

Acts 15 (1-18) – The Day the Gospel Exploded

Last week we saw how Jesus ascended to his throne in Heaven, and how he was going to pour out the Holy Spirit on his disciples, back on Earth. Jesus is ruling and reigning in Heaven, and on Earth, which we see through the growth of Christianity. And it continues to this day. And it will continue till he comes back again, with a New Heavens and New Earth, where righteousness will dwell forever. And the book of Acts details the spread of his kingdom. He rules everything now, but the manifestation of that rule through his people continues to this day. And that manifestation started at Pentecost, which we celebrate the week after we celebrate the Ascension.

The events of Acts 2 are what we call Pentecost. On that day, the Holy Spirit came upon those 120 disciples who were gathered to pray and to wait on the promise of power that Jesus told them about. Jesus told them to wait on that power, and then go forth in that power to evangelize the world. And after 10 days of praying and waiting, on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came, and 3000 people were saved. And the rest of the book of Acts details how Christianity began to spread like wildfire, even in the context of severe persecution. And what happened shortly before, during, and after Pentecost was the start of the most powerful movement in the history of the world.

Pentecost was the start of a revolution. That is the day that the greatest bomb that has ever hit Earth detonated for King Jesus and his kingdom. The Gospel exploded onto the scene. And the glorious promise of Pentecost continues, the promise that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Pentecost is the birth of the New Testament Church, and the birth of missions. Pentecost is the birth of unity for all God's people, from every nation, tribe, and tongue. So, to that, I say, Happy Birthday!

Now, before we get to our text in Acts 15, let's set the stage. Turn to Acts 1:4-8 – Would they receive power to restore the kingdom to Israel? No, they would receive power to spread the kingdom of God. They were missing the point, but they would get the point after they got the power.

Now, turn to Acts 2:1-21. We already read that this morning. And you see that the power Jesus spoke of came upon those who waited and prayed. It was the power to fulfill the Great Commission. The many varied tongues, or languages spoken, were a manifestation of the truth that the Gospel was for all people. The question people have about Pentecost today is the same as it was back then. Acts 2:12 – what does this mean? And the answer is still the same. Acts 2:21 – everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 10:13). Amen. The promise of Pentecost doesn't need to be made again with the manifestation of tongues. We know the Gospel is for all people, and we continue to spread the Good News of God's saving grace.

The narratives in Acts 2, 8, 10 and 19 are the fulfillment of what Jesus had promised in Acts 1:8, the thesis statement for the whole book. They did witness to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the known world. The Jews of Jerusalem (Acts 2), the hated, half-breed Samaritans (Acts 8), the Gentiles (Acts 10), and then, in Ephesus, more than two decades later, in the transitional period between the OT and the NT Church (Acts 19), all were included in the manifestation of unity and spread of the Gospel. Salvation was for all nations, tribes, and "tongues" (cf. Revelation 7:9).

The tongues were a sign that God was not going to work through just one nation any longer. God is going to build his church through the whole world. Acts 2 marked the beginning of the transition. Jews were still being saved, because 3,000 Jews were saved on the Day of Pentecost. But the Good News was going to go around the world, to all people.

Salvation has gone from being a Jewish possession and has come to all who call on the name of Jesus. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says – *For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.* This is not about some post conversion experience. Every person who is saved by Jesus shares in the promise of Pentecost, and they have the Holy Spirit. All of God's children, those who have been saved by Jesus Christ, we all have the Holy Spirit. To say that some Christians have the Holy Spirit but others don't is to miss the point of Pentecost.

And now to our text, Acts 15:1-18. This was known as the Jerusalem Council. This council was held at Jerusalem nearly 20 years after the events of Acts 2. And after Gentiles had come to know Christ. In vs.7-11, Peter gave confirmation of his Acts 10 experience, which was about 10 years earlier, and 10 years after Acts 2. In vs.16-18, James (the brother of Jesus), the leader of the church in Jerusalem, applies the prophecy of Amos 9:11-12 to the situation. Don't miss the point of Pentecost. Pentecost is cause for a continual celebration, not because of tongues, but because it was the day the Gospel exploded, and it is the reason for the missionary work that continues today.

The great cloud of witnesses is still going strong and getting bigger every day. The spread of the Gospel to every nation, tribe and tongue, the truth that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved, the glorious promise of Pentecost continues! The Jerusalem Council was about this question: Are other people groups being saved, without following the Jewish Law? And the answer was yes!

Peter, in Acts 2:14-18, refers to the OT prophecy of Joel 2:28-32, and shows us that not only are all people groups potentially included, but all gender, age, and social status are as well. *And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh* (not every single person, obviously, but all gender, age, and social status are included), *and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy* (talk about Jesus), *and your young men shall see visions* (do things for Jesus), *and your old men shall dream dreams* (think about Jesus); *even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy* – (preach the truth of Jesus, tell forth the mighty works of God, if God saved me, anyone can be saved).

This what we see in Titus 2:2-11 – the different genders, ages, classes, and roles. And this is what we see in this local church...children coming to Jesus, young men planning a work for Jesus, families working for Jesus on the mission field, old people witnessing to the worth of Jesus, people in bondage being set free by Jesus. people leaving their old life behind for a new life in Jesus. That's the power of Pentecost.

God still does supernatural things because it takes the supernatural power of God to deliver people in this day of darkness. I've seen unexplainable healings that had to be God. I've seen people be delivered from demons. I've seen impossible things, but nothing is greater than a person being born again, transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. That's the promise of Pentecost.

I've seen the power of God. It is the power of God that takes a lazy, lying, loser of a man and turns him into a soldier for Christ. It is the power of God that takes a beaten down and abused woman that is cast out and ignored by people and makes her a precious jewel that shines with love for and from Jesus. The power of God is the reason that a young family wants to spend their lives in service to the Lord. It is the power of God when an old person, who can't walk and can hardly talk, still wants to hear the Word preached and to hear people sing. It is the power of God that makes someone leave their sin and selfishness and lay down their life for the sake of the Gospel. The evidence for the truth of Pentecost is all around us. There was evidence & there is evidence. You are the evidence of Pentecost.

God in Christ has broken down all racial, gender, age, and social barriers. Colossians 3:11 says – *Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all*). What started at Pentecost hasn't stopped, the spread of the Gospel to every nation, tribe and tongue, to every gender, age, and social status, the truth that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

So, what now? The Apostle Peter addresses you in Acts 2:37-39. *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."* Believe in the promise of Pentecost. Call on the name of the Lord, and you will be saved. Amen.