

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:3).

The Church Alive – An Awakening (Part 2) Acts 2:14-21

14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: “Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. 15 For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; 16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 17 ‘AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,’ God says, ‘THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; 18 EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT And they shall prophesy. 19 ‘AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW, BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE. 20 ‘THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME. 21 ‘AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.’

We find ourselves in Acts 2 and looking at the first and most extraordinary address to the newly, Spirit-initiated church. Whatever the timeframes from Acts 2:1 up to Acts 2:14, the scene has been, in the words of Luke in verses 6 and 7, that of bewilderment, amazement and astonishment. Pockets of people scattered around Jerusalem hearing in their own native languages of the mighty deeds of God as the Spirit of God was giving those 120 disciples utterance. Anyone walking the streets of Jerusalem that day would not be able to make heads of tails of the events taking place.

So seemingly chaotic, so spontaneous and widespread was the effects of this event, so beyond any “reasonable” human explanation, some of the men concluded and charged the 120 disciples with being drunk (2:12) as if this would adequately explain the event that was taking place.

However, as we noted last week, Peter, assessing the situation from a biblical point of view, **“taking his stand”** with and on behalf of the other apostles and of the 120, is ready to give an answer, to make a defense, to give an explanation of what was taking place in Jerusalem that day. Truly, a spiritual awakening was taking place and in a very short time, literally thousands of people would come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Last week we took some time to look at an overview of Peter’s sermon, noting that from the very beginning of the church, solid, biblical preaching and teaching was the very core of her being. We saw that Biblical preaching **encourages** a proper Christian worldview, that it sets out to **explain** the Word of God and that it also strives to **elicit** a response.

Now we will look at this sermon in three parts; the first part today, covering **Acts 2:14-21** which gives an **explanation** of the what God was doing in this moment of time for and against the people of Israel as they had largely rejected Jesus Christ as Messiah. Next week we will look at **Acts 2:22-36** where we have Peter’s **exposition** to his Jewish audience revealing who Jesus is as he informs them of what a horrific thing they did by having Him crucified six weeks earlier. This is followed in **Acts 2:37-41** with the **exhortation** of Peter. For when these Jews realized what they had done, they asked Peter, **“What should we do?”** and Peter exhorts them to repent. So

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this morning, let us look at the **explanation** of what God is doing in and through these remarkable events of Pentecost.

I. The Explanation (2:14-21)

In response to the accusation that all of what was happening in verses 2:5-13 could be explained by the drunkenness of the disciples, Peter immediately takes his stand and beginning with **verse 14**, explains that they were not drunk and proceeded to show to them both what was happening and why it was happening.

A. The Plea (2:14-15)

14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. 15 For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; 16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:

Peter's speech begins as a defense of the 120 disciples. If you stand before a judge having been charge with a crime, he will ask you, "How do you plead?" And, assuming you did nothing wrong, you would say, "I plead not guilty." Peter is pleading here, "not guilty." Peter, the bold, sometimes rash man of action that he was could not help but say something. Peter takes a stand to correct the absurdity of the accusation that these 120 disciples were drunk.

As you consider Peter's words, keep in mind where he and the other 119 disciples are at this moment. They are at the temple mount, just outside the temple itself. They have been preaching to the very same people who had just a few weeks earlier had yelled of Christ, **"Crucify Him!"** It would be safe to assume that the religious leaders, the Scribes and the Pharisees were there taking this all in. It might even be that one Pharisee in particular, the rising theological and intellectual star of the group was there, a man named Saul, who himself would be radically transformed in the years to come. Can you image addressing this group of people. Can you imagine what it would be like address this highly educated and theological hostile group of people. Yet Peter takes his stand and preaches fearlessly. How could he do this? I say to you because he knew a truth that should cause us to be equally fearless. Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. He was a witness, and by this time more than 500 people, all at once, had seen the risen Savior as well. All that had been taking place was promised and predicted by that risen Savior and nothing was going to deter Peter from proclaiming this point. What was being seen in Jerusalem could not be explained by drunkenness but rather by delight in a risen Savior.

