

## EXPOSITION OF ACTS

### Message #5

### Acts 2:1-13

Just recently someone asked me what my favorite classical piece of music was. Without pausing I replied Richard Wagner's love-death theme from *Tristan and Isolde*. I think it is one of the most beautiful pieces of music ever written, even though it was written back in the mid 1800s. Now suppose I was to suggest that we rent out Miller Auditorium and advertise that I am going to hum or whistle Wagner. You would say, and rightly so, you are out of your mind. You cannot possibly expect that people will come to hear you attempt some shallow rendition by humming. You need a full orchestra to make Wagner come to life.

When it comes to the Church Age, trying to accomplish anything without the full power of the Holy Spirit is far shallower effort in futility than whistling or humming Wagner. In order for us to accomplish anything powerful and eternal for God as an individual or as a church, we need the full presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. John Stott said, "Without the Holy Spirit ... Christian discipleship ... is impossible" (*Acts*, p. 60).

Jesus told His own apostles (Acts 1:4, 8), don't you even try witnessing and taking My message to the world until you have the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. **As we come to Acts 2, we come to the moment when they get that power. Here is the beginning of the Church Age. Here is the moment when the Holy Spirit is authorized by Jesus Christ to come to this world to begin this new epoch age known as the Church Age of Grace.** This text is very important to the history of the church including our church. In fact, Ivor Powell said this is "the greatest event that ever took place in the history of the church" (*The Amazing Acts*, p. 34). What we see from this text is this:

**AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH AGE IT WAS THE PRESENCE AND THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT THAT ENABLED THE APOSTLES TO COMMUNICATE GOD'S WORD WITH LANGUAGES AND WORDS THAT PEOPLE COULD UNDERSTAND.**

The ability these first disciples had to communicate God's Word was not their ability; it was a supernatural ability produced by God's Spirit. The ability to communicate God's Gospel to others so they understand it and respond to it is not our ability; it is the ability of the Holy Spirit, and if ever there is a text that drives home that point, it is this one.

When the Holy Spirit is truly at work in a person's life, there will be a supernatural power to communicate God's truth. D. L. Moody was once told by an aged saint, "Young man, honor the Holy Spirit." That is what God wants all of us to do, honor the Holy Spirit in our lives. The more we are yielding to God's Spirit, the more God will use us.

Now we see from **verse 1** that the believers were all gathered together in Jerusalem on "the day of Pentecost." The word "Pentecost" means fifty. According to Leviticus 23:15-16, this feast known as Pentecost was celebrated seven weeks plus one day after the wave offering. This same feast is called the Feast of the Harvest (Exodus 23:16) and Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22).

This fifty day gap in time actually linked the Passover, the first fruit harvest, with the fall harvest in recognizing that God delivered people and gave all blessings to the present time and would give the blessings of harvest in the future time. Jesus Christ is the Passover (I Corinthians 5:7) and He was sacrificed and then He arose from the dead as the first fruits on the first day of the week. He ministered to His disciples for forty days and then ascended up into heaven and ten days later, which is day fifty, after Christ's first fruits resurrection, the Holy Spirit came and began the harvest blessings of the Church Age. Some later Jews say that fifty days after Israel left Egypt God gave His law. Although, as Horatio Hackett observed, there is "no trace of this custom found in the Old Testament or in the works of Philo or Josephus." Remember, Jesus told these believers that they were to wait in Jerusalem until the Spirit of God baptized them for ministry (Acts 1:4). This is where and when it happens. **We believe the significance of the Day of Pentecost is that it connects the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to all the harvest blessings in the Kingdom of God.**

I love something Dr. Chuck Swindoll said, we cannot reproduce these events of Pentecost any more than we can "duplicate the feeding of the five thousand or the parting of the Red Sea" (*Acts*, Vol. 1, p. 13). We cannot reproduce the events of that first Christmas, Good Friday, or Easter any more than we can in Acts 2. This was the unique beginning of the Church Age. Sometimes people will ask, "How long has the Church been here?" The answer is since Acts 2.

