

The Promised Coming of the Spirit

July 8, 2018

Acts 2:14-21

For those of you who were not here last week, we are in Acts 2 in our study of the book of Acts. Last week, we considered the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the people of God, complete with the sound of rushing wind, the sight of something like tongues of fire lighting on the heads of all the people, and the sudden, miraculous phenomenon of the people speaking in the precise dialects of the gathered crowd. As you can imagine, it created quite a stir. Here it is, 9:00 in the morning, church hour if you will, and this crazy group of Jesus followers is creating a scene in a public place, perhaps the outer courts of the temple.

This is where we pick up the story today. Over the next three weeks, we will consider Peter's sermon on that momentous day. Today, we will look at his explanation of this strange event where the Spirit of God was poured out. Next Sunday, we will see how his audience should understand the life and death of Jesus. And the following week, we will study the people's response to the sermon, an evangelistic event that saw 3,000 people put their trust in Christ.

So, today, the focus is on Peter's explanation of what had just happened. The people there that day would certainly have been overwhelmed, in awe perhaps, confused (many of them), and all would have wondered what to do with it all. This did not fit any understanding of the Jewish faith they comprehended. Peter here sets out to explain what was going on.

As we go through this text, we will learn not only Peter's perspective, but also see how this event fits into the ongoing relationship between God and His people. We will see how Peter understands and uses Scripture to explain it. And we will see demonstrated what it looks like when a fisherman speaks up as prompted by this new indwelling and empowering of the Holy Spirit. In other words, what Peter said that day is perhaps the perfect example of what it looks like to be empowered by the Spirit of God. This is what that looks like.

Follow along as we read this somewhat short text. Most of it is a quotation (with important slight modifications) of Joel 2:28-32. What is of importance to us this morning is what Peter does with that text. READ.

Main point: God's plan has always been to enter into this new (Christian) era with the pouring out of His Spirit on all of His people.

This was not something "else," meaning foreign to the God of Scripture. This was a fulfillment of what had been told long ago. This is the key to Peter's understanding. It was not a fluke, not some strange and different faith. Instead, it was the fulfilling of a promise announced long ago by a prophet of God that there would come a day when God's Spirit would be poured out on all of His people, resulting in a new situation, with many people having the ability to speak for God, resulting with a whole new era of salvation. Indeed, this connection between the gift of the Spirit and fruitful evangelism cannot be overstated. The text from the prophet Joel said more than perhaps even Peter knew that day. It would mean people like you and I would be able to experience a life-giving relationship with God. Yes, this coming of the Spirit changed everything. (3 parts)

I. The work of the Spirit might seem like craziness, but it is actually quite comprehensible. vv. 14-16

When the Spirit prompts people, fills people, empowers people, it could seem to resemble people not in their right minds, as if crazy or drunk. But in actuality, it is understandable, predictable, and even foretold by the prophets of God in ancient days.

v.14 - Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.

It seems to me that the whole of Jesus' ministry with His disciples was intended for this precise moment. As we see so often in the gospels, Peter speaks for the whole. It does not surprise us that Peter speaks. As we said two weeks ago, Peter tends to say what we would have said if we had been there. He usually said things that showed he (and the other disciples) did not get it. But on this day, Peter said things that could only have come from God. It is as if Peter instantly got it. He instantly had insight that could only have come from the Spirit of God. He here quotes OT prophets. He is bold in his speech. He doesn't coddle his audience. Indeed, he will later tell them that they were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus.

Can you see how far this is from the perspective of the disciples back in chapter I, or at the empty tomb, or with Jesus at the last supper? This is Peter preaching the truth, with insight, with power. What happened? The Holy Spirit came upon Him. This is what it looks like when the Holy Spirit indwells, empowers, and prompts a

failed, flawed fisherman turned preacher. This is what gives hope to people like me. If God can use Peter, then I guess He can use me.

He begins his message by addressing the crowd in a rather odd way, “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem.” What had just happened would have seemed to some of the locals as gibberish, but to those who had come from afar, it was hearing something they knew and understood, but never expected to hear coming from people like Peter. So, the address here is designed to express commonality with the crowd, and yet, recognizing that some heard something others could not comprehend.

