

**GOD'S SAVING PURPOSES PREVAIL
BY THE HOLY SPIRIT'S REVEALING WORK
Acts 2:1-21**

INTRODUCTION

If I were to ask you to name some history altering, world changing events, what might you say? Probably most of us would name the terrorist attacks of 9/11/2001 as a history changing event. Those who are older might name Hitler's invasion of Poland in September of 1939 which started WWII or perhaps the testing of the first atomic bomb in New Mexico on July 16, 1945 which has put the world on the brink of annihilation for the past 60 years.

But if we were to ask God what he thinks have been the most world altering events, what would he say? Without question he would say that the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus has been the most world altering event. But, that would be closely followed by the coming of the Holy Spirit as recorded in our passage this morning. God would say that the events that transpired in and around Jerusalem during the fifty days beginning with the crucifixion of Jesus and culminating with the coming of the HS as recorded here in Acts 2 are the hinge upon which the whole history of the universe turns. All that came before these events was preparation for them and all that has come after and is yet to come is merely the outworking of these events.

As Luke tells the story of the sending of the Holy Spirit to this band of 120 insignificant men and women waiting in an obscure room of an obscure city in a remote corner of the world he is at pains to help us to see the epoch changing nature of this event. His aim is to enable us to see the glory of God in his directing the course of human history by means of this ragtag group of Spirit empowered people. This event is the beginning of the end of God's work that he started at creation. God, through Luke, wants us to see and appreciate the miracle of our own existence as Christians and our place in the eternal plan of God to create a holy universe in which his holy people dwell with him forever.

Peter explains in Acts 2:33 what has happened here. Look at what it says, "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he (Jesus) has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing." God the Father gives God the Holy Spirit to God the Son who then pours out the Spirit upon the church. What we are observing here is a one time, non-repeatable event. Therefore, great caution must be exercised in how we apply this text to our own situation. It is a great error to simply say that everything that happened here, when the HS was given to the church for the first time, is to characterize the church for all time. So my objective this morning is to help us see and rejoice in what this coming of the HS to the church for the first time means for us.

MAIN POINT

The resurrected Christ sends the Holy Spirit to his church so that...

I. God can dwell in and with his people now (vv. 1-4)

The first thing we are told is that the day on which the Holy Spirit was given to the church was the day of the Jewish feast of Pentecost. Pentecost simply means "fiftieth day." In the OT this feast was called the "Feast of Weeks." It was the Jewish feast day meant to celebrate the conclusion of the grain harvest. It occurred fifty days after the Passover celebration. Remember that the Passover celebration was the time the Jewish nation remembered how God "passed over" their houses in Egypt because each family killed a year old, male, unblemished lamb and put its blood over the doors of their houses. Passover was the celebration of their escape from God's angel of death and from their slavery in Egypt by means of the blood of the lamb. It was on Passover, 50 days prior to this event, that Jesus, the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" was crucified in fulfillment of what the Jewish Passover had symbolized for thousands of years.

Over the years, Pentecost, in addition to celebrating God's provision in the harvest also became a celebration of God's giving the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. The reason for this was that Exodus 19:1 says that Israel arrived

at Mt. Sinai 44 days following the Passover and so the giving of the Law to Moses and the people would have happened on the fiftieth day after they left Egypt. God's sending the sound of a violent wind and tongues of fire and then the people speaking in other languages about the mighty works of God through Christ by the power of the HS all connect the coming of the HS in Acts 2 with God's coming to his people on Mt. Sinai in thunder and lightning and smoke and fire and speaking the words of the Law.

Again, if you will remember, God told Moses, as recorded in Exodus 19:4-6, to tell the people that the reason he had brought them out of Egypt was so that he could bring them to himself so that, out of all the peoples on the face of the earth they would be his treasured possession. God said, "Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." God came to live with them at Mt. Sinai and through the giving of the Law. So God's coming to Israel on Mt. Sinai to give the Law is viewed as foreshadowing or prefiguring the coming of the Holy Spirit to the church. However, there are several massive differences between God's coming on Mt. Sinai and his coming by the Spirit in Acts 2.

