

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND HIS UNSTOPPABLE CHURCH

PART 2: THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Stonebrook Sunday AM, 8/2/20, Matt Heerema

INTRO

Good morning! I'd like to add my welcome this morning to those of you with us and those of you watching at home.

Last week toward the end of the sermon, I went off script a bit and let you into my thinking that I believe it is entirely possible that it might be another 1,000 years until Jesus's return. In studying for this morning's sermon, I realized that our text today proves, in no uncertain terms, that we are, in fact, in the end times. And I'm eager to talk with you about that today.

Please turn with me to the book of Acts, and chapter 2. We're continuing our 17-week study through Luke's chronicle of the beginning of the church after Jesus's resurrection and ascension into heaven.

Last week we saw that Jesus told the disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit, at which point they would be filled with power, and would be Jesus's eye-witness message-proclaimers in Jerusalem, and Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Today we're going to pick up right where we left off, and we find the disciples doing exactly as Jesus instructed. They are waiting, and praying, and then... well, let's read through the passage.

Acts 2:1-2:21 (CSB)

2:1 When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying. 3 They saw **tongues like flames of fire** that separated and rested on each one of them. 4 Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and **began to speak in different tongues**, as the Spirit enabled them.

5 Now there were Jews staying in Jerusalem, devout people **from every nation under heaven**. 6 When this sound occurred, a crowd came together and was confused because each one **heard them speaking in his own language**. 7 They were astounded and amazed, saying, "Look, aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 How is it that each of us can hear them in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites; those who live in Mesopotamia, in Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and

converts), 11 Cretans and Arabs—**we hear them declaring the magnificent acts of God in our own tongues.**” 12 They were all astounded and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13 But some sneered and said, “They’re drunk on new wine.”

14 Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them, “Fellow Jews and all you residents of Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and pay attention to my words. 15 For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it’s only nine in the morning. 16 On the contrary, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

17 And it will be **in the last days, says God, that I will pour out my Spirit on all people**; then your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. 18 I will even pour out my Spirit on my servants in those days, both men and women and they will prophesy. 19 I will display wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below: blood and fire and a cloud of smoke. 20 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and glorious day of the Lord comes. 21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Violent rushing wind. Tongues of flame. Speaking in tongues. A huge crowd from all over the world. Are they drunk? Last days. Prophecy. Blood and fire and a cloud of smoke.

What is going on here? That’s what Luke says the crowd wanted to know on that day. And Luke reports Peter’s answer: Here’s what’s going on: we’re in the end times. Or as Dr. Strange put it: “We’re in the endgame now.” (By the way, some amazing parallels in that part of the story with our scripture today, but I’ll spare you because not everyone is familiar with The Avengers.)

FIRE

What a strange event, violently loud rushing wind and tongues as of flames of fire resting on each of the 120-or-so disciples. What is happening here? A bible study tip for you: when you are reading narrative or prophecy in the bible, and you come across a strange saying or event, look backward in the whole bible’s narrative timeline and see if there are similar things that happen. Often times in a Narrative like the Gospels, or in prophetic literature (Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, etc), or apocalyptic literature (Daniel, Revelation, and a few other places) - these strange happenings are references to, or meant to evoke other events.

So one question to ask is something like: "Where else in scripture is wind, fire, and other things and what does it indicate? And it happens there is a pretty clear tie here: The burning bush. The tabernacle. The temple. God's presence.

What we are reading today is a unique, one-time event in the unfolding of God's plan, and Peter is going to explain for us in a minute. It was something that the prophets predicted. God is now pouring out his spirit on his people. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, and similar things in other of his writings, using very clear language about this: The image of this rushing wind, and the tongues of fire are showing us that Jesus's people are now the temple of God. It's no longer a building, quite possibly the very building they were standing in when this happened.

1 Corinthians 6:19 (CSB)

19 Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,

They were filled with the Holy Spirit and the next weird thing started happening.

TONGUES

Speaking in tongues. What does that mean? Can I just say that this is simpler than we tend to make it? Luke writes very clearly here, but our English translation traditions keep an old word here "tongues", rather than the modern word "languages". Combine that with the last 100 years of Christian history and some weird theological ideas that have become very popular that have turned this word "speaking in languages" into meaning something like "speaking in gibberish", (or if I were more gentle "non-human language") a meaning not in Luke's head here, and that is the reason this seems confusing.

Very clearly, Luke says "they were filled with The Holy Spirit, and started speaking in other languages." And these are not random, accidental languages, there was a very important reason for the specific languages that the Spirit enabled them to speak. The very next verse gives us the reason.

EVERY NATION

This all took place on a Jewish holiday called Pentecost, one of several holidays where every Jew was supposed to travel to Jerusalem to worship God and celebrate his work. This was 50 days after Passover - a week of weeks. Pentecost means "50th" - and because it happened at a time of year when the weather was good, it was the best attended of all these festivals.

