

Introduction:

- A. Every story of someone coming to salvation in Christ is an amazing story. Even stories that seem ordinary are really amazing. We've heard two this morning. I've never forgotten an amazing sight I saw on TV in October 1992. The Billy Graham Crusade in Moscow was on, and when Dr. Graham gave an invitation to trust Christ I saw people *running* down the stadium steps and *running* out onto the field to be saved. *Running*.
- B. This morning I'd like us to visit the *first* story of people coming to Jesus. It is utterly unique. Never repeated, yet archetypal—the pattern for all the stories that ever followed. The textbook case. Turn to Acts 2.

I. JERUSALEM WAS IN FOMENT, TURMOIL, CONFUSION

- A. But the turmoil in Jerusalem wasn't in the streets. It was in minds and hearts. Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified on Passover. One day they cheered him as the Messiah and a few days later they killed him. New Jerusalem was a city with a guilty conscience. That was terrible enough but there were these *things* that happened. **Portents.** For example, as Jesus hung on the cross the sky went as black as night from noon to 3. It was terrifying. At just the moment Jesus "gave up his spirit," Matthew says, "*the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.*" [Matt 27:51-53] **What did these things mean?**
- B. News of Jesus' resurrection started as a whisper. Rumors, then witnesses. Lots of them. 500 of them. All saying they had *seen* Jesus alive, bearing the scars of the cross. **What did it all mean?**

- C. Fifty days passed and another great festival drew Jews from hundreds of miles in every direction back to Jerusalem. And surely, they all talked about Jesus' death and the godforsaken darkness, and the many reports of seeing him alive. It was the ancient Feast of Pentecost—always 50 days (*pente*) after Passover. It was the celebration of the beginning of the spring harvest. The Feast of First Fruits. It was, it turned out, God's promise.

Ten days earlier Jesus had walked with his apostles out to Bethany and had told them to wait in Jerusalem till they received the gift the Father had promised to send. Then he had told them, *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* Then, incredibly, he had been taken right up into the sky, and disappeared from their sight. So for ten days they had rejoiced, prayed, and waited. All told, there were 120 disciples gathering constantly in an upstairs room—probably the very place where Jesus had shared his Last Supper with the twelve apostles.

Then the Festival of First Fruits came. Acts 2:1-4... The *sound* of a mighty wind but not a hair was ruffled. The *appearance* of tongued fire but nothing was scorched. Then all 120 of them bursting into the streets with words both foreign and familiar. **Vv.5-13...**

You've never seen anything like it in your life. And neither had they. But it wasn't only astonishing and wonderful. It also, obviously, meant something. *"What's this all mean?"* people started asking. Eyes were wide. Hands reached for explanations. The irreverent among them bellowed, *"I'll tell you what it means! They're all drunk!"* But no one really believed that.

II. IN THE VERY FIRST CHRISTIAN SERMON PETER STOOD, WITH THE OTHER ELEVEN APOSTLES AROUND HIM, AND PUT THE PIECES TOGETHER.

He did two things. He told them what these events meant and he showed them how all these things were promised by God in the Scriptures. Jews knew their Old Testament prophecies, especially about the Messiah, yet incredibly they missed it all.

A. Vv.14-17...

1. *[After v.17]* People knew this passage but they'd never imagined it being like this.
2. *[After v.18]* I imagine Peter pausing and pointing at the ordinary men and women who had just been speaking out the wonders of God in all these languages, as if to say, *"These are the servants God promised. And you have just heard them prophecy—speak for God—because God's Spirit was just poured out on them."*
3. *[After vv.19-20]* Again I imagine Peter looking at them, as if to say, *"Seen any signs and wonders lately? Any people healed, any crowds fed, any demons banished, anyone forgiving sins. Has anyone seen the sun turn to darkness at noon, or the creation convulse. What if the great and glorious day of the Lord has dawned?"*

V.21... I suspect after he quoted that you could've heard a pin drop.

B. Then Peter quickly summarizes what they all knew had happened, but this time he puts God in the story. Vv.22-24... Think of the enormity of what Peter told them.

Despite all the God-given miracles, wonders and signs Jesus had done, they were each and all guilty of putting him to death. They'd waited for centuries for God's Messiah and when he came, despite all the signs, they murdered him—on a cross! *Then* God raised him. Not only were they guilty but now they were defenseless.

