

WHO IS THIS JESUS?

Acts 2

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We're in the Book of Acts. We're kind of meandering through without an overly preset agenda. We looked at chapter 1, which traces the events from the resurrection of Jesus until the Day of Pentecost, focusing on two major themes.

One theme being Jesus' ministry following His resurrection, the forty days in which He concentrated on re-emphasizing the truths He proclaimed in the first three years of His public ministry. No new truth at that point. Then the other thing that He was doing was promising them that the Holy Spirit would come. Following His ascension to heaven, the disciples go back to Jerusalem, are in a prayer meeting for ten days, and during that time, they select a replacement for Judas since they have become persuaded by an examination of the Scripture that a selection for office needs to take place. They pray and a successor is elected.

Then chapter 2 focuses on the theme: the Day of Pentecost. This day, which we have indicated, is not only a twenty-four hour epoch of time, but is a commemoration, a memorial of the Old Testament Feast of Pentecost, fourth of seven feasts articulated in Leviticus 23 which Christ fulfills—the four spring feasts, of which Pentecost is the last, is fulfilled in the present age. The last three feasts—Trumpets, Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement and Sukkoth or Booths is yet to be fulfilled. They are prophetic, waiting to be developed.

It is on this Day of Pentecost that the disciples gathering in this upper room, and perhaps already having moved from there to a room on the temple grounds, have the Holy Spirit poured out. That phrase, I think, is meant to be taken literally. It's used numerous times in the New Testament. It describes a person who is getting thoroughly saturated. When it rains heavily, one can say that

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the heavens opened and poured. “It is pouring outside.” There was no little bit of sprinkling of these early believers with the personality of the Holy Spirit. There was an outpouring. And anyone in that atmosphere and presence got thoroughly soaked with Him.

I don’t know of any better way of looking at the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives personally than to see the need to get thoroughly saturated by His presence. So that He becomes to us more than a few drops of anointing or blessing. But that our life be permeated at every level by His coming upon us.

We noted that for the disciples this experience of the Holy Spirit, this reception of the promise of the Father which Jesus had given them in Acts 1:4,5 and Acts 1:8, was an experience for them that was already subsequent to their conversion experience. A different administration of the Holy Spirit than that which is alongside of conversion, as witnessed in John 20:22, when Jesus breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” And bequeathed to them eternal life and the Spirit of God took up residence in them. Here, now, is an experience called a “baptism” or a “filling in;” the disciples are being placed into a fuller tide of life in the Holy Spirit. They are being empowered to do something for the Lord, namely, to be witnesses.

One of the things we’ve done as we’ve looked at the biblical text is to try to distinguish unique from normative events. We’ve suggested that the unique events are that the disciples could never again gather in one place, the sound of a mighty rushing wind does not appear on other occasions where the baptism of the Holy Spirit is given and third, the tongues of fire resting on each head also do not reappear. However, the tongues do reappear and, on the Day of Pentecost, all were engaged in speaking a language they did not know. But speaking as the Spirit gave utterance. It was this sound of their speaking which drew an audience in the temple precincts. It had to really be in the temple because it was the only area in which pilgrims would really have gathered

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in significant numbers. If you visited Jerusalem, you'd know—even today on the Temple Mount there's a vast area for congregation. In fact, it would be easy to gather five hundred thousand plus people for an audience on the Temple Mount should they so desire to be gathered there. Hearing this sound, the crowd is at first bewildered, then amused and amazed and even some react by mocking. That is to say that the charismatic experience, to the unbeliever, is a point of curiosity. It's not a point of conviction. We must establish this because sometimes we mistake this, in our zeal to get people involved in a charismatic experience and understanding of the giving of the gift of the Holy Spirit; when a non-believer comes into a setting in which spiritual gifts are taking place, which are verbal in character—whether they be speaking in tongues or prophetic words or whatever—often they raise curiosity, but do not raise conviction. It takes a clear proclamation of the Word of God to bring the conviction.

