

Fear and Trust

Lesson for May 7, 2023

Unit III: The Birth of the Church

Scriptural Background: Acts 2:1- 42

Printed Text: Acts 2:1-8, 14-24, 37-39

Key verse: *“The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”* (Acts 2:39, NIV)

A television program preceding the 1988 Winter Olympics featured blind skiers being trained for slalom skiing, impossible as that sounds. Paired with sighted skiers, the blind skiers were taught on the flats how to make right and left turns. When that was mastered, they were taken to the slalom slope, where their sighted partners skied beside them shouting, "Left!" and "Right!" As they obeyed the commands, they were able to negotiate the course and cross the finish line, depending solely on the sighted skiers' word. It was either complete trust or catastrophe.

What a vivid picture of the Christian life! In this world, we are in reality blind about what course to take. We must rely solely on the Word of the only One who is truly sighted--God Himself. His Word gives us the direction we need to finish the course.

Robert W. Sutton

This week's lesson demonstrates the same kind of blind trust at the beginning of the Christian church.

Key Terms

1. **Devout** (verse 5) – Having or showing deep religious feeling or commitment. Totally committed to a cause or belief. “God-fearing,” NIV
2. **Filled** (verse 2) – Pervade; become an overwhelming presence in; occupy a space.
3. **Sound** (verse 6) – Vibrations that travel through the air or another medium and can be heard when they reach a person's or animal's ear. Noise; language; utterance.
4. **Tongues** (verse 3) – Language; used in reference to a person's style or manner of speaking.
5. **Wind** (verse 2) – The perceptible natural movement of the air, especially in the form of a current of air blowing from a particular direction. Blowing; breath.

Lesson Background

There were three great Jewish feasts each year:

- Passover (in the spring), celebrating Israel's deliverance from Egypt, followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
- Pentecost, (Shavout) the Feast of Harvest or the Feast of Weeks. It was a Jewish feast celebrating the giving of the Torah and the summer wheat harvest. An initial harvest feast, where the Jews were to offer to the Lord the first fruits of the new grain. It occurred 50 days (seven weeks) after Passover. It was marked by pilgrims coming to Jerusalem from all over the world to celebrate the event.
- Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) occurred in the fall when Jewish people gathered together in Jerusalem to remember God's provision in the Wilderness, and also to look ahead to that promised Messianic age when all nations will flow to Jerusalem to worship the Lord.

At the beginning of this lesson Jesus has ascended into heaven. Following His resurrection and prior to His ascension, Jesus admonished the disciples, *“Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift He promised, as I told you before. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* (Acts 1:4, 8)

The disciples obeyed Jesus and they waited in Jerusalem. They didn't know ahead of time how long they would have to wait. The ministry of the disciples depended on them receiving the Holy Spirit and relying on His power. While they waited, ... “they spent all of their time in the Temple, praising God” (Luke 24:53). They were all with one accord sharing the same heart, the same love for God, the same trust in His promise.

I. What Just Happened? (Acts 2:1-8)

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come: It was now 10 days after the time Jesus ascended to heaven (Acts 1:3), and since Jesus commanded them to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The disciples were not strangers to the person and work of the Holy Spirit. They saw the Holy Spirit continually at work in the ministry of Jesus. The disciples also heard Jesus promise a new, coming work of the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-18).

They waited until the Day of Pentecost had fully come, but they didn't know ahead of time how long they would have to wait. It would be easy for them to think it would come the same afternoon Jesus ascended to heaven; or after 3 days, or 7 days. But they had to wait a full 10 days, until the Day of Pentecost had fully come.

What this passage tells us about the gift of the Holy Spirit.

- The gift of the Holy Spirit is promised to us.
- The gift of the Holy Spirit is worth waiting for.
- The gift of the Holy Spirit comes as He wills, often not according to our expectation.

They were all with one accord in one place: They were gathered together sharing the same heart, the same love for God, the same trust in His promise, and the same geography. Before we can be filled, we must recognize our emptiness; by gathering together for prayer, in obedience, these disciples did just that. They recognized they did not have the resources in themselves to do what they could do or should do; they had to instead rely on the work of God.

