

We turn this morning to the book of Acts as we have begun this series on the book of Acts that will take us through the spring. And as I stated last week, this sermon series is not going to cover every single verse of every chapter in the book of Acts. But it is a desire that we hit the major intersections of what the Lord is doing and as it's declared in this book of Luke. After he has written his gospel he continues to declare what Christ is continuing to do through his Spirit. This book is about mission. It is about the Lord sending his church and preparing his people for mission, to send them out. And he does so first by giving the Holy Spirit. So this week and next there's going to be a particular emphasis on some of the most well-known portions of the book of Acts---and oftentimes some of the most confusing when it comes to applying what is being taught here in regarding us as a church some two thousand years later. So how are we to understand this?

And so this morning I want to do something perhaps a little different, in that I'm going to let you know where most of the application for us is going to come. I'm going to teach this passage as I believe it is historically set. Then at the end I'm going to spend a little more concentrated time, essentially asking the question, 'So what?' What do we and are we to do with this passage? So let's turn together to the book of Acts 2:1-13. Hear now the Word of God.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs---we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

This is the word of God. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together. Father, on this passage we would particularly ask for the power of your Spirit working together with the truth of your Word, which is written for us, accounting for the history of what you have done through beginning your church and the giving of your Spirit. So Lord, help us to understand it, as those who were there would have understood it. But help us, O Lord, then, guided by your Spirit and your truth, to understand then, Lord, what would you have for us. What must we be careful of? What must we have joy in? What must we look towards as it relates to the giving of your Spirit and the power of your presence. We need you, O Lord. Your church needs you, that we might be a faithful witness to the world of Jesus Christ and him crucified and raised from the dead for our salvation. And so we ask, O Lord, by your power and authority, come, Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen.

We're going to look together this morning at this passage, and I've given you the verses there, so I want to be careful that we go through each of these verses understanding what they say and trying to apply it. Because, I will tell you, there is a great deal of room for error in these verses, and so we need to allow the Scriptures to speak. Because what Luke was doing, you'll remember, was giving an account for the most excellent Theophilus, this friend who was likely a high officer, who had great power and leverage---teaching him as one who has been converted to Christianity. He's recounting for him what to place when the disciples, then the apostles, were given the Holy Spirit. So we must

remember that first this is a recounting of history of something that has taken place. And we must be able to understand it in a way that makes sense of its history and its context, but yes, trying to apply it.

So the best way to do that this morning is to look at each of the verses. So we're going to begin by looking at 'The Day with a History Now Fulfilled,' verse 1. Then we're going to look at 'A Mighty Wind and a Burning Fire,' verses 2-4, and then the 'Reversal of Babel,' verses 5-13.

So let's begin, then, with the 'The Day with a History Now Fulfilled.' You see in verse 1, I'll read it again: "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place." What we must be aware of is that the idea of Pentecost, or the day of Pentecost is not---this is something we must understand historically---it is not a New Testament phenomenon. It was not a Christian day. This is a day which has been in the Jewish calendar since the day that they received the law at Mt. Sinai. So we need to understand, first of all, what is this day, this idea of Pentecost. What does it mean and why does it fall where it falls. And we need to look at some of the history, and how it was developed throughout the Jewish, Israel experience of being with the Lord. And then to see how is it fulfilled. So let's begin. This day, Pentecost, literally means 'fifty days.' It refers to actually the idea of seven weeks plus one day. This came to be known first not as Pentecost, but it became known first as the Feast of Weeks. This was to commemorate the giving of the Lord his blessing and then freedom of the people of Israel from the nation of Egypt. For back in the book of Exodus, we hear of what took place at Passover. You recall, there was the request of Moses to go and to ask Pharaoh to free the people of God. He refused to do so. But what happened at Passover was, if you will, the breaking point that then led Pharaoh to free the people of Israel. And that day was a day when the Lord instructed the people of God to take a fatted lamb, one who was a blessing of the Lord, which would've been theirs, which would have been pure and undefiled, and it was to be offered as a sacrifice. They were to eat of the meat in a particular way, roasted over a fire. And then they were to take the blood, and they were to put it over the door posts of their home. And then the Lord came, and he judged Egypt. But if, as he instructed, over the doorpost of the home---if there was this blood smeared over the doorpost of the sacrifice, then the firstborn of both children and animals were not taken. But if that was not there, then those were enemies of the Lord, and he would take the life of the firstborn, of not only children but also of the animals.

