

## **The Miracle of Pentecost**

### Acts 2

What is the miracle of Pentecost? That's the question we want to answer today. There were several miracles on the day of Pentecost, but we want to know which one was the important one. One of those miracles was the point of the whole story.

Acts chapter 2 describes what happens in one day, an important day in every believer's story. It was the day of Pentecost. Three times a year Jews all over the Roman world travelled to Jerusalem to have a festival together at the temple. One of these festivals was Passover, and on the year of Acts 2, Jesus had been crucified on Passover, and God raised him on the third day.

After Passover they counted off seven weeks, that's forty-nine days, and the next day, the fiftieth, was Pentecost. That was another one of the thanksgiving festivals where Jews from all over the world traveled to Jerusalem, to celebrate God with the other Israelites.

After Jesus rose from the dead, he met regularly with his disciples for forty days, and then he ascended back to his Father. Angels told his disciples, "don't worry, he'll come back just like this." So this day of Pentecost happens fifty days after Jesus was crucified, and about ten days after he ascended.

Acts 2 all happened in one day, and the chapter has four scenes.

### **Scene 1, The Holy Spirit Comes on the Believers – Acts 2:1-4**

The believers were mostly Galileans, but Jesus had told them to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit, so they were in Jerusalem, and they were all together on the day of Pentecost. Three remarkable things happened when they gathered that day.

(1) There was a sound like a mighty rushing wind. The word for "spirit," *pneuma*, also meant breath or wind. So it was not a windy day, but it sure sounded like it.

(2) Something like tongues of fire appeared on each person's head. It's written, "it appeared to be something like tongues of fire." What they actually saw was hard to describe, they didn't know how to put that into words, something like tongues of fire was the best they could do.

(3) They all spoke in tongues, in different languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this peculiar speech.

But these are not yet the miracle of Pentecost, these are preliminary to the real miracle.

## **Scene 2, Jews from Every Nation under Heaven hear the Praise – Acts 2:5-12**

In this scene, the Scripture stops looking at the believers and looks at the crowds who hear all this. Luke's camera turns to the crowds, and now we are standing among these crowds of Jews from all over, and we listen to them as they try to figure out what's going on in scene 1.

During these festivals, Jerusalem swelled to two or three times its normal size. Luke opens this scene by telling us that there were devout Jews in Jerusalem at that time from every nation under heaven. But that was not enough for Luke. He lists them, by my count 17 different places. Who cares? Why was it not enough to say from all over the place? For some reason, Luke wants to emphasize how many different places had come together.

The Jews had lived in these different places for generations, and grew up learning all those different customs and all those different languages. And now this whole crowd all hear the believers speaking the great wonders of God in their own language!

But that is not yet the miracle of Pentecost. That is another preliminary. This great crowd does not understand what is going on? What explains this?

## **Scene 3, Peter and the Apostles Explain – Acts 2:13-41**

Here the camera moves from the crowds to the apostles. Peter preaches, but we are not to understand his sermon coming from Peter alone, or from the 120 believers. Peter takes his stand with the eleven. Peter speaks for the apostles, that group, and he explains to the crowd what has happened. He passes on to the crowd the things that Jesus taught the apostles during the forty days after his resurrection.

The first shorter part of Peter's sermon is about the Holy Spirit, and he tells the Jews that what they see and hear is the very thing the prophet Joel predicted, when Joel said that God would pour out his Spirit. This is what Joel prophesied.

Then Peter switches to Jesus, and the longer part of his sermon is about Jesus, to answer another question. The crowd first wants to know, "what is happening?" Peter answers that, God is doing what Joel prophesied.

But that brings up another question: "why now? Why does God fulfill that promise now?" Peter talks about Jesus to answer, "why is God pouring out his Spirit now?"

Peter says, "God sent his servant Jesus to you, and God gave him great power to do signs and wonders so that you would know that Jesus was from God. But you Jews rejected him and you had him crucified, which was God's plan and purpose all along. But God raised him from the dead, and God seated this Jesus at his right hand. And from God's right hand, Jesus has poured out the Spirit on his people, which you now see and hear."

“That’s why this is happening now. God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ, and you all are in big trouble with God.”

Peter convinced many. They said, “what should we do?” He said, “repent, be baptized in the name of Jesus. Your sins will be forgiven and you will receive the Holy Spirit.” About 3000 responded, and were baptized on that day.

