

# Acts 2:1-21

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Date: 20 May 2018

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     How do you react when you witness a significant event?

To make that a little bit more real, let's take an event, a significant event that is both topical and also sadly very tragic.

I'm sure we've all witnessed in the last few days the clashes and loss of life at the border between Gaza and Israel. When you witness those events, how do you respond or what questions do you ask?

I think in the face of an event of that nature, there are two important questions that we can and should ask. It won't always be easy to find the answers, but we certainly at the very least must pose the questions and seek to secure truthful answers.

The first question is maybe an obvious one, and that's, what's going on? And here the concern is to have an accurate grasp of the events, what is really happening before us.

[ 1 : 1 0 ]     Of course, we're in a sense victims of how the events sometimes are presented, how they're packaged by the media. But we need to try and work out what's going on.

So, for example, in the example that I've given, was it a peaceful protest that was taking place there at the border? It's a question that we need to pose.

I'm not giving the answers at this point. Who are involved in this confrontation? How many Palestinians have died? We know that many have died, and that is tragic.

How many? In what circumstances? So, what's going on is an important question. But there's another subsequent question that is perhaps even more important. And the question is this, what does this mean?

What does this mean? Why is this happening? Why are the Palestinians protesting or attacking? Indeed, what verb you use will be a function of how you've answered the first question.

[ 2 : 1 2 ]     Why are the Israeli soldiers responding with such seemingly disproportionate violence? Why is that happening? And again, even the way you pose the questions, you need to be very careful because even in the posing of the questions, you kind of reveal maybe your own views and sometimes perhaps your own prejudices.

Now, I don't know the answers to either of these two questions with regard to the event that I have posed as an example. But what I do want to do this morning is on this day, Pentecost Sunday, direct our gaze to that same conflict-ridden land, hugging the Mediterranean, and to Luke's presentation of a hugely significant event that took place a couple of thousand years ago.

And in his account, and we've read some of his account, in his account of the events on the day of Pentecost, Luke answers the question, what's going on? He gives us a descriptive account.

This is what happened on that day. So, we have an answer to that question, that first question, what's going on? But in his account, he also records how many in the crowd, amazed by the events they were witnessing, posed the second question, what does this mean?

We're told that explicitly. Then in verse 12 of chapter 2, Luke is speaking of those who were witnessing what was taking place, and he records for us, amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, what does this mean?

[ 3 : 56 ] We know what's happening, we see what's happening, but what does this mean? Now, that's a great question. And our objective this morning is to try and answer that critical question.

Now, in fairness, Peter himself answers the question. Notice what he says as he introduces his sermon from verse 14 and following.

He says there very clearly, let me explain this to you. Clearly, he has in mind those who are posing the question, what does this mean? And he says, well, I'm going to tell you.

So, we have an answer. The answer is contained in the sermon that was preached by Peter on this occasion. But just to be difficult or just to be contrary, I want to try and identify the meaning of the events provided by Luke's description of the events in the first 13 verses of the chapter.

So, without making use of, without recurring to Peter's sermon where we find much by way of explanation, I think we can also find an answer to the question, what does this mean, in the description of the events and clues that are found within that part of the chapter, namely the first 13 verses of Acts chapter 2.

[ 5 : 22 ] And what we're going to do is identify what we could call three pieces of evidence that will help us answer the question posed by the inquisitive crowd, what does this mean?

And the three pieces of evidence that we're going to focus in on this morning are as follows. First of all, the meaning of the day. There at the very beginning of chapter 2, we read, when the day of Pentecost came.

And there we have a clue as to what is going on, or what is the meaning of what is going on. So, you have, first of all, the meaning of the day.

But then secondly, in Luke's description of what happened, you have an account of signs that were made visible, visible certainly to the disciples.

And so, we're going to think about those signs and the meaning of the signs, because they also will point in the direction or help us answer the question, what does this mean? And then finally, we're going to think about the meaning of the words, because the disciples, they experienced what they experienced, but then what happened?