That's what's going to happen on this occasion, when all the experience of Pentecost is done and they're not speaking languages such as had been spoken, where what has been prayed in an unknown tongue which has, by and large, not been recognized as a language, because we don't have as many language groups represented in this service as were represented on the Day of Pentecost. You've got Jewish pilgrims from all over the world. They're hearing these languages and they're amazed at these Galileans that are speaking these things. Yet the net result of all that is simply curiosity, amazement and mocking.

Peter then stands up. His sermon is really divided into two parts. We looked at the first part last week. The first part of his sermon deals with the theme of the event of speaking in other tongues. He has to explain and put a context for it. So he graciously interprets for the audience what is happening and locates it as belonging to a fulfillment of prophecy in Joel 2:17–18, that in the last days the Spirit would be poured out on all flesh. He goes on quoting that Scripture to let us know

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that the last days encompass a period of time which involves, at its beginning, the Holy Spirit coming upon old people and young people alike, men and women alike. But in the ending of the last days, there are cataclysmic signs and cosmic disturbances in the universe itself.

I suggested that those twin parcels of Joel 2, as quoted by Peter, are the A.M. and the P.M. of the last days. It's appropriate, in whatever generation, for any Christian who has ever lived, for that Christian to say, "I am living in the last days." The last days always has a twin movement associated with it. On the one hand, it's meant to be the coming and the pouring forth of the Spirit. And on the other hand, it is meant to be seen as a time culminating in the disturbance of the heavens themselves, when the P.M. of the last days occurs.

Once Peter has explained that and thrown in the verse, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved," he then goes on to the second part of his sermon, which is a clear declaration of who Jesus of Nazareth is.

Sometimes, we look at Scripture and we don't put ourselves back in the emotional state of the people that are involved in it. You look at these followers of Jesus. They really loved Him. It was not a legal relationship per se, although because of the provisions of justification of the new covenant, Jesus allowed them to enter into a relationship whereby they were legally acquitted in God's sight and were on firm ground so that, in the judgment day, they might escape all penalty. But it was far more profound than a legal relationship. It was a family relationship. They were deeply committed to Him and deeply loved Him. He was a person, because He was without sin, and whose brilliance and tenderness and way of touching life and people evoked in you a response of incredible admiration. The very idea that that magnificent human being who also was the Son of God had given to you the gracious invitation to share His company had to be awesome—"What am I doing around Jesus of Nazareth? That lovely fantastic human being."

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Then He's gone. There had to be times when everybody just sat down and cried. I'm sure the Resurrection took away a lot of the grief. But even the Resurrection—after it—Jesus leaves and they're on their own. Except they're not on their own, are they? He tells them something my son can't tell me. "Dad, I'm going away, but I'll send you another son." But Jesus says in John 14–16 that there are five or six promises in the promise of the Holy Spirit. Jesus makes a very profound statement when He indicates "I'm going to send you another..." the King James has "comforter." I think the NIV has "counselor." The Greek word is *paraclete*. That's a combination of two Greek words—"to call" and "alongside." "One called alongside." The idea is "called alongside to really help." "Another" is the word *allos* in the Greek. One word is the word *allos* and the other is *heteros*. (We use "heterogeneous.") *Heteros*, when it is used, speaks of "another of a different kind." Jesus does not say "I'm going to send you a *heteros paraclete*—that is, a helper, but He's different from Me. I'm going to send you an *allos paraclete*—another one just like Me. He's referring to the Holy Spirit. The empty places they need for relating to Him that they have grown so to love are going to be filled up by the presence of the Holy Spirit, who will make the Lord's presence continually real, even though He is not visibly there.

To me, the miracle of Christianity is that that exact thing has happened over these centuries. So that the same Spirit which was sent on the Day of Pentecost is ministering the life of Jesus to us right now. And although Jesus is not here in the flesh, He is with us because we have another comforter.

