

The New Testament Church Begins

Acts 2

DT- Being a Christian is not all about what you abstain from, but about who you pledge your allegiance to.

Acts chapter 2 is one of the most theologically rich chapters in all of scripture. I could spend the next 2 months preaching from just this chapter. This day that Luke is describing for us, is one of the most important days in all of human history. We celebrate Christmas and Easter as we should but honestly we should be celebrating what God did on this Day of Pentecost as well. This is where the New Testament church began, and what a beginning it was. Let's pray and get started so we can see what God did through the power of the Holy Spirit.

PRAY

The Holy Spirit does what he wants, where he wants, when he wants, and how he wants, without your permission. What the Holy Spirit did on this Day of Pentecost truly cannot be expressed fully with words. Luke himself stretches the Greek language as far as it can go to try and explain what happened with the Spirit that day. You will see words and phrases like bewilderment, utterly amazed, amazed and perplexed. Luke can't quite explain it or describe it and truthfully neither can I. But just like he tried to explain this amazing event to Theophilus in the Greek language; I will do my best to explain this event in our language. What we see first is that they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

1. They were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Listen to what happened that day, Acts 2:1-4 says, "On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability."

Wow. This is remarkable. But a question does immediately come to mind. Who are all the believers? The NLT says, "all the believers" were meeting together and "everyone present was filled". The NIV says, "they were all together" and "all of them were filled"

Who does they and them represent? Does this mean all 120 were filled with the Spirit or just the 12 disciples? We don't know for sure and I'm okay with either one, but the context would suggest that just the disciples were filled. Remember that there were no chapter divisions which means right after the 12 cast lots to choose Mathias as the replacement they were all together in one place. The disciples. This amazing filling of the Spirit happens in the house where they were staying. 120 people couldn't fit in a Palestinian house.

The next question you might have, now that we are fairly certain that just the disciples were filled, is what was this like? Luke struggles to explain it because it's a "you had to be there" kind of experience. Maybe this story will help. One of my professors once told us a story about a friend of his named David Hunt. David was a drug dealer in Carthage Missouri just outside of Joplin where Ozark Christian College is. He was a meth dealer, and he knew he needed to get off drugs when he found himself on the top of his car shooting at the demons with his 38. Mark said that he was so brilliant that the cops never did catch him. They knew he was a major distributor, but they could never nail him down. He is a former student of Ozark, of course he wasn't dealing drugs while attending Ozark he had converted by then.

David ruined his marriage, blew up most of his friendships. He had so many enemies that he studied poisons in case he needed to use that knowledge to take care of them. Mark described him at that time in his life as a very mean man. David was wrestling with God, and he was winning. He was not coming to Christ, and he knew that God was calling him. One day he pulled into a parking lot of a church, and he shouted at God, "I will never fear you." It was a calm summer day, and the windows of his truck were rolled up. Suddenly a blast of wind shot through his truck and an audible voice shouted, "You will fear me." And he did.

For some of you that story may cause the hair on the back of your neck to stand up. That's just a little portion of what they experienced when the sound from heaven came roaring through that house like a windstorm. Perhaps similar to the wind David felt in his truck that day. The disciples were filled with the Spirit and then Luke goes on in Acts 2:5-8 and says, "At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers. They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages!"

Native language means their own dialect. Part of their amazement and bewilderment is the fact that these men are Galileans speaking in their native languages. Galileans were hillbilly's. They were not known for their linguistic abilities. They were more of a "How y'all doin'" kind of people. Yet these hillbilly Galileans are speaking their native language perfectly. Luke continues to try and describe how incredible this was in Acts 2:12 he says, "They stood there amazed and perplexed. "What can this mean?" they asked each other."

The crowd around the disciples asks what can this mean? That's a decent translation of the original Greek but a better translation might be "what will become of this".

- What will become of this?

Something profound seems to be happening here. It's got everyone bewildered, perplexed, and amazed. The crowd knows that this is highly unusual, and it's almost as if they have the feeling that something more is coming. Something this strange and odd and wonderful doesn't occur for no reason. What will become of this? Surely there's reason why this is happening.

