filled with or full of the Spirit can receive a further filling or enabling for a particular ministry”³

That’s very helpful for us to see.

There is something HUGE happening here; something EPOCHAL and then also something ongoing. That brings us to our 4th important question:

4. Why did they begin to speak in other languages?

We see that in verse 4:

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:4 ESV)

³David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 133.

Now, I used the phrase “speak in other languages” because I think that is clearer than saying simply “they spoke in tongues”. When we encounter that phrase today in the 21st century we tend to hear it through the lens of the 20th century charismatic movement – so we think of ecstatic, unintelligible speech – but that is definitely NOT what is happening here. Here the whole point is that people could understand them. Verse 6 says:

“And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because **each one was hearing them speak in his own language.**” (Acts 2:6 ESV)

So whatever you may want to think about the 20th century Charismatic or Pentecostal phenomenon – and whatever you may want to think about what was going on in 1 Corinthians – those are interesting conversations that we can have at another time – it is absolutely beyond a shadow of a doubt that what is happening HERE is that the disciples are being supernaturally enabled to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in REAL HUMAN LANGUAGES that they had not previously known or studied. That’s the miracle! That’s the event that draws the crowd described in Acts 2 verse 6.

Now remember, at the Feast of Pentecost, Jews from all over the known world would have been gathering in Jerusalem. Luke says there were in Jerusalem:

“devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that we hear, **each of us in his own native language?**” (Acts 2:5–8 ESV)

So these people are Jewish background people who probably spoke Hebrew about as well as your Catholic grandparents spoke Latin – that is to say, a little bit, but most of it went right over their heads. But now all of the sudden, by the grace of God – by means of this incredible miracle – they are hearing the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their own native tongues! And they knew that there

was no way that the disciples – most of whom were from Galilee – could have been expected to speak those languages under normal circumstances.

So this is GLOBAL MISSION empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit!

Remember Pentecost was the Old Testament Thanksgiving – it was a HARVEST FESTIVAL – and so the SYMBOLISM here would have very hard to miss. John Stott again is helpful here, he says:

“Ever since the early church fathers, commentators have seen the blessing of Pentecost as a deliberate and dramatic reversal of the curse of Babel. At Babel human languages were confused and the nations were scattered; in Jerusalem the language barrier was supernaturally overcome as a sign that the nations would now be gathered together in Christ, prefiguring the great day when the redeemed company will be drawn ‘from every nation, tribe, people and language’.”⁴

So this is a very symbolic event - of course it really happened - something can be REAL and SYMBOLIC at the same time - but the symbolism here is what really matters. This is an event that communicates and it is saying that the Spirit is going to empower the church to reverse the curse of Babel and to regather humanity into one family under God through Jesus Christ! The Holy Spirit was given to empower the church and to gather the nations - thanks be to God!

And that leads us to our final question:

5. Why is the event of Pentecost important for us today?

To be clear, it is important for us today. We are part of the same HOUSE that is here FILLED with the Holy Spirit of God. The church is built up on the foundation of the prophets and apostles with Christ as cornerstone – so if you bring your stone to Christ – then you are part of this HOUSE that has just been filled and forever changed – so this is an EPOCHAL EVENT, not just for the early church but for the church in every age. Let me show you 3 reasons why that is. The event of Pentecost is important for us today first of all because:

⁴John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, The Bible Speaks Today. Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 68.

i. Without the Holy Spirit we are incapable of obeying God

That's the entire logic behind all of the prophecies and anticipations of the Holy Spirit that we encounter at the end of the Old Testament. In Ezekiel God says:

“I will put my Spirit within you, **and cause you** to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezekiel 36:25–27 ESV)

Brothers and sisters, can I tell you a secret?

At the end of the day, human beings always do what they want. They will make excuses, they will invent justifications, they will blame, they will explain – they will bend logic and defy objective reason in order to GET WHERE THEY WANT TO BE so as TO DO WHAT THEY WANT TO DO.

So if you want to change human beings you have to come up with a way to change them at the level of impulse and desire.

And that is what the Holy Spirit – and only the Holy Spirit – is capable of doing.

The Holy Spirit is not about external control. The Holy Spirit is not about punishment and reward. The Holy Spirit is about changing what you want, changing how you think and changing what you desire. You see, the end goal is not for you to obey God because you ‘have to’; the end goal is for you to obey God because you ‘want to’ and that is something that only the Holy Spirit can CAUSE YOU TO DO.

And that's why, incidentally, order of operations really matters when it comes to disciple making. We can't say to people: “Get your life in order and then come to church and get saved.”

No.

Because they CAN'T get their lives together UNTIL they are saved! It is only when the blood of Jesus washes away their guilt and the Spirit of Jesus begins to change their DESIRES from the inside that we can begin to talk about change.

So that's why Pentecost matters.

Because without the Holy Spirit filling the hearts and minds of men and women, we are hopeless, aimless and subject to our fallen thoughts, feelings and desires.

And then secondly, Pentecost is important because:

ii. Without the Holy Spirit we can't get along with people from outside our group

Remember we talked about how the Day of Pentecost represents the reversal of the curse of Babylon and that's why the Apostle Paul talks about the importance of maintaining:

“the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:3 ESV)

It is the HOLY SPIRIT – and only the HOLY SPIRIT that can BOND diverse people into a single, cohesive community.

Can I tell you another secret?

Without the Holy Spirit human beings are racist and nationalistic.

If you disagree with that or are offended by that, all that tells me is that you haven't read a great deal of history. If history is clear about anything it is that human beings are essential tribal in nature – FALLEN NATURE – I would add. We instinctively privilege and protect people from inside our circle – our family, our relatives, our tribe. And whenever we have power we marginalize, oppress and disadvantage people from outside our tribe. And that's not just true of

white people or North Americans or Europeans – that is true for all people, of every colour and nationality down through the ages. You can see this story playing out on every continent on planet earth going all the way back to Genesis 4.

That’s who we are, as human beings, after the fall.

And it is only when we are filled with the Holy Spirit that we are capable of overcoming that. Have you ever noticed how **DISTINCTLY SOCIAL** the fruit of the Spirit is? The Apostle Paul says:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23 ESV)

Or in other words, everything you need to live with different people in a community.

So that’s why **PENTECOST IS A REALLY BIG DEAL!** Because only when we are filled with the Holy Spirit and only when we are growing in the fruit of the Spirit are we capable of living in community with people from every tribe, tongue and nation on planet earth - as we were created and indeed as we are destined in eternity to do – thanks be to God!

And then finally – I’ve saved the most obvious one for last - Pentecost is a really big deal because:

iii. Without the Holy Spirit we can’t begin or complete the Great Commission

Jesus basically locked the disciples in a room lest they go out into the world without the Holy Spirit. He literally said:

“behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:49 ESV)

‘The Holy Spirit is coming, and I would really rather that you didn’t talk to anyone or tell anyone that you know me, until he arrives.’

There is wisdom in that, brothers and sisters – and also comfort. Because God would never send us out without first building us up. He equips those he calls. He makes that which he loves. He empowers that which he decrees. And therefore, as we see in this story, there is no Christian ministry, there is no Gospel preaching, there is no Great Commission without the gift, without the power and without the presence of the Holy Spirit – thanks be to God!

Let’s pray together.