

## **Introduction**

The Holy Spirit is a precious gift of God. He yields countless blessings in the lives of Christ's followers. Think of it. He is the Spirit of adoption by which we cry Abba, Father. He is that gift which enables the followers of Jesus to put to death the deeds of the flesh. He is the guarantee of our eternal inheritance. He is the one who illumines the understanding and regenerates those who were dead in sin. He produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. He prays for us with groaning too deep for words. And there is still another work that he does in the lives of Christ's followers which Joel the prophet highlights for us, and we turn our attention there this morning.

[Read Scripture and Pray]

This text of scripture was quoted on one of most notable days in history by one of the best-known of Jesus' disciples. After the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, he told his disciples to go to Jerusalem and wait to receive the promise of the Father. There they gathered together and prayed. The day of Pentecost arrived, and Jews from far and wide came to Jerusalem for the observance of the Feast of Weeks to worship God for his abundant provision and for the giving of the law. Meanwhile, the disciples were gathered together in fellowship and prayer. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind. Divided tongues of fire appeared and rested on them and they began to speak as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance. The sound of the wind brought together a multitude of people to investigate. They found the disciples preaching. They were proclaiming the mighty works of God. And each one who heard was hearing the proclamation in his own language.

Some said the disciples were drunk. But Peter said, "No; it is only 9 in the morning." What we have here is what we heard from the prophet Joel. He proceeded to quote most of the text we have read this morning. God had done what he had indicated he would do. The promise to pour out his Spirit was being fulfilled. What the disciples were doing is exactly what the Lord through Joel had foretold. They were prophesying. They were preaching. They were testifying by utterance from the Spirit the wonderful works of God.

The message of this text is that by the Spirit of God outpoured Christ's disciples are empowered by the Spirit; we are warned of dark days; and we are entrusted with a glorious message. The text breaks down in terms of: The Outpoured Spirit; The Ominous Wonders; and The Out-held Promise. This morning we have only enough time and attention for looking at the Outpoured Spirit. We are told of the timing, the pouring, the recipients, and the effects.

### **I. The Timing.**

The Lord had promised physical restoration to the repentant citizens of his city. He now makes the promise to pour out his Spirit. He indicates it will occur afterward. The Lord points us to a period of time that would come—not just an instance but an ongoing duration. It is signaled at the end of verse 29 by the words, “in those days.” The recipients of the prophecy would be anticipating a new and deeper stage in God's dealing with his people.

### **II. The Pouring.**

In the new era, the Lord would pour out his Spirit. In a physical sense the Lord had promised up in verse 23 to pour down abundant rain upon the land to accompany restoration. In the coming age he would pour out the Spirit upon the people themselves. The Spirit would be the rain of life to vivify the souls of those on whom he would fall. The idea of “pouring out” suggests an abundance. I can pour you a drink, but if I pour out the pitcher, I am emptying it and giving it all to you. This is God's way of indicating that he is extravagant in this gift of the Spirit. He will “pour out” his Spirit. God would lavish the Spirit on his people.

### **III. The Recipients.**

Then notice that the Lord identifies the recipients of this bounty. “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.” We need to be attentive to the text here. On the one hand, it announces a universal aspect of the extent of the outpouring. But on the other hand it places a restrictive aspect on the extent of the outpouring. The words, “on all flesh,” announce that everyone is included and no one is excluded. But the Lord, through the prophet, explains the inclusivity. He specifies sons and daughters, old men and young men, even male and female servants. So this is what he means by all flesh. No one will be excluded on the basis of gender, age, or station of life. The Spirit will be poured out on all kinds of flesh—male and female, young and old, rich and poor, privileged and unprivileged, masters and servants.

At the same time, however, we observe a restrictive or limiting aspect on the extent of the outpouring. Broadly speaking, we notice that the Lord is addressing the children, the people of Zion. And the measure of the extent is limited to them and their descendants. "YOUR sons and daughters," "Your old men and young men" says the Lord. When the Spirit would be poured out, he would come specifically on the people of Zion, but not just this one or that one, not the men without the women, not the young without the old, and not the masters without the servants. And now that we realize Gentiles make up a large number of the children of Zion, it is not the Jews without the Gentiles.

