

February 28, 2021
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Acts
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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PROMISE FULFILLED
Acts 2:1-13

Birthdays were such special days when we were kids. They are not quite so special as we grow older. When we were children, we looked forward to the celebration of turning a year older, partly because our parents often threw a celebration of some sort, complete with gifts, friends, families, and a lot of attention. As we age, a birthday is just a reminder that we are getting a year older. Not that becoming a year older is a bad thing, except for the fact that we know from experience that probably something else in our body will malfunction this year.

The birthday of the Church is one of the greatest days on earth and should be remembered. The day the Church was born was among the most significant, epochal days in human history. It is to be esteemed on the level of creation, the incarnation, the death/burial/resurrection/ascension of Christ, and the establishing of Christ's glorious kingdom and ushering in the eternal state.

God actually promised the coming of that day when He addressed the ruining entrance of sin into His perfect creation. God promised that the Seed of the woman would crush the head of Satan. God began arranging circumstances leading to that event immediately. He continued it through the making of the nation of Israel and the giving of His law that set the standard of His righteousness. God continued the process until Christ the anointed Messiah came to fulfill God's law by living without sin only to be brutally killed (His heel crushed by Satan). In that event, God paid the price to forgive sin so that He could build the Church that Christ promised.

Our Lord also promised to send the Holy Spirit to empower the people He used in the building of His Church. Pentecost was the culmination of all these divine promises and divine arrangements. The birthday of the Church was the beginning of God fulfilling this unique work and the continuation of His promise to crush Satan through Jesus Christ. He is building His Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Typically in Bible history, as God introduces a new way, a new form of working out His promises, He accompanies it with miracles in order to attract attention. The ministry of Jesus was replete with signs by which He intended to attract attention to His message that the kingdom of heaven was at hand and sinners needed to repent and enter that kingdom. The apostle John expressed the connection well when he wrote, *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).*

The Church is God's new and unique way of working. The Old Testament prophets, much like angels, tried to look into this period of God's unique work in the world but could not see what God would do (1 Peter 1:10-12). During this amazing epoch in which we are living, Jesus Christ is building His Church. It will continue until He returns to establish His kingdom. It is a most unique time, a most special way in God's work. Therefore, it was birthed with a most unusual circumstance.

Filled With the Holy Spirit (vv.1-4).

Christ's followers returned to Jerusalem and waited just as He had instructed them. *When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place (v.1).* On the great day in God's plan, they were together in one place. We read in our last study that *when they had entered [Jerusalem], they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers (Acts 1:13-14).*

For ten days the Lord's followers had been meeting together praying for God's will to be done in their lives. In addition, they had been gathering at the temple where they praised God (Luke 24:51-53). These ten days came on the heels of Jesus spending forty days repeatedly showing Himself in an actual body to many different people and groups of people in many different places (1:3). There was no doubt in the minds of Christ's followers that Jesus of Nazareth had risen from the dead. But then after forty days of fellowship, God the Son miraculously ascended to God the Father (1:9). But before He left the disciples, He instructed them to return to Jerusalem and wait for the promised Holy Spirit to arrive.

That is what the followers had been doing for ten days, which if we add them to the forty days of Jesus's revelation we have fifty days elapsing since Passover. That brings us to the day called Pentecost. Pentecost refers to fifty and is a rendering by Greek-speaking Jews to speak of the Feast of Weeks. It was the Feast of Weeks because it was held one week of weeks (7 days x 7 weeks = 49 days) past Passover.

By Old Testament reckoning, it was the second feast after the Feast of Unleavened Bread which was the week-long festival after Passover. The purpose for the feast was to dedicate the first fruits of the wheat harvest to the Lord (Leviticus 23:15-17). There was also a feast called Firstfruits that was connected with Passover and Unleavened Bread. That feast was held the day after the Sabbath after Unleavened Bread. That would be a Sunday. That Feast of Firstfruits celebrated the first fruit of the barley harvest. In Jesus's day, this was the Celebration of Firstfruits observed in connection with Pentecost. Also in Jesus's day, the feast celebrated the giving of the Law at Sinai.

Pentecost was one of the most popular, well-attended feasts. Because it was later in the year (May/June), weather would have permitted easier travel. This typically meant that the most number of people from the Diaspora (12 tribes of Israel scattered) would be in attendance.