[ 6 : 29 ] Well, they spoke. They spoke words. And so, we need to think about the meaning of the words that they spoke. And together, these three pieces of evidence, I think, will give us an answer to the question, what does this mean?

The very question that the crowds, or many within the crowd, were posing on that day. And what we'll discover is that these three pieces of evidence identify, in turn, a harvest, the equipping of the harvesters, and the means employed to bring in the harvest.

Now, that may all sound a little bit cryptic at this point, but bear with me, and all will, I hope, become clear.

The meaning of the day, the first piece of evidence, the meaning of the day. The passage begins, the account begins with these words, when the day of Pentecost came. Now, did the events described by Luke just happen to take place on this day?

Well, evidently not. By introducing his account with these words, Luke is indicating that the day in question on which these events occurred, the day of Pentecost, is significant and meaningful.

[ 8 : 03 ] Now, what does the word Pentecost mean? Well, it's a Greek word, Pentecostos, transliterated into English and means simply 50th or 50th day.

And the significance of this name is understood when we view the events of Jesus' death, resurrection, and his sending of the Holy Spirit on this day in parallel to the Jewish festivals at which time these events took place.

So, for example, the death of Jesus coincided with the Passover feast. We're familiar with that. The resurrection of Jesus coincided with the Feast of Firstfruits, which was part of the Passover week, but was a distinct festival in itself.

That's less familiar, perhaps. And Jesus' sending of the Holy Spirit coincided with the Feast of Weeks, named here in the Greek description of the day as Pentecost, relating to when it took place, 50 days after the Passover Sabbath, or 49 days after the resurrection.

And the Feast of Weeks relates to seven weeks, and seven times seven is 49. So, there's a real symmetry here going on. So, you have these three events, the death, the resurrection, and Pentecost, all in parallel with, all taking place at the time of these Jewish feasts or festivals.

[ 9 : 42 ] Now, clearly, this is not some kind of amazing coincidence. These three critical redemptive events in the mission of Jesus coincide, as I say, with these God-appointed festivals for His people.

And let's just think about the significance of that briefly. We'll start with the death of Jesus at Passover. Now, back hundreds of years before, on that momentous day of liberation from captivity in Egypt, the shed blood of the Passover lamb that the Israelite families were required to sacrifice, and the blood that was painted on the doorposts of their homes, protected the Israelites from the angel of death, and the death of their firstborn children.

And of course, that blood shed on that occasion, the genesis, if you wish, of the history of the Jewish nation. That blood pointed forward to the shed blood of Messiah Jesus, our Passover lamb, whose death secures forgiveness and liberation and eternal life for sinners.

And so we can see the connection. And of course, even in the way the events are described, we're very familiar with that connection, because it was as Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with His disciples that He instituted the Lord's Supper, and so it's so clearly connected.

But then, it's also the case that Jesus rose from the grave, was raised by the Father on the day of the Feast of Firstfruits. Now, why would that have taken place on that day?

[ 11 : 29 ] Well, listen to what the Apostle Paul has to say in his first letter to the Corinthians. And I'm going to read from chapter 15 and from verse 20. And Paul is speaking about the resurrection of Jesus.

And listen to what he says. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn. Christ, the firstfruits. Then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

So here, the Apostle Paul presents the resurrected Jesus as a kind of harvest of life. The firstfruit of a spiritual harvest of life, of resurrection.

But as the firstfruit, he is the precursor of a greater harvest of life, of spiritual life, of eternal life. And so, on the day of Pentecost, coinciding with the Feast of Weeks, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit.

[ 12 : 36 ] And note that the fifty days are accounted for at the very beginning of this book of Acts. In Acts chapter 1 and in verse 3, we're told how, I won't read the verses, but we're told how Jesus, following his resurrection, appeared to his disciples for forty days.

You're familiar with that. And then, what does it say? As he was about to ascend to heaven, he says, In a few days hence, I will send the Spirit. And so, you can see the fifty days coming together.

And when the day came, the appointed day, the day of Pentecost, so Jesus sent his Holy Spirit to indwell and empower his disciples.

