

June 9, 2024

EMPOWERED: ACTS 2:5-16,36-38

The Holy Spirit empowers believers to point others to Jesus.

TEACHERS NOTE: IT WILL BE EXTREMELY EASY TO GET SIDETRACKED DURING THIS LESSON. IT WILL BE IMPORTANT TO TRY AND KEEP YOUR FOCUS ON THE AIM ABOVE. THE TOPIC COULD EASILY VEER TOWARD DIFFERENCES OF OPINIONS ON THE HOLY SPIRIT AND SPEAKING IN TONGUES. YOU MIGHT HAVE TO GENTLY BRING YOUR GROUP BACK TO THE TOPIC AT HAND.

FACILITATOR 2

Focus Attention Option 1 (ETB LG, 17)

Ask the group members to recount the most memorable day of their life.

Explain: After they have a few minutes to share, explain that today we are exploring what was probably one of the most memorable days in the lives of Jesus' early followers. It is the day that Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled, and the first great sermon of the Christian era was preached.

Introduce the Passage: This is our second week in the book of Acts and, honestly, we have not seen a lot of action yet. Jesus had told His disciples and the Apostles to wait in Jerusalem before embarking on the Great Commission. They were to wait for the coming of the Spirit who would empower them for the mission ahead. While they waited, they prayed and replaced Judas as an Apostle. Today's lesson picks up ten days after Jesus' ascension. They had now gone ten days without the physical presence of Jesus. We know it had been ten days because the events in today's passage happened on the special holiday called Pentecost. This holiday was celebrated on the first day after the seven full weeks following Passover. Let's look at the passage and see what happened on this special holiday.

FACILITATOR 1

1. NOTICED (ACTS 2:5-13)

Read or have someone read Acts 2:5-13

Explain: In the verses just proceeding this passage, Luke recounts the arrival of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the disciples. While this lesson focuses on the power of the Spirit to enable believers to fulfill God's mission, we should take a moment and reflect on the Holy Spirit. Prior to this event recorded in the book of Acts, the Spirit would come upon people to empower them for a limited amount of time. The arrival of the Spirit in Acts 2 marks a change in the activity of the Spirit. No longer would He come and go in the lives of those who followed the Lord. The coming

Notes:

This is the Aim of the lesson. It drives our discussion and should be the point we drive home throughout the lesson.

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *New American Commentary: Acts* (NAC)
- *Holman New Testament Commentary: Acts* (HNTC)
- *Preaching the Word: Acts* (Preaching)
- *Unstoppable Gospel*, Gregg Matte

"From this point on in Acts, the gift of the Spirit became a normative concomitant of becoming a Christian believer (2:38)." (NAC, 98)

Empowered: Acts 2:5-16,36-38

of the Spirit in Acts marks the birth of the church, and from this point forward the Holy Spirit indwells every believer. The miraculous events in Acts 2 are marked by “a sound like that of a violent rushing wind” (Acts 2:2) and the presence of “tongues like flames of fire that separated and rested on each one of them.” (Acts 2:3)

This passage sets the scene for the events that follow.

The Day of the Spirit’s Arrival—Pentecost was a holiday established to celebrate the first fruits of the harvest. By the time of Jesus and the early church, the day had become associated with the giving of the Law on Sinai as well. God’s choice of date was no accident. As we will see later in our lesson, 3000 people were added to the church on this day. The 120 who received the Spirit initially and the additional 3000 were only the first fruits of the Kingdom. Moreover, the day “provided a perfect opportunity to contrast the giving of the Law with the giving of the Spirit.” (Preaching, 30)

FACILITATOR 2

Apply: As we pointed out above, it had been 10 days since the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven. It had been ten days since He left, but the Spirit had not arrived. Moreover, it had been ten or more days since the Lord commissioned the group to go into the world. Some of them might have been feeling emotionally empty. (c.f. Preaching, 29-30) Some might have been anxious about what awaited them. Most assuredly they were anticipating the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise regarding the Spirit.

