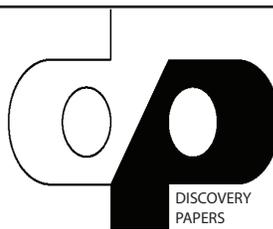


CUT TO THE HEART

**SERIES: SENT: LIVING THE MISSION
OF THE CHURCH.**



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Acts 2:1-41
2nd Message
Scott Grant
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There used to be a sign on Highway 17 in Scotts Valley that conveyed encouraging, biblical messages for motorists. On one particular morning, motorists approaching Scotts Valley were greeted with the message “DOG RACES.” Those who took notice of the sign were probably left scratching their heads. The message, for all appearances, was neither encouraging nor biblical.

Well, “DOG RACES” wasn’t the original message. In the middle of the night, some enterprising students from Bethany Bible College had rearranged the letters. The original message was “GOD CARES.” The biblical message comes to us: “GOD CARES.” But for many of us, for various reasons, “GOD CARES” makes about as much sense as “DOG RACES.”

If God loves us, how might we experience his love? We turn to the word of God, aided by the Spirit of God. Especially, in light of our text today, the Spirit comes to our aid. The Holy Spirit, along with the Father and the Son, is God himself. God is one, but he exists in three persons. The Holy Spirit is commonly referred to as the third person of the Trinity.

Jesus gave his early followers the daunting task of implementing his kingdom agenda, but he also told them that the Holy Spirit would help them. Wait in Jerusalem, Jesus told them, for the coming of the Spirit.

The Spirit is poured out

Acts 2:1-14:

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. 5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together,

and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” 12 And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13 But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.” 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.

One hundred and twenty early followers of Jesus were gathered in a house in Jerusalem, waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit, according to the instructions of Jesus (Acts 1:4-8, 15). Indeed, on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit comes—audibly and visibly, in manifestations resembling wind and fire.

The Spirit not only fills the house, he also fills each of Jesus’ followers. Luke, the author of Acts, uses different terms to describe the disciples’ experience of the Spirit in Acts 1 and 2: they are “baptized” in the Spirit, they are “filled” with the Spirit, the Spirit is “poured out” on them, and they “receive” the Spirit (Acts 1:5; 2:4, 17-18, 38). Even though they are filled with the Spirit at this time, some of them would be filled again: empowered for specific tasks at specific times.

At first, the Spirit fills all of them for the task of speaking in, or with, “other tongues”: human languages that were unknown to them. The manifestations of the Spirit, which at this time can be both heard (“like” a mighty rushing wind) and seen (“as” tongues of fire), can now be heard and seen in the disciples, who speak in other languages.

The sound of the disciples' speaking with tongues gets the attention of those nearby, who include Jews, proselytes (Gentile believers in the God of Israel) who had come to Jerusalem from all over the world. The disciples of Jesus speak in the native tongues of the bystanders, who hear them speak of "the mighty works of God." We might remember that Jesus told his disciples that they would be his witnesses "in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). In this case, the end of the earth has come to Jerusalem.

Likewise, people from all over the world have gathered this morning in Palo Alto. What will happen to us?

The astonished bystanders want to know, "What does this mean?" Others, however, are dismissive. Whereas Luke reports that the disciples were "filled with the Holy Spirit," the mockers deem them to be "filled with new wine."

Speaking in tongues

Some say that the gift of speaking with tongues is confined to the miraculous ability to speak in known human languages. However, the apostle Paul writes of a different phenomenon in 1 Corinthians 12-14. There, he defines the gift of speaking with tongues as an inarticulate, non-communicative form of utterance that in theory has the potential to be brought to articulate expression, either by the person speaking or by someone else (1 Corinthians 12:10; 13:1; 14:1-40). One who has this gift speaks to God, not others, and benefits himself or herself, because the Spirit works in deep ways that don't always pass through the cerebral cortex of the brain. Therefore, Paul encourages people who are gifted in this way to practice the gift in private, but for various reasons, he places strict limits on its use in public gatherings.

It is impossible to tell whether the modern phenomenon of "speaking in tongues," so-called, coincides with the gift that was evident in the Corinthian church. In the end, in my view, it doesn't matter. People can praise God however they please in private. Bark like a dog if you want to, if it helps you worship God. Just don't do it when the church is gathered, because you'd be a distraction.

