

THE POWER TO ADVANCE THE GOSPEL

Acts 2:1-13

Last week, we left off in our study of the book of Acts with about 120 followers of Christ gathered together in the upper room, ready and waiting to receive the Spirit of God. For about 10 days here, they were fearful. They were anxious. They were questioning, *“How in the world could God use me? How could He could use me to advance the message of Jesus to the world?”*

Fast forward now 2,000 years later, in Chadron, NE. Here we are, in Christ and worshiping Him, in a place that would have been to them the remotest parts of the earth. And there are gatherings of believers all around the world doing the same thing we are. *How did that happen? How did we get from there to here? What empowered that type of growth?* Well, it certainly wasn't that these fearful and anxious people just decided to get it together and pull themselves up by their own boot straps or grit their teeth and bear it. It wasn't man's self-esteem, man's cunning or man's ingenuity. It wasn't a marketing scheme. We're going to see today that it wasn't by their power at all, but by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit who comes and empowers them just as Jesus promised (Acts 1:8). That's what we'll look at today: some **works of the Spirit** from Acts 2:1-13.

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a noise like a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And tongues that looked like fire appeared to them, distributing themselves, and a tongue rested on each one of them.”

I. THE COMING OF THE SPIRIT. (VV. 1-3)

At least a little background material is needed here. **Pentecost** was the **4th annual pilgrimage feast** that Jewish men were to attend in Israel, sometimes called **Shavuot** or **Feast of Weeks** or the **Feast of Harvest**. The word Pentecost is transliteration of the Greek word meaning **“fiftieth”** because it took place on the 50th day after the **Feast of First Fruits (7 “weeks” or 49 days later)**. On the day after Passover (First Fruits), a **sheaf** (bundle) of the first wheat/barley was cut and brought to the temple as an offering and **waved** before the Lord. The priest would wave it above the sacrificial altar forward, back, up and down as an act of recognizing His provision – a form of thanksgiving.

After this, there was a great time of waiting and anticipation that would take place called the **Counting of the Omer** until Pentecost. More recently it has become a mournful state, because of Jewish tragedies occurring during the period. They will avoiding weddings and banquets and partiesⁱ – waiting for the 50th day and this Feast of the Harvest.

But just like the other Jewish festivals, **the Feast of First Fruits and the waiting in between that and the Feast of Harvest, was all very symbolic of Jesus and His work**. I would recommend that you buy a book called *The Feasts of Israel: Seasons of the Messiah* by Bruce Scott.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 that **Jesus is the first fruits**. *“But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection from the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.”* So Paul is proving that the dead will rise because Christ, the first fruits has risen. It’s an anthropological reality. If all died in Adam, all will also rise in the Last Adam, Christ – Christ redeemed us from what Adam did. And as **type of Christ, the first sheaf** of wheat gathered had to be **the first and best of the crop** – choicest produce – just like all the OT animal sacrifices. They were to be the best and **without blemish** to typify Christ’s perfect sacrifice.

But the time of waiting between First Fruits and Pentecost, the time of **expectant waiting** is exactly what these disciples were going through. At Pentecost, is when the great harvest celebration will ensue – symbolic of the **great harvest of souls** that would begin at Pentecost based on the First Fruit that was offered. Loads of wonderful symbolism going on!

First Fruits = Christ’s resurrection
Counting the Omer = anxious waiting
Pentecost = harvest of souls

Believers in the Church age are also considered first fruits in the Bible – meaning that to God, they are chosen, designated, choice, and special harvest (1 Cor. 16:15; Jas. 1:18). They will experience physical resurrection or rapture first. After that, there will also be 144,000 Jews considered another first fruits of the Tribulation period (Rev. 7:4; 14:4). To be honest, I wanted to do a devotional on how we are to give the first fruits of our lives but never found the time. It should be our desire to give Him our best and not the leftovers. One satire joke I came across this week was a conversation, “You know, people treat me a lot like a god.” “Oh yeah? How so?” “They ignore my existence until they need something from me.” We want God to be first regardless.