You and I do not have to wait for the inauguration of the Holy Spirit any more, because we received Him the moment we believed on Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 12:13). **We will never get any more of the Holy Spirit than the day we did when we believed on Jesus Christ, but the Holy Spirit can get more of us; and the more the Holy Spirit gets of us, the more powerful we will be in communicating God's truth.**

H. A. Ironside said that he talked with a man who was all confused about the Holy Spirit and he came to Dr. Ironside and said that he had been waiting for the Holy Spirit. Dr. Ironside said where do you get your justification that you need to wait for the Holy Spirit? The man replied from Acts where Jesus told His apostles to wait in Jerusalem until they were empowered with the Holy Spirit. Ironside responded and said you are confusing times and places. You are 10,000 miles away from Jerusalem and you are 2000 years too late. Had those apostles been waiting in Bethany or Galilee or Bethlehem or Michigan, they would have missed this.

Now as the Holy Spirit Age came to indwell believers and begin the Church Age, it started with six very observable beginning realities. All six were present and you cannot pick just one, like tongues, and stress this and eliminate the others:

**BEGINNING REALITY #1** – When the Spirit of God first came upon the apostles, it came with the sound like a violent rushing wind. **2:2a**

Jesus, Himself, used wind as a metaphor for the Holy Spirit. He said in John 3:8 that "the wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Stanley Toussaint says this sound of blowing wind points to the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit (*Acts*, p. 357).

I agree with Kenneth Gangel who says, “We need to be careful with the language of this text.” (*Acts*, p. 25). This was not a wind; it was sound “like” (ὡσπερ) wind. This apparently sounded like a rushing, gushing thunderous tornado kind of wind. If it had actually been wind of this force inside this room, it would have blown the place apart. What we have here is the roaring sound of a tornado. This was, as Thomas Walker said, “an entirely supernatural sound” (*Acts*, p. 58).

Notice the text says that this sound filled the whole house. Not the wind, but the sound like the wind filled the whole house. Isn’t that interesting? The dynamic power and presence of the Holy Spirit was not at the Temple of Jerusalem; it was in this house where these believers were.

**BEGINNING REALITY #2** – When the Spirit of God first came upon the apostles they were sitting . **2:2b**

The disciples were sitting and waiting. They were eagerly anticipating something powerful and wonderful. It is a great thing when we are totally focused on spiritual things in great anticipation of what God will do. The position of these believers is specifically stated. They are not standing. They are not begging. They are not pleading. They are not waving their hands or shaking. They are not jumping or running or lying down in aisles. They are quietly and calmly waiting and sitting.

**BEGINNING REALITY #3** – When the Spirit of God first came upon the apostles it came upon each of them visibly . **2:3**

No one is asking for any of this; God just sent this very unique sign of a tongue-shaped fire and it rested on “each one of them,” all 120 plus. Fire was used in the O.T. in regard to the presence of God. Every person in this group received the presence of God. They hovered over every believer and no one missed out or was left out.

Just as the Spirit descended from heaven upon Jesus in the form of a dove, so it descended upon these disciples in a visible form of a tongue-shaped fire. When Jesus was first born, a star stood over the place where His human life began. When the Church was first born, the sound of a mighty wind and visible tongue-shaped fire marked the place where it began.

M. R. DeHaan said that he ran into various charismatics who claimed to have the “Pentecostal experience” and he would ask them, well then, where is the sound of the mighty wind and the visible fire? (*Pentecost and After*, p. 28).

**BEGINNING REALITY #4** – When the Spirit of God first came all were filled . **2:4a**

The verb “were all filled” is passive, indicating that the people had nothing to do with the action at all. They were simply the recipients of the action. I love something Kent Hughes said, God will not “fill our sails with the wind of the Holy Spirit unless we admit that our sails are empty” (*Acts*, p. 35). Being filled with the Holy Spirit meant that the Holy Spirit has a very unusual and extraordinary control of these believers. They came under the control of the Holy Spirit.

There is a very unusual focus in Acts 2 on what happened to “all” of them - both men and women. They were all together (2:1). They were all filled (2:4). They all were speaking the truth of God (2:7). They were all witnesses (2:32). They all had all things in common (2:44).