The day of Pentecost fulfilled

The day of Pentecost was celebrated fifty days after the Passover, which commemorated the release of Israel from slavery in Egypt. The day of Pentecost commemorated the Lord's giving—and Israel's receiving—the law, the Lord's instructions for his people. It was also a harvest festival: on the day of Pentecost, the people offered to the Lord their "first fruits," the first of their harvest, in thankfulness for what has been given and in hope for more. Literally, the day of Pentecost didn't arrive; it was "fulfilled."

The death of Christ, as opposed to the death of the Passover lamb, fulfills the Passover and signifies the new Exodus—not from Egypt but from evil itself: Satan, sin, and death. The giving of the Spirit fulfills the day of Pentecost in two ways. First, the Spirit fulfills the law and by empowering God's people to follow Jesus. Second, the new believers constitute the "first fruits" of a spiritual harvest.

The manifestation of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost also fulfills the temple. When the temple built under Solomon was dedicated, "fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple" (2 Chronicles 7:1). Now the Spirit, in a similar manifestation, fills not the temple but an ordinary house—and people in the house. The people of God now constitute the temple of God (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Finally, Acts 2 represents a reversal of Genesis 11, when God confused the language of those who united to build a tower and storm the gates of heaven. In Acts 2, God enables people to miraculously understand one another in order to unite the whole world. It is no coincidence that the call of Abraham, in Genesis 12, comes right after the story of Babel. In Genesis 11, God scattered humans. In Genesis 12, he called one man and told him that in him "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." The people of God, now followers of Jesus, are blessing the families of the earth.

The coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost represents a decisive turning point in human history, the culmination of the first advent of Christ.

Peter has a two-part answer to the onlookers' question concerning the meaning of the disciples' speaking in the languages of the onlookers. First, by way of explanation, he calls forth the prophet Joel.

What it means: part one

Acts 2:14-21:

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. 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 declares that the disciples of Jesus are speaking of the great works of God in languages that the onlookers are able to understand because the expectations of the prophet Joel are being realized (Joel 2:28-32). The development means that God at last is “pouring out” his Holy Spirit on “all flesh,” not just, as in the past, here and there, when he came upon particular individuals such as prophets, priests, and kings in Israel.

The new inclusiveness is illustrated by three pairs of opposites: “your sons and your daughters,” “your young men” and “your old men,” and “my male servants and female servants.” Noteworthy is the inclusion of women and slaves. Especially noteworthy is God’s elevation of slaves: they are “my” servants. Moreover, the words “all flesh” imply that the Spirit is being poured out not just on Jews but on Gentiles also.

Because of the new ministry of the Spirit, some will receive revelation from God in visions and dreams, which will be in evidence later in Acts (Acts 9:10; 10:3, 10, 17; 16:9-10; 18:9). Most especially, though, the Spirit enables some to prophesy: Peter uses the words “shall prophesy” twice in verses 17-18. When the disciples speak of the mighty words of God in other languages,

they are prophesying. Moses’ wishes are coming true: “Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!” (Numbers 11:29).

The wonders and signs that Joel anticipated, accomplished in connection with Jesus, are now being accomplished also in connection with his followers (Acts 2:2-4, 23, 43). The final developments (blood, fire, vapor of smoke, darkness, blood) anticipate both judgment for those opposed to God and the final “day of the Lord,” when Christ returns to consummate his reign. They are not necessarily to be understood literally, but as portending events of cosmic significance: Joel was originally anticipating not literal fulfillment but the judgment of a locust plague in his day.

The good news, though, is this: “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved”—that is, everyone who responds to the Gospel and believes in Jesus will be delivered from the judgment of the end. Again, inclusiveness is emphasized: salvation is for everyone, not just Jews.

First, the disciples’ speaking in other languages means that the Holy Spirit is being poured out.

A flood or a trickle?

The Holy Spirit hasn’t been parceled out here and there in increments. No, the Spirit has been “poured out.” He hasn’t been poured out on some; he has been poured out on all—all who believe in the Son of God, that is. That means, if you believe in Christ, the Holy Spirit has been poured out on you.

What does the Spirit do for you? Listen to the apostle Paul, who employs similar language to that of Peter when speaking of the Spirit: “God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5). In being poured out on you, the Spirit has also been poured out in you, flooding your heart with God’s love.

