

"What Does This Mean?" Part I

Acts 2:1-13

Read Acts 2:1-13

"Amazed and perplexed they said, What does this mean?" (v.12) The word for amazed is used twice here (v.7, 12) and it's a word the gospel writers often used to describe the crowd's response to Jesus' miracles or teaching. Astonished, hard to explain, out of the normal, it stands out. But also "perplexed" meaning confused or don't know how to explain something. Luke used this in Luke 24 when the women came to the empty tomb. So v.12 is kind of important here as to how do we explain what this outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples was all about.

There are a number of things that this means, and we're just going to focus on vv.1-13. When we pick it up again in 3 weeks in v.14 to 41 we'll look at some more reasons what this meant. In the context of Luke-Acts the coming of the Holy Spirit first of all fulfilled Jesus' words. Jesus said wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit, it will not be many days. I think this is a good place to start because Jesus had made many promises during His ministry. He said He would be arrested by the religious leaders, crucified, He would die and He would rise from the dead. Then He said to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit who will give you power to be My witnesses. Before we get into the details of the passage I think we need to remember that Acts 2 is what Jesus promised. Therefore, it's a good reminder that this meant

We Can Trust Jesus' Words **(2:1-13)**

This is something that is often ignored in this passage. We're puzzled and amazed ourselves at the whole Holy Spirit event that we forget Jesus promised this would happen. As we have read through the gospels we have seen that everything Jesus has said would happen has happened exactly as He said. He's batting a thousand on prophecy. So then this is a good place to reassure ourselves that we can trust everything Jesus says, especially

Concerning every future promise (1:4-5, John 20:21-22)

Jesus instructed His disciples in 1:4-5 to stay in Jerusalem and wait for a few days because the Holy Spirit would come and empower them to be His witnesses. And this happens in Acts 2. But Jesus had already mentioned the Holy Spirit's coming on a number of occasions including His first resurrection appearance to them in the Upper Room. In John 20:21-22 Jesus told them,

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit did not come on them at that moment but Jesus was giving them a hint that when the wind/breath [same words in Greek] of God on you, let it happen. The Spirit will come upon you. And that they were then to forgive people's sins. How? Through sharing the gospel which announces Jesus will forgive your sins. The gospel itself is a future promise from Jesus. If we confess our sins (present tense) what will Jesus do in the future (forgive our sins). He forgive today's sins before they happened. He's forgiven tomorrow's sins already. And then of course He's forgiven all our sins so

that when we die and stand before God, we can stand in the judgment because Jesus has paid for and taken away the punishment for our sins.

If Jesus promised that He would return and establish His kingdom one day, then it will happen. If Jesus has promised that He is building additions on His Father's house where we will live in the future, then He is. If Jesus has told us not be anxious about the things of life and that our Father knows what we need, then we can trust His future promise to provide whatever it is we need. And that applies to ministry as well. Because Jesus promised the disciples that the Holy Spirit would come ...

To equip us to be His witnesses (v.8; 2:4)

That's what He told the disciples in 1:8 what would happen and here in 2:4 we read when *"all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit they began speaking in tongues as the Spirit enabled them"* and v. 12 tells us *"they were declaring the wonders of God"*. People heard them speaking in their own native language – 15 different nationalities are mentioned – so they understood what the disciples were saying. It would make little sense for the Spirit to come on disciples to speak incoherently. As Peter will go on to explain in vv.14-41 what they were talking about was how the Scriptures prophesied of the Messiah Jesus' death and resurrection and that people need to repent of their sins and place their faith in Jesus to have eternal life.

The Spirit's empowering work in us (Jesus' disciples today) is still to be His witnesses. When Jesus says we will have power to be His witnesses too, then we can trust Him that He will enable us to serve Him and share His words with those around us who need Jesus. In 1 Cor. 12-14 Paul explains how the Spirit equips us and empowers us to serve God, each other and the lost in many ways. So let's trust all Jesus' words; especially those that enable us to serve Him.

Luke begins 2:1 with *"when the day of Pentecost had come ..."* means that the Feast of Pentecost is important to the coming of the Holy Spirit. What was Pentecost? Pentecost means 50th. Israel was to count off seven full weeks from the day of First Fruits. First Fruits was the Day that followed the Sabbath after Passover, during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

First Fruits was the day you brought an offering to God of the first of your wheat harvest, before you had any yourself. God commanded Israel to do this as a sign of trust that in the next 7 weeks He would bless them with an abundant harvest and by 7 weeks the harvest would be complete and they were to come to Jerusalem to celebrate God's blessing for a week, the Feast of Weeks. While we're going to examine this Feast more fully on Pentecost Sunday in May, for now we must realize that this Pentecost meant ...

That a Harvest of Souls Was Ready **(2:1-13)**

Deut. 16:9-11 explains the connection between the day of the First Fruits of your harvest and the 50 days of the harvest:

⁹ *Count off seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain.* ¹⁰ *Then celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the LORD your God has given you.* ¹¹ *And rejoice before the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name—you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, the Levites in your towns, and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows living among you.* ¹² *Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and follow carefully these decrees.*

“In proportion to the blessings the Lord has given you.”

Deut. 16:16 says Pentecost/ Weeks was one of the big 3 Feasts all Jewish males were commanded to attend in Jerusalem. Why were all these Jewish people there from all these other countries? In obedience to the Word of God. God, however, had another harvest in mind than the agricultural harvest. There would be 3000 new disciples when the day was over (Acts 2:41). Which is fascinating when we understand that ...