**BEGINNING REALITY #5** – When the Spirit of God first came upon the apostles each was able to speak in a known foreign language. **2:4b**

Carefully notice that “all” spoke in a different, actual, understandable foreign language that was clearly understood by those who could speak the language (2:6, 8, 11). **The words “other tongues” refers to a language that was different than their normal, native language. The languages were not unknown languages, they were existing languages not previously known by the speaker.**

Now if we look carefully down through this context we will discover that the word “tongue” is used to refer to an actual human language (2:6, 8, 11). In fact, we may observe that in **verses 6 and 8** that the word translated “language” (διαλεκτος) dialektos is the word from which we get our English word “dialect.” This is a much narrower word than language. This word means that not only were they speaking an actual language of a particular nation or person, but the actual dialect of a particular country or district (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 109). (i.e. The Spanish in Peru is different than the Spanish in Spain or in Mexico.)

So when the Holy Spirit came upon these apostles, they were given a supernatural ability by God to communicate the message of God in the precise, normal, actual human language of the hearer, when the apostle who was speaking had not previously known, studied, or learned that language.

Typically to learn a language takes years of study. For example, my major in school was New Testament Greek. In five years of study when I was in school, I took twenty formal credit hours of study of Biblical Greek, which translates into 300 actual classroom hours of Greek. This does not count the hundreds of hours I spent in study. Just imagine what it would have been like to all of a sudden know the Greek language without having to attend one class. That is exactly what this gift was and did.

What God was initially teaching these apostles was, your job will be to take My message to the whole world and God’s Spirit will give you the power to do it.

**BEGINNING REALITY #6** – When the Spirit of God first came upon the apostles it made a major impact on great numbers of people. **2:5-13**

The purpose of any spiritual gift is to make a practical impact on other people.

**Impact #1** - It made an impact on devout Jews from every nation. **2:5**

Devout men are men who are very careful worshippers. These were God-fearing Jews, not God-mocking atheists. These are people who were very reverent in their approach to worship. Men who came from various languages, lands, and places.

In Jerusalem, on this Day of Pentecost, there were devout men from every nation under heaven. By virtue of the fact they are devout men, they were not shallow simpletons who could be emotionally conned or swayed. These were dedicated men to Judaism.

**Impact #2** - It made an impact on a multitude of people. **2:6-13**

Ivor Powel claims that there were nearly three million people in Jerusalem for the Passover and many stayed over for fifty more days until the Pentecost Feast (*The Amazing Acts*, p. 36). This was a national holiday and Jews traveled from all over the world to attend. The people who were in Jerusalem for this festival were an international contingency of multi-cultural and multi-lingual people. After the feast, the people would have left Jerusalem and traveled home. So this was the perfect day to kick off the Church Age.

This multitude literally heard the sound of those disciples who were speaking in various languages. There were four main responses that the people had who saw and heard these things:

**(Response #1)** - Some were bewildered. **2:6**

The word “bewilder” (συγχέω) is one that means the people hearing this became very confused. They were completely bewildered because each person there, regardless of the language they spoke, heard the truth about Jesus Christ “in his own language” in their own dialects (διαλεκτῶ).

**(Response #2)** - Some were amazed. **2:7**

The word “amazed” (ἐξίστημι) is interesting. This particular word means that these people could not make sense of this. Literally they were going out of their minds trying to figure out what was happening (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 160-161). The word “marvel” (θαυμάζω) means they were at a total wonder to understand (*Ibid.*, p. 203).

**(Response #3)** - Some started asking questions. **2:7b-12**

There were three main questions they asked:

**Question #1** - Aren't all of these who are speaking Galileans? **2:7**

**Question #2** - How can these Galileans possibly know so many languages? **2:8**

The major languages of the day were Aramaic, Greek, Hebrew and Latin. But apparently there were more than just these languages. We may assume some spoke Russian, Turkish, Persian, German, and Spanish. There were people who spoke various languages and dialects. As Ivor Powell says, “the list of countries given in these verses is awesome. People had come to Jerusalem from many nations.” Some of these people had traveled more than 1000 miles.