This needs to be reminder to us. This is a hard thing to swallow. But it is to remember that the Lord is a holy God, fierce in his love for his people and to free them. And he is a mighty and holy God who will judge those who are against him. This was his judgment on the nation of Egypt, but his instruction to his people. And so he would pass over the homes of those believers who belonged to the house of Israel, to the nation of Israel.

They were freed from the nation of Egypt, and three months later we come to the beginning of Exodus 19:1, where there we will learn of the Lord preparing his people to receive---through the mouth of Moses and through Moses's intercession and mediation between God and his people. He would go up to Mt. Sinai, and there he would receive the Law. And so as a part of that Law--- that was not just the Ten Commandments as we've come to know them, but it was far more than the Commandments. It was how they were to celebrate, the ceremonial law, how they were to celebrate, to worship. Also how they were to conduct themselves ethically and morally as a nation, so we also had the civil law. But as it related to their relationship with God the Father we had the moral law. All of that was given through these instructions to Moses, and Moses came down and gave the people the law of God. And as a part of that ceremonial law was the establishment of three feast days or three feast times throughout the calendar year.

One of those feast days was the Feast of Weeks, and it came, at first, during a time of harvest. It was to be a recognition that as the harvest was taken from the fields, they were celebrating God's

provision for them of freedom from Egypt, of providing for them a covering through the blood sacrifice, but also the provision for the people of God, even while they were in the desert. And while they will be led to the promised land, that God is the God of the harvest. He provides for his people.

Now, over the intervening years from Leviticus up until the New Testament, that Feast of Weeks often at times was a movable feast, as God would lead them. And because of their disobedience and because of their dispersion the people of God, the Jews, were dispersed over a wide ranging area---a clue, by the way, to why those who heard the tongues of men in their own language, that Diaspora are those who were spread out in these ways that we just read about. So this feast was moved to different parts of the year, but became settled on the fifty days after Passover. And at this Pentecost was a remembrance of the Lord's provision and freedom from Egypt, but also that the Lord has given his commandments, how they are to live. So that's the history. It was a Jewish day in the Jewish calendar for the ceremonial worship of the people of God.

So that's the day of history. How is it fulfilled? Well here's the problem with many of our English translations. The problem with many of our English translations is we read something [like] the following: When the day of Pentecost came..." When we hear the word in English, when the 'day came,' it sounds like, well, that the day just arrived. It's here. But that's not the sense in which the Greek communicates the word that we've seen translated as 'came' or the word 'arrived.' It literally means, as it was taught by Luke, and because he was recounting what he heard from the eyewitnesses and those who received the Spirit and he had spoken to the apostles. It means this, literally: When the day of Pentecost was fulfilled.

What was fulfilled? So what Luke is establishing here is that this Pentecost, this Feast, this fifty days, is after what? Passover. What was fifty days before this day? Fifty days before this day was the night on which Jesus was betrayed. Do you recall? That was at Passover, which we've come to know as Maundy Thursday, where we have the establishment of the Lord's Supper. So now, stay with me, because again we need all of this to make sense of how we're to understand it. So we have now that Pentecost was fifty days after Passover. So what does Luke mean by saying 'When the day of Pentecost had been fulfilled'? That means that something about the harvest is being celebrated here, that is more than just God's provision of wheat and grain for the people of God. Something is being fulfilled, which should be a clue to us that when God provided for his people harvest from the fields, they were literal food to be enjoyed and to be celebrated. But they also were to be a sign and symbol of something greater. Food will be exhausted. It will run out. We need more. So something at this Feast of Weeks, something at this fifty days, this Pentecost, happens that is new.

So to understand how it is fulfilled, let's go back fifty days. Do you remember what I said about Passover in Egypt, where the people of God were to take a lamb, roast it, and take the blood and place it on the door posts. That was God's covenant instruction to his people. That blood was to be a covenant sign, a promise of relationship that that family under that doorpost had with the living God. So when they commemorated Passover, they were commemorating God's covenant promise to redeem them. However, with the advent of Christ and his incarnation, in taking on a human nature, becoming the Redeemer, Son of God declared by God in our midst, who would go to the cross---the Passover is fulfilled.