In progress of time, the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost. We now live in those days about which the Lord spoke. The Spirit has been poured out, and he indwells all who are in Christ. If you are in Christ, you have been made a partaker of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:12 says, "Now we have received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God." And all believers have received the Spirit. Neither your gender, your age, nor your station in life in any way has any relation to this fact. It is like Paul says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:24-25).

One reason for this emphasis on "ALL flesh" is that up to this point in time, God's Spirit had come upon people but only particular people. Bezalel was filled with the Spirit to exercise skill and craftsmanship and design for constructing the tabernacle (Exodus 35:31). The Spirit rushed upon Samson enabling him to kill a lion with his bare hands (Judges 14:6). The Spirit of God came upon Balaam enabling him to prophesy (Numbers 24:2) as he did Saul (1 Samuel 10:6; 19:23-24). David prayed that the Lord would take not the Holy Spirit from him.

But the time was coming, and now is, when ALL the people of Zion, those who are born in Zion, that is born of God, united with Christ, and children of God have the Spirit poured out on them. Human distinctions are nullified and the body of Christ is one. The distinctions are not obliterated, but they will not be allowed to separate or divide. The Spirit overcomes what sinful humans allow to wrongly affect the way we look at and evaluate one another. Because of the Spirit we mesh together into one body and each person is vitally important to the whole. When Paul instructs the Corinthians about gifts of the Spirit, he says, "There are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but the same

God who empowers them all in everyone. To each of us is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. . . . For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”

God’s work of pouring out the Spirit on all brings each one into union so that outward distinctions like gender and age and station in life actually work to unify us even more intimately to the glory of God.

The practical point is that we who have been joined in Christ and baptized with the Spirit need to cultivate an appreciation for one another as members of the same body. Every member is critical to the well-being of the whole. Every member is precious as a recipient of the Spirit of God. We are not allowed to wish we were some other part of the body nor are we allowed to denigrate other parts of the body. We need to make sure that we do not devalue each other based upon the things that distinguish us but place value on the One who brings us together. None of us should see ourselves as more important or more valuable or even more privileged than the other, because heaped upon the gift of grace that is ours in Christ, we have the riches of the gift of the Holy Spirit. This gift is a profound gift. If you have forgiveness of sin and all that comes with it, you have wealth of the greatest magnitude. You are privileged. You are blessed abundantly.

Our dealings with each other and our valuation of one another need to reflect the recognition of the valuation God has made to pour out his Spirit on all flesh. If there is any place on earth where ethnic bigotry should be absent, it is here, in the church. Among other things skin color is a superficial distinction that is part of our being an assembly of people from every tribe and tongue the world over.

And that leads to a second reason for the emphasis on “all FLESH.” This time we underscore the word flesh. The Lord declares he will pour out his SPIRIT on all FLESH. What jumps out is an incredible contrast. That which is flesh is flesh and that which is spirit is spirit. Think about this. John describes the incarnation of Jesus this way: “the word (that is Jesus, the Son) became flesh and dwelt among us.” Jesus was with us when he came. In contrast the Spirit is poured out upon flesh. The power and work of God come upon us in the person of God the Holy Spirit, and according to Jesus, actually takes up residence within us.

But using the word FLESH highlights human weakness and frailty, our inability. For instance, Isaiah cries out in Isaiah 40:6, "All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades . . ." Jesus said, "The Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." The Spirit's outpouring on the flesh serves to highlight the power and life-giving nature of the Spirit over against what will shrivel up and die without it.

Paul says in Romans 8 "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you." By the Spirit, we enjoy life; we can put sin to death; and we can please God.

#### **IV. The Effects.**

The New Testament teaches us that the works of the Spirit are numerous, but Joel highlights one of those works in particular. Actually three facets of this work are referenced here—prophesying, dreaming dreams and seeing visions. These were to be effects of the Lord's outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh.

The focal effect to which Joel draws our attention is the act of prophesying or proclaiming. He mentions prophesying, dreaming dreams, and seeing visions, and each of these effects were experienced by the OT prophets. Isaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel to name just three saw various visions. Jacob dreamed. The import of these three references is to divine revelation. When the Spirit came so would revelation and so would speaking forth that revelation from God.