It was a most fitting time for God the Father and Son to send God the Holy Spirit. It was the time when wheat harvest was just beginning. The festival of Pentecost thanked God for the first fruit which was a sign of more to come. The coming of the Holy Spirit to

draw 3,000 souls into the kingdom was the very first fruit of much fruit that has followed. As the festival thanked God for His law, the Holy Spirit came to give new life in Christ apart from the law.

In that setting on the day of Pentecost, Christ's followers experienced some amazing signs. We do well to remember that when the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at His baptism to equip Him for the kingdom of heaven ministry, there was also unusual, observable evidence. The Spirit took the form of a dove. God spoke from heaven affirming His pleasure in the Son (Matthew 3:13-17).

In a similar way, when God the Holy Spirit came to empower the apostles to preach the Good News, there were unusual, observable signs. First there was the sign of the sound of wind. *And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting (v.2)*. The disciples were gathered together in the upper room, and suddenly they were taken by surprise. Yes, Jesus had told them that the Holy Spirit's arrival was imminent. They had obeyed Jesus and were waiting together for the Lord's will to be done. But because they were suddenly surprised indicates that they were not praying for a filling of the Holy Spirit.

Without warning there came a supernatural sound from heaven. This was not an unexpected weather phenomena. In fact, the text does not describe any actual wind. Rather, there was a sound like a mighty wind. It was a loud sound that attracted the attention of all the people in Jerusalem. Maybe we can think of the testimony of people who have survived a tornado. They often say that it sounded like a freight train. A sound like that completely filled the house where the people were meeting. We really don't know exactly what the people were doing, but it appears they were just kind of sitting around, maybe chatting about Jesus and what He taught them. Surely they were shocked when the sound from heaven came into the room.

Then there was the appearance of fire-like tongues. *And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them (v.3)*. After the supernatural sound came a supernatural visual sign. Again, it was not actually fire but something tongue-shaped that looked like fire. The sign rested on each one of the followers just like the sign of the Holy Spirit looking like a dove rested on Jesus (Matthew 3:16). This was a unique and supernatural miracle that

baptized, identified each of the followers into the one Body of Christ, the Church.

And then there was a sign of speaking in tongues. *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance (v.4)*. There is an important distinction made in this verse. The followers of Christ were not only baptized with the Holy Spirit, but they were also filled with the Spirit. Baptism by the Holy Spirit is the experience of every single person who is born again by the Holy Spirit. We do not pray to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. That happens at the moment of salvation. Paul taught the Corinthian believers and us, *For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13)*.

Filling of the Holy Spirit is different than baptism by the Holy Spirit. The filling is a matter of the Spirit of God having our complete dedication, submission, obedience. That is why we are rightly commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit. That is our responsibility. We are right to pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit which is another way of praying for us to be submissive to Him. To that end, we read that Peter, who was filled with the Holy Spirit at this point, was also filled again when he preached to the religious rulers (Acts 4:8). And Stephen who was chosen to be a deacon because he was full of the Holy Spirit (6:5) was also being filled with the Holy Spirit when he preached his execution sermon (7:55). And Paul who was filled with the Holy Spirit when he was saved (9:17) was filled with the Spirit when he rebuked Elymus the magician (13:9).

The result of being filled with the Holy Spirit of God on Pentecost was that everyone spoke in OTHER tongues as the Spirit gave them the ability. This was not gibberish or unintelligible speech. The Greek word for tongues (*glossa*) refers to languages, words. We get the English word “glossary” from this Greek word. A glossary is a “list of words.” Furthermore, the context of this story tells us that people from all parts of the world heard words that they understood in their language.

The Holy Spirit gave the utterances, He was in charge. This was God’s plan. The Holy Spirit did not baptize the people and fill the people because they had spent 10 days praying that God would do it.

Rather, while praying, they were being prepared for and conformed to the will of God. God gave this unusual sign for the purpose of carrying out His will. Immediately, the witnesses for Christ would be able to tell the good news to people from all over that part of the world. That it was a temporary miracle is obvious from the fact that evidence for tongues is lacking in Paul’s later letters (mid 60s) and all of John’s letters (90s).

Evidence of Holy Spirit Filling (vv.5-13).

After the signs of the mighty wind sound, the flaming tongues, and the foreign languages, God gave another sign by which many kinds of people were impacted (vv.5-11).

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians” (vv.5-11a).

