

ACTS 2: 1 – 21 THE CATALYST, THE METHOD AND THE MESSAGE

Have you ever looked at pictures of a house on Zillow or some other site? Or, have you just looked at pictures on your phone or the internet of some place you've never been before? Well I have, and it never ceases to amaze me how, no matter how good the pictures are, when you actually arrive at your destination, it still seems to look different than what you saw online. In general, things always look smaller in person. This all goes back to what we talked about last week when we dealt with the question kids ask when going on a trip. "Are we there yet?" That is the question the Apostles asked Jesus regarding the kingdom of God. "Is this the time when you will restore to Israel, the kingdom?" Jesus then told them that it wasn't for them to know the time, but to just get busy about the Father's business.

The reality was and is, that the kingdom didn't look like what they had expected. Jesus, the Messiah, didn't look like the king they expected. We might need to get used to that idea for a while, because it doesn't look like what many people today think it does. We will learn more about that as we go through the book of Acts.

1 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

At this point in the story they have already been through Passover and the 50 days between it and the feast of Pentecost. This was, in OT times an agricultural festival. The Passover took the Jew instinctively back to the Exodus when Death Angel spared the first-born of all the homes which had the blood of a lamb sprinkled on the doorpost. This led, that very same night to the Israelites leaving Egypt in the great exodus. They eventually crossed the Red Sea, which symbolized a new birth to the nation as they came through the waters of chaos. This same imagery would instinctually pop into their heads when they crossed the Jordan upon entering the Promised Land and when John was baptizing Jesus and the multitudes. The same imagery should be seen by us when someone is baptized today.

Pentecost was an agricultural festival whereby the first sheaf of grain (first-fruits) was brought to the Temple and offered to God not just as a show of gratitude but also as a prayer that the balance of the crop would be bountiful. The first century Jews and proselytes were familiar with this and the imagery of what was happening at Pentecost would not have been lost on them. The Spirit moving in and through the Apostles would have dove-tailed into this scene and this is why, like the Passover, God chose this time to do what He was doing. The Spirit was moving in a new and dynamic way! Now, as we shall see, there was a new harvest beginning to take place – indeed the first-fruits of a new harvest! The harvest had just begun with what happened at Pentecost! Also, as they hearkened back to Sinai, they would have remembered how Moses ascended the mountain and then came down again with the Law written on tablets of stone, but now the Law of God was coming down to them via the Spirit and being written on their hearts.

We see that the Spirit came from Heaven. At the time of creation, the Spirit hovered over the waters of chaos just prior to God beginning His creative work. Now, there is a new creation

happening – that of a new kingdom being launched, but also a new work of creation in the heart of every individual who believes. And it is important to note that the Spirit didn't come to give people some sort of spirituality whereby the things of earth would be made irrelevant, but to transform the earth with the power of Heaven through the lives of believers. Just think about how the Gospel has changed the world and what it would be like without the Gospel.

I'm sure the coming of the Spirit was both terrifying and exhilarating! We need to be careful here. There are some who feel guilty if their experience doesn't match that of the Apostles. We can't take this as the norm. We don't see it happen like this again anywhere in the Bible. As we shall see, there are places in Acts where God moves in a "loud" way and there are many other places where He moves softly and quietly as He goes about moving circumstances and the hearts of those who hear the Gospel. We should avoid the extremes of thinking wind and cloven tongues of fire are the norm and on the other hand, we shouldn't push such things to the side either. Jesus said in Luke 11:13 that all we had to do was ask and the Spirit would be given to us. Upon asking, how God chooses to manifest the Spirit in and through us is His business. But what should be clear here is that Luke is telling us that God is launching something new and grand, just as a fleet of ships in that day was launched with prevailing winds and just as a wildfire is often started with just a small spark.

5 And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. 6 And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. 7 Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those

dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” 12 So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “Whatever could this mean?” 13 Others mocking said, “They are full of new wine.”

At that time in the Mediterranean world, everyone’s second language was Greek. Ever since Alexander the Great, some 400 years earlier, Greek had become something of the lingua franca of the day – much as English is now. Most people would have been able to get by in Greek, while probably speaking at least one other language, if not two or three. Jews in Palestine would know and usually speak Aramaic, but some would have known classical Hebrew as well. Some would have been able to speak Latin, which was growing in usage as Rome imposed herself on the cultures of the area. But as those present were moved upon by the Spirit and praised God in all these languages, there was something else being shown in the background. Something that many there may have picked up as the continually hyper-linked to their history.

The whole question of Acts chapter one was how God would fulfill the promise to extend His kingdom, His saving, sovereign rule, not only in Israel, but through Israel. This began in Eden with the dominion mandate given to Adam and Eve. The theme runs throughout the OT. The challenge is to see how God would fulfill His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3.

Genesis 12:3

**3 I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”**

And this promise came on the heels of God scattering the nations at Babel by confounding their languages. (Read DT. 32 and Ps. 82) God divorced the nations at that point and handed them over to their false gods and the powers behind them. Now though, the countries represented in these verses in Acts are the same geographical areas to which the people groups spread in Genesis 10 and 11. Now Luke is implying that the curse is being overturned! In other words, God is dramatically signaling that His promise to Abraham is beginning to be fulfilled and now the whole human race is going to be addressed with the good news of what is happening through Jesus! A new king is being heralded. The people that heard the tongues were all Jews or Gentile proselytes there for the festival. And they will eventually return to their homes spreading the news of their conversions, plowing the ground that Peter, Paul and the others will eventually get to evangelize!

