



"The Gift of the Holy Spirit"

by Pastor Jeffrey Miskus

Preached on the 5th Sunday after the Epiphany

Text: Acts 2:1-21

DATE: February 6th, 2011

IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST,
OUR CRUCIFIED, RISEN AND ASCENDED LORD,
WHO IS NOT DEAD BUT ALIVE,
WHO IS NOT IN THE TOMB, BUT IS WITH US HERE,
NOW WITH HIS LOVE AND HIS POWER AS HE LIVES
AND REIGNS AT THE GLORIOUS RIGHT HAND OF GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER.
DEARLY BELOVED CHILDREN OF GOD...

Today we continue our Study of the Book of Acts. This book of the New Testament begins where the Gospels leave off – more specifically it covers what happened to the church after Jesus rose from the dead. For a quick review... a few weeks ago we noted that Chapter 1 of Acts reveal to us that the risen Lord Jesus Christ is still leading his church. After Jesus rose from the dead he appeared to his disciples over a period of 40 days and spoke to them about the Kingdom of God. He's also told them to wait in Jerusalem for a powerful gift from the Father – the Holy Spirit. Then the disciples watched as Jesus ascended to God's right hand – where he could fill the universe – have all authority in heaven and on earth – that is be in charge of all – and at the same time be with each one of his followers. So far in the book of Acts we see the early church totally led by Jesus and constantly in prayer seeking His further directions.

We left them waiting and praying last week – waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised he would send from God the Father.

Acts 2: 1-12 begins this way... "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs--we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

Pentecost was fifty days after the Passover Sabbath. So about 50 days since Jesus rose from the dead – God sends the gift of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Jesus. There were about 120 followers at this time.

Now let me ask you some questions... Did any of these people know exactly when the Holy Spirit was going to come? No. Did any of these people know they would have a tongue of fire descend upon them that day? No. Did any of these followers of Jesus know that they would be suddenly gifted to speak in a different language that they'd never learned that day? No. Did any of these followers think that 3000 people would be baptized and join them in following Jesus that day? No.

Of course we know one who did know. Jesus knew. He sent the Holy Spirit. He orchestrated everything because – he was still in charge. He had told his disciples that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the rest of the world. And now he made that possible by giving them the ability to speak about God's great works in different languages.

Languages that were totally understandable, to those who spoke them.

These Jews from many different places would hear God's Word, believe in Jesus, be baptized, and then return one day to other countries to spread the Gospel. God's plan to spread the Gospel of Jesus to the ends of the earth is put into action – BY GOD HIMSELF! God sends the Holy Spirit – God gives the miraculous gifts – God times things so that there are loads of visitors in Jerusalem from all over the Roman world.

But let's get back to the account from Acts 2:13-21, "Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine." Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:" ` In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs 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. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Brothers and sisters – Peter makes it so clear in his sermon that every single follower of Jesus receives God's Holy Spirit. Allow me to quote verses (Acts 2:17-18), "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy."

As baptized believers in Jesus Christ we have God's Holy Spirit poured out upon us. Let me say this again. Every baptized believer in Jesus Christ has God's Holy Spirit poured out upon them. If you are a follower of Jesus you have God's Holy Spirit.

This is not a matter of feeling or seeing something or experiencing anything. This is a matter of faith. We are not called to 'experiences' or to 'miracles', we are simply called to believe that God's Holy Spirit has been poured out upon us. We don't have to prove we have the Holy Spirit by doing miracles or speaking in special languages – the Bible never says that. Rather we simply accept God's gift – and we also pray to God's Spirit to give us the gifts God needs us to have for his purposes and plans.

We are part of this prophecy of Joel. Men, women, old and young, we all have God's Holy Spirit. And we all prophesy. I should explain - the concept of prophecy has both a broad and a narrow sense in Holy Scripture.

The narrow sense is what we're used to hearing about in the Old Testament. A specific person is directly called by God to speak about what God intends to do in the future. Usually they are called to speak the prophecy from God to a King, a city, or even a nation. This person is called a prophet - one who speaks a prophecy from God. This is the narrow sense of prophesy.

But there is also the wider sense of the word prophesy. This sense includes any telling, voicing, or proclaiming of the saving and blessed will of God. That means that what I'm doing right now – is prophesy in the wider sense. Many of our hymns and spiritual songs can be classified as prophesy because they speak of God's mighty acts. The reader today – in reading God's word to us – uttered prophesy.

Think for a moment about how we as Christians speak about God. We talk about his works in the past – creation – the calling of Abraham, rescuing the Israelites from Egypt, bringing his Son into the world, Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection paying for our sins and defeating death and the devil, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. These are all acts of God done for us in the past.

There are also acts of God done for us in our past. We were baptized into God's family. We've been brought to faith by the work of God's Holy Spirit. Think of all the times God has forgiven you, cared for you, protected you and giving you strength to meet each day.

Every single Christian ought to be able to tell about how God in his grace brought them to repent of their sins and receive forgiveness through Jesus. This is the story of God's work in every Christian. This is your story – and it is about what God has done for you. When you tell it – you prophesy.

Finally there is what God has promised us in the future. Once again every single Christian ought to be able to tell others about this. God has given me eternal life. God has prepared a place for me in heaven to live with him forever. Jesus is coming back one day to take me home.

It's all prophesy and when we speak it we prophesy. Jesus is still speaking through us today – no less than he spoke through the first believers. That same eternal Spirit lives in you and me. That same story of salvation from sin still calls, gathers, and enlightens believers. That same Spirit makes us bold to prophesy.