Discuss: Why is it important to wait on the Lord’s timing in life?

The Lord’s timing is always best. Sometimes He waits because we are not ready or because the situation is not ready. Sometimes he waits for the benefit of others. That is what we see here. It seems that the Lord desired for the crowds in Jerusalem to benefit from the experience of the filled Christians.

FACILITATOR 1

The Details of Those Present at the Spirit’s Arrival—Luke tells us that “there were Jews staying in Jerusalem, devout people from every nation under heaven.” (v. 5) On this special holiday, people from all over the region joined the residents of Jerusalem. They would have been either Jews or God-fearing Gentiles. Either way, they would have been people who knew the Old Testament Scriptures. Some of them would have been present at the illegal trial and crucifixion of Jesus. Luke is very thorough in his description of the locations represented. “The catalog [of locations] covers North Africa (Egypt, Libya, Cyrenaica), then north and west all the way to Rome, then southeast to the Mediterranean island of Crete, and finally much farther east and southward to Arabia.” (NAC, 102) (See the attached map)

Notes:

TEACHER’S NOTE

Commentators differ on their thoughts here. Some say Luke is referring to people who had moved to Jerusalem from other places. Others point out that those mentioned were visiting the city for the holiday. For our purposes, the residential status of these people does not matter. The disparate locations of origin and the fact that they spoke multiple languages is our focus.

Some argue that the miracle was one of hearing and not speaking. In the end, I don’t think it matters. However, in the OT we see instances in which those filled with the Spirit prophesized. I don’t recall a time when the Spirit filled someone and caused someone else to manifest a miraculous gift.

The Declaration of Those Present at the Spirit’s Arrival—Based on Luke’s account, either the sound of the wind or the sound of the Spirit-filled Christians speaking “in different tongues” (v. 4) attracted the attention of the masses in Jerusalem. The believers were “declaring the magnificent acts of God” (v. 11) in foreign languages so that those from the many different places Luke mentioned understood “in our own tongues.” (v. 11) The response of those who experienced the disciples’ actions was varied. Some were confused. Some were astounded and amazed. Others sneered.

FACILITATOR 2

Discuss: In what negative ways do people respond today when someone declares the magnificent acts of God recounted in the Bible or experienced by the believer? (You might want to write these on the board or a large Post-It note. You will use them later in the lesson.)

Apply: When we declare the works of God either recorded in the Bible or experienced in our personal lives, people can respond in many different ways. Sometimes they will be confused like the people in Acts 2. In our world people are confused when we declare the magnificent change God brings about in our lives—turning the racist into a defender of others, healing the addicted, or renewing the anxious mind. People can be genuinely confused by these changes. Sometimes they are amazed and astounded when healing takes place or relationships are renewed. People respond in such ways because they cannot rationally explain the work of God. Many times, these people, like those in the Book of Acts, are not antagonistic. They are simply confused. Others, though, can be antagonistic. Some in Acts 2 declared the disciples drunk. Like these who sneered, today “some [commit] the fatal error of attributing supernatural to natural causes. They are ‘modern men.’ Spiritually indifferent, they flippantly [make] light of the most important things of life and [go] on their self-sufficient way.” (Preaching, 34)

The response of others is outside of our control. These believers were “brim full” (NAC, 100) of the Spirit and they were doing what Spirit-filled believers do even today—they were talking about the Lord. The response of others was not their responsibility. Likewise, we can’t control how people respond when we talk about the things of God.

Transition: These Spirit-filled, temporarily bilingual followers of Jesus likely made their way to the Temple complex. The whole way there they declared the magnificent acts of God. The most magnificent act of God is the saving work of Jesus. This work is declared around the world in different cultures and in different languages. Then, like today, “The languages differed; the message remained the same: the wonders of God.” (HNTC, 27) In the next passage, we will see how Peter zoomed in from the general goodness of God to the specific work of Jesus.