First of all, in Exodus 19:5 the condition of God making them his people is that they obey his commandments. In other words, the only way God will live with them and they will be his people is if they fully obey that external law that God gave on Mt. Sinai, beginning with the 10 Commandments. However, the coming of the Holy Spirit to the church is not conditioned upon the obedience of the people to God's law but upon the obedience of Jesus to God's law and his dying in their place for their disobedience and rising from the dead for their justification. Second, the Law of Moses was written by God on tablets of stone, external to the people, which they must obey in their own power. However, as the OT prophets repeatedly said and as Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit wrote God's law on the hearts of the people. Listen to Ezekiel 36:26-27, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." This is what is meant by that brief phrase in v. 4, "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit." God gave his Spirit to each individual Christian so that they now have a new nature that wants to obey God.

Third, the coming of the Holy Spirit is both a corporate experience of the entire church and an individual experience in contrast to the giving of the Law which was only a corporate experience. Thus God, by his Spirit now lives in every Christian and every Christian is united to every other Christian by the fact that we all share this one Holy Spirit. We all share in common the very life of God. We are one body of Christ, yet each member is directly related to God by the presence of the HS in each one of us. As Jesus said in John 14, the Holy Spirit lives with us and he lives in us and his presence in and with us is the very presence of Jesus and of the Father.

Fourth, God spoke to Israel out of the fire on Mt. Sinai. How did the people respond to God's communication? This is what the people said to Moses after God spoke to them out of the fire: "But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer. For what mortal man has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived?" The God who is a consuming fire has come to live in each member of the church and speaks through each member. That's the point of the tongues of fire on the head of each one. The consuming fire comes to us but does not harm us but rather empowers us to speak of his glory. Rather than fearing God and wanting him to stay at a distance we now have intimate fellowship with him by the Spirit on the basis of what Jesus has done for us.

The coming of the HS on this day of Pentecost ensures that every Christian and every Christian church is filled with the Holy Spirit. He is an unconditional gift given to every person who is trusting in Jesus as their only hope of salvation. God lives in and God lives with every Christian and every Christian church without exception. People who run around looking for a "Spirit-filled" church are ignoring what the NT clearly teaches, beginning with this passage. God lives in and with every true Christian and every true Christian church by means of the Spirit of God. This is not simply some trite Christian cliché or some esoteric Christian doctrine. God is in us and he is with us, right now and always because this is the promise he made throughout the whole OT and it is the promise that Jesus obtained for us by his life, death and resurrection. In this passage we are

witnessing the fulfillment of that promise to us, his people. The same Holy Spirit who filled these 120 also fills each one of us who are trusting in Jesus.

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II. God can gather a joyful people out of all the nations of the world (vv. 5-13)

Before I can deal with what this text means for us I need to clear away the confusion that surrounds it due to the modern controversy regarding speaking in tongues. You cannot use this passage to teach that every Spirit-filled Christian must speak in tongues because you must also then say that every Spirit-filled Christian must hear the sound of a violent wind and have a tongue of fire on his or her head. These three signs are a package.

Additionally, you need to know that the Spirit enabled speaking in other languages that we observe here is not the Spirit given gift of speaking in other tongues that is described in 1 Corinthians 12-14. There are at least four things that show this is not the same thing as the gift of tongues. First, these are actual spoken human languages as you can see from vv. 6 & 11. The gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians is simply an unknown language which may or may not be a living human language. Paul describes the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians as either the language of angels or humans. Second, the gift of tongues is to be used only in the context of the gathered church and is for the purpose of building up the church, not evangelism as is the case here. In fact, the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians is viewed as an impediment to evangelism in 14:23. Third, according to 1 Corinthians 14:2 those who have the gift of tongues are speaking to God, not men. However here, it is obvious that men are being addressed. Yes, they are declaring the wonders of God but they are declaring those wonders to men, not as praise to God. Fourth, and most important, these "other languages" being spoken here were clearly and easily understood by those who were native speakers of the language. In 1 Corinthians the gift of tongues requires the presence of a second gift, the gift of interpretation in order for the gift of tongues to even be practiced in the assembly of the church. No such Spirit empowered ability is necessary here. Those who were native speakers of these languages understood what was being said without any supernatural help of the HS. In spite of the fact that the same phrase in Greek, "other languages or tongues" is used in both places these are not the same thing and it is an error to connect these Spirit empowered foreign languages with the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians.