Now a small group in the crowd thought perhaps the disciples were just drunk. I've personally never been drunk, but I have been around people who were and their ability to speak doesn't seem to improve while intoxicated, and I don't think the people I was around were trying to say something in another language or specific dialect. We can rule that out quickly, in fact Peter does just that. Still the question remains, what will become of this? The disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit and it's amazing and powerful and now what? Now Peter was moved to preach.

2. Peter was moved to preach.

Peter stands up full of the Spirit, quickly refutes the drunk theory, and begins to describe first what this crowd is witnessing. Peter says in Acts 2:16-21, "What you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days,' God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants—men and women alike—and they will prophesy. And I will cause wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below—blood and fire and clouds of smoke. The sun will become dark, and the moon will turn blood red before that great and glorious day of the Lord arrives. But everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"

Peter quotes Joel 2 to describe to this crowd what they are seeing. They are seeing the pouring out of the Spirit, and the most wonderful thing about what Peter is saying here is that this Spirit can be poured out on anyone. Sons, daughters, young men, old men, servants, men, women. The Holy Spirit can be received by all people.

Remember the old children's song "Jesus Loves the Little Children".

Jesus loves the little children

All the children of the world

Red and yellow, black and white

They are precious in His sight

Jesus loves the little children of the world

As short and sweet and simple as that song is; it is wonderful theology. That song is so perfectly true. All people can receive the Spirit. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord can have this. Peter says this but it won't be until chapter 10 that he fully understands it. Peter says what you are seeing is the pouring out the Spirit and it will be for everyone. Then he shifts the conversation directly to Jesus.

Peter says in Acts 2:22-24, "People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him. But God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip."

They knew the miracles Jesus had performed; everyone did. Several of the miracles we have recorded were done in very public places. In fact John 11:47-48 says, "Then the leading priests and Pharisees called the high council together. "What are we going to do?" they asked each other. "This man certainly performs many miraculous signs. If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him. Then the Roman army will come and destroy both our Temple and our nation."

The miracles of Jesus were well known. Those miracles were proof of who Jesus was. They were an endorsement to help people believe. Peter shifts from the miracles as proof, to the crucifixion itself. Who killed Jesus? Technically the Romans did. But they would have never killed him without the Jews. It was also God. At least it was God's plan. That's what Peter says here. God's prearranged plan, God's purpose was set in motion when he sent Jesus. That plan was carried out, with the help of lawless Gentiles Peter says; that's the Romans. Then Peter brings the hammer down when he says "you Jews nailed him to the cross and killed him". Who killed Jesus? It was God's plan, it was the Romans technically, it was the crowd of Jews for sure as well, and it was also you and me. Our sin sent him to the cross. We killed Jesus. We may not have been the ones shouting crucify, crucify, but our sin put him there. The weight of our sin was on his shoulders.

But God's plan was not done, and he raised Jesus from the dead because the grave could not keep a grip on him. Peter then shares a proof text, a psalm that proves the Messiah would not rot in the grave. It was a psalm written by David, but it couldn't apply to David. The end of that proof text says this in Acts 2:27-28, "For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your Holy One to rot in the grave. You have shown me the way of life, and you will fill me with the joy of your presence."

That can't apply to David because as far as we know David is the only person buried inside the city limits of Jerusalem. Peter tells them that. He basically says we can walk over there right now if we wanted to. It's on the southside of Mount Zion. Which means David must have been speaking prophetically. David knew that God had promised he would place one of his descendants on the throne and that descendant would somehow survive the grave.

Peter explains to them that David was speaking about the Messiah's resurrection. They're starting to get this, they're starting to get the picture. The Holy Spirit is moving. Peter is filled and although we just have a portion of his sermon, he's about to bring it home in a big way. Peter says in Acts 2:32-35, "God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this. Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God's right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today. For David himself never ascended into heaven, yet he said, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit in the place of honor at my right hand until I humble your enemies, making them a footstool under your feet.'"

David makes yet another claim with another proof text from the OT to back it up. I wish I had more time to explain the depth of this psalm he quotes. This is Psalm 110 and it's quoted several times in the NT, in fact Jesus quotes it himself. When we read this it sounds cool but somewhat normal. The Lord said to my Lord. For these Jews it was bigger than that. The proper way to read this text would be to say, "Yahweh said to Adonai". God said to God. How can that be.

It can be if God sends his son the Messiah to earth, to live and die and rise again so that God can say to God, so that Yahweh can say to Adonai, come sit at my right hand as I make the enemy a footstool under your feet.