In **verse 15** Peter reminds his audience that it is only the third hour, 9:00 AM. According to Josephus, the Jewish historian who lived around this same time, tells us that the first meal of the day was not typically eaten until the fourth hour, about 10 AM, but some might begin to eat a little earlier. However on the Sabbath, which many believe this day to be, a larger meal, the main meal of the day, was served at the sixth hour, or noon. Up until this main meal, the Jews would be busy making the morning sacrifices at the temple and therefore would never drink wine until that main meal of the day. This custom was so common, so ingrained into the Jewish mindset that Peter could confidently assert that drunkenness was not the proper explanation for the events experienced. For even the most intemperate, if they bothered themselves to be at the temple, would not be accustomed to drinking before this hour. And therefore, we have Peter', saying in

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effect, "Are you kidding? Drunk? At this hour? We have not even had breakfast yet, and lunch, that main meal does not being for another three hours!"

I wonder sometimes whether or not our unbelieving families and friends are aware enough of our customs that similar types of accusations can be regarded as nonsense in light of our constant practice. I know that I have had family that regards Christians as intellectually weak, not very well read and often largely ignorant of the very Book they claim to know and love. Beloved, of those three charges, may it never be said of us that we are ignorant of the Book, for according to Psalm 19:7, ***"The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple."*** Oh to be a simple man that has been made wise by the Word of God. Peter, the burly, backwoods fisherman of Galilee, because of his constant exposure to the Word of God and the preaching of Jesus, proved that he is not metal incompetent, that he can assess the culture around him and can apply the Word of God to the situation. And there then is an application for us; that we would be a people culturally perceptive, able to see the what's and why's of our culture's thinking; that we would be Biblically grounded, knowing, as best we can, the Word of God; and then that we would be intentionally practical, applying and speaking the meaning of God's word to others. This was Peter's plea.

B. The Prophecy (2:16-20)

After dealing with the accusation of drunkenness, Peter begins his explanation of what is taking place. And notice that he appeals to what? To the Word of God. He says in verse 16, *"But this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel."* To what does ***"this"*** refer? This ***"this"*** refers to the present context and can only refer to one thing, the fact that some 120 men and women are speaking the mighty deeds of God and of Jesus in unlearned languages. And ***"this"*** prophesying, this proclamation of the working of God, Peter says, is what the prophet Joel wrote about in **Joel 2:28-32**.

So, we need to take a look at **Joel's** prophecy if we are to grasp the meaning of all this. So please turn to the Old Testament book of Joel. The prophecy of Joel is contained in just three chapters. The message of Joel is largely concerning God's judgment on the nation of Israel for having rejected Him as their King and for having turned to other kings and other sources for protection and provision. God is judging Israel for turning from His moral, civil, and ceremonial laws in order to worship idols.

The prophecy of Joel may be divided into two parts. The first part of Joel speaks of God's present judgment on Israel, around 825 BC as well as God's future judgment during the Great Tribulation on both Israel and the nations. The second part of Joel begins in **2:19** and speaks of God's future deliverance and blessing of the nation of Israel. This future deliverance assumes a future repentance on Israel's part following her judgment; a time that will also bring a great restoration of Israel's material, spiritual, and national well-being; a time we know to be the future 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth.

Let me walk you through Joel's prophecy so we can get a feel for it as we seek to understand Peter's use of it in Acts 2. As you read the opening verses of Joel, we find that God's judgment on Israel is severe. This judgment most recently revealed itself in a catastrophic crisis in the land, a plague of devastating locust had ravaged Israel and left virtually no vines or crops of grain. Read with me Joel 1:4 - ***What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten; And what the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten; And what the***

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creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten. Four different species of locust consumed the land. Now, look at Joel 2:3: ***"A fire consumes before them and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the garden of Eden before them but a desolate wilderness behind them, and nothing at all escapes them."*** The land is stripped bare.

Back in Joel 1:5, the drunkards are called to weep because all the wine is cut off since the vines have been eaten. The point of the prophecy here is to show the people that this plague was no accident but rather it was the judgment of God on Israel for having turned their backs on their covenant God. In this way the locusts are seen as God's army marching on Israel. Look at Joel 2:11 where we read, ***2:11 reads, "The Lord utters His voice before His army; surely His camp is very great, For strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome, And who can endure it?"***

Israel was not an industrial nation like ours. They were a rural, agricultural economy and so the destruction by locusts was an extremely serious thing. This was their livelihood, their only means of survival, and it was gone. Now when bad things happen to us, we like someone to come along and tell us, "It will be okay! We will get through this! Some good will come of this." That is not Joel's approach for he predicts that rather than things getting better they will actually get worse as the locust are only a foretaste of a greater final judgment to come. And so, Joel cries out for repentance in Joel 2:12-14 –

12 "Yet even now," declares the Lord, "Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; 13 and rend your heart and not your garments." Now return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil. 14 Who knows whether He will not turn and relent and leave a blessing behind Him, even a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God?