But there was resistance. Some there thought that these believers were drunk! But Paul assures them that no one was drunk, at least not at 9:00 in the morning.

There will always be resistance to the Gospel. Even there with all the power of the Spirit being manifested there were those who thought the whole thing was silly. And there are those today who think the same thing. **The question we need to ask ourselves is, “What are we doing to make people think we are “drunk” on the Spirit?”** And if that isn't being asked, we need to ask if it is because the Spirit is moving in some other way, which is possible or if it is because we have quenched Him.

14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. 15 For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the

third hour of the day. 16 But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

***17 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your young men shall see visions,
Your old men shall dream dreams.***

***18 And on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;
And they shall prophesy.***

***19 I will show wonders in heaven above
And signs in the earth beneath:
Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.***

***20 The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.***

***21 And it shall come to pass
That whoever calls on the name of the Lord
Shall be saved.'***

Remember Y2K and all the ideas that were floating around with the inception of the millennium? That is what things were like in Jerusalem at this time. Think of a 2,000 year journey where the possibilities and the hope you had heard about all your life seemed to be coming together. This is the world of the first century Jews. They saw themselves as the generation that would finally see all they had been hearing about for all these years... much like people today. They saw themselves as the generation for which the end of the exile had come. Why was this?

The book of Daniel was one of the most studied books in their canon. Just as it is today for us. And Daniel had prophesied about a 490 year exile, beginning in Babylon. Well, that had taken place between 400 and 500 years ago, depending on how you

calculated it. And many had calculated it in many different ways. Like they do today.

It is only by imagining a world in which people were puzzling over and studying apocalyptic texts, such as Daniel that we can even understand how Peter could even think of launching into a quote from the prophet Joel in order to explain all the shouting and praising that was going on in the confusion that was taking place. Peter says in no uncertain terms that “these are the last days.” The signs of the end of exile had arrived... even if they didn’t look like many had always imagined it.

We need to understand that the term, “last days” was a general term used for the time to come when the promises would be fulfilled. But though they were in the last days, they hadn’t yet reached ‘the LAST DAY.’ This was/ is not necessarily to be understood as a 24 hour day. (“Back in the day.”) It is a time in the future when God would judge the nations and all the people in them. Christians took up this same terminology and believed they were living in a period of time between the moment when the ‘last days’ had been launched and the ‘last day’ of the LORD, the event already promised in Acts 1:11. This is the day when Heaven and earth will be joined together in the great coming renewal of all things.

Acts 3: 19 – 21

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, 20 and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, 21 whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

In verses 19 and 20, what is known as apocalyptic language is used. This may be difficult for some to hear, but we shouldn't imagine that the first century hearer or reader would have taken this language of fire, smoke, sun turning to darkness and moon turning to blood, "literally" as we would say. These phrases had already been used in the OT to refer to judgments on nations and these things didn't happen literally. Instead this language was used to speak of "earth-shattering" political and society shaking events – things that changed the very fabric of society. The ends of empires and political rule were what in play when these words were used. And Peter is speaking of that very thing here as he quotes Joel. A new king is being enthroned and a new kingdom is being launched! A new kingdom that will be run in a way much different from those they saw then and the ones we see now. But Joel didn't only speak of terrible things. He spoke of a new creation – one that would start with God's own people.

God Spirit has always moved in and among His people. But until this time it was always through kings, prophets and priests – a person or two here and there. But now, through this new and dynamic work of the Spirit through the death and resurrection of Jesus which was the precursor to the coming of the Holy Spirit, God's Spirit had been poured out upon a great number of people that would only grow, and in fact has to grow until the entire earth has been reached. Now, everyone who believes has a part in the grand plan of the ages!

This is striking! If the prophecies of Joel were coming true, then the Spirit is available to all God's people – both genders, all social classes, all ages, title or not title! And it's being poured out in the upper room and on the street, not in the temple or the rabbinical schools! It's being poured out wherever and to whomever people believe the Gospel of the kingdom! And this is where our writer, Luke, introduces a vital and complex theme in his book – salvation! All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved!

Being saved didn't mean, as it does to so many today, 'going to Heaven when we die!' It meant/ means knowing God's rescuing power, the power revealed in Jesus which anticipates in the present, God's final great act of deliverance! Peter then goes onto encourage his hearers to 'call on the name of the Lord,' so as to know that salvation, that rescue as a present reality as well as a future hope! (confidence) If these are the last days, then salvation has already begun! Anyone who knows they need rescuing can call on the Lord and discover how it can happen!

And we find ourselves in the same time-frame and in the same situation. We are still part of same open-ended sequel. The same power, if we ask for it, if we grasp it and all that entails, that reality is still here for us now, today! Let God work in and through you as He did for them and then see what God can accomplish!

The catalyst: The Holy Spirit.

The method: The Gospel, the heralding of a new king goes throughout the earth, one heart at a time.

The Message: The Gospel of the kingdom and the King, Jesus.