We read that and we think it's cool, because we know how this story goes, but the crowd of Jews that Peter is preaching to is starting to get that sick feeling in their stomachs. Goosebumps all over their bodies because they are coming to the realization of what they might have done. Peter knows that and senses that, either all on his own, but more likely through the Holy Spirit that is filling him, and Peter brings the sermon to a crescendo when he says in Acts 2:36, "So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!"

Jesus was God. It was Yahweh and Adonai. What have we done. We killed the Christ. We killed our very own Messiah. Acts 2:37 says, "Peter's words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?"

What a question that is. What shall we do?

- What shall we do?

Peter is there anything we can do? Now we understand the incredible mistake we have made. Is there any hope? Can we somehow be saved again? What shall we do Peter? Please tell us you have an answer. I heard a story recently about a moment when a pastor was sharing the story of the prodigal son with someone who didn't know the story at all and didn't know how it ended. He was telling the story of how the son demanded the father give him his half of the inheritance and how he squandered it all; and after trying to make it as the servant in a pig farming operation he finally decided to go home to his father. At least his father's servants received better treatment than this.

As the pastor was telling this woman the story he could tell she was interested in the ending. What did the father do, how was he treated when he came home? As the pastor began to tell of the father filled with love and compassion, running out to embrace the son her eyes welled up with tears. She asked who the father was. The pastor said the father in the story represents God. Do you know who the prodigal son represents? Now the tears were beginning to run down her face as she faintly said almost as if she was asking a question, "Me?"

This crowd surrounding Peter on Pentecost was in a similar position as that woman, wondering, hoping that God would be filled with love and compassion for them as well. What shall we do? Peter answers in Acts 2:38, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Praise God he is filled with love and compassion. The word repent is plural. There are some words that we say here in this part of the country and especially in Oklahoma where I grew up. Word's like y'all. Do you know what the plural for y'all is. All y'all. Peter says All y'all need to repent. Every single one of you needs to turn towards God in repentance. The response to this sermon would have been something to see. Many accepted the message and were baptized.

3. Many accepted the message and were baptized.

Luke tells us 3,000 people were baptized that day. What a powerful movement of the Spirit. That still happens today. This kind of response has occurred throughout the history of the church. Sometimes mass groups of people like this give their life to God, and sometimes its 1 or 2 or 3 people at a time. Either way this sermon reminds us that being a Christian is not about what you abstain from, but about who you pledge your allegiance to.

Peter is not saying be good, he is saying go and die. Die to your sins, let go of them because they have been paid for, even the sin of crucifying your Lord is paid for. Die to sin and live to follow God. Then in Acts 2:39 Peter makes one more clarifying statement that answers the question; who is this for?

- Who is this for?

Peter has already said who this is for but the Holy Spirit prompts him to say it again in Acts 2:39 he says, "This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God."

Jesus is for everyone. He came for everyone. He came for all y'all. Where there was no hope Jesus brought hope. As I said earlier, Peter didn't even fully understand what he was saying; first because the Holy Spirit was working through him, but secondly because his heart was still being changed by God. If you were to ask Peter at this point that same question, who is this for, he would have said for you, your children, and those far away, but the catch would have been that this is for Jews only.

It's not until Acts chapter 10 that Peter finally figures out for himself who this is for. Peter is summoned by a Gentile man named Cornelius who is a Roman army officer. God speaks to Peter through a dream and says to him in Acts 10:15, "Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean."

In the context of that passage he is talking about food, but God is about to apply that statement in a greater way because the Jews saw the Gentiles as unclean. Finally, after hearing about Cornelius's vision Peter says this in Acts 10:34-35, "I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right."

Luke goes on to write in Acts 10:44-45, "Even as Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the message. The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles, too."

The promise is for you, your children, and all those far away who are called by God. Our initial response should be repentance, baptism, and then making sure that our children and all those far away get the chance to hear this wonderful news. Your walk with Christ is not so much about what you abstain from, but who you pledge your allegiance to, and then like Peter telling the story of what God has done for you so that perhaps many can accept the message and find that Jesus is for them too.

You have this same Spirit inside of you. Yield to it, and let the Holy Spirit do it's work in you so that others can know this good news as well.