

Sunday, August 30, 2020

Bible Study **Acts 2:14-21**

Listen to Pastor Kelly's sermon for August 30, and then read Acts 2:14-21.

“What does this mean?” Throughout our nation, and the world, people are wondering and asking this question. The global pandemic has revealed the shaky foundations upon which our world has built itself. Up is down, right is wrong, the truth is portrayed as a lie, and lies are now the truth. Our world has slipped its moorings and is drifting back into the tumultuous, chaotic deep so long ago defeated when the Spirit first hovered “over the face of the waters...” (*Genesis 1:2*). And people are fearfully asking, “What does this mean?”

That same question was being asked (*Acts 2:12*) by those in Jerusalem the day the Spirit was “poured out” at Pentecost (*Acts 2:1-13*). On that day, Peter and all of the others in that room, were driven into the streets by the mighty wind of the Spirit. Ignited by the power of the Spirit to breach the barriers of language, they told the Good News of Jesus Christ to all in Jerusalem. Some mocked this new thing that God was doing, but others were asking, “What does this mean?”

So, Peter stood up with the Eleven, and answered the people's question. The example of the disciples that day invites us to follow suit. For it is one and the same Spirit which dwells in each of us. That same wind which filled their sails, sending them to “the ends of the earth” (*Acts 13:47*), has been poured out to catch-up our own unfurled lives so that we may also be sent. That same flame which appeared as “tongues of fire” igniting a fearful band of disciples with power, has been poured out to kindle our own weakness into strength (*2 Corinthians 12:8-10*).

And in that Power, Peter raised his voice amid the cacophony of mocking jeers and perplexed amazement and said, “...let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say...” (*Acts 2:14*). Peter then preached a sermon, based upon Joel 2:28-32, in which he explains that the Spirit of God is being “poured out on all people”. Just as had been promised through the prophet Joel. Those of us on this side of Pentecost may miss the wonder of such a thought and promise if we cannot see it through the eyes of those who lived before Pentecost.

You see, in Joel's day, people reckoning with their own tumultuous events were also asking, “What does this mean?” So, God gave Joel a special vision of Israel's future through the calamity of a devastating locust invasion. In answer to that question for the people of his day, Joel began, “Hear this, you elders; give ear, all

Sunday, August 30, 2020

inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers? Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation. What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten” (*Joel 1:2-4*).

The damaging locust invasion was a portent of an invading army that would one day do the same thing (*Joel 1:5-12*). Joel then calls upon God’s people to repent and return to God (*Joel 1:13-2:17*) and promises that God will hear the contrite hearts of His people, have pity of them, and restore their land (*Joel 2:18-27*).

And then Joel takes God’s promises to His people a step further, into a future far from his own current events. “It shall come to pass that I will pour out my Spirit on all people” (*Joel 2:28*). If we parse this out a bit, we will begin to see what Peter saw when he preached from this text on that Pentecost morning.

When Joel said that God would “pour out” His Spirit, he was telling us that God would not be stingy. He would not “parcel out” His Spirit, but “pour out” His Spirit in full. Up to Peter’s time, this same Spirit which moved at creation had been given to chosen individuals. As when the Spirit empowered Samson to do his mighty deeds of strength (*Judges 13-16*), or Gideon to lead in a special way (*Judges 6:34*). Rather than being given to kings (*1 Samuel 10:6; 16:13*) and prophets (*2 Chronicles 20:14; Micah 3:8*) at times of special need, God would now “pour out” His very own Spirit upon ALL of His people.

Moses had even prayed for this during a time when God took some of the Spirit given to him and divided the Spirit among Israel’s elders (*Numbers 11:16-30*). On that occasion, two men not in the company of elders when the Spirit was given out, began to prophecy like the others. Joshua complained about this and Moses declared, “Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit on them all” (*Numbers 11:29*)!

And so it happened, and continues to happen. As Peter rightly discerned from Joel’s prophecy, the “pouring out” of God’s Spirit on ALL of His people marked the beginning of the ‘last days’. We are in them still — the ‘last days’. We cannot say how long these ‘last days’ will be, but that truly is of little-to-no concern for us. For you see, the key for Peter, for Joel before him, and for Moses before either of them isn’t the nature of the ‘last days’ but the character and nature of God’s people **during** the last days.

Sunday, August 30, 2020

These ‘last days’ are not so much marked by darkness, confusion, and calamity. These things have always been with us. The difference between these ‘last days’ and the ‘days of yore’ is that ALL of God’s people have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. The power that was present at creation when God spoke order into the chaos and light into the darkness, is now in all of us. The power to speak the truth of God in times of decadence or despair as the prophets did before us, is now in all of us. The power to live faithfully before God and die sacrificially for our neighbor, as our Savior did, is now in all of us.

And so, “What does this mean?” As Peter stood up with the Eleven, can we — in that same power of the Spirit — stand up with them and also declare, “...let me explain this to you...”. “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, AND YOU ALSO will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”, “and it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (*Acts 2:38-39, & 21*).

May you, in these ‘last days’, know the power of the Spirit as promised through the prophet Joel and fulfilled at Pentecost. May you live into that power without fear, for the sake of your neighbor. And may we be found faithfully moored to our Lord and Savior, even as the days grow darker (*John 9:4*).

Questions for Further Reflection

Compare John 18:25-27 and John 20:19 to our present text (*Acts 2:14-21*). What accounts for the difference?

What does Peter want the people to understand (*vv. 15, 17-18*)? Why did God pour out His Spirit only upon Jesus’ followers? How do you understand verses 19-21? If you had been there, what would have indicated to you that Joel’s prophecy was being fulfilled? What tells you that it is still being fulfilled?

To explain what is necessary to become a Christian and what is promised, how would you put verses 38-40 in your own words? How have you experienced the reality of God’s promises? How would you describe your experiences with the Holy Spirit? What do the wind and fire (*vv. 2-3, symbols of the Holy Spirit*) convey to you about the nature and work of the Holy Spirit?

What encourages you as you watch and listen to Peter deliver his sermon (*2:14-41*)? How might you ‘stand up’ with Peter this week?