15 These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! 16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

The obvious is stated. The people saying strange things were not drunk, they were not out of their minds. They were all awake, sober, alert, coherent. Even a stranger who walked into the setting would know this was not the time and place for out of control drunk people. No, the explanation for what had just happened was elsewhere. The people speaking in foreign tongues were being controlled by a supernatural force. But this sudden outburst of such a thing was not unexplainable either. In fact, this precise event had been foretold by the prophet Joel hundreds of years before. The foretelling of this event was a part of their sacred texts, Joel 2:28-32.

Can you see why this would be important? This strange event was not some different faith, not some distortion of the one true faith. No, it was a fulfillment of a prophecy of the Jewish faith. What Joel predicted in Joel 2:28-32 had come to pass right in front of them. God had been true to His promise. And it happened in such a way that no one could fake, could make come to pass. Who could have made such a thing happen by their own will? Who would have known which people would be there that day to hear their own dialect? Who could have trained uneducated people to instantly speak like natives? Who could have orchestrated the tongues of fire and the sounds of the rushing wind? No one could have manipulated such a thing. It had to be an act of God. These people were overwhelmed with the presence of God, prompting them to do the impossible. They did not put on a show, but rather had the instant ability to profess the truth of God in the native tongues of a random group of gathered strangers.

II. To usher in the new and final era of humanity on earth as we know it, God will indwell and empower all of His people. vv. 17-18

Once more, it seems to me that we are so used to this that we miss its significance.

Imagine this: since creation, God had used certain people, His prophets to communicate with His people. He would speak through people like Moses, or Elijah, or Isaiah, or Joel. If you wanted to know what God thought about a certain situation, you would consult the prophet. But over the past 400 or so years, there had not been such a prophet. We call them “the silent years.” Indeed, when John the Baptist came on the scene, it created quite a stir. Here was a prophet!!!! We know that there were other God-fearing prophets, Simeon and Anna come to mind in Luke 2. But it was well understood that the days of God speaking to His people primarily through His selected prophets was in a continuous, long, dry spell.

And yet, there was this knowledge, this promise written down in Joel 2, that there would come a day when God would indwell and empower all of His people! There would come a day when there would be many, many prophets. God promised this as recorded in Joel 2. So Peter points his audience to the text of their own sacred text, Joel 2:28-32. In fact, he quotes it to them. This text gives the best explanation for what the people that day had just witnessed.

17 “ ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.

If we opened both texts side by side, we would notice only a few minor differences. But the differences are important. Peter is in essence preaching from Joel 2 when he quotes it. He is interpreting the text to make the point of the text clear. We see the first minor modifications at the start, “In the last days,” and “God says.” I simply note that “God says” reflects the fact that what the prophet declared was God Himself declaring.

Then we see that Joel has it simply as happening “Afterward.” Joel puts it in relative terms “afterward,” whereas Peter puts it in absolute terms, “In the last days.” Now, since this happened 2,000 years ago, we must not conclude that Peter misspoke in thinking the end was near. No, the term is pointing us to the last in a series, “this final age” if you will. The promises of God would be fulfilled in this final stage. What

the patriarchs and faithful Jews since had believed in hope for so long was finally coming true in this last age, or eschaton.

And the new situation described in Joel 2 was that the Spirit of God would be “poured out,” or lavished upon, or emptied on all people, all of God’s people. Can you see how different this would have been for them? Can you see how we ought not take for granted the fact that as believers, the Spirit of God resides in us? God can and will speak directly to us, or as here speak through us to others. We don’t have to go to special, designated “holy men” to find out what God wants us to know. We don’t have to wait for a special occasion, or go to a special event, a pilgrimage perhaps. We don’t have to endure long dry spells when God appears to be silent. In this last age, if you are one of God’s people, you have His Holy Spirit in you, empowering you, prompting you. You may not think this way, but it is the truth.