In Bruce Scott’s book, I found it interesting, he mentioned how in fear of losing the significance of this harvest festival, and keeping the Jewish men coming, the Jews **tried to connect the Harvest festival with the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai which occurred the same time of year**, approx. 50 days after the exodus.ⁱⁱ And if that’s true, then the symbolism is further – God gave the Spirit on Pentecost to contrast the Law given the same time. The Law was external restraint on sin but the Spirit ushers in a new era where the power to live righteously is internal.ⁱⁱⁱ By the Spirit we have power over the flesh (2 Peter 1:3).

Another interesting note, Jewish tradition (*maybe speculation*) also claimed that when God gave the Torah at Mount Sinai, He did it in 70 major languages. So if that was in their mind when these disciples started speaking other languages, it naturally caught the attention of the Jews that day. It would be very powerful. After some time thinking it over, most of those Jews undoubtedly understood the symbolic meaning of everything that was going on that day. **This was just the first-fruit of a much greater response to the gospel around the world.**

Now let's look at some **supernatural phenomenon/symbols that accompanied the Spirit's coming**. These **symbols** help us understand what is going on. One symbol is **noise, like a violent rushing wind**. It wasn't wind, but the noise of wind. Jesus told Nicodemus that **new spiritual birth** by the Spirit like the wind - you can't see it (John 3:8) but it is happening. So the **sound of wind is symbolic of God's Spirit**. The Greek word *pneuma* can be used for the word spirit, wind, or breath. I think Genesis 2:7 gives us the foundational picture of what is going on here. God breathed into Adam and he became a living being. Adam however, sinned, bringing forth a spiritual death so he must be born again. At Pentecost, it's like this new spiritual life of God is being breathed back into those who have trusted in Christ. It's kind of like in John 20 – Jesus breathed on them and said *“Receive the Holy Spirit.”* In that post-resurrection moment, they were temporarily filled with the Spirit until He baptizes them here. This new birth is invisible, like the wind and it is God, who is Life, coming back into man.

Work of the Spirit #1

The Spirit baptizes believers into Christ, causing them to be born again.

Acts 2 only says they were filled but remember **the expectation was that they would be baptized by the Spirit (Acts 1:5)**, *“For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit [and fire] not many days from now.”* So again, in Adam all died spiritually but in Christ, we are regenerated and born again through Spirit baptism. Spirit baptism is **something that only happens once** and that is the moment you trust in Christ. The Church constitutes of those who have been baptized by the Spirit into the finished death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:13 says, *“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”* So regardless of water baptism, it's the Spirit baptism that baptizes us and all who are baptized are what make up the Church. Clear doctrine in Ephesians 1:13-14 says that moment we believe in Christ, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit.

In the OT the Spirit of God was pretty economical. He came and went upon men as God willed for certain purposes. We could say God used Him reservedly (**the Spirit of God is not just a force. He is a person. A member of the Trinity. God is 3 in one: Father, Son and Holy Spirit**). But it's not that way today. The Spirit of God has come and when someone believes today, He comes to indwell them forever. They're never alone ever again. They will not walk one moment without the Spirit, even if they don't walk with the Spirit as the Spirit desires. The Spirit can be quenched and grieved by disobedience but never extinguished in us. He never leaves nor forsakes us.

Work of the Spirit #2

The Spirit indwelling presence brings a new way of life.

The second symbol is **tongues as of fire being distributed** to each disciple. The tongues that were as of fire, seem to signify **God's presence**. Thinking back to the OT, there are many occasions where God's presence is associated with fire. Moses' interaction with God in the burning bush,

the consuming fire on Mt. Sinai, the Israelites guided in the wilderness by a pillar of fire, Abraham and the blazing torch... just to name a few. This fiery presence reminds us of God's supernatural and guiding, covenant presence with man.

