

The Miracle of Pentecost: The Plan for the Age in One Day

Acts 2

Turn to 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 is at the core of Acts 2.

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. 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 fiftieth day 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. 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. These four scenes summarize what God is doing this whole age, this entire time between the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ. In Acts 2, one day, we get a model of what God is doing in this age. Everything we covered last week, Jesus preparing the apostles, was to set up this day.

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

In scene one, we are watching 120 believers gathered in Jerusalem. The believers were mostly Galileans, waiting in Jerusalem, and they were all together on the day of Pentecost. Three remarkable things happened when they were together.

(1) There was a sound like a mighty rushing wind. The word for "spirit," *pneuma*, also meant breath or wind. 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. These are not yet the miracle of Pentecost.

These three together are simply signs that Jesus has poured out the Spirit, as he promised. These are not *why* he poured out the Spirit, they just tell us that he has done so. On that day, the heavenly tap opened and the Spirit began to pour out on all followers of Jesus. That tap never closed, it is still wide open.

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 turns to the crowds who hear all this. Luke’s camera now points at the audience, and now we are standing among these crowds of Jews from all over, and we listen in scene 2 as they try to figure out what’s going on in scene 1.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

During these festivals, Jerusalem more than doubled 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 “every nation under heaven” was not enough for Luke. He lists them, by my count 17 different places. Who cares about this list? Why could Luke not just 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!

At the tower of Babel in Genesis 11, God divided nations by means of languages. The day God sent the Spirit, he started bringing nations back together again. This great crowd does not understand what is going on. What explains everyone hearing God’s wonders in their own language?

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

Here Luke’s 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 speaking for that group, 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.

Peter's sermon has two parts. First he explains why the people are hearing about God in their own language, and the answer to that is that the Holy Spirit has been poured out. Then Peter explains why the Spirit has been poured out now, and the answer to that is that Jesus of Nazareth, who they crucified, was raised from the dead by God and is now seated at God's right hand, and Jesus at God's right hand has poured out the Holy Spirit.

What Peter actually does is explain four Old Testament Scriptures: Joel 2, Psalm 16, 2 Samuel 7, and Psalm 110. Peter shows what these four Scriptures mean in light of Jesus, and shows them how Jesus fulfills these. Is Peter suddenly a messianic prophesy scholar? No, Peter and the eleven attended the Jesus Messianic Prophecy School that we saw in Luke 24. Peter is just repeating, with the Spirit's power, what Jesus taught them before he ascended.

Let me summarize Peter's message: "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. You can see that you 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.

It would be a mistake to think that the Spirit came and filled Peter for preaching just so that 3000 could repent and be baptized. That's not a small thing, for sure, but the 3000 converts are still preliminary, not the real reason that the Spirit was poured out and Peter preached.

Luke wants us to grasp the "before" and "after" of Peter's sermon. *Before* the sermon, Jews: "from every nation under heaven, Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs."

After they hear the gospel and repent and receive the Holy Spirit: *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone*

who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Before, people from every nation under heaven, many languages. After, they show incredible unity and oneness, and have a remarkable life together. It actually makes us a little uncomfortable. 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, every nation under heaven, hear the gospel and repent. They are baptized and receive the Holy Spirit, and this life together is what they do next. The miracle of Pentecost is the change from before to after, the beginning of God’s new people.

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 the essential was all about one another. That’s the heart and soul of what the gospel and the Holy Spirit do. This story is discipleship at its best, it gives us the essence of how disciples of Jesus live.

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 to 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. Fix that in your mind. 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 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 it well. The problem is churches and individuals that want the gospel and the Spirit, but think that leads somewhere else, and they have some other priority. We live together poorly, but God can work with that. Let's keep this in front of us. 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.

Detour: You left your First Love – The Ephesus Church in Revelation 2

Jesus has a strong warning for the church at Ephesus, the first church of the seven mentioned. Jesus knows the works of the Ephesian church, and commends them for many things. They do important things right. But they have left their first love, and if they don't remember and repent and go back to the works they did at first, Jesus will take away their lampstand.

When the church at Ephesus was young, they lived like the Acts 2 church. But their lives in Ephesus had become more difficult, and they were distracted, and they left behind their early love for each other. Jesus said, if they did not remember, and repent, and do what they did at first, he would take away their light. They would not be a church. Love one another is the new command, the last command, and the only command. It matters. The Ephesus detour is over.

How Does This Look Now?

That was the day of Pentecost. How about now! How do these things look now? No one now is a witness in the sense that Jesus used "witness" in Luke 24 and Acts 1. Those men had to have been with Jesus from John's baptism to the resurrection of Jesus. That kind of witness only applies to twelve chosen men.

But starting in Acts 6, God gives the Spirit to others to speak the word, to spread the gospel: Stephen, Philip, Saul called Paul, and many others. Since then, Jesus has always been sending workers into his harvest fields, and has put his Spirit on them to evangelize. This all continues. Some evangelists live ordinary lives at home, and some travel to far places with their gifting. It has never been the call to all believers or the gift of all believers, but always some.

Here's what we learn from Acts 2: the reason the Spirit moves evangelists is not just so the message will go out, or even that souls will be saved. The Spirit gifts and fills evangelists so that a great variety of believers will live together as the ideal church did at the end of Acts 2.

No church since then has done it so well. No other New Testament church could match that first church. Let's at least know our business. Our mission in this world is to replicate that life together, as much as we can, one week at a time, until the Lord returns.

The good news is how much of this happens every week in this very church. The good news is that there are pockets of believers all over the world, pockets of faithful Jerusalem living in the midst of huge Babylon.

Our mission is not to change our society or our nation. Our mission is to be the new society, so the world around us can see the new nation, the new Israel, by our life together. We are to live out now, one ordinary week at a time, what life on the new earth will be like when the Lord returns. Our life together gives the world around us a peek into the life to come on the new earth. Amen.

PRAYER: O God our Father, we also have heard the gospel of Christ, and you have opened our hearts, so we could repent and be baptized as they were. We are discouraged because we fall short of their life together. We're not even sure we want it. But are also grateful, Father, because you've shown us where to aim. And there's hope, because we've heard the same gospel and have the same Spirit. And, Father, things do happen among us that are like that first church. This is from your gospel 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.