It is that person, Jesus of Nazareth, who Peter now sets forth and proclaims. Obviously, there would have been no message of Christianity if the whole guts of the Christian gospel were not based on an objective truth. The objective truth being, Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by

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God with miracles, wonders and signs (in verses 22–24, as Peter gets into his proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth). In verse 22, he deals with Jesus' life. In verse 23, with Jesus' death. In, verse 24, with Jesus' resurrection. Then the rest of the following verses substantiate, from the Old Testament, the resurrection. I'll comment on why that's there. In verse 22, Peter notes, very clearly, how Jesus did what He did through the power of God. He was more than a teacher. He was one who came with demonstrations of power.

One of the interesting phenomena, and we need to watch for it as we go through the Book of Acts, is that whenever you see the word "miracles" or "wonders," you will never see those words by themselves. You will always see the word "miracle" or "wonder" in association with another very important word. It is the word "sign." Because Jesus never did any splendid deed or supernatural deed in order to cause people to simply look and gape and say, "Wasn't that marvelous?" He did things in order that His miracles and His wonders might be windows through which we could look and see the character and nature of God. For example, the miracle of the storm at sea is meant to be more than a wonder where we say, "Wow! Look at that! He has power over nature!" It is meant to say to us that it is the character of God to always speak to us in our life's storms and grant us peace. He was giving us windows and signs through His miracles. And the signs pointed to who He was. Only the Creator could do those kinds of signs.

So through signs and wonders, His earthy ministry proceeded. His death—Peter, for an uneducated guy, non-trained speaker, he did all right things in the school of Jesus, because in verse 23 he resolves and lays to rest Arminian and Calvinist controversy. That's a very bold statement for me to say, but I am satisfied that that controversy, in my own mind, has been resolved by Peter when he talks about the death of Christ, whom he attributed to the determined action of God: "His purpose and foreknowledge." "And you, with the help of wicked men, put

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Him to death by nailing Him on a cross.” The crucifixion was God’s plan and man’s plan, and they rest side by side. One is not on top of the other and you can’t take one without the other.

They are two truths, existing side by side, as principles of understanding. We get all bent out of shape if we try to push one and diminish the other. It is both. We are free to decide. It was through the action of man that Christ was crucified. But it was also God’s determined plan to deliver Him up. And how that might all be resolved in our mind is going to have to wait until that day when we stand before God, but both actions are there—God’s activity and man’s activity, in equal degree.

I guess, in my own life, I’ve been simple enough to say I would like to more greatly understand predestination, election and freewill. But here is a powerful Scripture, that says to me that they lay both side by side. “Christ was delivered up for us. Then God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death.”

Then Peter goes on to describe how, from the Old Testament, the coming of the Messiah and His raising from the dead had been prophesied. He takes two passages—Psalm 16 and Psalm 110. Again, as we noted last week, we must see that Peter is not prepared, in the normal sense, to preach a sermon on this occasion. Remember that he had come in to a prayer meeting at the beginning of that day. It was early in the morning, the Spirit was outpoured. Nobody had had time to say to him, “Peter, by mid-morning you’re going to be preaching to thousands of people. You ought to spend a few hours in your study getting ready, and get out the commentaries and exegetical tools and brush up on a few memorized passages and get your notes in shape.” When Peter gets up immediately, the Scripture, which had been drilled into him by the Lord, is evident and it is in his life. He knows where in the Old Testament to go.

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A question that I would put before you is simply this: Why in the world does Peter have to go to the Old Testament, anyway? If Jesus has risen from the dead, that ought to be proof enough.

Why dredge up the Old Testament? He can establish the case for the Resurrection on the basis that they were all eyewitnesses and none can contest what is happening there on the day of Pentecost. You've got fifteen different language groups of people being spoken by persons who obviously don't know those languages. God is being glorified. Why then quote the Scripture? Isn't there evidence enough? Why is it even needed?

It really struck me, listening to the Supreme Court nomination of Judge Robert Bork, we have an answer within the present political process for why Peter does that here. The reason why, evidently, Judge Bork is not being confirmed in the Supreme Court is that he has not stuck with precedent. And lawyers and judges are very fussy about the body of law, which grows over a period of time. Judges must rule in accordance with precedent so that law might have logical development to it. And woe to the person who throws everything in reverse and chucks out precedent!