Through the indwelling Spirit, God will be giving the disciples new life: new power, convictions and insights into God's Word, new gifts and new guidance to do His will. No more casting lots like last week. It's **a new way of living in a new era in God's program.**

II. **THE RESULTS OF THE SPIRIT'S COMING. (VV. 4-11)**

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with different tongues, as the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak out. Now there were Jews residing in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together and they were bewildered, because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. They were amazed and astonished, saying, “Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty deeds of God.”

I think the text suggests that all of the disciples gathered there were baptized and **filled** with the Holy Spirit in the same way that **unique day** – which was approximately 120 of them (1:15).

Work of the Spirit #3 The Spirit fills the believers.

Following the baptism of the Spirit, comes the filling of the Spirit in verse 4. **The Spirit's filling, unlike Spirit baptism, is recurring** (4:8, 31). This filling on this day was definitely unique but the NT teaching continues. Paul even commands believers to be filled with the Spirit in the NT by yielding to Him and the Word of God. It's something that can happen many times in one day! As soon as we know we're walking in the flesh, we know we're not filled with the Spirit and we confess and repent and ask to be filled again. Spirit-filled people are those who yield to God and His Word and aren't quenching or grieving the Spirit (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19). When someone is filled with the Spirit, we find a common pattern with what went on that day: He uses our tongues to speak the wonders of God in Christ (2:11).

Notice it was *“The spirit was giving them the ability”* also in verse 4. When Jesus said they would advance the gospel, they would, but not in their own strength. Nothing would happen if they tried to do it in their own strength. The Holy Spirit had to bless their efforts as they depended on Him.

Work of the Spirit #4 The Spirit of God empowers believers to do the will of God.

God supplies the means to carry out the mission to advance the gospel for us just like them through a moment-by-moment dependent relationship with Him. Just like the OT prophet Zechariah told Zerubbabel in Zechariah 14:6, *“It’s not by [man’s] might, nor by [man’s] power, but by My Spirit, ‘declares the Lord.’”*

Notice how **the Spirit initially effected their language**. That’s a big deal because it tells us what the Spirit and God’s mission is primarily about: sharing the truth with all people. The Spirit of God gave these Galilean men the ability to speak in **new languages** to share the wonders of God with people. This is not one uninterpretable ecstatic language here. It is other (*heteros*) languages (*plural, dialektos*). There are several different real languages being spoken, even dialects of languages.

The context of Acts gives us the clearest picture of what this gift was. It was **the supernatural ability to speak an unlearned language to advance the gospel to all nations** to spread the gospel quickly and get the Church going. It’s evidence of God’s blessing on it. It’s neat to think, this is a reversal of what took place at the Tower of Babel where God instantly confused languages. There’s no reason not to believe Babel based on the historicity of Acts 2 and the early Church.

I also don’t see any real reason to think that the tongues of 1 Corinthians 12-14 are any different. Just read through 1 Cor. 12-14 with the idea that they are speaking foreign languages and it makes sense. One of the best things I ever did was went through Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 12-14 a couple of times wrote down everything it says about this revelatory gift of tongues (just making observations) and I think you’ll come to the conclusion these are real languages. It was a **revelatory gift** that was destined to cease along with **prophecy** and **knowledge** gifts with the completion of Scripture. But before Scripture and in the early Church stages, these gifts were necessary. The reason they need an interpreter in Corinth and not here is because there’s no one there from all over the world who speaks what they’re speaking – you know what I mean? There’s no Parthians there so no one can be edified. It’s not good that they were edifying themselves when the purpose of gifts is to edify others.

This is something that’s amazing though. They’re speaking languages they’ve never learned. They didn’t have *Duo-Lingo* or *Google Translate* or language books. They didn’t spend years in language school or culture immersion. God just made it happen in several languages.

Since the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities 100’s of years earlier, when Jews were taken to other countries for their idolatry, there were many Jews who never moved back to Israel. They were still dispersed all over the world. There were Jewish cities and Jewish precincts in various cities all over the world from Iran to Rome to North Africa at the time. All of the dispersed Jews around the world and some proselytes from Rome who had come to Israel for the festival started to hear those now-home to them languages and they were drawn to that. A crowd started to gather.