For on the night in which he was betrayed Jesus took bread and he broke it. 'This is my body which is for you.' Ladies and gentlemen, when he says this is my body which is for you, he's pointing to this: He is that better lamb. He is also the greater Moses, that Jesus is instructing his people to take this bread, which would be his body. On the next day, on the cross, he would be the sacrificial lamb, the lamb who was slain. Then after the supper he took the cup and he said, 'This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood.' Do you hear the blood? So no longer would the blood need to be put on the doorpost of a family's home. No, the blood of Christ would be poured out....for what? For redemption

and the forgiveness of sins. So Jesus's celebration of the Lord's Supper, which is pointing to what he does on the cross, is a fulfillment of Passover. It is the ultimate Passover, which does not need to happen again and again and again. His sacrifice was once and forever, which is the point of the book of Hebrews.

But then fifty days later we had this day of Pentecost, which would have been celebrated by the Jewish nation as the Feast of Weeks of God's provision of grain for them and a commemoration of God giving his covenant promises and his law. But guess what? Now that day is fulfilled. Jesus promised that he would give to his apostles, who were looking for Israel to be restored---he does something greater. He gives---not the law again---he gives his Spirit. Do you know why? Because no longer would the law mediate between us and God. Christ is our mediator. Christ is our righteousness. Because the law is a noose around our necks. Have you read the law? I can't do it. I don't know about you. And so now no longer between us is the law of God, but the Spirit of Christ, sent forth by Jesus Christ to point us to the greater Passover, to the greater sacrifice, and to the fulfillment of what we really need. The food we need is more than just water and bread. We need living water, and we need a living Spirit. Do you see? It's not then that the law is unimportant, it's that no longer is our righteousness seen through the law. Our righteousness is seen through Christ. And when he gives us his Spirit, folks, that means, then, the law is no longer a noose. It's something I get to do. I get to obey the Lord, not on my own strength, but by the Spirit who was given by the Lord, do you see.

So this is a day with a history fulfilled. But it began way back by the Lord's plan of what he was going to do. The Spirit has come that we might be united to Jesus Christ, with a focus on his body, his blood, and his resurrection power, that from there came the Spirit.

But not only is it a day of history fulfilled, it is also a mighty wind and a burning fire. Now, when it says in verses 2-4 this mighty wind and burning fire, how are we to understand it? It wasn't a literal wind, the text tells us so. Notice what it says. It says: "Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind..." It wasn't a violent wind that came into the house. It was the sound.

Now that should be a tipoff to us, because this has happened somewhere else. This happened at creation as the Spirit hovered above the waters with the Lord God and his Son in the creation of the world. But then, at the sin of Adam and Eve. They were in the garden, and the passage in Genesis 3 tells us this: That they heard the sound of the Lord in the garden. The same idea there is the sound of a mighty wind---it is to mark, what you see in your outline, as the presence of God. This mighty wind, this coming on to these disciples, is the presence of God for his apostles.

But not only is it the presence of God, it also tells us here that it moves them out of a place of judgment and into a place of wisdom. What do I mean? Well look at verses 3 and 4. "They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on them." Now the word 'tongues' there, I must tell you, is that Greek word *glossolalia*. I'm sorry to go into such....I'm not trying to show off with fancy Greek words, but this is important. The word here as *glossolalia*, translated as 'tongues' is not---though often done---translated as the word 'tongues.' What it should be understood as is 'language.' Known language. And so if we are to understand 'They saw what seemed to be languages of fire...' so they saw light that came and rested on them.

This idea of fire is important for us to note because the idea of fire has two meanings in Scripture. One is judgment and purification. But here's the beauty. Because of what Christ has done fifty days earlier on the cross, he took the fire of God's judgment and wrath that was due to us on himself. So now, when this fire of language comes on the disciples, it is not one of judgment, but one that will be for them wisdom. Because we see when it says this: "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, [languages], as the Spirit enabled them." The Spirit enablement is

the wisdom that God gives to his people from his Word. And here we will see next week of what that's going to look like. It's going to look like the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So this mighty wind, this sound, is the presence of God, which is always understood by the people of God to be the presence of his power. Now I want to tell you, when this presence comes onto the apostles, and when they are given languages that lead them to declare the glory of Christ, we need to see this as what it is. It is the Lord saying to his people, I am sending you out in mission, and that is what they do. They go out, and they speak, they speak the truths of Christ. But they do so because they are full and filled.