Notes:

“Here for the first time appears a motif that runs throughout Luke-Acts—in itself, without the element of personal faith and experience, even the most profound aspects of the good news are not self-confirming but can lead to skepticism and even rejection (cf. Luke 24:11; Acts 17:32; 26:24).” (NAC, 104)

“He most likely spoke in the Aramaic dialect used in Jerusalem, which all these residents of Jerusalem would have understood.” (NAC, 108)

“Most scholars believe Peter spoke in Aramaic, the common dialect of Jerusalem which all there would have understood.” (HNTC, 27)

“There is no suggestion that Peter now spoke in a tongue unknown to himself.” (FF Bruce, 60)

Empowered: Acts 2:5-16,36-38

2. ENGAGED (ACTS 2:14-16)

Read (or have someone read) Acts 2:14-16

Explain: In this passage, Luke presents Peter yet again as the leader of the post-resurrection disciples. In Chapter 1, it is Peter who initiated the selection of Judas' replacement. Peter has come a long way in the past few weeks. It has only been seven weeks since he denied Christ. Now, he stands with the other eleven Apostles and delivers the first sermon of the new church. He begins by answering the question raised by those mocking the believers. They had accused the disciples of being drunk. He answers them by addressing the unreasonable nature of their assumption. It is early morning on a religious holiday there is no way a good Jew would be drunk at this time. After this, Peter goes to preach his sermon.

FACILITATOR 2

Discuss: Before we look at the sermon let's consider what Peter does with this opening remark. He is addressing the questions directly and not being antagonistic to the questioner. Earlier we talked about some negative ways people might respond to the announcement of God's marvelous works. What are some Peter-like ways you can respond to those?

Explain: Peter chose to respond to the content of their rejection. He did not argue. He just countered with a statement of fact and reason. Sometimes if the response we get is amazement or awe we can just tell our story and give glory to the Lord. If people respond to the work of God that changed us or healed us relationally, we can take them to Scripture and show where God speaks about those areas. Going to Scripture is always a good option. That is what Peter does. He connects the experience of that morning to Scripture. Drawing attention to the signs and wonders the crowd had observed and then explaining them with the words of the prophet Joel he reminds us of the purpose of signs and wonders. "Signs and wonders are not given to us as mere special effects to sensationalize God's work. Signs and wonders in the Scriptures serve a special purpose: they validate the words of God." (Matte, 51) Today we do not often experience signs and wonders in the Western church. However, we do experience the activity of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. The transformation of the believer, answered prayers, and acts of Spirit-led service all validate the words of God.

FACILITATOR 1

Peter does this in his sermon. We are not going to break it down in detail, but let's outline the sermon.

- I. Peter's assertion concerning their supposed drunkenness. (v. 15)—He connects their questions with scripture.

Notes:

"The story of Jesus led *to* Jerusalem; the story of the church led *from* Jerusalem." (NAC, 86)

"The ascension tradition is unique to Luke-Acts, in all the New Testament being found only here, in Acts 1:2, and in Luke 24:51, though it is implied in John 20:17. It is, however, closely related to the many New Testament texts that speak of Jesus' exaltation to the Father, such as 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 3:21f." (NAC, 86)

Empowered: Acts 2:5-16,36-38

- II. Peter’s scriptural explanation for their actions (vv. 16-21)—By asserting that their actions were actually a fulfillment of prophesy related to the Messiah he gained their undivided attention.
- III. Peter’s scriptural and logical explanation of Jesus as the Messiah (vv. 22-36)—With their attention focused on thoughts of the Messiah, he points them to the person of Jesus.
- IV. Peter’s call to action (vv. 37-40)

We are going to examine Peter’s call to action in a moment. First, let’s consider his appeal to scripture. Peter is speaking to a highly religious crowd. They knew about Joel’s prophecy concerning the end times and King David’s writings. The important thing about Peter’s approach was the connections he made to Jesus. We can use Scripture to answer someone’s concerns, questions, or ridicule of God or God’s work, and all Scripture connects to Jesus and the gospel.

