

May 17th, 2020

Pentecost Part 3 In The Last Days; The Promise Is For You!

Last week we looked at Acts 2:4-13, under the heading, “The wonder of God is not in the signs, it's in the message”. Acts 2:4 “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit”. I explained that being filled with The Holy Spirit is not an emotion or an experience. And it happens only once: that is on the day that we are saved, as God's Spirit enters into our heart and dwells within us.

I also said that on the day of Pentecost God overturned His judgement upon man's language, a judgement which happened at the tower of Babel in Genesis chapter 11. So this inauguration of Christ's New Testament Church symbolically came with this repealing of God's judgement upon Babel through the pouring out of His Spirit and the preaching of the gospel. This in effect turned the whole world upside down, or better put, right side up, as God turned the wisdom of the world on its head. Acts 2:6 “The people gathered together”; Acts 2:7 “they were utterly amazed”; Acts 2:8 “then how is it”; Acts 2:12 “amazed and perplexed”. In the words of the centurion overseeing Jesus' crucifixion: “surely this man was the Son of God”. Acts 2:5 “God fearing Jews from every nation under heaven” and Acts 2:11 “Both Jews and converts to Judaism” all heard in their own language “the wonders of God.”

At the time of Jesus' death the curtain between the holy place and the holy of holies in the temple was torn from top to bottom, indicating the opening of the way for men to come to God, directly through Jesus' own blood, not through a priest or sacrifice. Likewise, His gospel is for all men, both Jew and non-Jew. There are no longer any distinctions between men, “for all are one in Christ”.

The final point I made was that in Acts 2:13 it recounts that “Some however made fun of them and said, “they have had too much wine.” So yet again as I have said many times, we see the double edged sword of Jesus. It cuts both ways: to heaven yet also to hell. But most importantly, the wonder of God was not in those signs. It was in Christ's gospel message!

So now we continue in today's text, Acts 2:14-21. In Acts 1:14 and following Peter takes the lead. “Then Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd.” The first thing we need to understand and acknowledge here is that there was indeed a crowd. It was an exceptionally large crowd because verse 41 tells us that “3000 were added to their number that day.” No doubt not everyone who were present that day responded in faith, so perhaps there were four or 5000 people there, we don't know. Friends, perhaps my reason for making a point of this may seem silly. It is just that whenever we see one of those ‘religious’ movies (for want of a better description) supposedly recounting the events of the Bible, they generally have a dozen or two people following Jesus or the apostles. And it really annoys me. The Lord Jesus and his apostles shook the whole world, and His gospel message continues to do so. Yet when they seek to recount those events they scale down the enormity of those things. It's a pet hate of mine.

To grasp the enormity of what is taking place before us here, we need to set the scene correctly. That “violent wind”, has shaken the house where they were staying from within. Those “tongues of fire” have lighted upon the apostles, signifying that not only had the Holy Spirit come, but that He had also entered into them with power, and not only for mercy but also for judgement! Those signs having disappeared, the apostles have gone outside and began to preach “the wonders of God” in the gospel. Anyone who heard

them, from any place of the then-known world, was cut to the heart by the truth and power of what was preached as the Spirit of God stirred them and spoke to them in their own native language. Yes the Holy Spirit was striking the hearts of people for, and with the Kingdom of Jesus!

Now there were thousands of people gathered in this place hearing this tumultuous stirring of the Spirit of God. Peter finally feels the need to stand up (having been led by God's Spirit) and bring this occasion to order. Acts 2:14: "Fellow Jews, and all of you who live in Jerusalem". (Remember verse 5 "Jews from every nation under heaven" and verse 11 "Jews and converts to Judaism"). Again, there were people from everywhere from the then-known world who had come celebrating the seven weeks of the feasting of the harvest, and he addresses them as one. This is very important for us to notice because at that time there were many divisions in Jewish society. There were Levites and priests; the Pharisees and the Sadducees; divisions of the men from the women; the rich from the poor; the slave from the free, and the Jew from the non-Jew.

But Peter here addresses the crowd as one. He included himself among them by calling them his "fellow Jews, and all who live in Jerusalem." Clearly the point he is making is that everything which he is about to say is for *all* people, and that no-one is excluded from Christ's message of redemption.

Acts 2:14 "listen carefully to what I say." Peter pointing out that what he was about to say to them is imperative for their eternal souls. This demands from us more than just a passing thought. He as much as says 'what I'm about to explain to you is what has been promised and what was prophesied about over 600 years ago, through God's messenger the Prophet Joel'.

"These men are not drunk; it's only 9 in the morning." Then he goes on to make his "God breathed" application of those words which the prophet Joel spoke on behalf of God in Joel 2:28-32. Please take note of how it begins: verse 17 "in the last days". Yet why is this significant? Simply for this reason: there is so much talk throughout modern day Christendom about the coming of the "last days", as though we should be looking for a future time when certain things are going to take place which will herald in the "last days", or the end of the world as we know it.

But the problem with such thinking is that it leaves no room for Jesus to return now. It allows us to think that we don't need to have our lives in order now because He is coming at some time in the future.

