

HEAR NOW THE NEWS

Jesus People Proclaim a World-Changing Message

Jesus People (Part 2)

Text: Acts 2:1-41

Introduction to the Scripture

When you strip away all of the layers that have accumulated over the original canvas of Christianity through the centuries... when you wash away the sentimentality and selfishness, the politics and commercialism, that have been painted and pasted over what Christ began... what you find beneath is an amazing Master piece. You find in the book of the Bible we call **Acts** a portrait of the life and love of the *Jesus People*. How God moved through the hearts, minds, and hands of this first small group of people to influence the world all the way down to our time today, is what we're studying together in this series.

We continue that journey today by turning to Acts chapter 2. You can find our reading on page ____ of the Bibles in front of you. We'll provide the text on the projection window for those who value the larger print, but I encourage the rest of us to take God's Word out of the pew and into our hands. We'll read responsively just the first 21 verses together and I'll pick up the rest in the course of my sermon comments. You may find it helpful to keep the text open.

Let's proclaim together then, the Word of the Lord...

A Managed People

It is one of the great wonders of history – how a small group of common people ultimately multiplied into a movement that turned the Roman Empire upside down and millions of people right-side up. When you consider the difficulty so many churches today have in gaining a hearing for their message, the growth of the early church is all the more amazing. No amount of human ingenuity adequately explains it. There is no evidence in the documents that the first followers of Jesus possessed unusual intellect, great organizational savvy, or uncommon eloquence. The only way I know to explain it is that this very ordinary group of people came under very extraordinary management from beyond themselves.

Jesus had said this would happen. In Acts 1:5, Jesus told them: **“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised.”** In Acts 1:8, Jesus said: **“You will be given power to be my witnesses when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.”** In spite of the fact that Jesus then bodily leaves them, we see evidence days later that Christ's management of their lives is still holding. We see the disciples trusting in Christ's promise. We see them obeying his commandment to stay in

Jerusalem. In Acts 1:14 we see them **“all joined together constantly in prayer,”** asking Jesus to have his way in them and with them. And seeing all this, a question spins to the surface for me and maybe for you: *Are we at all like this?* Is our life together, or even as individuals, marked by trust in Christ’s promises, by obedience to Christ’s commandments, by faithful prayer that Jesus will assume a wise and wonderful management of all that we are?

I ask these questions because where this manageability exists, God seems to enjoy pouring out a simply spectacular power. I’m not talking about wind and flames, or even the ability to suddenly speak in foreign languages without taking classes. As near as I can tell, that was a once-off occurrence to jumpstart the Church. What I mean are the other effects of the Holy Spirit recorded in Acts 2 and many times after that. If you’ll bear with me, I want to lift up from this text, three more aspects of the *Jesus People* worth noting. I want to suggest to you that if we could get all four of these aspects to come together in this church or any other, it would proclaim a message that would have as world-changing an impact today as it did in the First Century. And that is worth praying for.

A Magnetic People

Have you ever noticed the buzz that kicks up when a store comes under new management? I remember when the old hardware store in our town shut down and how everyone mourned it. That was until the Fuller Family took it over, renovated it from top to bottom, and opened for business. Years later, it still strikes me as amazing. The store has something of the shape and content of the old operation, but the improvements are so dramatic that people in town still buzz about it and return to see it.

When Jesus took over the management of the disciples’ lives through the power of his Holy Spirit, it was like this. He transformed what had been, according to Gospel accounts, a fairly unspectacular group of men and women into the talk of the town. Acts 2:7 says, **“Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?’”** Verse 12 reads: **“Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, ‘What does this mean?’”** Not everyone, of course, cheered the evidence of new management. Verse 13 makes clear that **“some”** responded with the skepticism of Marshall Fields customers to the arrival of Macy’s and **“made fun of them.”** But just about nobody, it seems, was ignorant that over there, some kind of change was going on. People of all kinds became curious and were drawn to come and see.

This is how it is going to be where Jesus really has management among a people. There are going to be stories of life-change. People are going to describe habits and relationships, priorities and patterns, that God’s growing influence over their life is renovating and improving. People are not going to remain cranky or gossipy or angry or bitter or superficially faithful and say, “Well, I’m just like that.” They’re going to say,

"God, please help me change that. Come with Fuller power into that part of my life." They are going to interact with other people differently, spend their time and resources differently, be present to other people's needs differently. And as that happens, people are going to notice the changes. *Character and conduct change is a universal language.* It makes Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Wheatonites, Chicagoans, start to talk. They may marvel or they may mock, just as folks did in Acts 2; but they are going to be drawn to what is happening. When Jesus People become manageable they become magnetic people.

