

We're beginning a new series this week on Acts. If you've watched some of the shows on Netflix or the commercial channels these days they tend to have a season with 8-12 episodes. Each episode ends on a dramatic note and we're left wondering what is going to happen next. Acts is a bit like this. It's the unfolding story of the early church; it's the ongoing story of what the Holy Spirit did in the lives of the first Christians. As we look at each chapter in the weeks to come we're going to get the next episode. Sometimes we'll be left hanging wondering what will happen next. Luke, the writer, of course wrote one of the gospels to explain to his Greek friend, Theophilus, what exactly happened to Jesus and why he came to earth. Now, Luke tells Theophilus that he is continuing the story of what happened to the first Christians when Jesus ascended into heaven.

In Acts 1:8 Luke records that Jesus told his disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came on them and they would be Jesus' witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. So what we see in Acts is this story. First the disciples are witnesses in Jerusalem as we'll see in the next few weeks, then the good news goes out to Judea and Samaria and then finally we have the record of Paul and Barnabas taking the gospel to "the ends of the earth"- well to the whole of the Roman Empire which seemed like the ends of the earth in those days.

I've chosen to have the text for today from the New Living Translation. I found some of the words in the translation really helpful in bringing out the meaning of the passage, just a little bit different from the NIV. But if you have your NIV you'll be able to follow easily – just a few words and phrases that are a little bit different, but same meaning.

As we read through Acts each week I want you to ask the same questions we've been asking of the Bible all along in this past year – why is this in the Bible? What is God wanting us to know through this section? How does it fit in with the rest of God's story in the Bible?

So let's go to chapter 2. You don't have the first few verses but I'm just going to go over quickly what happened on that day that the Holy Spirit came. The disciples/followers of Jesus didn't ask to be different or to stand out that day. They were just following instructions to wait. As they were filled with the Spirit, there was the noise (v.2) and this is what everyone heard (v.6) and came running and then they start to hear these Galileans speaking in their language. They begin the conversation; they say to the followers of Jesus, "You're drunk." It's not the Christians who are approaching the non-believers. BUT they have an answer. In response to the accusations they have an answer. And so Peter **witnesses** – he witnesses to Jesus and the death and resurrection of Jesus in words that the Jews would have understood.

Peter is speaking to a group of Jews. They knew the OT. So for them they are waiting for the Messiah; they would know the context of the prophets even if they didn't know every single prophecy. For us today these words all sound a bit strange so I want you to imagine that you are a Jew listening to Peter. What would you be thinking? Many of the Jews at this time knew the prophecy in Daniel, one of the Old Testament books that people studied carefully, there was a prophecy there of an exile that would last for 490 years from the Babylonian exile.

Well, the Babylonian exile had taken place...somewhere between 400 and 500 years before depending on how you calculated it. So now there was an expectancy that the time had come, something new was about to happen. There were other prophecies in the Old Testament about terrible things that would happen, but also of a time when things would be reversed, when God would bring them to a new place and do quite new things with them. So when Peter gets up to speak, to answer the question of are they drunk or what's going on, Peter points to the prophecy of Joel and says that the time has arrived, the new things has come.

It's a bit like us today – we're all waiting for the time when we can go visit each other normally, give each other a hug. Fred can't wait to give you all a hug. I had to restrain him last Sunday. We don't know when that day will be, I think it's coming soon, but we're waiting. Now we've only been waiting a few months; can you imagine waiting 500 years!! There is a huge feeling of expectancy!

So, basically, Peter is saying to the crowd what you see is the results of this prophecy of Joel actually happening today – the Spirit is on us; we are speaking in languages that we do not know; “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”.

He begins with the words “in the last days” – this was a general term for the time to come, the time when promises would be fulfilled. The story would arrive at its climax, the time we’ve been waiting for had arrived, and so all sorts of new things would start to happen. This moment of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit was the last days. Today we are still living in the last days. The Holy Spirit is still being given to all who call on the name of Jesus. We wait for the LAST DAY which is coming – when Jesus will return. But before we get to that in v. 20 notice the prophecy mentions “all people” (therefore Gentiles as well); also men and women, young and old, black and white - ALL people.

Remember we said that in the Old Testament the Spirit would just come down on special people like prophets, leaders, kings and only for a specific purpose for a short time. What is happening here? It’s coming down on ALL people - there is no discrimination between slaves and free, male and female, young and old and most relevant for us today, between different coloured people. They are all marked out side by side, as the nucleus of God’s true people.

But notice, who has the Spirit come down upon – not the chief priest, not the learned teachers of the law, not the Roman governor. It has fallen on those who were with Jesus, those who had heard him speak and seen him heal people and stop the storm and then seen him alive after his resurrection. Now they find themselves filled, overwhelmed with the wind of the Spirit and they’re unable to stop speaking about what they have seen and heard.

The accompanying signs would be prophesying, visions & dreaming and also natural signs. The signs mentioned here in v. 19 and 20 seem pretty horrific. The people listening to Peter though probably wouldn’t have taken that literally. They knew the Biblical prophetic language and these words about signs were the regular way of referring to what we would call “earth-

shattering events”, things that would shake society to its foundations, things like the coronavirus pandemic, the death of George Floyd and the resulting demonstrations and riots, wars between nations – times of instability and great uncertainty. But the prophet Joel doesn’t just warn of times of fear and trembling; he says that something new is going to happen -a time of new creation; and this new creation would start with God’s own people.