I'll get to the application point in just a moment. But there are two ways to understand how the apostles were both full and filled. They were both. In the western understanding of logic, if I have this bottle here, it is full of water. So in our western way of understanding 'full and filled' you can't imagine if it is full of water, how do I fill it any more? But the way in which it was understood, in the way the Greek works, is that you can be both full and filled at the same time. They were full of the Holy Spirit, the passage tells us. And "they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit..." So they were full of the Holy Spirit. But then watch what happens. And they "began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." That enablement carries along with it another part of the meaning of 'full.' In other words, this bottle is full of water. Being filled with the Spirit means it is internally being enlivened in new ways. And here for them, for the purpose of preaching the gospel they were full of the Spirit, but then the Spirit filled them, enabled them to speak in languages which were not their native tongue. So that they might---and I won't do it---pour out the grace and gospel of Christ on the nations. Do you see?

So as we go further---because I know what you might be wondering...So what? Ok, we're going. What happens next in verses 5-13 is the reversal of Babel. In verses 5-13 we first see that there is the removal of the barrier. If you recall, or if you know the story of Babel early on the book of Genesis, chapter 11, what we hear is that man was so welled up with his pride that they said, I know what we will do, because they all spoke a common language. We will build a tower, so that...what? We can work our way up to God, so that we can be God. God, recognizing the pride and the wickedness of men's hearts not to submit themselves to him, but want to be like him, he frustrates their efforts and gives them different languages so they cannot understand one another. Because in our hearts the language is not the problem, it's the problem of the heart. It's always the problem, that in the heart we want to conspire against God. We want to be to God. And so God frustrates the pride of man, and allows language to be the barrier.

But here, verse 5: "Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound..." So they perhaps heard the sound of this mighty wind, but they also heard the sound of the hundred and twenty people who had received the Spirit and were filled and enabled to speak a language. Now you may wonder where do I get a hundred and twenty. It comes from verse 15 of Chapter 1. "In those days Peter stood up among the believers in a group numbering about a hundred and twenty..." So here they are gathered together. The Spirit comes, they are enabled, filled, and full, and they start speaking languages that were not their native tongues. And then the Jews, the God-fearing Jews---some were converts, some were not---began to hear suddenly this group of Galileans who would not have been able to speak their tongue. Now suddenly they're hearing their mother tongue, and they are amazed. This is God providing his Spirit for the removal of the barrier.

Today, ladies and gentlemen, we no longer have the barrier of language. Language---there are a lot....I only know English---but here's the thing. I want to learn language? I have the ability. I have the tools. I can go and learn another tongue. We have Bibles that are being translated into every language around the world. That is all enabled and guided by the Spirit of God giving wisdom and

resources to his church. This is the removal of the barrier, and it begins here uniquely in this way, so that that hundred and twenty is the beginning of the Church of Jesus Christ. And that will rapidly grow in the coming verses.

But there is also the blessing of the nations. There is no question here, as we see in verse 12. "Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" The Lord gave his Spirit, filled his apostles, and filled those disciples who were gathered there to speak languages that were not their own. For what purpose? That those who are gathered in Jerusalem---remember that's where the mission begins---would know the gospel, and they were amazed. And they said, "What does this mean?" Next week we learn what this means. Peter gets up and he preaches the gospel. That's what it means. So, to be continued.

So let's apply. Sorry to be so abrupt, but here you go. I want to apply this in three ways: testimony, mission, and personal.

First, testimony. My testimony. Shortly after I became a Christian in 1986, I was just...I was so radically, just excited about what just happened in my life. I told anybody and everybody, even those who didn't want to listen, I was willing to tell. And one of those people who I became friends with in one of my high school classes was a believer. She was a friend, just a friend, not a girlfriend, and she began to try to give me instruction as a new Christian. And so I had the person who was discipling me on one side, and then I had this friend who also had other friends like her who were trying to instruct me of what it means to be a young Christian. And one of the things that they wanted to teach me was that I needed this blessing. That while I had professed faith in Christ, there was no doubt in my mind that they were leading me to believe that my Christian profession and my Christian faith at that point was subpar---what I call 'back of the bus Christianity.' And so they encouraged me to attend church with them. And I would go to church, and then they wanted me to go into a Sunday school class where I could learn how to speak in tongues. This tongue was not a language that was anything we would recognize. It was a tongue that they would call ecstatic prayer language.