The New Testament could have very well come along and said, "The Old Testament is an inferior document, and Jesus has come with a new order. Let's all throw it out." But no, that is not the case at all. It is one through which God, over a period of time, has revealed to us His will and His heart. The ministry of Jesus was building sequentially, accumulatively, on what God had done in the past. Therefore, it is important for Peter to establish—and for an apologist and witness to Jewish people—to again establish that what is happening to Jesus of Nazareth is consistent with what God has done in the past and what He has said in His Word. We have, therefore, the union—as we look at the Scripture—of the Old and New Testament, because they

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bear witness to the one God. What Peter is saying is, “Jesus of Nazareth is consistent with what has gone on in the past.”

One of the things we’re seeing, by the way, in our day, is an inability by some to quote Scripture accurately. We see, for example, in verse 34, where David did not ascend to heaven. Yet he said, “The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” That is one of the most frequently quoted verses in the New Testament, Psalm 110:1. “The LORD said to my Lord.” From an Old Testament perspective, that phrase doesn’t even make sense. How could David say, “Yahweh said to my Yahweh”? It’s like God talking to God. That’s why it’s such a critical passage for the New Testament, because the New Testament is laying down the understanding that Jesus is God. So it makes sense. “The Lord said to my Lord.” “My Lord,” being David’s Son—the Messiah, Jesus. The Father said to the Son, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” Which is a Scripture reference to the ascension following the Resurrection. Jesus is now in session, sitting at the right hand of the Father until the Father makes His enemies His footstool.

Those of us who have had the experience of being in the Cairo museum, and have seen the incredibly priceless exhibition of King Tut, which is far more vast than what was brought to Los Angeles several years ago, have seen his throne chair and have also seen his canes. One of the fascinating things about his throne chair and his canes is where his enemies are located. His enemies are engraved in visible form on his footstool. So that, when the king sits back, when the Pharaoh sits back to rest and puts his feet up in the air, it’s not just some ottoman. It’s his enemies. When he is relaxing, his feet are on his enemies. When he is walking, his walking stick is curved in such a way that the form of his enemy is a person that is curving on the ground, so that, as he points his stick down, he is always on top of his enemy.

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Some are misquoting that Scripture today as saying, “It is the church’s business to make the world His (Jesus’) footstool.” It’s a misunderstanding of the verse. It’s the Father who said, “I’ll make the enemy His footstool.” Peter preaches so powerfully on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it’s obvious that something very special is happening in that moment and people’s hearts are being stirred by what he says. He concludes, “Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36). Christ. That, from a Jewish context, is a very important statement because those two offices—God and Messiah—were not always joined in the figure of the Messiah. God has made Him both Lord and Christ. “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart.”

Now the awakening. With the charismatic gifts, they were curious. Now they say, “What do we do? This Jesus we knew. He taught here among us. What now have we got to do?” And Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit; the promise is for you and your children, for all who are far off, all whom the Lord our God would call” (verses 38-39). And then, like every anointed evangelist since then, he extended the altar call. He didn’t just say it once. But “with many other words, he warned them and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation” (verse 40). The word for “corrupt” there is the same word from which we get “sclerosis,” a lateral curvature of the spine. Save yourselves from this bent generation. This generation that is bent in its morals and in its ethics and its manner of living. Save yourself from this.

As we look at the outflow of this message, I want to talk for a few moments. I want to center on verses 37 through 47, and talk about qualities in a biblical church. The qualities that are to be

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found, without exception, in a church and a people that God is using. I think this is key to the development of this church or any church that sets out to seek to experience God's will.