We have a tendency, when reading this text to view these people as if they were in some sort of a trance; like hypnotized people who are not in control of themselves and do whatever the hypnotist tells them to do. Yes, their ability to speak in foreign languages is entirely a supernatural work. However, their declaration of God's wonders while supernaturally empowered is not incomprehensible. The Psalms are full of descriptions of what these 120 people are doing. The Holy Spirit is doing that main thing that he has come to do. He is glorifying Jesus to these believers. He is giving them eyes to see the glory of Christ and he is holding Christ forth to them in his glory. Their hearts are full of joy and amazement at the greatness and glory of God made known in the face of Christ. Thus, they do what every amazed person does; they declare the glory of that which amazes them. These people declared the wonder's of God because they wanted to declare them out of their joy in them.

This is the language of the Psalms. Listen to these few verses from Psalm 105 as an example that describes what we witness these 120 believers doing: "Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice." The HS has filled their hearts with the knowledge of the glory of Jesus so that their hearts rejoice in him and his saving work and so they, out of this God given joy, declare the wonders of God in foreign languages that the HS enabled them to speak.

The second thing that is emphasized about this embryonic church is the fact that they are declaring the wonders of God to the nations. While all the people to whom they are speaking are either native born Jews or Gentile converts to Judaism, yet the emphasis here is upon the universal, worldwide appeal of the gospel. The list of nations given here covers the entire Roman Empire or what would have been the known, "civilized" world. There are people here from the far eastern edges of the Roman Empire in what is today the eastern border of

Iran as well as from the western border in Italy. There are people from far northern Turkey to the southern border of Roman civilization in Egypt and Libya. There are people from everywhere in between. All these nations are gathered in Jerusalem and are hearing the gospel of the kingdom of God, the wonders God has done in and through his Messiah, Jesus. There are literally hundreds of verses in the OT that have described this event. God brings his scattered people back to Jerusalem, to Zion where he comes to dwell with them. Listen to Isaiah 43:5-7, "Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth--everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made. Lead out those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf."

How is God going to bring back his deaf and blind sons and daughters, everyone who is called by his name? He is doing it through his Spirit-filled and thus joyful people who go among the nations declaring his wonders in and through Jesus in the languages of the nations. Every missionary who goes to another culture and learns the language and culture in order to declare God's wonders in a foreign language is continuing to do what was begun on this Pentecost some 2000 years ago. Every time you declare the wonders of God to your children or neighbor or co-worker you are continuing what was started here. In fact, we as an American, English-speaking church exists because of God's sending forth his Spirit-filled church through the ages and across all cultures declaring the wonders of God.

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III. God can complete what he began at creation (vv. 14-21)

The large crowd that has gathered as a result of these Galileans declaring God's wonders in unlearned, foreign languages are amazed and perplexed by what they are witnessing. They want to know what it means. However, notice that some are unimpressed by this miracle and mock them, calling them a bunch of drunks. So Peter, flanked by the eleven other apostles, stands up in order to explain what is going on. After dismissing the charge of drunkenness he quotes a passage from the prophet Joel. (Please do not miss that he says God spoke these words through Joel.) Before we look at the actual quote you need to understand something about the prophecy of Joel. The word of the Lord that comes to Joel is the news that God is going to send a locust plague against Israel. It is an incredibly powerful, vivid and poetic description of the destructive force of this coming locust plague. The locusts are God's army and he comes at the head of that army. Numerous times throughout the prophecy Joel says that this plague is "the day of the Lord." "Alas for that day! For the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty." "The day of the Lord is great. It is dreadful. Who can endure it?" Joel calls the people to repentance in view of this coming day with the promise that if they repent, God will relent. He will restore what he has taken and "never again will his people be hungry."