As this text indicates, there were a lot of people staying in Jerusalem because of the feast. The typical population of Jerusalem in that day was estimated to be about 120,000 at the most. Josephus and other historians claim that during major festivals like Pentecost the city would be jammed with between 1 and 2 million. That was God’s plan.

Our text informs us that these were devout men. This was one of the feasts where adult Jewish men were expected to attend. A chief characteristic of many of the guests is that they had a penchant for God, a desire to be in His chosen city. This too was God’s plan.

They were from all over the Mediterranean part of the world. *Parthians and Medes and Elamites* were from modern-day Iran. *Mesopotamia* was Iraq. *Judea* would include most of Palestine. Included also are places that make up parts of northern Africa and Asia, as in modern-day Turkey and Greece. The visitors were

shocked to hear Galileans speaking foreign languages—THEIR languages. That is especially a miraculous sign in that people in Jerusalem generally thought of folks from up in Galilee as Hillbillies. At best they were ignorant and untrained fishermen. They even spoke with a “twang” (a dialect) that had given away Peter at the enemy’s campfire (Luke 22:59).

But most important is the fact that all those people from remote areas of the world heard about God’s work. They concluded, “*We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God*” (v.11b). This was the point, the purpose of the miracle. Ten days earlier Jesus had promised that when the Holy Spirit came to the followers, they would be His witnesses. Now those witnesses were all telling the wonderful news about Jesus in many foreign languages. The story about Jesus is the mighty works of God.

The witnesses were not just talking about the miracles that God had done, that Jesus had done, or that the people were observing at the moment. The creation of the nation of Israel out of one man named Abraham is the mighty work of God. The sustaining of the little, rebellious nation until God incarnated the Beloved Son in that nation is the mighty work of God. The perfect fulfillment of God’s law and subsequent death by which God the Son paid sin’s penalty is the mighty work of God. The resurrection of God the Son and His ascension into heaven is the mighty work of God.

This is still the purpose of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Good News, the story of salvation is the story of the whole Bible. How God has brought about the fulfillment of His promise regarding the “Seed of the Woman” is astonishingly good news. It is the news, the story we must tell. It is such serious news that God asked, *How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will (Hebrews 2:3-4).*

Holy Spirit filling is not for our personal enjoyment. Certainly we find peace when we are in right fellowship with God the Holy Spirit. Certainly He witnesses to our spirit that we are the children of God (Romans 8:16). Certainly He gives us courage and confidence that through all things we are still destined to be glorified with Christ

(Romans 8:17-39). But we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to magnify the mighty works of God. His work should be evident in changed lives. His work should be known as we explain the gospel. His work should be glorified as other sinners like us are redeemed by hearing the Word of God through us. The indwelling Holy Spirit compels us to witness to the mighty works of God because *faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17).*

And when the witness witnesses, there are differing responses (vv.12-13). On one hand, when the disciples told of God’s mighty works, accompanied by some amazing signs, there was sincere interest. *And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” (v.12).*

Everyone was impacted. Amazed and perplexed are words that describe great surprise to say the least. To be amazed means to be moved from its place, to shake, as in an earthquake when equilibrium is lost. Perplexed means to be at a loss, not knowing how to respond. Is that not clear in the question, “What does this mean?” Granted, the people were witnessing a miracle from God. It was a bit dumbfounding.

But we are prone to think that it would be nice if the gospel lived and told would cause such questions. It should. The mighty work of God in offering salvation to the very people who offend Him greatly by their sins and offenses should demand the attention of sinners who are destined to pay for sin in hell for eternity. If we would stop and think seriously about the story of salvation, we who are saved should be amazed. We should sing with Charles Hutchinson Gabriel:

I stand amazed in the presence
Of Jesus the Nazarene,
And wonder how He could love me,
A sinner condemned, unclean.
How marvelous! How wonderful!
And my song shall ever be:
How marvelous! How wonderful!
Is my Savior’s love for me!

It has been said that John Newton said, “When I get to heaven there will be three things that amaze me. First, I will be amazed at

who is in heaven. Second, I will be amazed at who is not in heaven. Third, I will be amazed that I am in heaven.”

On the other hand, there was also a somewhat flippant rejection of the message about God’s mighty works. *But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine” (v.13)*. Human explanation for transformation is a means to avoid the obvious. The obvious is that God does a mighty work in salvation. The right response is to ask, “How does that effect me?” Sinners who contemplate what God has accomplished through Christ will be forced to accept or reject the gospel. That is God’s plan.