And the other problem is these words which we have before us. They have been applied by one of Jesus' own inner circle of the apostles to that particular moment in the history of God's people! Peter takes the words of the Prophet Joel and declares that *this* is the day which Joel spoke of, and it is fulfilled in the hearing of those gathered. From this day on, we are living in the "last days." Yes it is *this* day from whence the end begins!

But what about the "great tribulation" of Revelation 7, some may ask? Well I agree with Les Stewart's explanation of that passage. "The great tribulation" is life itself, when it is lived for Jesus in these perishing bodies of flesh and yet have souls which have been born of the Spirit, and we seek to live our lives for Jesus in this sin sick world! Friends, throughout the history of God's church there have been wretched and unbridled periods of tremendous persecution and attack. And I have no doubt that this will continue until Jesus takes us home. That's the message of the book of Revelation. It's cyclical in its makeup. Like in the book of Daniel, kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall, but we see in Revelation 7:13-14 that Jesus reigns now.

Yes, we are still, since the day of Pentecost, in those "last days". We are living in The Day of the Lord. That is our epoch, or our dispensation of time. If you disagree with me that's fine. Yet I ask you to listen to

Peter's application of the Prophet Joel's words. Acts 2:16-18 "No, this was what was spoken by the Prophet Joel: in the last days, God says 'I will pour out my spirit on all people, even on my servants, both men and women; I will pour out my spirit in those days.'" Friends, it is beyond question that, Peter, inspired by God's Spirit, applies Joel's prophecy to have been fulfilled at that moment on the day of Pentecost. God's Holy Spirit was poured out on all kinds of people as He had never been before. Prior to this moment The Holy Spirit had touched very few, and generally, only for a period of time and for a specific purpose. But this was a new day. The day of our Lords New Testament church.

But the problem which we face with this prophecy is in Acts 2:19-20: "I will show wonders in the heavens above and on the earth below. Blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord." Now brothers and sisters, if we are in need of a literal interpretation of these things, we could refer to Luke 23:44-45 literally. It describes the time at Jesus death when darkness came over the whole land for three hours, "for the sun stopped shining". Matthew 27:51-53 says "the earth shook, the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs and after Jesus resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people."

So these signs and wonders should suffice if we are in need of a literal explanation of these things, and I don't have a problem with this. But I tend to throw my lot in with the old Bible commentator John Calvin. He explains that what God was doing through the Prophet Joel was speaking comparatively and also metaphorically. The comparison is that such would be the unparalleled blessing which would fall upon those who came to God through Jesus at the pouring out of His Spirit, compared to the upheaval of God's wrath in the created order of things which remained for those who refused to come! So His common mercies to mankind due to their unceasing wickedness and refusal to repent and submit to Him would slowly be withdrawn as evil abounds.

We see the continuing results of those things today: the metaphor of the sun no longer bringing its warmth and energy to support life, and likewise, that of the moon ceasing to light the sky by night so that people are left in darkness. Yes when darkness reigns, evil abounds. *That* I believe is the meaning here. As this series has revealed, the message is always both mercy and wrath!

Yet the final line of this applied word of God from Joel through Peter holds the blessing and the key. It speaks in the midst of the uncertainty, evil and darkness of the days in which both the believers then, and we also today in increasing measure live. Yes verse 21 holds the key: "and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

What is that word? "Everyone ". What will they be? "Saved". But what must they do? "Call on the name of the Lord." What did the thief on the cross do? He called on the name of the Lord: "Jesus remember me when you come into your Kingdom", he cried out.

Beloved, no one is excluded from Jesus' message. Acts 2:39 "The promise is for you and your children and all who are far off". Friends, can you see? That is who *we* all were. We were all "far off"; we were not on some spiritual pilgrimage seeking after God. He reached into the wilderness and rebellion of our lives in this world, and took hold of us in His mercy through Jesus, and drew us to Himself.

And brothers and sisters, we are "saved" because there is something to be "saved" from! God's judgement, God's wrath, and God's hell are all realities, they are not fairy stories. Jesus is called our Saviour because we needed to be saved. We were in peril; we were in danger of the fires of hell. There was nothing that we could do to be saved. No deeds, no merits, no right of birth. Ephesians 2:8 "For it is by

grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Yes we are called the Saved Of God because there is indeed something to be saved from. The fires and torments of hell burn as an everlasting furnace, and they do burn, for eternity. And there is but one way to escape. Acts 2:21 “And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

What comfort we can lay hold of brothers and sisters, in the last hours of the night, or the early hours of the morning, when we lie awake and are alone in the darkness with our thoughts, unable to get back to sleep. Yet we know that we are never alone because Jesus is near. He never leaves us and praise God He has put His Spirit within us!

As we saw last week from Ecclesiastes 3:11 “He has set eternity in our hearts.” And now He has filled that eternal emptiness in our souls with his Holy Spirit! Yes beloved, in these last days “the promise is for you.” The question is; Have you called? And if not, will you “call on the name of the Lord” to be saved?

Let's pray.