These qualities must be present:

I. First, repentance.

We must change our mind about who Jesus of Nazareth is. That is, what is meant about repentance here is *metanoia*, "change your mind." They viewed Him as a man, as a prophet, who was either false or true. That's immaterial but it was a lesser view than what Jesus had presented Himself to be—Lord and Christ. Repent. Change your mind. To change your mind, then, is to change your way of life and living. It means that entrance into the church is not through absorption. It means that it's not through being connected to a family, generationally. It is not something that you do by osmosis. The only way to get into the church is to make a personal decision, where your faith and belief lines up with what the church bears witness to: Jesus Christ. There is no other way to admit anyone into the body of Christ than through repentance first. I think, if we have done anything wrong in modern Christianity, we have highlighted the word "belief" and minimized the word "repentance." Not that "belief" isn't a good word. But "repentance" is the first word. A repentance that says, "I was wrong about Jesus of Nazareth; He is who He declares Himself to be."

II. The second thing that Peter says is "and be baptized."

Notice he does not say, "Repent or be baptized" or "repent and be baptized someday, if you feel good about it." I kind of have a thing about baptism, because I think, as Christians, we are really lax in doing what the Lord tells us to do. If you have become a believer in Jesus Christ, if you have repented, you are under an obligation from the commander-in-chief of the forces of all heaven and earth, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, to be baptized. If you are not baptized upon your

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repentance, then what you're saying to Jesus of Nazareth of His very first order to you is, "I am not going to go along with Your direction for my life. I want to believe in You, but this business of getting all wet doesn't really appeal to me and I'm just not going to do it. Or I'm going to indefinitely put it off."

I don't really understand all the reasons why the Lord gave us baptism. I have a sneaking hunch that one of the reasons He gave it to us was just to see if, right at the outset, we would start being obedient to Him, even if we didn't understand something. But I know that it represents other things, like washing and being placed from death into life. But be baptized.

"Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven." Repentance and baptism are meant to closely connect together because both involve the washing of sins.

Repentance, being the spiritual act whereby the sins are washed; and baptism, being the physical act that symbolizes that washing that is taking place on the inside.

Why does Peter say "be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ," instead of using the baptismal formula in Matthew 28, "Baptize in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit"?

Here is where the "Jesus Only" people who threw out the doctrine of the Trinity have had a field day by saying, "When Peter began preaching baptism, he said be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. He didn't say in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." I need to deal with that quickly because you may have come up against it. One of the things you never do is you never set Scripture against Scripture. If Jesus said, "Be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (notice he didn't say "names"—one God—Father, Son and Spirit) then it wasn't Peter's prerogative to come along and say, "I happen to disagree with Jesus on that point, therefore, I've substituted it with my own formula." Wouldn't you agree that Jesus has the foundational word, even over an apostle? Therefore, if an apostle says something, we must look

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at it, compare it with the original statement, in order to contextualize what the apostle says, and get at its meaning in light of what Jesus has already said.

What Peter is doing is clear within the Jewish culture. Jewish culture has baptism. What Peter is saying is, “In order to get into the Christian faith, if you are a Gentile proselyte into Judaism, one of the things you will do is go through baptism, which is immersion, bathing—the symbol of the leaving of the old life and the taking on of the new.” What Peter is saying about this baptism is that it is in the name of Jesus. It is Christian. It is distinct from all other forms of baptism, which these people had been experienced. He is not at that point trying to set forth some opposite view of the doctrine of the Trinity or some opposite baptismal formula. It is simply enough for this occasion to say that this baptism is different than anything you’ve ever experienced. It’s in the name of Jesus.

“Repent and be baptized.” Those are the two things we can do.

III. Then there’s one thing God has to do. “And you will receive the promise or you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

This gift is also a promise. “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off. For all whom the Lord, our God, will call” (Acts 2:39). If you want to trace this, go back to John 14 and find Jesus promising another comforter. Then go to Acts 1:4 and find that Jesus gives them a promise that they’ll receive the Holy Spirit. It would have been, I think, very easy for the disciples, after the Lord had risen and ascended into heaven, to immediately go out. They had to be so excited—He’s risen from the dead! We’d better go tell it!—but Jesus said, “Long range, you’re going to need this power of the Holy Spirit. This is a promise I’m going to give you.”