Suddenly there came a sound from heaven: The association of the sound of a **rushing mighty wind**, filling the **whole house**, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is unusual. But it probably has connection with the fact that in both the Hebrew and Greek languages, the word for *spirit* (as in *Holy Spirit*) is the same word for *breath* or *wind* (this also happens to be true in Latin). Here, the sound from heaven was the sound of the Holy Spirit being poured out on the disciples.

The sound of this fast, mighty wind would make any of these men and women who knew the Hebrew Scriptures think of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

There appeared to them divided tongues as of fire, and one sat upon each of them:

These divided tongues, as of fire, appearing over each one, were also unusual. It probably should be connected with John the Baptist's prophecy that Jesus would *baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire* (Matthew 3:11). The idea behind the picture of fire is usually purification, as a refiner uses fire to make pure gold; or fire can burn away what is temporary, leaving only what will last. This is an excellent illustration of the principle that the filling of the Holy Spirit is not just for abstract power, but for *purity*. In certain places in the Old Testament, God showed His special pleasure with a sacrifice by lighting the fire for it Himself – that is, fire from heaven came down and consumed the sacrifice. The experience of the followers of Jesus on Pentecost is another example of God sending fire from heaven to show His pleasure and power, but this time, it descended upon *living sacrifices* (Romans 12:1).

The Holy Spirit **sat upon each of them**. “The word ‘sat’ has a marked force in the New Testament. It carries the idea of a *completed preparation*, and a certain *permanence of position and condition*.” (Pierson) Under the Old Covenant, the Holy Spirit rested on God's people more as a *nation*, that is, Israel. But under the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit rests upon God's people as *individuals* – the tongues of fire **sat upon each of them**. This strange phenomenon had never happened before and would never happen again in the pages of the Bible, but was given to emphasize this point: that the Spirit of God was present with and in and upon *each individual*.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit: Essentially, the rushing mighty wind and the tongues, as of fire, were only unusual, temporary phenomenon, which accompanied the true gift – being *filled with the Holy Spirit*. While it would be wrong to expect a rushing mighty wind or tongues, as of fire, to be present today when the Holy Spirit is poured out, we can experience the true gift. We, just as they, can be all filled with the Holy Spirit. We should note:

- The disciples were filled *in fulfillment of a promise*.
- They were filled as they *received in faith*.
- They were filled *in God's timing*.
- They were filled *as they were together in unity*.
- They were filled *in unusual ways*. (Guzik)

This coming and filling of the Holy Spirit was so good, so essential for the work of the community of early Christians, that Jesus actually said that it was *better* for Him to leave the earth bodily so He could send the Holy Spirit (John 16:7).

And began to speak with other tongues: In response to the filling of the Holy Spirit, those present (not only the twelve apostles; it was estimated that approximately 120 or were gathered. Acts 1:15) began to speak with other tongues. These were languages that they were never taught, and they spoke these languages, speaking *as the Spirit gave them utterance*.

Devout men, from every nation under heaven: The multitude from many nations gathered in Jerusalem because of the Feast of Pentecost. Many of these were the same people who gathered in Jerusalem at the last feast, Passover, when an angry mob demanded the execution of Jesus.

And when this sound occurred: A crowd quickly gathered, being attracted by this sound, which was either the sound of the *rushing mighty wind* or the sound of speaking in other tongues. When the crowd came, they heard the Christians speaking in their own foreign languages. Apparently, the Christians could be heard from the windows of the upper room, or they went out onto some kind of balcony or into the temple courts.

We hear them speaking in our tongues the wonderful works of God: This is what the crowd heard the Christians speak. From this remarkable event, *all* were amazed and perplexed, but some used it as a means of honest inquiry and asked, “Whatever could this mean?”

Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? People from Galilee (Galileans) were known to be uncultured and poor speakers. This was all the more reason to be impressed with their ability to speak eloquently in other languages. “Galileans had difficulty pronouncing gutturals and had the habit of swallowing syllables when speaking; so they were looked down upon by the people of Jerusalem as being provincial.” (Longenecker)

Speaking in tongues has been the focal point for significant controversy in the church. People still ask the same question these bystanders asked on the day of Pentecost. What could this mean? The scriptures state, “*We hear them speaking in our languages the wonderful works of God*” (Acts 2:11).