This is just like when I was a missionary – if I heard someone speaking English it caught my attention. Well, these people are surprised that **Galileans** were speaking their language. Most of

Jesus' initial disciples were Galileans from northern Israel. And you remember what they were like from Mark? They were considered the hicks, the country bumpkins compared to the Judeans in the south. This gives us another great principle.

Work of the Spirit #5

The Spirit of God works to bless all nations (to advance the gospel).

This event confirmed the gospel and God's blessing on the Gentiles since **it was Gentile languages they were speaking**, even though it was mostly Jews present. Remember, that would be new to them. This may have been symbolized too, on Pentecost, by how **two loaves were presented at the Feast of Harvest**. They would offer two loaves of bread (which were leavened) as one offering, probably signifying the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile was torn down in the Church age (Eph. 2:14-15). You can read more about that in Scott's book on the feasts of Israel.

Luke says Jews **from every nation under heaven** were there. That might be a bit hyperbolic, but this is how the Church spread so quickly. These individuals who were at Passover and at Pentecost heard and saw all that happened and they went home to Italy and Libya and Cyprus and Crete and Iran and churches started to pop up all over and later they would need organized. That's why Paul sent Titus to Crete, to organize the spontaneous churches with apostolic instruction. Jews that remain will give themselves to apostolic teaching until persecution and the Church is scattered.

III. THE REACTION TO THE SPIRIT'S COMING. (VV. 11-13)

“we hear them in our own tongues, speaking of the mighty deeds [wonders] of God. And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others were jeering and saying, “They are full of sweet wine!”

So in this unique event, they were filled and began to testify about Jesus. Tongues and wind and fire are not the emphasis, but the testifying is. If someone is Spirit filled they testify about Jesus.

Work of the Spirit #6

The Spirit enables believers to speak of the wonders of God.

As believers, we experience the mighty deeds of God in our life. He saves us and restores us and brings healing to our lives and relationships. We have found life and satisfaction and purpose in Him. We've found hope and joy and peace and self-control...the fruit of the Spirit. The world needs to hear that witness – the wonders of what He can do in a life and for a life.

But at the same time, we shouldn't expect everyone to initially believe it. Some thought the disciples were drunk – as you can imagine that many different languages not being understood would look that way. Some people mocked it, despite the miracles! The Spirit doesn't guarantee outcomes. He empowers us but at the same time, not everyone will be willing to accept it, even

when convicted by the Spirit. Soon in Acts, some of the Jews resist the Holy Spirit, plug their ears to the preaching of Stephen, and rush at him to stone him to death as the first martyr.

When we share the good news with an unbeliever, we're dealing with hard hearts. The Spirit has to convict them of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16) as we share the gospel and from God's Word. We have to depend on the Spirit to work in their hearts because of the condition they are in spiritually. We share, dependent on Him, trusting His ways and His timing.

In closing I want to say that since the beginning Satan has been trying to get us to operate independently of God because he knows we were created for God. We weren't made to live without God in us. The good news is that Jesus has paid for our sins and made His indwelling presence available again through faith in Christ. We depend on Him for salvation and from there, we continue to depend on Him.

In every moment, we're called to live with a prayerful, conscious mindset that we cannot and will not do the Christian life or ministry on our own. We must admit we are empty if we want to be filled. I think that's a key to being filled and allowing His power to work through you and in you is just to admit you can do nothing without Him (John 15:5). It's important we do because this world needs believers filled with the Spirit and dependent on the Spirit – people who just cannot keep the message to themselves.

ⁱ Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, Volume 5* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Publishers, 2016), 35.

ⁱⁱ Bruce Scott, *The Feasts of Israel: Seasons of the Messiah* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel, 1997).

ⁱⁱⁱ William H. Marty, *Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 1674.