FACILITATOR 2

Discuss: Why is it important to connect our assertions, experiences, or beliefs to Scripture?

Explain: My assertions about the world, my beliefs about morality, or my experiences with God offer a good way to begin a conversation about Jesus and the gospel, but the conversation cannot end there. My assertions, beliefs, or experience hold only so much authority. While some might question the Bible, it is the only true authority we have related to the gospel and spiritual issues.

FACILITATOR 1

Transition: Peter’s sermon is based on Scripture, reflects his experience as an eyewitness to Christ, and is gospel-centered. He concludes with an appeal for repentance. Let’s look at that now.

3. INVITED (ACTS 2:36-38)

Read (or have someone read) Acts 2:36-38

Explain: Peter’s last statement summed up the problem for those in the crowd. Upon revealing that Jesus was the Messiah, Peter reminds them that they killed Jesus, the Messiah. This group was prompted by the work of Spirit through signs and wonders. They were then presented with the truth revealed in the Scriptures. The work of the Spirit and the revelation of Scripture pierced their hearts. “The Greek poet Homer uses this same word to describe horses stomping and pounding their hooves. To be ‘cut to the heart’ is to feel as if the horse has trampled you and burrowed its hoof into the flesh of your heart.” (Matte, 62) The aim of a gospel presentation whether it be a sermon, a conversation over coffee, or a home visit is not knowledge transfer. The point of a gospel presentation is to touch someone’s heart. The person presenting the gospel cannot do

Notes:

“Before Pentecost, before the presence of the Spirit to lead it, the church sought the direction of God and used the Old Testament procedure of securing divine decision.” (NAC, 95)

this. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the goal should always move past information transfer to heart transformation. One essential to heart transformation is the call to action. That is what Peter does in verse 38. “The conviction of sin demands a response.” (Matte, 61)

Apply: The need to move past information transfer toward heart transformation applies to our small groups as well. Gregg Matte, pastor of First Baptist Houston, writes, “A great sermon isn’t a collection of information; its a *call to action*.” (Matte, 61) I would add to that and say, “A great sermon [or a great Sunday School lesson] isn’t a collection of information; it is a *call to action*.” (Matte, 61) For small groups to become places of heart transformation that regularly issue calls to repentance and calls to growth requires two essential groups: the leader and the group members. First, the leader must be prepared with the information. He or she must also be ready to apply the information to the lives of the group. Lastly, he or she must be willing to issue the call to repentance or growth. The second group, the small group members, must also be prepared. They should be filled with the Word from the devotional study throughout the week and ideally will have studied the passage for the week’s lesson. Group members must also desire more than passive information transfer. Group members should come ready to actively participate in the study of God’s Word. Lastly, group members should be ready and willing to receive the Word and any call it places on their lives.

FACILITATOR 2

Guide and Discuss: Guide the group to page 27 of their Personal Study Guide and ask the question on the page: “Why is it important to invite others to respond to the truth of the gospel?”