II. The Last Days (Acts 2:14-24)

Verses 9-13 of Acts 2 provide an account of the number of nations represented in Jerusalem at Pentecost. There were representatives from nations across the known world at this time. Yet each heard those gathered declaring the “wonderful works of God”. The disciples declared the praises of God, thanking Him with all their might. The gathered crowd merely *overheard* what the disciples exuberantly declared to, and about, God. Others used it as an excuse to dismiss the work of God and said, “They are full of new wine.”

Peter, standing up with the eleven: Peter stood and preached to the crowd as a representative of the whole group of apostles. The Holy Spirit now worked through Peter’s preaching.

Raised his voice: There was a remarkable change in Peter. He had courage and boldness that was a complete contrast to his denials of Jesus before being filled with the Holy Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost Peter didn't teach as the rabbis in his day usually did, who gathered disciples around them, sat down, and instructed them and any others who might listen. Instead, Peter proclaimed the truth like a herald.

This remarkable sermon had no preparation behind it – it was spontaneously given. Peter didn't wake up that morning knowing he would preach to thousands, and that thousands would embrace Jesus in response. Yet we could say that this was a well-prepared sermon; it was prepared by Peter's prior life with God and relationship with Jesus. It flowed spontaneously out of that life, and out of a mind that thought and believed deeply.

What we have in Acts 2 is a small portion of what Peter actually said. Acts 2:40 tells us, *And with many other words he testified and exhorted them*. Like almost all the sermons recorded in the Bible, what we have is a Holy Spirit inspired abridgment of a longer message.

For these are not drunk: Peter deflected the mocking criticism that the disciples were drunk. In that day it was unthinkable that people would be so drunk so early in the day (about 9:00 in the morning).

Commentator Adam Clarke says that most Jews – pious or not – did not eat or drink until after the third hour of the day, because that was the time for prayer, and they would only eat after their business with God was accomplished.

Quoting Joel 2, Peter explains the strange events at Pentecost. This quotation from Joel 2:28-32 focuses on God's promise to pour out His Spirit on all flesh. What happened on the day of Pentecost was a near fulfillment of that promise, with the final fulfillment coming in the last days (which Peter had good reason to believe he was in).

Joel mostly prophesied about judgment that was coming to ancient Israel. Yet in the midst of the many warnings of judgment, God also gave several words of promise – promises of future blessing, like this one that announces an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

It shall come to pass in the last days: The idea of the last days is that they are the times of the Messiah, encompassing both His humble coming and His return in glory. Because Jesus had already come in humility, they were aware that His return in glory could be any time.

I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh: In using the quotation from Joel, Peter explained what these curious onlookers saw – the Holy Spirit poured forth upon the people. Before the Holy Spirit was given in drops, now He is *poured* forth – and *on all flesh*. This was a glorious emphasis on Pentecost. Under the Old Covenant, certain people were filled with the Spirit at certain times for specific purposes. Now, under the New Covenant, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is for all who call upon the name of the LORD, even **menservants** and **maidservants**.

Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved: Peter also used this passage from Joel to an evangelistic purpose. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit meant that God now offered salvation in a way previously unknown – to *whoever calls on the name of the LORD*, whether they are Jew or Gentile.

Men of Israel, hear these words: This was much as Peter had already said, *let this be known to you, and heed my words* (Acts 2:14). Peter wanted people to pay attention, and he spoke as if he had something important to say.

As you yourselves also know: Peter referred to what these people already knew about Jesus. They already knew of His life and miraculous works. Often in speaking to people about Jesus, we should start with what they *already* know about Him.

Being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God: Peter knew that Jesus' death was in the plan of God. At the same time, those who rejected Him and called for His execution were responsible for the actions of their **lawless hands**.

Peter did not flinch at saying, "You crucified this Man who God sent." His first concern was not to please his audience, but to tell them the truth. The Spirit-filled Peter was a different man than the Peter who, a few months before this, denied even knowing Jesus (Matthew 26:69-75).

It was not possible: Peter knew that Jesus could not remain bound by death, as explained by the following quotation from Psalm 16. It was not possible that Jesus should remain a victim of the sin and hatred of man; He would certainly triumph over it.

Having loosed the pains of death: In the phrase **pains of death**, the word **pains** is actually the word for "birth pains." In this sense, the *tomb* was a *womb* for Jesus.

III. How Can We Fix This? (Acts 2:37-39)

The sermon concludes with a summary. Simply, all Israel should know that even though they crucified Jesus, God has declared Him **both Lord and Christ**. It is as if Peter said, "You were all wrong about Jesus. You crucified Him as if He were a criminal, but by the resurrection, God proved that He is Lord and Messiah."