#### **Scene 4, The Life of the Three Thousand** – Acts 2:42-47

In this last scene, we watch the 3,000 who were baptized. We must not treat these last verses of Acts 2 as a kind of epilogue; that would break Luke’s heart. Everything in Acts up to now has been preliminary, to set the stage for the real punch, this new people of God.

Luke wants us to grasp the “before” and “after” of Peter’s sermon. *Before* the sermon, people from every nation under heaven, separated by region and language and custom, are baffled by hearing the praises of God in their own language.

*After* they hear the gospel and repent and receive the Holy Spirit, they show incredible unity and oneness, and have a remarkable life together. It actually makes quite a few of us a little uncomfortable, and we’ll let that be. That’s how we are. Twelve short lines describe the “after,” the first four are a summary, the last eight give more detail.

- (1) The 3000 were devoted to the teaching of the apostles, (2) to fellowship,
- (3) to breaking bread and eating together, (4) and to the daily prayer times at the temple.

Now in more detail,

- (5) The believers were all together
- (6) They held all they had in common
- (7) Those with possessions and property sold them
- (8) They divided the proceeds among the group as anyone had need
- (9) Every day they met together at the temple
- (10) They ate meals together in their homes
- (11) They received their food with joyful and sincere hearts
- (12) They praised God.

Everything here describes their life together, and this is the miracle of Pentecost. 3000 people, from different countries and languages, hear the gospel and repent. They are baptized and receive the Holy Spirit, and this life together is what they do next.

The Bible tells us nothing about what changed in their private lives, or what changed in their lives among unbelievers. There probably were changes, but they are not important enough to mention.

We don't read that the 3000 speak in tongues, or that they perform signs and wonders. We don't read that they shared meals with unbelievers, or that they shared their possessions with unbelievers, or that they spoke about the Lord Jesus to unbelievers. Some of this probably happened, but there's a reason the Scripture does not mention these.

God's word does not give us a *complete* description of their changed lives, it gives us the *essential* description of their changed lives, and it was all about one another. That's the heart and soul of what the gospel and the Holy Spirit do.

The apostles, for their part, continued to do signs and wonders, to preach the gospel and teach the people. The rest of Jerusalem was totally impressed. The unbelievers had never seen people live together like that before.

Jesus said the new command was that we love one another as he loved us, and if we did this, the world would know we were his disciples. That's what happened in the miracle of Pentecost. Jerusalem held these people in high regard. And the Lord added those he wanted among his people.

There is no description of church life in the New Testament that can match what we read here at the end of Acts 2. This paragraph stands alone as the biblical ideal of church life. By the time that Luke wrote Acts, the Jerusalem church was not like this anymore. We do not read about such whole hearted fellowship anywhere else in the New Testament, either. This lasted a little while in Jerusalem, and that's it.

But it's good to know what our model is. We model our individual lives after Christ. That's good, and we aim to imitate Christ even though we don't do well. But it helps us to know what we aim for. This is the model church that the Bible gives us. We will not equal this. Still, it is good for churches to know what the target looks like.

This church does not need to grow up, this is an ideal church. The rest of the New Testament never corrects a church that lives this way, or tells a church living like this to do more. The rest of the New Testament only encourages churches to be more like this.

The problem is not churches and individuals that make this their priority but don't do that well. The problem is churches and individuals that want the gospel and the Holy Spirit, but think that leads somewhere else, and have some other priority.

You see, what God wants to do, through Christ and the Holy Spirit, is to start a new people of God. That's why there must be 12 apostles, not 11. God begins with devout Jews, and on the day of Pentecost he starts a new people, a new society. Our business is not to cure the old society, but to be the new society, to be the new people, to be the new nation, by this kind of life together.

And you are here today! Here today, believers from different churches come together. We praise God together, we have a collection, we pray, we listen to the teaching of the apostles, and we will eat together. That's pretty good. The gospel of Christ and the Holy Spirit are still at work. Amen.

PRAYER: O God our Father, we also have heard the gospel of Christ, and you opened our hearts also, so we could repent and trust that message and we could receive the Holy Spirit. We are a bit discouraged here, because we fall a long way short of this. But are also grateful, Father, because you've shown us where to aim. And there's hope for us, because we've heard the same gospel and have the same Spirit.

And, Father, many things happen among us that are just like this. We also do the things that those believers did. This is from your call and your Spirit, and for that we thank you. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give us all a spirit of unity among ourselves as we follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.