When Peter is preaching in Acts 2, he says in verse 33, “Jesus, exalted to the right hand of God. He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see

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and hear.” In other words, the promise that is made in John 14,15,16, reiterated in Acts 1:4 and 1:8, experienced in Acts 2:1–4, is interpreted in Acts 2:33 to be a promise which is visible and has auditory qualities. It is not a promise which is totally subjective. It is not just a feel-good experience. It is a promise which can be seen and heard. And what the disciples are experiencing on the Day of Pentecost is audible. They hear them speaking to God in languages they have not learned, declaring His glory and His praises. They also see this kind of behavior, so the promise has a kind of experiential content to it. It’s seen and it’s heard. “This promise,” Peter says, “is not just for these.”

How in the world some persons, in the development of Christian doctrine, ever came up with the view that the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the works of apostolic ministry was limited to the Early Church is beyond me, the person has to butcher this verse in order to get that view.

Because the promise of this experience, which is visible and audible, is not something which was related only to the first century church, to the apostolic age, the great cosmic shove-off of the church, where God simply gives the church at Pentecost a big push and expected it, for twenty centuries, to simply coast on the big shove at the beginning. But instead, this experience is for your children and all who are far off. Far off in time and far off geographically, in space. For “all”—no exceptions. “All whom the Lord our God shall call.”

So a third basis of the church is not only a community of people who have gotten there by their own volition, that is repented and has been baptized to express their commitment to Jesus Christ and their reception of forgiveness of sins through His death. But it’s also marked as a community that is expecting to receive a promise. A promise of the Holy Spirit. A promise that will energize and empower them. If we don’t receive this promise, we are going to be deficient in two areas as a believing community. The areas of deficiency will be worship and evangelism. Because that’s

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what the Holy Spirit's for. The Holy Spirit is meant to lead us into God in worship. And the Holy Spirit is meant to lead us into the world in power.

Without this promise of the Father, the church is reduced to mechanical techniques. To, first of all, keep its present membership and secondly, try to reach out a little bit to others. That is why, in my time with you as pastor, I am saying to the church, "We need something more than business as usual." If I understand the church and what it is meant to be, it has got to have something more than some guy sitting in the office of pastor, coming up with good ideas. It's got to have more than effective administration and programs and good financial undergirding. It has got to have a power that goes beyond human agency. If the church is satisfied to live life as it is, it's never going to do anything. Somehow, there has got to be in the church a realization that only God can build it and only people whose hearts are poured out and broken and open and dependent are going to be the kind of qualified candidates on which the Spirit of God can fall. I grew up in an atmosphere of what we call "tarrying for the baptism of the Holy Spirit." There are a lot of bad things about that. Including all the times I felt rejected, because I was one of these people who have always been very rational and I expected that, when I received the promise of the Father, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, I would be somehow rendered unconscious or whatever, and I would have no recollection of what happened until someone woke me up later. I discovered this was not a biblical experience. So there are a lot of bad features in tarrying. But we replaced that, in contemporary charismatic circles, with "microwave Christianity." We want everything as fast as we can get it. So what we do is say to a person, "Repeat after me..." and suddenly, they're speaking in tongues. No emphasis on a life that is hungry for God. No emphasis on personal holiness. No emphasis on brokenness before God. No emphasis on the fact that this gift is meant for something other than spiritual masturbation or gratification. But it's a

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gift that is meant to empower us in our relationship to God and our fellow man. So we get a few people speaking in tongues. But there's no power and dynamic. Because that promise of the Father can only come in its depth and its power to people who are really hungry for something that is beyond themselves to bring on. Hungry for the power of God to be poured out in their midst.

And Jesus locates this openness to receive the gift as one of the critical credentials for His church. I would like to go one step beyond to the older Pentecostals in this congregations and say that it is not sufficient to interpret the Scripture as having been fulfilled once upon a time—we received the gift of the Holy Spirit and then the rest of our life we say, “I got it back then.”