Again, Peter explains from Scripture—a passage they knew well from Ps. 16, written by David. Vv.25-28... The people looked at him uneasily. They had never really

understood that part. So Peter connects the dots for them: **v.29-33...** That brings them back to the beginning, to what the prophet Joel had said, *“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.”*

Then one more crucial Old Testament explanation, from Ps. 110. **Vv.34-35...** The Scriptures promised a Messiah who, even though he died, would not die—would not enter the realm of the dead and his body wouldn’t decay. They knew that *wasn’t* David! What’s more, this Son of David *“saw the Lord always before me.”* He is at the right hand of God, where the LORD Yahweh says to his Lord Messiah, *“Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”* Enemies?! The people listening to Peter were those enemies! God’s Messiah will crush *them!*

Then Peter pounds the gavel: v.36, *“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”* They had just been indicted. Charges had been filed. They were dead to rights. They were stunned. Aghast. Terrified. A foretaste of Judgment Day. *“Oh sinner man, where you gonna run to?”*

Then came the amazing, unexpected good news: **Vv.36-41...** If all that they’d heard before was astonishing, this was even more so. Such sins as theirs could be forgiven? Washed away? In the very name of Jesus Christ whom they’d crucified? And then he would pour out on them the gift of the Holy Spirit as he had on these disciples? And this great good news could be not only for them, but for their children, and for people far off?! And all this because the Lord God was calling *them*—his *enemies*? And so this good news dawned on them and hundreds and hundreds believed it. The repented, and in every pool that could be found, the believers baptized them in the name of Jesus Christ. First fruits of the gospel.

A story like no other. And a story just like every Christian’s story.

III. THE GOOD NEWS NEVER CHANGES

- A. We are all guilty-to-death of sin and are the enemies whom the Lord will use as his footstool. We cannot defy God's King, raised from the dead and seated at God's right hand.
- B. But Jesus died and rose again *for us*—not to condemn us but to save us from our sins. This was "*God's deliberate plan.*"
- C. We must repent and identify with Christ—that is what baptism does—as our Savior, the one who washes us clean with his forgiveness and gives us new life.
- D. When we do this, our Lord Jesus Christ pours out his Spirit on us, and we become new creations, immortal and holy.

Finally, let me bring us back to that Pentecost morning—to the sudden sound of win, the sight of fire, the languages. You have not likely ever had such an experience, but what we read is in fact what has happened to us.

IV. FROM THE VERY BEGINNING ALL OF JESUS' DISCIPLES ARE UNIQUELY GIFTED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT TO BE HIS WITNESSES—OUR MOST IMPORTANT WORK

- A. We are alive with the Spirit of God. There is a brief scene recorded in **Jn 20:21-22** you might have forgotten. It happened when Jesus was with the disciples in the upper room the evening of his resurrection.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit..."

Then they waited breathlessly for 50 days till suddenly on that Pentecost morning God *exhaled* and Jesus' followers *inhaled* the power of the resurrection, till they inhaled immortality. And those 120 people, and all who have joined them, are breathing that life still, and will forever.

We may not feel the wind of the Spirit any more than those disciples did, but **you'd better believe that when**

you have trusted Christ, you are newly alive with the Spirit of God who is in you, once and for all. *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”* Jesus said, *“My peace I leave with you.”* Jesus said, *“You have life and you have it abundantly.”* *“We have this treasure in jar of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”* 2 Cor 4:7.

- B. After the wind came the fire. *“They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.”* We often associate fire with passion. *She’s really on fire for the Lord. Let’s take our group to the ‘Catch the Fire’ conference.* There’s a place for that. But it isn’t the point here in Acts. This fiery imagery is drawn from Old Testament sacrifices which were burned. The fire signified a transfer of ownership to God. God owned and purified what was sacrificed to him. It was in the dying that it became useful. We sing, *“Make my life a living sacrifice.”* He does. That’s what this fire signifies.

When we put our faith in Christ we become living sacrifices set ablaze by the Spirit of God. We belong to the Lord now. He is purifying us. We are fragrant. We become **repurposed people**. The point isn’t that we must go out *“on fire for Jesus,”* all passionate and radical—though there is certainly a time for that. But the point is that we are made holy—set apart by grace, goodness, and truth. So Paul tells us in **Rom 12:1-2**, *“I urge you, brothers and sisters in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

- C. Then there is this element of miraculous speaking so all people can hear the gospel. This passage has little to do with what we typically think of as *“speaking in tongues.”*

Here are ordinary, monolingual men and women, who by the Spirit's enabling, can put "the wonders of God" into language that lost people hear and feel most deeply.

Jesus said we would receive power from the Spirit and we would then be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. So now we see how that happens—with the Spirit's life, the Spirit's holiness, and the Spirit's enabling us to communicate God's wonders.

This gift of language happens all the time through Christians; it just doesn't always happen this way. Over here is a missionary who has spent years learning a language so she can speak the good news to lost people. Over there is someone who can uniquely speak the wonders of God to artists, and over there to athletes, and there to scientists and business leaders, to people who ponder philosophy or suffer hardships. There is a woman quietly sharing in a neighbor's sorrow over the kitchen table and the neighbor thinks, *"She knows what I'm going through."*

The Holy Spirit does this through us. **He enables us to speak the heart language of others so that they might be drawn to our God, and then hear the good news of Jesus.** Just go out into the world, brimming with the good things of God, and you will be surprised at who listens. You will be surprised at who listens to you and thinks with wonder, *"Now God speaks my language!"*