It is therefore notable that when Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit, he explicitly told the disciples that there were things he had to say to them, but for these things they were not yet ready. And yet, he promised, "When the Spirit comes, he will guide you into all the truth. . . . he will take what is mine and declare it to you." Jesus had also told them, that the Helper, the Holy Spirit would "teach them all things and bring to their remembrance all that he [had said] to them." Then we go to Acts 1. There Jesus tells the disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit was come upon them, and they would be his WITNESSES in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Then we come to the day of Pentecost and Peter is quoting the text from Joel to instruct the curious multitudes as to what is going on. He mentions the line twice that the Lord would pour out his Spirit and the people would prophesy. Peter later saw a vision of the sheet let down from heaven. John saw visions in Revelation. And Paul had a vision in the night of man calling out for

him to come to Macedonia and help them. But the main and lasting thrust of this prophecy is that the Spirit-empowered people of the Lord would prophesy. They would speak. They—not just some of them but ALL of them—would tell forth the wondrous things of God.

There is a striking text in the book of Numbers. In chapter 11 Moses was feeling overwhelmed with the heavy burden of dealing with the Israelite people. So the Lord told him to gather 70 of the elders of the people outside the camp to the tent of meeting. The Lord was going to take some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on them. They would bear the burden with Moses. And as soon as the Lord took of the Spirit and put it upon them, they began to prophesy. Two of the designated elders had not come out to the tent of meeting but were still in the camp when this occurred. And they began to prophesy there in the camp. This caused alarm to those who were in the camp. They reported the incident to Moses. Joshua himself urged Moses to tell them to stop. But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!"

And now, with the coming of the Spirit upon all flesh, it appears that the longing of Moses has been answered. All who are in Christ have all been made partakers of the Spirit, and we all are privileged and called to proclaim the excellencies of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. We are all empowered and equipped to spread abroad the glorious good news that God has shown a sinful world what real love is. He has sent his own son to suffer and to die for the sins of others so that everyone who will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

It does not matter what your age. It does not matter whether you are a male or a female. It does not matter if you come from the lowest rung of the social ladder or the highest. It does not matter what country you come from what your skin color or what language you speak. God has called us all to go into a lost world and point it to him. And isn't that what our world most needs today? Yes! It needs the gospel. And those who love the gospel need to say with the Apostle Paul, I am not ashamed of the gospel; for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also the Greek."

In Romans 10, Paul asks, "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" One of the most

important matters we need to take from the message of the book of Joel is that since God has poured out his Spirit in these last days, one of the most critical responsibilities of “all flesh” in Zion—everyone belonging to Christ—is the solemn obligation to proclaim the wondrous work of God in Christ Jesus in the power of the Spirit.

## **Conclusion**

In the early church was a man who was recognized as being FULL of the Holy Spirit. You might be able to guess that one of the marks of this man was that he boldly and clearly proclaimed Christ. I am talking about Stephen. Some of the Jews disputed with him but they could not overcome his command of the Scriptures. Filled with rage they stoned him. And on that day a great persecution arose in Jerusalem against the church, and the believers were scattered across the region throughout Judea and Samaria. In that light, Acts 8:4 makes an astounding report: “Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.” Even as these believers were running for their lives, they did what the Spirit had come upon them to enable them to do. What about you?

## **PRAY**

One of the ways we proclaim Christ is by the Lord’s Supper. Paul told the Corinthians, “As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup [of the Lord’s Supper], you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). We are about to proclaim the Lord’s death together by observing the Lord’s Supper. This is a communal memorial. Eating of the bread and drinking of the cup are simple actions by which we who partake make a bold outward profession that we are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ—His incarnation, his life, His death, His resurrection. We admit ourselves to be sinners. We confess ourselves to be repentant toward God. We have renounced our sinful ways. We declare that we live to deny ourselves and take up our crosses to follow Jesus who lived, died, and rose again for our forgiveness, reconciliation, and adoption. If you do not make that profession this morning, you should not be partaking. The ordinance of the Lord’s Supper is a ceremony for deep and serious consideration of Christ and of your relationship to him.

You do not have to be a member of Grace Community Church to share in this ordinance with us, but you need to be a baptized follower of Christ. You have outwardly confessed your repentance from sin and your faith in Christ through baptism and now you are reaffirming that faith in this ordinance. Examine yourself now before the Lord to see that you discern his body and that your heart is right before him.

## PRAY

Please take out your element packages. Open the tabs.

On the night he was betrayed, as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after a blessing broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Then Jesus said, "I tell you I will not drink of again of this fruit of the vine until that day I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of olives.

Let's close with song.