A Multi-Cultural People

And they will be a multi-cultural people too. Raise your hand or your eyebrows if that word sets off your PC Alarm. I can understand why it does. Whatever race or region we come from, nobody wants demands for diversity jammed down our throats. We like our own kind. We feel more comfortable and less labored when surrounded with people like us. It always works best when people are free to choose diversity, because they want to. And, apparently, given his druthers, God makes that choice.

It is not an accident that the very first sermon ever given by a Jesus Person was on a text from the second chapter of the book of the prophet Joel, which read: **"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people."** That point would have been hard for some in Peter's audience to swallow. The Jews in his audience thought God primarily favored their people. The Samaritans thought it was them. Both of those groups were sure God disdained Gentile people. But here God is saying, all the races matter to me. I am reaching out to **"all people."** I seek to bring them all under the blessing of my management.

I will embrace in my service, not just all races, but both genders too: **"Your sons and daughters will prophesy... Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy."** That was hard to take for those in the audience who recited the familiar daily prayer: "Lord I thank you that I was born neither a woman nor a Gentile." Women weren't aloud to speak in worship. They had to sit in a separate section. It was questioned by some at the time whether women had souls. But God says it is my intention to **"prophesy,"** that means to speak divine truth, through **"both men and women."**

And then God blows down the walls of age discrimination too: **"Your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams."** Younger people, older people... they're both going to have a significant voice... they're both going to speak something of my vision, my dream... they're going to need each other to see the whole picture of my plan. In the end, my people will be a glorious mosaic of races, genders, and generations. And I think I know why God would say this.

It's for two reasons. First, because his love and grace is just that rich and wide. Jesus showed us that on the cross. But secondly, when you see a multi-racial, multi-gendered, multi-generational people living and worshipping with one another, looking for the work of the Spirit through one another, expressing a sense of need for one another, you know something supernatural is happening there. Human beings would never think this up on our own. Only God could come up with that or make it possible. But in a world that is so stratified and conflicted today along all these lines, don't you think that a people who somehow expressed a Kingdom Culture greater than those divisions might fill the world with fresh hope? I think so.

A Metanoic People

The world needs to see a people living under the management of Jesus. Where that is true, they will increasingly be a magnetic people, a multicultural people and, also, a METANOIC people. The word "metanoia" is a Greek word. It means to change your heart or mind. When it is translated into English in the New Testament and put in its imperative form, it is normally rendered by a word you've often heard. It is the word "repent." But on the lips of Jesus People it carries a very different tone than commonly heard. Listen again to how Peter sought to convey the Jesus message in his Pentecost sermon.

"Listen to this," said Peter. **"Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know."** In other words: There is widespread, credible witness that Jesus was no ordinary man. You've certainly heard this. **"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."** Translation: "God gave Jesus to the world for a wonderful purpose, but tragically, blinded by wickedness, we human beings killed the gift."

"But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." In other words: Here's the good news: No darkness, not even death itself, could stop the power of God's grace at work through Jesus. **Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear... God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."** Translation: The powerful life-changes you are seeing, the culture-transcending unity you are hearing about, there is only one explanation for this: This Jesus, whom you rejected before, is the Great Manager and Savior, the great hope that this world has been waiting for.

Amazing, isn't it, how people responded, when the message came to them this way? When it wasn't on a placard at a football game or shouted from a billboard... When it wasn't offered in a drive-by way by people who acted superior or insipid... When it was

accompanied instead by the visible evidence of a Spirit that changes lives and transcends cultures... Then the facts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection could be laid out and really get a fresh hearing -- even from people who'd rejected Jesus before. For then, the call to repent felt less like law than like love. They could *hear now the news*.

"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' Peter replied," – *metanoesate* -- 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. [For] The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call.'" And "three thousand were added to their number that day."

Not everyone responded this way, as we'll be reminded next week. But many more would, I believe, if our witness was like we encounter here. Let me say it one last time, because I need to hear it myself. The world needs to see a people who are genuinely under new management... a people whose lives are magnetic because they speak the universal language of changed character and transformed conduct... a people whose multicultural unity pictures fresh hope for our fractured world... a people whose call to metanoia (repentance) feels more like the voice of love than law. The world still needs the world-changing message of the Jesus People. By the grace and power of God alone, may that witness go forth through you and me.