

Gospel Triumph: When the Spirit Shows Up – Acts 2:1-21

We live in a 24-hour news cycle where every event is presented as if it has massive historical significance. But most things that happen fade away after a few days and won't be remembered 50 to 100 years from now as producing any real change in the world. I sometimes imagine what events or people will still be talked about 200 or 300 years from now. Things like the advent of the Nuclear Age and the discovery of Antibiotics will be shown to have made lasting change, whereas many events that we consider so consequential will be a footnote in a history book somewhere.

Our text for this morning in Acts 2 is a defining event in the history of the world and of God's work in the world. Just to be clear, salvation came to OT saints as they looked forward to God's future Messiah and trusted in God's words, but they were not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In the OT the Spirit empowered certain leaders for certain tasks, but the Spirit's work and help was not a feature of everyday life for followers of Yahweh. Listen to what Jesus said in John 7:37-39. Moses understood this very clearly about the people he was leading in the OT. Listen to his words in Numbers 11:29. Moses understands that without the Spirit and the new heart that comes from the Spirit, the people would not consistently obey the Lord. Listen to some of Moses's final words in Deut. 29:2-4.

This is part of the reason why the promise of the New Covenant of a new heart and the coming of God's Spirit is such good news. John the Baptist understood the massive change that would take place when Jesus arrived. Luke 3:15-16. We've seen this to in the promise of Jesus at the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts. Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4-5.

The expectation has been building since Israel's earliest days that God would intervene in human history and change things. That His Spirit would come and empower His people to live by faith and obey His Word from the inside out. The arrival of God's Spirit would not only cause His people to obey but would give them the strength and confidence they need to go on mission for the King. Listen to Acts 1:8.

And so, we reach Acts 2 and the day of Pentecost, and this is the moment when things changed forever. The impact of this day echoes down to our lives today in

profound ways. So, here's what we will see in Acts 2:1-21. 3 Works of the Spirit that Indicate God's Mission is Moving Forward.

1. The Spirit Arrives as Promised (vv. 1-4)

Look with me at verse 1. Pentecost was a yearly Jewish harvest festival that was held 50 days after Passover. It's called the Feast of Weeks in the OT. Notice in the ESV it says that the day of Pentecost "arrived". In Greek this word translated "arrived" is the word that is normally translated "fulfilled." Luke uses this same word in Luke 9:51 to speak of the time of Jesus's death and resurrection being fulfilled. It's likely here that Luke intends us to understand all the background I shared with you from the OT and the words of Jesus in Acts 1 and to see this day as a fulfillment of God's promises.

Once again, we find the disciples together in one place, probably praying, and let's see what happens. Verses 2-3. Several unique things happen here and all of them point to the arrival of God's presence. In other words, God shows up to His people. His real presence with His Spirit comes to His people as He promised.

Both a rushing wind and fire were associated with God's arrival in the OT. Listen to a couple of passages. 1 Kings 19:11; Job 38:1. Moses Himself saw a burning bush in Exodus 3 that indicated God's presence and just listen to Exodus 19:18.

It's important here that God Himself is present with them but notice where His Spirit arrives from in verse 2. This is a clear connection back to Acts 1:9-10. Jesus went into heaven and now He's sending His Spirit from heaven. The disciples are receiving the presence and power of God from Jesus to continue His ministry. Notice what happens first as the Spirit arrives in verse 4.

It's quite clear here that the Spirit empowers them to speak in other languages, which is what this means as you will see in a minute. These are understandable languages. But I want you to keep in mind throughout this passage that the Spirit's gifting here applies directly to verbal ministry. They speak, the prophecy. In this particular passage they speak in other languages, but throughout the rest of the NT, the Spirit's empowerment enables His people to speak the gospel. As Acts 1:8 promises, they are witnesses to the person and work of Christ and the arrival of His Kingdom. We see this in our second work of the Spirit in verses 5-13.

2. The Spirit Confounds and Calls the Nations (vv. 5-13)

You see two actions of the Spirit in these verses. The people who hear the disciples speaking in other languages are amazed and confused. They are astonished by what is happening but they don't know what to make of it. And who are these people? The text makes it quite clear that this is God gathering Jews from all over the world back to Himself at Jerusalem and then ultimately launching them to the ends of the earth. Look at verse 5.

These Jews may have been simply in town for the festival, or they may have moved back to Jerusalem from other nations. Probably a little bit of both. But it seems like what took place in the house where the disciples were gathered spilled out into the street and a crowd started to gather. Look at verses 6-8. They are shocked and bewildered by what is happening and it's quite a variety of languages they are hearing. Look at verses 9-11.

This seems like a random list of places, but there are actually two things going on here. Some of these places are taken from a list in Isaiah 11:10-12. Of course, Isaiah 11 begins with these words about the future Davidic King in verses 1-5. So, I think Luke, the author of Acts, wants us to see this event as the fulfillment of Isaiah 11. But there's something else we need to notice about the list in Acts 2:9-11.

If you begin plotting the locations out on a map, they start East of Jerusalem, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, and then back to Jerusalem with Judea, then move north with Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia and then back to Jerusalem. Then west with North Africa and out to Rome and back to Crete, which is on the way back to Jerusalem, then Arabians, which would have been south of Jerusalem. 4 points on the compass, all given with Jerusalem at the center.