It would be like if there was a worldwide Christian conference in New York City every year, and at that time of year airfare or other travel was cheap and easy, and you would see family and friends, and everyone went and celebrated. A national holiday where everyone got along. (And in the analogy it would be something that Jesus commanded people to do, or something like that...)

This is what was happening, and Luke tells us there were people from "every nation under heaven." - Every ethnicity is a more clear rendering here. Luke also takes pains to list specific regions, and for the most part describes the entire Roman empire.

Now these are devout people, people who knew the Hebrew bible, And to their surprise, they heard the disciples - who were obviously Galilean, speaking in their own native language. What in the world is going on here!?

Note also, that their surprise is not at the content of the message. These people heard the disciples declaring "the magnificent acts of God" - they agreed with the content. There was no new message here. The surprise was that it was in their own language. And it got their attention. Some of them asked "are these guys drunk?"

And finally Peter stands up to explain what is going on. "No they're not drunk yet, its too early for that." (Kinda a humorous response."Maybe they'll be drunk later, but it's too early right now.")

What is happening, Peter says, is that we have now entered the end times. Just like our prophet Joel said would happen!

THE LAST DAYS

He then recounts Joel chapter 2. Foretelling this day. God's spirit is no longer located in a single physical place. It would be poured out in the people. This is a remarkable phrase.

Up until this point, God's people have only known God's spirit dwelling in a tabernacle, or temple, or resting on a single anointed person like a prophet or a king, and Israel has had none of those things for hundreds of years.

The disciples asked Jesus in Chapter one: "Are you going to restore the Kingdom to Israel at this time?" And Jesus's answer was not "No." It was more like "Yes, but not in the way you thought."

And for this crowd witnessing this miracle of the Holy Spirit poured out on the disciples, and then offered to all who would follow Jesus, and Peter says "THIS is what Joel was talking about..."

And 3,000 people in the crowd believed and accepted Peter's message, and started following Jesus. Next week we're going to take a closer look at the content's of Peter's announcement of the Gospel.

I want to wrap up this week with some implications of today's passage for us.

APPLICATION

Our application won't come from trying to make today's narrative somehow for our day. As I said, this was a unique event. But the event kicked off "the last days" - the "eschaton" or "the end times". This is the period of time we've been in since that day on Pentecost, and will be until Jesus returns to earth. (Most of the time when we talk about "the end times" we mean something like "the end of the end times" - but most of the time when the bible speaks of the end times, it is talking about this period of time. That's a whole can of worms we can talk about another time.)

And in the end times - it is no longer a single location that is God's dwelling place, he is in every believer. When we embrace the reality that Jesus is God's Messiah, the chosen rescuer who saves us from the consequences of our rebellion against our creator. He pays the debt we owe for our sin, and he shows the way to live as God's children, so that we would follow his way and not our own.

Ephesians 1:13-14 (CSB)

In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, he gospel of your salvation, and when you believed.

Another way Paul puts it, is that we are God's temple (dwelling place), and this is a call to purity and holiness in our life.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (CSB)

19 Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body.

We no longer to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem several times a year to try and be closer to God, he dwells directly within us.

And we are told to be filled with the Spirit, or another way it's put is to let it richly fill our way of life and way we treat one another:

Colossians 3:16-17 (CSB)

Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Just like those first disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and started proclaiming "the magnificent works of God" - that is the kind of speech that should dominate our lives as well. Let our hearts and minds dwell on Christ through psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, gratitude toward God, these should fill our thoughts. And let that spill out of us in the way we speak to our fellow Christians, and toward one another.

We're going to be talking about being ambassadors for Jesus a lot this year. And this is how we do it. Fill our hearts and minds and speech with gratitude toward God for his magnificent work. Doing everything we do, and saying everything we say, in Jesus name.

I wonder if when we hear about "the end times" if we imagine some epic battle between the forces of Good and forces of Evil. Wars and persecution, and governments and corporations trying to get you to compromise or deny your faith in Christ under the threat of physical death, harm, or ostracism.

For example, Revelation indicates that in the end times no one will be able to buy or sell without worshipping the beast, and so we're constantly afraid of some government edict that is finally going to set that up.

But this epic battle between good and evil, wars, persecution, worldly superpowers trying to get you to compromise your faith, has been the life experience of Christians in these end times for the last 2000 years. We've been pretty sheltered from it here in the United States, but that shelter seems to be dwindling. And maybe that's because we're at the end of the end, or maybe we're just starting to experience first hand what generations of believers have experienced for 2000 years. Regardless, our weapons are the same. Our actions are the same. "Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Let's pray.