Nevertheless, many of us experience the love of God more like a trickle than a flood. In fact, for many, it seems that even the trickle has dried up. Many of us question whether God loves us.

Ann Voskamp writes of her doubts:

Though I can hardly whisper it, I live as though He [God] stole what I consider rightly mine: happiest children, marriage of unending bliss, long, content,

*death-defying days. I look in the mirror, and if I'm fearlessly blunt—what I have, who I am, where I am, how I am, what I've got—this simply isn't enough. That forked tongue darts and daily I live the doubt, look at my reflection, and ask: Does God really love me? If He truly, deeply loves me, why does He withhold that which I believe will fully nourish me? Why do I live in this sense of rejection, of less than, of pain? Does He not want me to be happy?*¹

How, then, might we experience God's love? After calling forth the prophet Joel, Peter calls forth King David.

What it means: part two

Acts 2:22-36:

“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. 25 For David says concerning him,

“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, 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

yourself 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.”

On the one hand, Peter says that Jesus was crucified “according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” so that Jesus might draw the evil of Rome, Israel, and the entire world onto himself in order to defeat it. On the other hand, Peter says, the fact that it was God's plan to defeat evil in this way doesn't let those who delivered him up to be crucified by the Romans off the hook.

Just as Peter channeled the words of Joel from Joel 2, he channels the words of David from Psalm 16. Peter says that David, though he was speaking of himself as king in Psalm 16, was also speaking of the Messiah, the final king. If the prophet Joel anticipated the pouring out of the Spirit by Jesus, King David anticipated the resurrection of Jesus.

David said to God: “For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, / or let your Holy One see corruption.” First, David was expecting the Lord to deliver him from his enemies. But his wording anticipates a greater deliverance: deliverance from death, after death. And it is clear that David has not experienced this deliverance—at least not yet—because “his tomb is with us to this day.”

God made a covenant with David in which he promised the throne of Israel to his descendants finally, a singular descendant, whom the Israelites began to call the Messiah (2 Samuel 7, Luke 1:32). Peter says that that promise was fulfilled in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the Christ (Greek), or Messiah (Hebrew). Jesus sits on the throne of David even now, having ascended to the right hand of God. From the throne of David in heaven, Jesus has poured out the Holy Spirit.

First, the disciples' speaking in other languages means that the Holy Spirit is being poured out, according to the expectations of the prophet Joel. Second, the disciples' speaking in other languages means that Jesus has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven, according to the expectations of King David, and that he, from heaven, has poured out the Holy Spirit.

David not only expected the resurrection of the Messiah in Psalm 16, he also expected the ascension of the Messiah in Psalm 110, in which God promises, in time, to “make your enemies your footstool”—that is, to completely subjugate everyone and everything that is opposed to the benevolent reign of the Messiah (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). God is beginning to subjugate such enemies through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to followers of his Son.

Having been resurrected and exalted to heaven, Jesus is more than king of Israel. According to Peter, he is also Lord—that is, Lord of the world. Think about that, Peter is saying to the onlookers: you didn’t just crucify some Galilean upstart, as you supposed; you crucified the Lord of the world, the Christ—your own king.

We crucified the Lord

Is anyone else guilty? According to the New Testament, everyone is guilty. Paul says that “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures . . . ” (1 Corinthians 15:3). Peter says, “He himself bore our sins in his body . . . ” (1 Peter 2:24). John says, “He is the propitiation for our sins . . . ” (1 John 2:2). With every sin, we nailed Jesus to the cross. And who is Jesus? He is Lord! We crucified the Lord of the world!

First, the onlookers asked, “What does this mean?” Now, after hearing Peter’s explanation, they ask a second question.

Cut to the heart

Acts 2:37-41:

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?” 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.

First, the onlookers, having witnessed the followers of Jesus speaking in other languages, asked, “What does this mean?” Second, having heard Peter’s answer, they ask, “What shall we do?”

Even though the onlookers are guilty of crucifying Jesus, who is both Lord and Christ, all is not lost. In fact, everything is to be gained. Peter tells them to repent, to turn from their way of being Israel, and to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ: to be immersed into Christ, into his community, and into his way of being Israel. If they do so, first, their sins will be forgiven, not, as before, in view of perpetual animal sacrifices offered to God but in view of the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ. Second, they, like the one hundred and twenty, will receive the Holy Spirit, who will empower them for this new way of living. Think about it: they were guilty of crucifying the Lord, but not only can they be forgiven for doing so, they can even receive the gift of the Holy Spirit!

