

Part 3: Promises Kept, and Promises to Keep

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There's a handful of events in human history which not only shape who we are, but shape how we are described as people. The "Greatest Generation" survived the Great Depression and fought in WWI. Millennials had the burden of growing having to use the TV Guide Channel instead of streaming services.

But our calendaring system divides us up universally based on another specific event. There are those who lived B.C., that is to say "before Christ." And there are those who live A.D., that is to say we live in the year "anno domini," "the year of our Lord."

We've recently completed a study through the gospel of Luke examining the life, ministry, death and resurrection of that Lord, the God-man, Jesus Christ. We've now started the sequel to that book, the book of Acts. But if you've been with us, you've seen that even though Jesus was resurrected from the dead proving that he is indeed the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, just like Elvis, "the King has left the building"—he ascended to heaven, and cannot be seen by human eyes.

When a baby is born today, they don't have a smartphone in their hands. And yet because we live in this new era—it won't be long before they encounter it. The internet age is a felt age. But how can we say that we live in the year of our Lord, when we cannot see him, nor do we find the boundaries of his kingdom?

The answers to these questions are found in today's text in the book of Acts. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Jesus's disciples is the event on which this next chapter of history sits. How do we know Jesus is ruling? Because he has poured out the Holy Spirit, promised by the Father, and send as the crescendo of his earthly ministry to regather, restore, and reign through his redeemed spiritual people.

Until WWII, WWI was the defining event of what it meant to be alive. AI is changing how we interact with our digital world. But for every human born after the events of Acts 2—this is the most influential event until Christ comes again. We have officially found the "you are here" mark on the map of redemptive history.

So if we want to find out who Jesus is, what he is doing, and what it means for us, we need to pay attention to what we see in our passage today. This is the event the disciples were waiting for, and it is the event that we will wait with until Christ comes again.

Our main point this morning is this: **The Holy Spirit fills God's people, fulfilling God's promise for the fulfillment of global missions.** We are going to see this through two perspectives this morning. First we will see **The Holy Spirit: Sign of Promises Kept**, examining what it means in relationship to the Old Testament. But we will also see **The Holy Spirit as The Seal of Promises Made**—while Pentecost buttons up certain aspects of God's promises, it assures the fulfillment of the rest of God's promises.

If you remember what we saw in the concluding chapters of Luke, he was intentionally trying to show that Jesus was God's messiah and God's king. While other people were anointed, and other kings existed in the Old Covenant, and promises were made to them—all of them were meant to find their fulfillment

in Jesus as the true redeemer of God's people. Building off of that idea of fulfillment, what Luke has been doing in the opening chapters of Acts is showing us that the church is the fullness of God's people. While promises were made to Abraham, and to Israel, those too were meant to find their fulfillment in the people of Jesus—the church.

It wasn't until a third of the way through the Old Testament that national Israel got a king. But remember what God told Samuel? **1 Samuel 8:7**, "they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them." God already had a king, and the covenants were built to bring them back to God's true king.

So when God promised Abraham in Genesis 12 that he would be the father of many nations, and that kings would come from him—we need to remember that in Genesis 1, God already made a people in his image, he already gave them dominion over the whole world, and they were to be image bearers.

So just as the promise of God's king predated David, so too the promise of God's people predated Israel.

So as the covenants built over the Old Testament, the coming of the Holy Spirit showed that the next stage of redemptive history had come—we are getting closer to the garden. The physical covenants needed to restrain sin by boundaries and the blood of bulls were now giving way to the spiritual covenant of those bound by faith, sprinkled clean by the blood of Christ.

Last week, God guided the disciples to bring the number of Apostles back to 12 as a full restoration of God's leadership—and now today God is going to make full not only the leadership of God's people but the whole of his people with the Holy Spirit.

This is our first point today **The Holy Spirit as a Sign of Promises Kept.**

Luke opens by drawing on the theme of promises fulfilled when he opens saying: **Acts 2:1**, "When the day of Pentecost arrived they were all together in one place."

In the Old Testament there were three annual feasts that God gave for his people to keep, and one of those feasts was called "the Feast of Weeks," or "the Feast of the Harvest." Fifty days after Passover they were to gather in Jerusalem for this feast—which came to be called Pentecost which simply means "fiftieth."

When God brought his people out of slavery in Egypt by miracles and might, it only took them three days to start whining. Grateful for deliverance, they had their concerns about following an invisible God into a visible desert, being brought into a land they've never been, while leaving the food of Egypt behind them.

God gave them instructions for this feast while they were still wandering in the desert. He prepared a people who only saw barrenness, that once a year they would bring their bounty to the temple in the Promised Land. It was meant to remind them that what they feared they couldn't find, God was faithful to provide.

When we first come to Christ, we often have a similar experience. We want to be saved from the weight of our sins, but all of us at times long for the certain comforts sin provides us. But in the same way, the

Holy Spirit is our new reminder that God is faithful, more faithful, more generous, and more satisfying than the empty smells of sin.