This is what we talked about the last couple of weeks. God's work will begin in Jerusalem and move out from there to all the nations of the earth. And what are the disciples talking about? Look at the end of verse 11. One author said it like this: *"They proclaim God's new intervention in history—the powerful salvation through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, Israel's Messiah."* – Eckhard Schnabel

But it's not clear to the people hearing all of this what it all means. Look at verse 12. This is the question you and I are supposed to ask here. We need an

interpreter, someone to explain the meaning. And that's what we will get in verses 14-40 as Peter stands up and explains. We're going to look at the first part of that explanation in a minute this morning, but before we get there, notice what happens in verse 13.

This explanation in verse 13 is just wild. They are so drunk that they are clearly speaking other languages where people understand them clearly? It's an insane theory, but people will go to great lengths to deny God's work in each situation. You will sometimes hear people say, why doesn't God just do something miraculous or just show up in a very clear way? Then I would believe. No, you wouldn't. You would explain it away just like the people here did. But Peter simply won't allow their wild speculations. And this brings us to our last work of the Spirit.

3. The Spirit Divides in Judgment and Salvation (vv. 14-21)

Once again we see Peter taking the lead here. Look at verses 14-15. Peter's like, look, these people aren't drunk. Instead, he's going to explain to them and interpret for them what this means. Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-40 is the answer to the question in verse 12. It's the answer for the people who witnessed it and it's the answer for us. Now look at verse 16.

Peter's going to quote a longer section from the OT prophet Joel, but as always, it's vital that we understand the context in which this OT quote comes. We need to do that because Peter says that the events unfolding on Pentecost are fulfilling the prophecy of Joel. So, what is the book of Joel about?

Joel describes a plague of locusts that happened in Israel and then pivots from the destruction of the locusts to the future destruction and judgment of the day of the Lord. Listen to Joel 2:1-2. This terrible day of God's judgment will happen unless the people turn in repentance to God. Listen to Joel 2:12-17. Notice the language, rend your hearts, not your garments. Repentance involves a real sorrow for sin and not just an outward show.

Repentance is possible because God is slow to anger, gracious and merciful. But repentance means that you recognize your sin before God and turn from it and to God in trust and faith.

And Joel gives hope that at some point in the future God will show up by His Spirit and change the hearts of the people. Look at Joel 2:28-32a.

Now, if you move over to Acts you will notice a slight change in Peter's language. He doesn't say "afterwards" like Joel does. Instead, he says "in the last days." Peter understands the arrival of God's Spirit to be the fulfillment of Joel 2 and the beginning of the last days. In other words, God's final act of redemption has come through His Spirit to His people. And it's clear that what is happening fulfills Joel 2 because the people are prophesying by the Spirit. This just means that they are speaking God's Word on God's behalf. Again, it's the verbal ministry which is empowered by the Spirit.

So, Peter understands verses 16-18 to be happening at Pentecost, and they come before the judgment of God in verses 19-20. Look there. The Spirit has arrived and initiates the "last days". God's final act of redemption has come, and this will be followed by God's full and complete judgment, which are described in verses 19-20. Therefore, the proper response is found in verse 21.

Peter quotes this passage from Joel because it all leads up to this. Paul will quote this same passage and say it's for Jews and Gentiles in Romans 10:12-13. Back in Acts 2 Peter will then go on to explain in verses 22-40 that Jesus is the Lord that they must call upon and we will work through the rest of his sermon next week.

So, let me try to put the pieces together here. Peter says that the last days have come with the arrival of God's Spirit and the verbal ministry of God's people. That means that God's judgment at the day of the Lord will certainly come in the future. Your response in the present to avoid that day of judgment is to repent from the heart. Turn to the Lord, trust in Him, and be saved. Who is that Lord to whom you must turn? We will see in great detail next week in verses 22-40 but it's the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, this sermon is a warning sermon in Acts 2. It's a plea to avoid God's judgment by turning to the Lord. It's a sermon that recognizes that the Spirit has come, and this means both salvation and judgment are on the table. If you are a follower of Christ this morning, this same Spirit dwells in you and empowers you. If you are not a follower of Christ, you need to listen carefully to Peter's words of salvation and judgment. You cannot remain neutral regarding Jesus. Repent of your sin and turn to Him in faith. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 9/29/24

- What events from the past 100 years do you think will still be significant 200 years from now?
- How do we know that the Spirit did not indwell believers in the OT the same way He does in the NT? What was the Spirit's role in the OT?
- What are some of the major differences the Spirit makes in the life of a believer today?
- What difference does the Spirit make in your life on a daily basis?
- What is significant about the list of locations given in verses 9-11?
- What does the response of the people in verse 13 indicate about miracles and faith? Why do you think miracles don't convince people of God's work?
- What do you know about the message of the book of Joel?
- What does Peter quote Joel here? What is the point Peter is trying to make?
- What are the key elements of repentance as described in the book of Joel?
- Why does Peter change Joel's language from "afterwards" to "in the last days"?

- How is Peter's quote from Joel a message of judgment?
- What is the connection between the Spirit's arrival and God's judgment?
- What's one truth from this passage that you can use to encourage a fellow believer this week?