But I began to ask this question over and over and over again. And I still have never found any way to overturn this question, because I believe God's Word is clear. That what they were saying to me is that this is the pattern for the people of God, that you can become a Christian, but then you need the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is to speak in tongues. But then I asked the question, 'But why?' If I read, as I had been discipled, Romans 8, it says the Spirit prays for me in ways that words cannot communicate. That means, as I was taught, the Spirit is mediating for me. If Christ died on the cross regardless of my language and does not need me to speak any particular tongue to hear the Word, or to respond to the gospel, why then do I need to speak in a language no one else can understand if the only purpose is to pray?

I've never found a suitable answer for that. Because I want to tell you there are many, perhaps even in this room, who have been taught that your faith is subpar because you have not experienced this 'speaking in tongues.' And so they go this passage and teach that, indeed, it was more than just a known language, it was an ecstatic utterance. There is simply the weight of history and the weight of the full meaning of the Greek word that does not mean ecstatic utterance, other than a known language. And so this is why we draw the distinction between you can be filled and full of the Holy Spirit, but God according to his Word stirs up that Spirit according to his will, to sanctify you, to mature you in your Christian faith, to have new insights into his Word, but not for you alone. Nowhere in this passage is the giving of the Spirit taught as being simply for you as an individual, for your private spiritual edification.

No one will argue against the fact that there was certainly spiritual edification, but it wasn't just for your private experience. It moves to mission. The whole bent of the book of Acts is God, through

Christ's death and resurrection, the giving of his Spirit into his church for the purpose of---not for our puffing up or our own personal individual experience, but for the proclamation of that very gospel. It is for mission, first.

But what about the personal? I do want to say this. That what I'm going to say is completely, perhaps, to much of our hearing, unexciting, but I have nowhere else to turn other than the Word of God. There is most certainly a personal experience of the Holy Spirit. But where I was first taught erroneously that that experience personally of the Spirit ought to be demonstrated in the speaking of a private prayer language or some ecstatic utterance that needs some interpretation, I believe there's something far more beautiful, but far more mundane. What is very clear is that when the Spirit of Christ comes on the disciples, when it comes onto Paul, when it comes on those who hear it and who respond, guess what happens. They put their trust and faith in Jesus Christ. Which means the personal application of the giving of the Spirit is not seen in flashes of amazing, personal, individual experience of the Spirit, but rather it is this. That you can go home today, if you are married, and you can love your husband or your wife, empowered by God's Spirit, better than yesterday.

The personal application of the Spirit, Paul teaches us, is the fruit of the Spirit. Notice he never says the fruit of the Spirit is speaking in tongues. No, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc. etc., and love. What is the personal application of the Spirit look like? It looks like being changed from the inside out, reflecting the love, grace, and hope of Jesus Christ to those that we are in relationship with, those that we are neighbors of, those that we work with. Because the Word tells us everything we need for life and for godliness is in his Word. The Spirit takes nothing from what is his own, only that which he is given. And what has he given? He's given us the Word. And this Word and this Spirit working in the heart of the believer matures you, makes us healthy in our relationships, to long for reconciliation, to be quick to forgive, quick to confess. It looks a lot like a beautiful, every day disciple of Christ, learning to grow and what it means to follow Jesus.

There's much more that I could say, but I have to close---otherwise you'll shoot me. So I'll come back next week with more. But I want to encourage you in this. What I am grateful for with my Pentecostal brothers and sisters is this reality. While I may disagree with many of them on this particular issue, and while I believe many have been led astray, and when they do not experience that ecstatic thing they believe that their faith is deficient, and that becomes a man-centered faith, not a Christ-centered faith. But what I appreciate and love about even my family members who are Pentecostal, it is this: That when they come to Sunday morning gathered together with other believers who profess faith in Jesus Christ, they are expecting the Lord to up and do something. Now we might disagree on what that something may be, but I think the Scripture is very clear.

If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, I want to encourage you to pray---to pray for the Spirit to fill you. Even though you may be full of the Spirit, may he shake us up to desire to live in obedience and to enjoy the fruit of the Spirit. And when we come together with one voice to praise and to sing and to pray---Lord, fall fresh on the people of God, that we might be made more and more into your glorious image. They have taught me to come expectantly. For where two or more are gathered, there I am also, said the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit is here, and he is here in a powerful way. May he make us beautiful, radiant, glorious, forgiven broken sinners for the mission and witness to Christ.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, come by your Spirit and make us new, longing to be made into the image of our precious Savior, who is our Passover once and forever---by whose body and blood and victorious resurrection is our hope in this life and forever. Make us, then, a people full and filled with your Spirit, eager to worship, eager to proclaim, because you are making us into your glorious image. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.