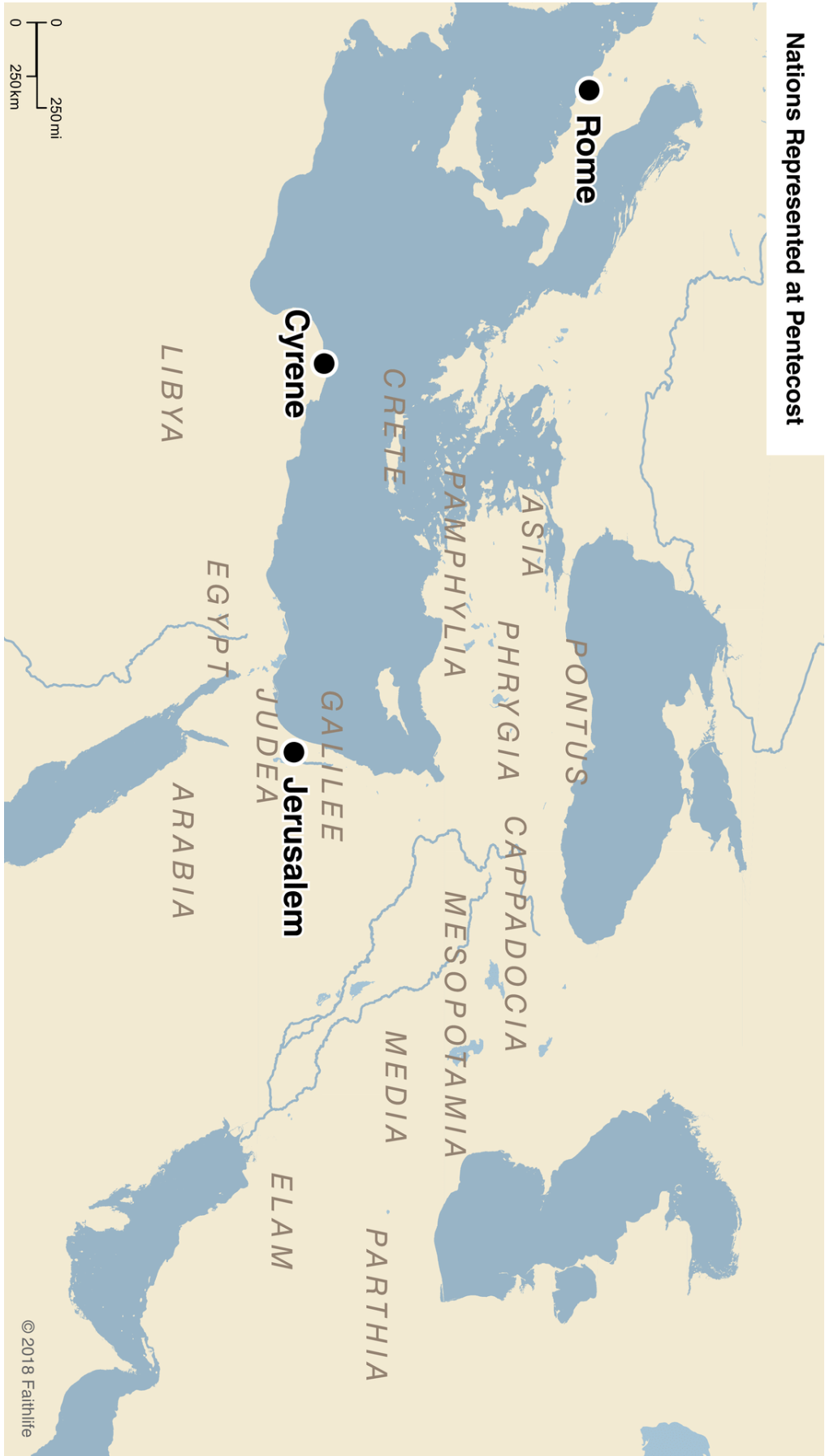
Summarize and Transition: Presenting the gospel or truths of Scripture without asking others to respond would be like going to a restaurant, looking over the menu, and hearing the specials only to have the waiter never return. If we do not allow for a response to the message the other person will know the truth but still be bound by sin.

CONCLUDE

Summarize: Peter’s call to respond and his sermon were both preceded by the work of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, it was the work of the Spirit that made the entire day possible. It was a mighty movement of God’s Spirit. Luke tells us in verse 41 that 3,000 people came to faith in Christ that day.

Challenge: Encourage the group to pray for a movement of the Holy Spirit in the body of our church. Ask the Holy Spirit to make us holy people who cause others to ask questions about faith. Ask the Holy Spirit to make us bold people who are ready to answer questions. Ask the Holy Spirit to make people committed to the Bible and who are faithful to the Scriptures.

Notes:



Nations Represented at Pentecost