- 1) There were people who were Parthians - area south of the Caspian Sea - Iran, Turkmenistan
- 2) There were people who were Medes - modern day Iran
- 3) There were people who were Elamites - modern day Iraq and Iran
- 4) There were people from Mesopotamia - modern day Iraq

- 5) There were people from Judea - modern day Palestine
- 6) There were people from Cappadocia - modern day Turkey
- 7) There were people from Pontus - near modern day Russia
- 8) There were people from Asia - modern day Serbia, Hungary, Romania
- 9) There were people from Phrygia - modern day Ukraine, Poland, Belarus
- 10) There were people from Pamphylia - modern day Turkey and Georgia
- 11) There were people from Egypt - modern day Egypt, north part of Africa
- 12) There were people from Libya - modern day Libya, north part of Africa
- 13) There were people from Cyrene - chief city of Libya
- 14) There were people from Rome - many Jews lived in Rome
- 15) There were people from Crete - Mediterranean island sixty miles south of Greece
- 16) There were people who were Arabs - modern day desert Arab areas which includes many countries that surround Israel

All of these people from all of these places were hearing the great truths of God in their own languages. The first Spirit-filled witnesses spoke of the wonderful works of God. They gave great testimony to the greatness and grace of God. Again they were “amazed” which means they could not make sense of this in their own minds and there was “great perplexity” (διαπορεω) which means they were at a great perplexing loss as to what to do (*Ibid.*, p. 110).

**Question #3** - What does this mean? **2:12c**

The answer to the question is this means that God has just started a new dispensation.

**(Response #4)** - Some started to mock. **2:13**

There were some who literally scoffed at what was happening. The word means they mocked this thoroughly through and through (*Ibid.*, p. 113).

They mockingly said they were full of wine. The Greek word used for “wine” (γλευκος) is one that refers to a sweet, new wine. This is the only place in the New Testament where this word is used (*Ibid.*, p. 93). This is interesting because some of the more legalistic-type of people say that this new wine was not really a fermented wine but was like a grape juice. Jack Van Impe claimed that in his book called *Alcohol: the Beloved Enemy* (p. 180). Dr. Luke, who is writing Acts, uses this word contextually to say this was real fermented wine and if you drank too much of it you could get drunk. These people from various nations thought these disciples were drunk.

Now I am not advocating the promotion of drinking alcohol, but I refuse to let anyone make up things that are not true to the Word of God and that is exactly what many do with this subject.

These disciples are accused of being drunk. Of course we know that the fruit of the Spirit is self-control not a drunken loss of control. These disciples were perfectly in control, and they were perfectly speaking these languages, and they were proclaiming the amazing works of God pertaining to Jesus Christ.

Dr. Ironside said that he and some of his ministry buddies would often go to the worst part of San Francisco on a Saturday night to share Christ. He said there were hundreds of sailors from all over the world and they would hold a street meeting. He said one of his friends was a Spaniard who spoke fluent Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, and other languages. He said when he would see a group of French seaman, he would start talking to them in their own language and after a few minutes if he saw a group from Portuguese he would start talking to them in their language. Ironside said every Saturday he would speak in multiple languages and people who did not know the language he was speaking would say, "What is the use of listening? He is drunk. You cannot understand a word he is saying" (*Acts*, pp. 45-46).

It has been observed that there is a pattern here that you may actually track through the book of Acts. The world starts out questioning God's people. Then it spirals downward to mocking God's people. Then it starts threatening God's people. Then it starts putting God's people in prison. Then it starts beating God's people, and eventually it will start killing God's people. This world does not love God. It does not love Jesus Christ. It does not love truth.

The tragedy of Jerusalem even to this day is that at one time, she had the very person of Jesus Christ in her city, she had the very presence and power of the Holy Spirit in her city, and then in A.D. 70, she had the judgment of God in her city, and she has never been the same.

### **PRACTICAL THOUGHTS:**

- 1) There was an outpouring of God's Spirit on "all" His people and there should be some form of manifestation of the Holy Spirit in each of our lives. We do not expect to see the signs of the first Pentecost in our church, but we do expect fruit evidences of the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- 2) When the Spirit of God controlled these believers, it affected their hearing - they heard the sound of a mighty wind; it affected their eyes - they saw tongues of fire; it affected their speech - they communicated the truths of God. When the Spirit of God controls us, we should want to hear the Word of God, see the Word of God, and communicate it.