And so, on this day, in terms of how that connects with the Jewish festival, we see how the festival of weeks, the Jewish festival, which had as its purpose to give thanks for the ingathering of the full harvest, the festival of firstfruits, was to give thanks for the beginning of the harvest.

But fifty days later, the harvest has been gathered in, and so you have the festival of weeks, where there is thanksgiving given for the full harvest. And this is the day on which Pentecost occurs, when the Holy Spirit is sent to indwell his people.

[ 14 : 00 ] And so, it's clear, I think, the meaning of what is going on. Pentecost is the beginning of the ingathering of the full harvest, of which Jesus was the first fruit.

So, with these facts, I suppose, in mind, let's just remind ourselves of the question of the crowd, and our question, what does this mean? Well, it means that on the day on which these events take place, the day of Pentecost, to give it the name that we're familiar with, on the day on which these events take place, we have revealed one aspect of the meaning of the day, namely that on this day, God is gathering in a spiritual harvest.

So, we have the word harvest, and focus on that for the moment, as we move on to the second piece of evidence, which is the meaning of the signs that are recorded here in Acts chapter 2.

Well, there are two signs identified by Luke in the first couple of verses of the chapter. First of all, the blowing of a violent wind, or, to be accurate, we have to say, a sound like the blowing of a violent wind.

So, it's clear that Luke is saying it wasn't actually a violent wind, but the sound of something like a violent blowing wind. Equally, with regard to the second sign, the tongues of fire.

[ 15 : 26 ] Luke is careful in his language, and he says they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. So, these two very clear signs, the violent blowing wind and the tongues of fire.

Now, what do these signs mean? Well, both signs are symbols. Wind and fire represent God. In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God is identified by the Hebrew word ruach, meaning wind or breath.

We see that at the very beginning of the Bible. In Genesis chapter 1, the Spirit of God is spoken of. The ruach of God. Jesus, steeped in the Old Testament Scriptures, employs this same symbol to identify the Spirit of God in His conversation with Nicodemus.

You remember the occasion recorded by John in His gospel. In chapter 3 and verse 8, we'll just read the relevant verse within the account. This is Jesus speaking.

The wind blows. Whatever it pleases, you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. As for fire, well, fire often served to represent God's light-giving and purifying presence.

[ 16 : 44 ] We can think of the pillar of fire by night that accompanied the Israelites during the Exodus. Or how at the dedication of Solomon's temple, recorded in 2 Chronicles 7, we're told that fire fell from heaven and the glory of God filled the temple.

So these signs, the violent blowing wind and the tongues of fire, they not only represent something God is doing, but they represent God Himself.

Now, God is coming down from heaven in the person of the Holy Spirit. And then what happens? Well, what are we told by Luke?

Well, Luke tells us that all of them, that is all the disciples, were filled with the Holy Spirit. They were filled with God. The wind or breath of God took up residence in their lives.

And the fire of God entered into their very beings to bring life and light and purity. Now, what has this got to do with the harvest that the day speaks of that we identified just a moment ago?

[ 17 : 52 ] Well, it has to do with it in this way, that God is equipping and enabling the harvesters. You see, if there's a harvest to be brought in, you need harvesters to bring in the harvest.

And these signs speak of how, or describe how, God is equipping the harvesters, His own people. And He is equipping them by His own enabling presence amongst them and within them.

It's striking how Luke uses language so carefully. He speaks of how all the disciples were gathered together. And so, the picture there is of the Spirit amongst His people.

But then He very carefully records for us how the tongues of fire rested each on a believer. And so, you have this wonderful combination of the Spirit amongst His people, but the Spirit within each of His people.

Enabling, equipping, empowering the harvesters who are to bring in the harvest. And this language of enabling or equipping is language that Luke uses in his account where he relates what happens.

[ 19 : 05 ] There in verse 4, all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them, as the Spirit equipped them. Remember the question, what does this mean?

Well, the signs tell us that it means that God's people are being indwelt by God in order that they may be equipped and enabled and empowered to gather in the promised harvest of which Jesus is the first fruit.