The First fruits [of the spiritual harvest] was offered

... 50 days prior. On the Jewish calendar it was the Day of First fruits, the Sunday that followed the first Sabbath after Passover. Did anything significant happen that day? Jesus rose from the dead! He offered Himself as the Passover sacrifice to God for our sins and 1 Cor. 15:20,

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own turn: Christ, the first-fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

Paul calls Jesus the First-fruits of the resurrection guaranteeing that since the best was offered first, then God blesses the rest of the harvest. That applies to our future guaranteed resurrection but first it has to apply to a harvest of salvation. Jesus was the best sacrifice that alone could remove our sins. He rises from the dead to prove He has victory over sin and assuring those who place their faith in Him that they too will be victorious over sin. 50 days later we have a great harvest of 3000 souls saved through the Spirit empowered disciples of Jesus. Why should this not surprise us? Because

Jesus promised they would ‘catch’ people (Matt. 4:19)

Jesus called the Galilean fishermen to drop their nets to follow Him and He would “*make them fishers of men*”. He would make them, not they would eventually become. Up until this Pentecost the disciples had done very little ‘fishing of men or women’. It wasn’t until the Spirit of God came and empowered them to be His witnesses did they have the joy of speaking God’s truths of forgiveness through Jesus and seeing people respond.

And how did they actually do that? First, they believed and obeyed Jesus’s words to wait for the Spirit. Here they were, still in the same room as we read in Ch. 1. They tried to go back and do some real fishing (John 21) but that didn’t pan out until Jesus showed up. But now they are waiting and when we wait on God, God will work. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was a one-time only never-to-be-repeated event in the life of the church. God made sure this was orchestrated by Him that there were three (not one or even two) clear signs this was of God. First they heard what sounded like a violent wind – but there wasn’t any wind. It was a roaring sound. Second, they saw what looked like tongues of fire on each of them, all 120. And third, each of them as far as we know miraculously spoke in the languages of the countries from which these Jewish people and converts to Judaism had travelled from, languages which were not their native tongue. What did this mean?

That the Curse of Babel was Now Reversing (2:5-13; Gen. 11:1-9)

Let’s recall Gen. 11:1-9. After the flood had ended, God reminded Noah and his family in 9:7 of the original mandate given to Adam and Eve;

⁷ As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.”

However, in Gen. 11 we see mankind was not spreading out. We read,

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ² As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

With one common language they decided to build a tower that would be their rallying point, an achievement by which they would be known for.

³ They said to each other, ... “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”

In direct disobedience to God’s command. And probably the tower was their efforts to reach ‘god’ on their own.

⁵ But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. ⁶ The LORD said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”

⁸ So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹ That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

When God said ‘Come let us’ who was He talking to? The other two members of the Trinity, Jesus and the Spirit. At Babel God miraculously created multiple languages so people could not understand one another, for the purpose of filling the earth. But now, at Pentecost, God is starting His plan to renew all things through the cross and the Spirit comes down from heaven and instead of confusing people we see ...

Multiple languages being understood (vv.5-8)

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?

It is quite clear here that the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues meant speaking a known language that you had no ability to speak before for the purpose of helping people understand the message of forgiveness of sins through Jesus (which Peter will explain in vv.14-41). It would be like you and I going to Chinatown in Toronto and the Spirit of God miraculously equipping us to speak Chinese so we can share the gospel. The people understood what they were saying because they heard them speak in their native language. The recipients knew that the apostles were Galileans. Galileans had a very unique dialect. They were the Newfies or the southern Texans of Israel. We will talk more about tongues as we come across it again in Acts.

So God was starting to reverse the curse of Babel now by miraculously empowering His people to speak in different languages to speak the message of the gospel, for what purpose?

The Spirit descended from heaven to unite people (vv.9-13)

Through the message of Jesus. And now that the Spirit had come, all those who would accept Jesus would also be baptized or indwelt with the Spirit. That was Jesus' promise that the Spirit would not just be with us but in us. The only other place baptism of the Spirit is even mentioned is in 1 Cor. 12:13

13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Here Paul is speaking to a divided church family to come together because you all have the Spirit (past tense) and you all have His gifts. Baptism means immersed in. We got all the Spirit at salvation, we need to let Him control us so we can help more people be united to God through Jesus.

So what did this Pentecost mean? Pentecost fulfills the promises of Jesus and begins the new work of God called the church, Jesus' body. The Spirit unites us to God and each other. We work together through His many gifts to spread the message of the gospel so more people can be united together in Him. As we'll see when we return to this passage in a few weeks, Pentecost means the beginning of the end. Now that Christ has died and risen we are in the 'last days'. And if we understand now what Pentecost means it means we need to let the Holy Spirit use us with His gifts to bring a lost world together through the message that our sins can be forgiveness in Christ. This world is divided over race, sex, politics, the origin of life and the future. The message of Jesus declares the wonders of God. The miraculous ability of God's Spirit to bring divided sinful people together through the message that Jesus Christ died for us and rose from the dead, assuring our future resurrection as well.

Seriously pray about opportunities to share Christ this week. Ask the Spirit to empower you to be Jesus' witness to even one person this week. And we'll all pray that God would show He's still a God of wonders and miraculously save some.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at oliviet@rideau.net