Israel has never repented as a nation, but according to the Word of God, they will do so, some time during the Great Tribulation. And when Israel repents, there is a promised blessing, spoken of even by Joel, that will come, a time we know as the Millennial Kingdom of Christ, His 1,000 year reign on earth. We see this time of blessing unfold beginning in Joel 2:18-19:

18 Then the LORD will be zealous for His land and will have pity on His people. 19 The LORD will answer and say to His people, "Behold, I am going to send you grain, new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied in full with them; and I will never again make you a reproach among the nations."

To be sure, Israel is still regarded to most as a reproach among the nations and so we wait with Israel for her time of repentance and blessing. Then, in Joel 2:28-32, the very passage Peter will quote from, we read of the signs that mark the beginning of this time that leads up to Israel's repentance and God's blessing. We must keep in mind that Joel is not prophesying here about the birth of the church or even about what is to take place during the church age. Rather, what we see in Joel 2:28-32 is a prophecy pointing to a time still future, that will ultimately and finally unfold during the Great Tribulation to come. But, for now we need to answer the question, what does this passage have to do with Acts 2? Let me read the Joel text:

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:3).

28 "It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29 Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. 30 I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire and columns of smoke. 31 The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. 32 And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls."

I believe the point Peter is making in quoting Joel 2:28-32 is this, that the men of Israel should have recognized that what they were seeing was a work of the Spirit of God, not the result of drunkenness. They were attributing the working of God to the wretchedness of man. And as the prophet Isaiah said in Isaiah 5:20, **"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!"** What Peter is doing is revealing the hardness of heart on the part of most in Israel concerning God and His Messiah, Jesus Christ. Peter was not quoting Joel to say that everything that Joel said was going to happen, had just happened in 2:1-13 with the 120 disciples, because it obviously did not. When you take all of the signs and wonders of Joel's prophecy, none except one had just taken place in Acts 2:1-13. The truth is not one of the other signs that Joel states would happen can be shown to have happened either in the book of Acts or up to this point in time, which means that this is yet to come.

Also, it should be noted that the speaking in tongues was not a part of Joel's prophecy either. Rather, what we see in Joel is a different gift of the Spirit, the gift of prophecy. The gift of prophecy in the New Testament speaks largely of *the ability to publicly proclaim and apply the Word of God*. We tend to think of "prophecy" as simply having the ability to foretell the future. While that is sometimes an aspect of it, the most common understanding of the gift of prophecy is not of "fore"-telling, but rather "forth" telling of the truth about and from God. And what do we see as having taken place back in Acts 2:11? We find the disciples **"speaking of the mighty deeds of God."** They were prophesying, as Peter refers to it, twice, in verses 17 and 18. Look again closely with me at **verse 17**. Peter said: **'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says, 'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS;**

What was so extraordinary about what was happening in verses 1-3 was twofold. First, prophecy – this "forth"-telling of God's truth was taking place and was being done in foreign languages rather than in the Aramaic or Hebrew which was what one would have been expected. Second, the women were also involved in this event. Let us remember that generally in Israel's history, women did not prophesy as a matter of practice, particularly on the Temple Mount. This was a monumental turn of events to see many women boldly proclaiming and praising God aloud in that location.

I would also like to give you some insight into the meaning of the first words of Acts 2:17, namely, **"And it shall be in the last days."** The phrase **"last days"** is a common Old Testament expression that refers to the time when the Messiah would come and set up His kingdom. In Jewish thought, Messiah would simply come, establish His kingdom and judge the

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nations. The Jews did not see two comings of Messiah, separated by a long intervening period known as the church age, but just one coming. In Isaiah 53 we see the Messiah coming as the Suffering Servant;

4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. 6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

Yet in Isaiah 9:6-7 we read that the Messiah was to come in the glory of a King to set up His kingdom.

6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. 7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.