So, we have a harvest and now we have harvesters. But there's a third piece of evidence and it's the meaning of the words that are spoken. The disciples, or let's call them the harvesters, were, we're told, enabled to do what?

Well, they were enabled to speak, to speak words. And there's two things that we can say about the words that they spoke. First of all, we can note the languages in which the words were spoken.

And often our attention is particularly drawn to this aspect because it was miraculous. And it is, of course, significant. The disciples are said by Luke to speak in other tongues.

[ 20 : 18 ] He uses that expression in verse 4. And the following couple of verses make clear that these other tongues were the native languages of the pilgrims gathered from across the known world there in Jerusalem for the festival that was taking place.

The Holy Spirit granted the disciples the supernatural ability to speak in languages that they did not know and that they had never learned. Why?

Why did He do that? Well, I think the meaning is clear enough. By granting this gift, God is vividly confirming, not announcing, but confirming that the time has come for the Gentiles to be brought in to the family of God, men and women from every tribe and nation and language.

And this gift of languages, as we maybe take a step back, also points to the pivotal place occupied by Pentecost in the big story of redemption and God's purposes for the nation.

You remember way back in Genesis at Babel when man in his pride and arrogance sought to build this edifice that would reach the heavens. And man's rebellion against God provoked God's just judgment.

[ 21 : 37 ] And God's just judgment found expression in what is described as the confusion of tongues and the consequent division and hostility between the nations of the world.

And at Pentecost, we witness a deliberate and dramatic reversal of the curse of Babel. But not only is it pivotal as we look back to the history of God's people, but also as we look forward.

Because at Pentecost, we find a foretaste of heaven. As heaven is gloriously described in John's vision in Revelation chapter 7 and verses 9 and 10.

And we would do well just to read those two verses. And what do we read there? After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

They were wearing white robes and they were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

[ 22 : 45 ] You see, without Pentecost, there could be no such heavenly choir as John sees in his vision. So when we think of the words that were spoken, the meaning of the words, we focus on, as we just have, the fact that they were spoken in other languages.

But perhaps more importantly, the truths that the words declared. In the context of this picture of a harvest that we're utilizing, not inventing, but drawing from what we have before us.

But in the context of the picture of a harvest, what purpose do the words serve? Well, the words are kind of like the sickle or the combine harvester if we want to bring it to our day.

They are the tool employed to gather in the harvest. What do the harvesters have that allows them to bring in the harvest?

Well, they have words. They have words from God. They have words about Jesus. They have, in the language of Luke, words that declare the wonders of God.

[ 23 : 53 ] Notice there in verse 11, how the crowd, as they witness what is going on, they testify of the disciples declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues.

What were they speaking about? Well, they were speaking about Messiah Jesus. They were speaking about his coming. They were speaking about his death. They were speaking about his resurrection. The wonders of God. This is the tool that the harvesters have to bring in the harvest.

Words from God to announce, to declare, good news, to share. And that is the mean that God employs to draw in his harvest.

And as the people hear these words, what happens? Well, the prophet Joel, extensively referenced by Peter in the sermon that follows, anticipates the impact of these words on those who would hear them when he declared, and everyone who calls in the name of the Lord will be saved.

What does this mean? Well, I hope we've discovered in these three pieces of evidence the meaning of the day, the day of Pentecost, the meaning of the signs, the meaning of the words.

[ 25 : 12 ] I hope together they draw a picture for us or provide an explanation for us or an answer for us to the question, what does this mean?

I think there's another question that we must also address more briefly, and that's simply to take that question we've already addressed but to twist it somewhat or tweak it somewhat.

And the question is this, what does this mean for us today? You see, when we think about Pentecost, we need to maintain a proper balance between recognizing Pentecost as a unique and unrepeatable redemptive event, as unrepeatable as the death or resurrection of Jesus.

Nobody would ever contemplate Jesus dying again. Nobody would ever contemplate Jesus resurrecting again. It's inconceivable. Well, equally, there will be no new Pentecost.