Notice it is not just a select group of old men who get to experience this supernatural power. Men and women, sons and daughters, young men will all have communication with God that previously was reserved for a few. This was predicted through the prophet Joel, fulfilled starting on this first celebration of Christian Pentecost.

18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

It is not the highest of high that will receive this honor. It will extend down to the lowest of the low. Can you see how this reflects the values and structure of the Kingdom as Jesus described? The Kingdom of God really is an upside down kingdom. The last are first, the first are last, the least are held up for higher honor. In this case, the pouring out of the Spirit of God is experienced by the most unlikely, the servants. It does not surprise me that later, when writing the epistles, Paul adopts this language for himself, a servant, or bond servant of Jesus Christ.

III. This remarkable event would be accompanied by distinctive events in nature, and incredible fruitfulness in evangelism. vv. 19-21

The impact of this great event would be visible, as signs in the natural world, and witnessing many, many people being saved. As I hinted before, I believe this text proclaims something that was even beyond Peter on that day. He would have to come to learn and accept who that “everyone” was. It would include people like us!

19 I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 20 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

There is some lack of clarity regarding whether these signs were all visible in Peter's day, or if this describes the whole as seen in part on that occasion. In other words, some of these things happened in those days: fire on Pentecost, darkness on the day Jesus died on the cross, an earthquake that opened tombs and split the temple curtain. But others were either not recorded or perhaps yet to come.

But the point I do not want you to miss is that this pouring out of the Spirit would not be able to be missed. You couldn't help but notice. I think of the soldier at the cross, acknowledging that "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39) You couldn't miss what had happened.

21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

In this last era, God would fulfill His promise to save. This issue will become the focus at the end of the sermon, but for now, I want you to notice the connection between the pouring out of the Spirit and the promised fruitfulness in evangelism. There is a direct connection between the two. And we see an example of how that works here in front of Peter. The Holy Spirit empowered ordinary people to do and say the most unlikely of things. Surrounding people heard, listened, were convicted, and responded, "What must we do!" That sounds like Spirit empowered evangelism! Huh! And 3,000 people called upon the name of the Lord and were saved, just as the prophet Joel had foretold. That's how it was designed to work.

But as I mentioned at the beginning, the key word here to us is, "everyone." I'm suggesting to you that even though Peter quoted that word, he did not comprehend how broad was that word, "everyone." I say this because he will have to be convinced to go and preach to a Gentile family in chapter 10. After all, such people would have been "unclean" to a good Jew like Peter. And God had to go to some extremes to convince Peter that it would be okay to include the unclean Gentiles in the "everyone." But for now, Peter was on track, quoting the appropriate text, proclaiming it with power, making the connection between the strange phenomenon witnessed and the promised pouring out of the Spirit of God.

So, what do we do with this? Well, in one sense, we are living it out every day. We are still living in the light of that new day. It is routine to us. And yet, I think it is abundantly clear that many, many believers do not take advantage of the help that

God has given in the person of the Holy Spirit. I believe that God is wanting and waiting to speak to us through His Spirit, but we don't utilize Him. Either we don't think it is real, we don't stop to listen, or we are waiting for something dramatic when He is speaking to us in a still, small voice. For a variety of reasons, we fail to put to best usage the tremendous gift we have been given. And I believe that He is willing to speak to us in ways that fit us, that we will recognize as His voice. In other words, you ought not hear someone talk about what happened to them and then expect that this is how it would happen to you. Indeed, I think it is instructive that the people gathered there that day heard the word of God in their own dialect.

We have a shepherd, and we will recognize the voice of our shepherd. But we have to be quiet before Him, listen for His voice, invite Him to speak to us. I am convinced that there would be a whole lot more communicating going on if we only thought it would happen!

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

- 1) We will give thanks for the gift of God's Spirit poured out on us.
- 2) We will depend on the Spirit when involved with evangelism.
- 3) We will be open to the Spirit speaking to us and through us.
- 4) We will read the Old Testament with newfound joy and understanding, knowing that we are the planned recipients of the promises of God!