For some seven hundred years, the Jews looked forward to their coming King, but either ignored or simply could not fathom the possibility that their Messiah would have to suffer first. It is this coming of Jesus that begins the “last days.” The author of Hebrews reminds us in 1:1-2a, **“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”**

And so, we see that the “**last days**” began with the first coming of Jesus and have lasted nearly two thousand years. During this time, God has graciously called Gentiles, people like you and me, to salvation and has been punishing Israel for her unbelief. These “**last days**” will find their final fulfillment with the coming of the millennial kingdom. And so, when answering the question as to why Peter used this portion of Joel’s prophecy, I say to you that Peter wanted the people so known that what they had just witnessed was a sample of the power that the Spirit of God will release just before and during the kingdom. For the only part of Joel’s prophecy that is in effect, is the gift of prophecy, of boldly proclaiming and speaking of the mighty deeds of God. The rest of the prophecy is yet to come, at the end of the “**last days**.” At current, I would say to you that we live somewhere in the middle, or hopefully near the end of the “**last days**.”

There is another expression I would have you take note of in verse 20, “**The day of the Lord.**” This phrase has both a general and specific meaning. Generally, whenever God acts in judgment, this is said to be “**the Day of the LORD.**” And in context, the people of Israel are about to experience a taste of God’s judgment because they rejected their Messiah. In effect, God delayed establishing His Kingdom (something He already knew He would do) and put Israel on hold for two thousand years. And so, rather than working through Israel to accomplish His purposes, God has, at this time, chosen to work through His church, through people like you and

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me, who have been granted the Spirit of God and are called to faithfully proclaim the mighty deeds of God in sending His Son Jesus to be both Savior and Lord.

But specifically in this passage, the ultimate **Day of the Lord** is in view and refers to that period of time known as the Great Tribulation, the time of God's judging both Israel and the nations for unbelief; and which precedes the second coming of Christ and the establishing of His Millennial Kingdom on earth. This is the prophecy and it reminds us that God deals seriously with unbelief. For Israel lost her privileged position as the instrument of God's communicating His truth through as a result of her unbelief. But one day God will work through Israel again.

C. The Promise (2:21)

This brings us to the final aspect of Peter's use of Joel's prophecy – the promise. Can you image being there, listening to Peter's sermon? You begin to understand that what was happening was promised in Scripture; you begin to realize what your people had done to God, God's Son and to God's Word. You begin to wonder how you could have missed all this and more to the point, how can you avoid the coming judgment of the Great Tribulation as revealed in this text? And yet already in Peter's sermon, because Peter is in tune with his culture; that is he knows how people think; because he is grounded in the Word of God, and because he is seeking a response from these people, Peter provides hope. Quoting from the Word of God, he says in verse 21, ***"And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."***

What a blessing, that not only will those who call upon the name of the Lord, who look to the Lord and Him alone for salvation be forgiven for their rebellion and ignoring of God, but they will experience the full blessing of salvation; a salvation that is both now but ultimate and full in the future. In Jewish thinking, the most important Being, next to Yahweh, was their coming Messiah. And what the rest of the sermon and account in Acts 2 will reveal is that these Jews were emotionally devastated as they realized that they had just put their Messiah to death.

But the promise is hope – hope in the grace, in the mercy and in the benevolence of God; who pardons sinners, those, who in the words of Colossians 1:21-22, before coming to Christ, were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet now have been reconciled to God by the work of Jesus on the cross, in order to present us before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.

For you see, like those who heard this first sermon of Peter, we are no different. Each one of us has gone astray, we are lost sheep, and we need to know that it is our own fault, we sin, we rebel, and we ignore God. And in the words of Ephesians 2:4-7

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

This is the Jesus Peter preached. The Jesus who is the surpassing riches of God's grace. Is this the Jesus you know? Or have you been ignoring Him, seeking to explain away the divine working of God as nothing exciting, nothing extraordinary, nothing worthy of your praise and your life's devotion, thinking that it is just the vain imaginations of some religious fanatics, some hyper-

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spiritual zealots, some church cheerleaders; or do you stand in awe and wonder that you know Jesus; and even better yet, that Jesus knows you!

Let us be a people with the mindset of Peter; a people who are culturally perceptive; biblically grounded and intentionally purposeful in proclaiming the life, death, resurrection and life of Jesus.

Soli Deo Gloria

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