Peter, in his first letter, makes it clear that it is not the rite of baptism that saves a person but what baptism represents: an appeal to God (1 Peter 3:21). Note that Peter preaches in a similar way in the next chapter of Acts without reference to baptism: “Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out . . . ” (Acts 3:19). Likewise, Jesus himself says, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Nevertheless, baptism is not an option; it is a biblical imperative. If you believe in Jesus and have not yet been baptized, talk to one of the pastors or elders, and we’ll get you wet.

Peter assures the onlookers that the promise of the Spirit is for them, even those who crucified Christ. Moreover, it is for their children and for those who are “far off,” both Jews who have been dispersed and even for Gentiles (Acts 22:21, Ephesians 2:13, 17). Indeed, the promise is for “everyone.” Once again, Luke emphasizes inclusiveness.

“Save yourselves,” Peter urges them. Of course, only God can save them: “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved”—saved by God, that is—but they can and should call on the name of the Lord so that they might be rescued from “this crooked generation.” The generation of Jesus is crooked in that it has rejected his way of being Israel—the way of self-giving love—in favor of their way, which features for many of them exclusive, nationalistic values. Instead of looking out, Israel has turned in on itself.

Guilty but forgiven

Jesus Christ is the resurrected, ascended, and enthroned Lord of the world. What has he done as Lord? He has poured out the Holy Spirit on his people and in his people so that they might be flooded with God's love. What then if we experience the love of God more like a trickle than a flood? What if even the trickle seems to have dried up? What if we question whether God loves us?

The Spirit of God, in addition to flooding our hearts with the love of God, illuminates the word of God—illuminates the word of God, in fact, that he might flood our hearts with the love of God (1 Corinthians 2:6-16).

G. Campbell Morgan, who had already become a successful preacher, was plagued by doubts at the age of nineteen. He canceled his preaching engagements, bought a new Bible and said to himself, "I am no longer sure that this is what my father claims it to be—the Word of God. But of this I am sure. If it be the Word of God, and if I come to it with an unprejudiced and open mind, it will bring assurance to my soul of itself." Morgan reported, "The Bible found me!"² In 1883, he found new motivation, and he devoted himself to the study and preaching of the word of God.

Likewise, the original hearers of Peter's sermon were cut to the heart. How does the word of God in Acts 2, illuminated by the Spirit, affect us? Will it find us?

Think about it: we are guilty of crucifying Jesus Christ, the Lord of the world, but not only are we forgiven for doing so, his crucifixion is also the means by which we are forgiven. Not only is our crucifying the Lord the means by which we are forgiven, the very one we crucified also pours out the Holy Spirit on us and in us so that we might experience God's love for us.

Is the Spirit pouring out the love of God in your heart even now?

Motivated by God's love for us, we are sent by Jesus into the world with the healing love of God, much as Peter was sent in Acts 2—Peter, who disowned Jesus; Peter, who was forgiven by Jesus; Peter, who was gifted by Jesus. Paul says "the love of Christ controls us"—that is, the love of Christ compels Paul and the other apostles

in their Gospel ministry. The Holy Spirit actualizes God's love for us in Christ. Now, can you imagine what could happen when Jesus sends each of us, sends all of us, into the world and the Holy Spirit floods each of us, floods all of us, with the love of God?

Save yourself

Do you not yet believe in Jesus? Do you find yourself, after hearing the words of Peter, asking, along with his original audience, "What should I do?" Repent and believe: turn away from your way of being human, which has very little if anything to do with God, and give your allegiance to Christ. Your sins will be forgiven, and Jesus, whom you crucified, will pour out on you and in you the Holy Spirit. Repent and believe, and then be baptized.

Save yourself from this crooked generation, which is chasing after everything but God. The promise is for everyone.

Endnotes

¹ Voskamp, Ann. "How founders can tell a great startup story" Fortune. Fortune, 9 February 2015. Web. 1 September 2016.

² Wiersbe, Warren W. *Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching & Preachers*. Moody Press. 1984. 211