There won't be another Pentecost. It is an unrepeatable redemptive event in history. And on that, we need to be clear. But also, Pentecost has to be seen as the inauguration of what we might call a Pentecostal age or the age of the Spirit, the last days, to use the language of the New Testament.

[ 26 : 36 ] In his gospel, in Luke's gospel, in chapter 24, Luke records the promise of Jesus to send his Spirit. and he records it in this language.

He speaks of how Jesus promised his disciples that he would clothe his disciples with power from on high. With power from on high. And the word translated power there is the Greek word *dunamis*.

And preachers over the years have been quick to tellingly highlight that the English word dynamite is derived from this Greek word *dunamis*. Of course, that's true.

But in the context of Pentecost, there's another English word derived from *dunamis* that is perhaps even more telling. The word dynamo. A dynamo is a continual source of power for a continuing mission.

And so, though Pentecost is an unrepeatable event, it inaugurates a continuing age where we stand in permanent need of the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the mission that God has given us.

[ 27 : 45 ] I guess we can see how both words, dynamite and dynamo, capture the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and his continuing and powerful enabling of his people and mission.

Pentecost, if you wish, was dynamite. But the Holy Spirit is our continuing dynamo, even in the absence is often of great explosive drama.

Of course, God is not tied. His hands are not tied. And if he chooses to grant us explosive drama, bring it on. That's in his prerogative. The Holy Spirit came down and clothed and filled and enabled the disciples in the day of Pentecost.

But the same Holy Spirit as our living dynamo continues to clothe and fill and enable his people. If we maybe just as we close and draw the threads together, we think of the three elements of the harvest that we have identified that are represented or present at Pentecost.

The harvest is still being gathered in. Three thousand men and women were gathered in on this day. But the harvest continues to be gathered in. God still has many people in this city to gather in.

[ 28 : 59 ] Perhaps even today in Aberdeen, perhaps amongst us here in Bonacord, God will gently gather in one or two or more into his family, into his kingdom as men and women are enabled to put their trust in Jesus as their Savior.

And the harvesters are still being equipped. And that would be me and you as believers and as a congregation we are in as much need of being clothed with power by the Holy Spirit in order to fulfill God's mission as those 120 disciples huddled in the upper room 2,000 years ago.

And there is here, we acknowledge, a dynamic spiritual tension that we have no need to try and resolve. We are indwelt by the Spirit of God.

But we need to be continuously filled by that same Spirit. Remember the words of Paul to the believers in Ephesus, be filled with the Spirit. Be continuously filled with the Spirit of God.

And so we pray, come Holy Spirit and clothe us in Pentecostal power. The harvest, the harvesters, the tool employed to bring in the harvest is still today the spoken word.

[ 30 : 19 ] You need to speak. We need to speak. We need to speak to the nations. nations. And God in His gracious providence has brought the nations to our doorstep.

You need to declare the wonders of God to those around you. And so I leave you with this challenge. Will you do that this week? Imagine if the disciples on this day of Pentecost, imagine if they had been filled with the Spirit of God and had said nothing.

But it's inconceivable. And we wouldn't be gathered here this morning if they had remained silent. Well, we are indwelt and equipped and enabled and empowered by the same Spirit of God.

We have the same words to speak, the same wonders to declare, the same good news to share. So go, speak, and do not be silent. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You for the Bible. We thank You for what it records for us today. concerning this amazing day in the history of Your dealings with Your people when the Holy Spirit was poured out from heaven to indwell the church, to indwell believers, to enable, to equip, to empower for service.

[ 31 : 41 ] We thank You for the words that they spoke, words declaring the wonders of God. We pray that we too, with the disciples on that day, we know what it is to be filled with Your Spirit.

We know what it is to be equipped and enabled and empowered to speak these same words concerning this same Jesus of who He is and what He has done and how He invites all to rest in Him, all who are weedy, heavy laden, to find rest and forgiveness and eternal life and purpose and peace and joy in Him and in Him alone.

And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.