It is immediately following that promise that the verses Peter quotes are spoken by Joel. The promise is that in the last days God will pour out his Spirit on all people. The evidence that God has poured out his Spirit will be that all age groups, all social classes and both men and women within God's people will prophesy, see visions and dream dreams. What Joel says is going to happen in the last days is that God will pour out his Spirit on all of his people without exception. (Note: the "all people" in verse 17 does not refer to all human beings without exception but all God's people without exception. We know this because "all people" is defined as "your sons and daughters" and "my servants, male and female".) When he says that all God's people will "prophesy" as evidence of this pouring out of the Spirit it is using the word in its broadest definition in the OT. It is a reference to any kind of divinely inspired and enabled speech, which includes speaking in other languages by the Spirit as seen here. The seeing of visions and the dreaming of dreams is the usual way that God revealed himself in the OT to the prophets. The point here is this. Under the OC the HS was given to only a few people and for specific purposes, like being a prophet. However, now, with the coming of Jesus the Holy Spirit is

given to every Christian without exception. This is seen in the fact that all 120 Christians, no matter their age, gender or social status is declaring God's wonders in foreign languages. It is the same with us. Every Christian is filled with the Spirit and as a result we all speak of the wonders of God because our hearts are full of joy in his salvation because the HS has glorified Christ to us.

The second thing to notice is that beginning with this Pentecost we are in the last days. We have been in the "last days" for almost 2000 years. These last days will end with that final, great day of the Lord when Jesus returns and puts all of his enemies under his feet and takes us to live with him forever in the new heavens and the new earth in our resurrected bodies. That is the "great and glorious" day of the Lord that is referred to in v. 20. Now there is debate over what vv. 19 and 20 refer to. These events, these wonders and signs, blood, fire and billows of smoke, the sun turning to darkness and the moon to blood; to what do they refer and when will they occur? The simplest way to read this is in light of how the prophet Joel uses this language. Turn to Joel 2 on page _____. Read vv. 1-5 and 10-11. Notice how all these images, fire, darkness, clouds, sun and moon not shining are all used to describe a locust plague. This is graphic, poetic language describing God's judgment, in the locust plague which is a type of God's final judgment in the final "day of the Lord." In other words, these symbols are a description of God's judgment upon human sin which is seen in our world in natural calamity and warfare. It will all be brought to final conclusion on the final, great day of the Lord when Christ returns and destroys his enemies. In other words we shouldn't look for a literal sun going dark or moon turning to blood but rather we are to expect throughout the course of these last days expressions of God's wrath in all manner of natural and manmade disasters which are all forerunners of God's final calamitous judgment. I feel very confident of this understanding because of what Jesus says in the gospels when his disciples asked about his return. Remember how he said that there would be earthquakes and famines and wars and rumors of wars but that these were not the end but only the "birth pangs," which pointed ahead to that final judgment? If you just think about 9/11. Was that not a day of blood and fire and billows of smoke? Was not the sun darkened on that day? How often since then has that day been described as a dark day? What about hurricane Ike? Was not the sun darkened and moon turned to blood as the hurricane sent darkness to the entire state of Texas?

The other reason I'm sure that is how we are to understand this prophecy and how Peter understood it is because of the last verse. As we see and sometimes experience these catastrophic events and understand them as the rumblings of hell what ought our response be? We should call on the name of the Lord so that we can be saved. Not that we are saved from bad things happening here but from what these terrible troubles are pointing ahead towards. The great and terrible day of the Lord is coming; the God who is a consuming fire is on his way and we are witnessing the advance stages of his judgment and how will we endure the day of his coming? If locust plagues and hurricanes and the collapse of financial institutions overwhelm else, how will we endure that great and terrible day of Christ's coming? There is only one way to endure it and that is by calling on the name of the Lord. This Lord upon whom we are to call is the Lord Jesus Christ, who lived and died and rose again and who is coming back to save his own people from his wrath but to pour out judgment on all who have refused to call upon him. As the OT continually says; when he comes, after he destroys his enemies he will restore the universe to the holy condition he originally created. He will complete what he began and we will live with him forever as his holy people, fulfilling the original divine purpose of being his perfect image bearers as we rule over the new creation as his stewards.

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