Now when they heard this: They respond with a question: What shall we do? his was obviously a significant work of the Holy Spirit. The great crowd listening to Peter was deeply moved by Peter's bold proclamation of the truth. *They* asked Peter how they should respond.

Cut to the heart: This is a good way of describing the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They now knew that they were responsible for the death of Jesus (as each of us are), and that they had to *do* something in response to this responsibility.

Men and brethren, what shall we do? When God is working on someone's heart, they *want* to come to Him; they will act to come to God.

Then Peter said to them, Repent, and let every one of you be baptized: Responding to the question, “*What shall we do?*” Peter gave them something to *do*. This means that we must *do* something to be saved, we must *do* something to follow Jesus; it doesn’t just “happen.”

Peter *did not* say, “There’s nothing you can do. If God saves you, you’re saved. If God doesn’t save you, you’ll never be saved.” Though it was true that only God could do the saving, the people had to receive through repentance and faith, faith leading to action such as baptism.

Repent: The first thing Peter told them to *do* is repent. To repent does not mean to feel sorry, but it means to change one’s mind or direction. They had thought a certain way about Jesus before, considering Him worthy of crucifixion. Now they must turn their thinking around, embracing Jesus as Lord and Messiah. Repent is an essential aspect of the gospel. Repent has been rightly called “the first word of the gospel.”

Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ: This was the second thing Peter said they must do. For them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ was an expression of their belief and complete trust in Him.

The promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off: As they repented and demonstrated faith and obedience by baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit would be given to them as it was given to the original group of disciples. Peter also specifically promised that the **promise** of the Holy Spirit would be given to those who believe in all succeeding generations (all who are afar off).

They saw the glorious work of the Holy Spirit among the disciples, and Peter told them that it was something that these people could take part in; they didn’t only have to be observers. And since the promise is for **all who are afar off**, it includes all people up to the present time.

It is also important to note that Peter did not say that the unbelieving, unaware children of his listeners should be baptized. He simply said that the promise of **the remission of sins** and the **gift of the Holy Spirit** were for *all* who would repent and believe with active faith, even to coming generations and *all who are afar off, as many as the Lord God will call*.

Lesson Summary

Acts 2 follows the apostles’ preachings as they were filled with the Holy Ghost on the day of the Pentecost. After receiving the gift of tongues as they preached the gospel, God’s influence went further than ever before. Three thousand souls were converted that day after hearing the apostles preach. They were baptized and welcomed to repent, receive the Holy Ghost, and be welcomed by God. This moment heavily influenced the establishment of the church and marks the beginning of the Christian church’s world mission.

The Pentecost experience enabled the apostles to communicate with all the people of Jerusalem fluently and concisely. It became clear to all the disciples that their mission from God was to share the word of Jesus far and wide. This was one of the most important missions for the early church. Spreading Jesus’s love remains a key mission in the church today, as missionary work knows no limit and stops at no border.

Another significant element of Acts 2 that we can take guidance from today is how the apostles insisted on meeting in an upper room and in the temple courts. Although they had other places to meet, they knew that they would encounter many Jewish people in the courts who had not yet learned of Jesus.

Stepping outside of the church is necessary to spread His word far and wide. We must hold that lesson close to our hearts as leaders of churches in the 21st century, as it becomes easy to stay within our Christian communities. Had the apostles done that, few would have been converted.

It is interesting to note the calmness held by Peter when he spoke to the crowd at Pentecost. There were mixed reactions to the apostles speaking in languages/tongues, with some claiming they must be drunk and scoffing at the idea of a miracle. This is something faced by many church members who reach out to the community.

Instead of responding with anger or demanding that the people have faith, Peter explained to them with care what they needed to know. Similarly, he did not back down from the responsibility of explaining. He proceeded with care and caution, but he proceeded nonetheless. In order to speak with authority, we must let the voice of God flow through us as we navigate ministry. The authentication of God through miracles meant the proclamation of the gospel by the apostles was seen as authoritative. While we don't always have miracles by our side, we must teach in the knowledge that He is with us and lead with strength.

The central message in Acts 2 is to have no fear regarding the things of this world. Trust God and His promises to us. Rely on His Spirit which He gives to *ALL* believers to empower them.