

Week 4 - The Age of Fulfillment

Acts: The Story of the Spirit

Introduction

Last week, we covered the coming of the Holy Spirit in the upper room on the day of Pentecost.

A crowd has now gathered after the commotion of that event, and they witness the disciples speaking in their own native languages worshipping God.

Everyone is amazed, and asking what it all means.

This is not popular with everyone...

READ Acts 2:13 (ESV)

13 But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

We need to pause here and take note that this is not an event that is immediately understood by onlookers, and some are already hostile to it.

Don't forget the Biblical background to this moment.

Jesus was arrested at the hands of the Romans, led to Jesus by one of the disciples.

Peter followed Jesus, but when confronted with his connection to Jesus, Peter denied knowing Him three times - as prophesied by Jesus only days before.

Jesus is then executed by the Romans, to satisfy the Jews that were rioting outside.

Jesus raised from the dead 3 days later, and had been teaching and interacting with many of His disciples before His ascension, BUT there is no indication that the general attitude of the public towards Jesus had changed. Certainly, the same people that wanted Jesus dead want Him to stay that way, and want His followers to disband completely.

They were willing to kill Jesus, so the certainly will be willing to kill the 12.

The 12 disciples, with Peter as their spokesman, are now confronted with a large crowd with a vocal group mocking them.

WHAT WILL THEY DO?

Standing with the Eleven

Bearing this in mind, I think this next single verse is one of the most powerful in the whole of the N.T.

READ Acts 2:14–15 (ESV)

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. 15 For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. [9am]

These same 12 men that scattered from Jesus when the trouble started, or outright betrayed him, now stand together with Peter leading, facing the mocking crowd.

They are not simply facing a potentially unsympathetic crowd, they are facing death on a cross just like Jesus did a little over a month prior.

And they are doing it without any preparation, forethought, or planning ahead of time. One minute they are filled with the Holy Spirit and the next they are standing in front of a crowd.

When Peter speaks, he speaks loudly, and confidently. He dispenses with the hecklers immediately with a humorous, and somewhat dismissive, comment that amounts to “It’s not even 9 o’clock in the morning, we haven’t had time to get drunk!”

He doesn’t even take the mockery seriously, when a very short time ago a little servant girl made him so afraid that he couldn’t find the courage to admit that he knew Jesus at all.

Luke’s focus is on the Holy Spirit’s empowerment to continue the ministry of Jesus in the formation of the Church. Paul comes along and develops this idea that the Holy Spirit not only calls new Christians into the Church, but the Spirit also empowers is to act like Jesus towards each other. The Spirit creates in us the character and mind of Christ.

Paul does this without taking anything away from Luke’s focus on the mission of the Church.

But here we can see in the example of Peter, and the other 11, that being baptized in the Holy Spirit has made a profound difference in their character instantaneously.

Peter is still Peter, and he still has issues. This is not perfection. But it is impossible to deny the before and after that we see here.

The First Sermon of the Church Age

What follows is Luke’s summary of Peter’s sermon, with a few quotes from Peter as well as the main scriptures he referenced. We know this is a summary because of verse 40, which we will read in a moment.

We can divide this into two main sections.

First, in verse 16-21, Peter is going to teach from Joel 2:28-32, explaining that the phenomenon that the people see in the disciples being filled with the Holy Spirit marks the beginning of a new era of God fulfilling His promises.

Then, in verses 22-36, Peter will make the case that the “Lord on whom everyone must call” mentioned by the prophet Joel is Jesus.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter is going to expertly draw a careful line from the prophet Joel to the upper room, and from the upper room to Jesus and the gospel.

SECTION 1:

READ Acts 2:16–21 (ESV)

16 But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

17 “ ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; 18 even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

19 And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;

20 the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

21 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

Peter is quoting Joel 2:28-32 here. Joel is prophesying about what they called “The Day of the Lord”, a promised future time when a King from the lineage of David would return the kingdom to Israel. This prophesied deliverer was called the Messiah.

Peter is telling them that this has now occurred in history, and this outpouring of the Spirit is this prophesied blessing of that new age.

The authentication of Jesus as the Messiah is not only His death on the cross, not only His resurrection, it is finally in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on **all people**. The outpouring of the Spirit is not a second-hand event, separate from your entry into the Christian faith. The outpouring of the Spirit is gift given ONLY to those that belong to Jesus.

The last line of his quote from Joel chapter 2 becomes the springboard for the rest of his sermon:

READ Acts 2:21 (ESV)

21 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Who is this “Lord” whose name they must call on?

SECTION 2:

READ Acts 2:22–36 (ESV)

22 “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. 24 God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. [...for him to be held in its power]

25 For David says concerning him, [Psa 16:8-11]

“ ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;

26 therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope.

27 For you will not abandon my soul to Hades [the realm of the dead], or let your Holy One see corruption.

28 You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'

29 "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, 31 he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. **33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.** 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

"The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand,

35 until I make your enemies your footstool." '

36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Peter reminds the crowd that God came and died, in His own sovereign timing, but they are still guilty of murdering Him. He then quotes Psa 16, written by king David. Peter explains that this was a prophecy from David about the Messiah's resurrection.

Though they are guilty of killing Him, God raised Him from the dead. "It was not possible for him to held in its power" (v24).

This is a relatively simple gospel presentation for us in our day. But in this moment, it's almost impossible to believe from the crowd's perspective. They just killed this Jesus, and now His followers are doing these wild things and telling them that a new age of fulfillment is upon them, the man they killed was the Messiah, but it's ok because He's stronger than death.

Cut to the Heart

READ Acts 2:37 (ESV)

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

("Pierced to the heart" is a common saying that means "acute emotional distress".)

This is a work of the Holy Spirit. This is not just Peter's great speaking skills. This is a crowd full of hard hearts turning soft. The Holy Spirit is not confined to the disciples, but He is busy at work in the hearts of those listening, opening their spiritual ears to hear what Peter is saying.

These are thousands of people realizing that they are under the white-hot wrath of God and have no way of escape. They have transgressed an infinitely holy, and infinitely powerful, God. They cannot hide from Him, and they have no way out.

(Notice that Peter has not yet told them what to do about it.)

Three Thousand Souls

READ Acts 2:38–41 (ESV)

38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Conclusion

The Holy Spirit's mission is bigger than you, but it is not less than you.

The disciples were transformed, in an instant, from disciples to apostles. And in that moment, the Church was born. Their individual transformation was part and parcel of the larger mission of the Church. The Spirit was doing both at the same time.

We need to set our bar of expectation at spiritual transformation, not just incremental improvement.

You are living in an age of fulfillment of the promises of God. Jesus is holding the door open to the throne-room of God, giving you full access to the Spirit. The same power that was in Christ, is now in you.

Let that frustrate you into persistence! Let that make you hungry for the Spirit to so transform you that your life now looks more like their life then.

Questions for Reflection

1. After Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, how was he ***different*** from before? How was he ***the same***?
2. Peter said (quoting Joel): “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” In your own words, what does it mean to “call on the name of the Lord”? And what does “saved” mean?
3. Have you ever been “cut to the heart” over your sin? How did that change you? Were you able to also receive the grace of God over it, or was that difficult?