Then v.20 – “that great and glorious day of the Lord arrives”. The use of the term, “the Lord” is significant. Remember, you’re a Jew; put your Jewish thinking cap on. There were many references in the Old Testament to “the day of the Lord”. The Jews would use the words “the Lord” to refer to God, because they didn’t want to say God’s name. These first Christians took this phrase and went on using it – only now “the Lord” referred to who – to Jesus. So when Peter quotes Joel in v.21 – “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Yes, it’s referring to God, but later in his sermon he will make it very clear that the Lord is Jesus – so he’s saying that Jesus is God. The distinctive thing about the people on whom God will pour his Holy Spirit is that they will be people who call on Jesus to be saved. Why aren’t the chief priest and the teachers of the Law filled with the Holy Spirit – because they refuse to call on the name of the Lord, instead they have put the Lord to death.

And so Peter now in v.22-24 proclaims the staggering message – Jesus, the person hung on a cross just 7 weeks earlier, was publicly endorsed by God with miracles, acts of power (eg raising of the dead, stopping the storm, feeding the 5,000, water into wine etc); God was at work as Jesus was handed over to be killed; you put him to death; God raised him from the dead;

So Peter goes on – ok before I tell you anything more David, the king and prophet spoke of this resurrection. v. 25-28 - Peter is quoting Psalm 16 – he recognises only in God does he have complete security; no one can escape the sentence of death, but even in this God will provide a way of escape. Key verse is v.10 of Ps.16 quoted in v.27– “you will NOT abandon me to the grave, not will you let your Holy One to rot in the grave”. David in the psalm is saying that even the grave cannot rob him of life; God makes a way to bring life.

But there is a twist to it. Peter goes on and says – v.29 – 31 – David could not have been referring to himself; we can see his grave today. The only sense we can make of David’s words in the psalm is to read it prophetically; that is, to see it as expressing a deep “Davidic” truth which would remain mysterious until, one day, a **son of David** would appear to whom it would actually happen. Then we would know that he was the One in whom the strange prophecies had come true. Then we would know that the “last days” had arrived. But God put it into his mind in a prophetic way to speak of Jesus’ resurrection – v. 31 – “David was looking into the future and speaking of the Messiah’s resurrection.” This Jesus was the Messiah, the one who was from David’s line and was promised hundreds of years ago.

Now he’s getting to the heart of the matter because he ties it all together when he proclaims, in v.32, “God raised Jesus from the dead and we’re witnesses of this.”v.33 – that’s why he has been able to pour out the Holy Spirit with such dramatic effect.

You want to know why we have this pouring out of the HS on us – it’s because Jesus is at the right hand of God, and he’s been given the authority by the Father to hand out the HS. That is why we now act and speak as we do. Jesus is not dead; he’s alive ; he’s at God’s right hand; and he’s given us the Spirit.

So, everyone, we **ARE WITNESSES – JESUS IS ALIVE. V.36 – HE IS LORD AND MESSIAH.** This Jesus who you crucified is the Messiah ; he is the Lord, ie God.

The response then comes – keep your Jewish thinking cap on – the evidence is here. What we’ve been waiting for has come. But we haven’t received the Holy Spirit. So what is our question – **BROTHERS WHAT SHALL WE DO?**

So we leave you on a cliff hanger. Their response – “What should we do?” What will Peter say to them? Most of you will probably know but if you don’t you’ll have to wait till next week.

Well actually you can read ahead and find out for yourself. Go on, read about it this week. But I leave the question with you? What should you do in the light of this announcement by Peter.

I sometimes think – how can I reach others for Jesus. It is true that some people are called to be evangelists, to go out, like Paul and Barnabas did, and share the good news. But most of these early Christians did not go on mission trips all over the Mediterranean. We are called to be witnesses; witnesses to what we know about Jesus. Wherever we are we are his witnesses to his death and resurrection; to his working in our lives; to his love for us; to the fact that he is Lord; to the fact that he is coming back and everyone will have to face him and answer for their life.

We are speaking into a society that is very different. How do we speak to our society? Peter is speaking to Jews who had a history of being God's people; God had delivered them from Egypt and slavery; God had watched over them as they had established themselves as a kingdom under David and Solomon (although this "kingdom" never lived out the true intention of the Jews being "God's people"); and then the period of the prophets bringing God's word to them to repent, to escape judgement; the period of exile. Through all of this there was the hope always that God was going to restore his people; that there would come a Messiah, a Saviour to rescue his people and establish a new kingdom. Peter proclaims this to the Jews gathered. Yes, this is the Messiah, Jesus has rescued his people. But not in a triumphant, all-conquering, worldly sense. He died on a cross but then rose again.

We, today, do not have the Jewish mindset. But we, like the Jews, have a longing for a better world. We know that what we see in this world is not right from the pain that we experience in our own relationships with our spouse, our children, our workmates to the injustices we see meted out to people; police who are meant to protect giving rough treatment to a man which leads to his death; people put into prison because they have a different political view from the government; corrupt government officials doing deals with powerful business men. We know this isn't right; there's something wrong with our world. We have a longing for a better world.

Peter speaks to us today as he spoke to the Jews 2,000 years ago. Jesus is the Lord and Messiah/Saviour. God has established the true Kingdom, his Kingdom in the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus. To all those who come to his Kingdom, who repent and turn to God, who turn from their trust in themselves or other things in this world, education, social status, money, being liked and accepted (how many followers do I have on Instagram) – now their trust is to be in Jesus. And the sign of this change of allegiance is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will now live in me and grow my allegiance to Jesus and show me more of what it means to be in the Kingdom of God.