There must be in the Christian life a continual dependence and hunger and openness to the Spirit of God, if the church can be vital and effective. Otherwise, we're going to all wind up holding hands and looking nice. But the church is more than that. It's got to be more than that! I want more than that. I'd be so bold as to say that I'm at kind of a point in my life where I want to see God move in a great sweep, or I'm going to say, “We gave it our best shot. Evidently, God's going to do it another way. I've done my best.” I want to be a person hungry for the work of the Holy Spirit. I want us, as a church, to be open to the Holy Spirit. This probably means that we're going to make changes, whatever the changes have to be. There's nothing fixed except the Scripture and the Lord.

Repent, be baptized, receive the Holy Spirit. The church can't be built without Him.

In the last conversation I had with E. S. Williams, who was the spiritual patriarch for the Assemblies of God, he was in his mid-nineties when I last talked with him. Jewell and I had gone especially to visit him, to get blessed by him. We just wanted hands laid on our heads and to be blessed. This man was my mother's pastor back in the 1920s, a great, godly man. I said to him,

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“Brother Williams, is there anything that bothers you in contemporary Pentecostal circles and in our churches?” He said, “I am pleased at what is happening. But if there’s one thing that scares me, it is that the church is placing such great emphasis upon socialization that it may crowd out the work of the Spirit.”

I thought about that. What he meant was that when you become a Christian, you gradually divorce yourself—not intentionally, but gradually, you pull out of the network from your unsaved friends. You find Christian people are wonderful to be with, and even when they do fight and get a little bit cross, they’re still great people and you can work it out. Isn’t the church wonderful? And so we have all these things going on among us that are rewarding and fulfilling and, after a while, the church realizes that it needs to incorporate new people and make people feel at home—so we don’t feel like strangers and that kind of thing—works harder and harder at the sociology of the church. What kind of a community are we? Gradually, we get so absorbed in the word “church” and the concept of the word “church” that it’s become more magnificent and more central than the person of Jesus. We become a sociology community instead of a community that is vertically related to God. We’ve got to get that priority, that vertical relationship. Let’s enjoy all the *koinonia* fellowship in the world. We probably don’t have enough Biblical *koinonia*. But for sure, let’s not get a church that is built on sociology, birds of a feather flocked together—and isn’t it wonderful to go to a place where there are other neat people? The church has got to be more than that.

When those first three out of thirteen were present, you’ve got three thousand people showing up in one day. I would submit to you that I don’t know of any local church in the United States that is prepared to receive three thousand new converts in a single day. Especially, if that church is a hundred and twenty.

WHO IS THIS JESUS?

Acts 2

If I understand Jesus correctly, He never came to make us comfortable. He came to give us eternal life, that's pretty comfortable, I suppose. And He came to give us quality of living now, but He didn't intend that we'd all sit around in a small club and look at one another saying, "Aren't we wonderful, isn't it cozy? It feel so good, let's not let any new people in!" The whole focus and thrust of the church was, "Let's go out there and get them and include them. Let's go out on the highways and byways of life and find people, people who are different from us, culturally, rationally. People who are different politically. People who are like us or unlike us, it doesn't matter, let's get out there and bring new people in and make sure that they get connected to the Body." Let's get on with the church growing and not worry about keeping the church at the size of our artificial zone of comfort. We're here to glorify the Lord, not to take it easy. Believe God that the day will come in this church when we'll see Pentecost all over again. Pray that one day God would bring three thousand into the church. If that ever happens, there won't be a single person who ever muttered that old lie again, "I want to be in a small comfortable church." You'll be so jazzed at what God is doing, you can't wait to go out and get more people. There's nothing that satisfies the heart more than to see people come to Christ, and lives turned around. Once we catch on fire, we'll never be the same.

Closing Prayer

Lord, do it again, we pray. Do it again. We're hungry for You, Lord. We don't know how, we just need You. We need You to change attitudes and perspectives. We need You to empower us. We need Your Spirit to give us boldness to witness to the person that we don't know how to approach. We need this place and this sanctuary, Your presence. To have a dynamic encounter with You, which affects our relationship with others. We just open ourselves in this moment to

WHO IS THIS JESUS?

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You and ask, Lord, visit us. We're here to do Your will. We're here to be made available to You.

We want that in our life.