That's why Paul is able to say this in **Ephesians 1:13-14**, "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

Only a sovereign God can promise a feast of garden harvest to a people in a barren desert. He gave as a command for them to bring what only his grace and care could provide. So too, our Promise Land awaits in glory, but we have something certain right now through faith—the promised Spirit.

It's in the context of this miraculous harvest feast our story picks up today: **Acts 2:2-4**, "And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues of fire first appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."

On the feast where the Jews typically presented to God the grain they reaped of the field, God caused them to reap the harvest of the Holy Spirit—a provision of a promise far greater than food. If you're unfamiliar with, or new to Christianity—the God of the Bible is a Triune God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Three persons equal in divinity, essence, and eternality—through faith in the Son, the promise of the Father was coming in a powerful way.

And as God acted here, we can note two promises which were being fulfilled. First, we see **Prophetic Fullness**.

Luke tells us that a sign of the Spirit's arrival was tongues as of fire resting on the disciples. This is a symbol that draws several Old Testament images and events.

In 1 Kings 18, Elijah defeats the prophets of Ba'al calling down fire from heaven and we see the response of this in **1 Kings 18:38-39**, "Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it they fell on their faces and said, 'The LORD, he is God; the LORD he is God.'"

When fire fell from heaven and consumed an altar, the watching world noticed God. But here at Pentecost a new pattern is set—God is seen not by falling from heaven to consume an altar—but by falling on heaven to fill his believers through which the world will say: "The LORD, he is God."

But fire was not only a witness to the world, it was also a witness to God's people of his own presence. When God brought Israel out of Egypt he stopped for a conference with them at Sinai and he came to meet them there. But God told Moses that he alone could come up because he would otherwise consume the people on account of their sin. Notice how God descended on the mountain: **Exodus 19:17-18**, "Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly."

When God came down the first time he came in fire at a distance—only Moses as their representative priest could approach. But here, at Pentecost, the greater Moses and true high priest has purified his

people washing away their sins so that God's presence comes not at fearful distance, but in intense intimacy.

This is what was prophesied **Ezekiel 36:25-28**, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove your heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."

Here, on the 120 some Jewish believers who were gathered, God's promised presence fell on his people. But God's promise was not to show this to a select few people—but instead the whole of Israel. But this is the second promise we see: **Prophetic Restoration**.

You'll remember from our study in the book of Habakkuk that part of the reason Israel was going to be scattered was because of their sin. God sent Assyria to carry away the northern kingdom of Israel, and later on he sent Babylon to carry the southern kingdom of Judah into captivity.

God promised to bring his people back, and he did that. In 536 B.C.—Cyrus the Mede sent the exiles back to Jerusalem, Israel was restored, the temple rebuilt, and yet it was still empty—and Israel for the most part—still scattered.

But the promise God made to Israel was still that he would gather them to a fullness. Look at how Isaiah talks about this **Isaiah 11:10-12**, "In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand a signal for the peoples—of him the nations shall inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shina, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth."

Well what did we just see? We saw the Holy Spirit of God fill his small group of Jewish believers and the 12 Apostles. What did the Spirit of God do? It rested on them. And now we have a context for what happens next: **Acts 2:5-11**.

What's happening? God is gathering his people from every nation under heaven. These Jews came to inquire on what they heard and saw. And what did they hear and see? A restored people proclaiming in miraculous ways the mighty works of God.

God is keeping his Ezekiel 36 promise to restore his people, to bring them back to the land not so they could fill the temple as they thought, but so they could be filled with the Holy Spirit, marked off with new hearts by faith in the way God always designed it to be. That's why the sending of the Holy Spirit is spoke of in scripture as the final act of Jesus' earthly ministry. It's the final work of the Messiah on earth until he comes back to judge the earth.

The coming of the Holy Spirit reminds us that God keeps his promises, and we need to be aware of this because he's made more promises. We just looked at Isaiah 11:10, but Isaiah 11:9 says this: "They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord!"

God's promise and God's people are going global. That's what Jesus himself said in **Acts 1:8**, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

God's not just restoring Israel to himself—he's restoring people to himself from the ends of the world. And how is he doing it? Through his Spirit-filled, mission-driven, Jesus-preaching people.

This is our second point this morning with more direct application to our own lives today: **The Holy Spirit as a Seal of Promises Made.**

Just as God commanded them to keep a feast when there was no crop knowing he would provide—so he calls us to bear witness to people who have not yet heard—but he will provide what we need to do so.

We can see three such promises for our own lives today. First notice the ***Promise of Universal Fullness***.

Now remember what we looked at last week. We saw that the apostles were uniquely commissioned by Jesus to establish and lead the church. We see in the Old Testament that the Holy Spirit would often come upon prophets for special missions.

So it would have made sense that like the Avengers, God's Spirit would have filled the Apostles to do their thing. But notice how Joseph, who just missed out on becoming an apostle was just as filled with the Holy Spirit as Matthias was. Peter was just as filled as Mary was. Luke tells us they were all filled!

This will be unpacked more in the following pages of Acts, but who gets the Holy Spirit? Anyone and everyone who believes the gospel—all God's church gets the Holy Spirit. Inside the church we see there are varying degrees of gifts, varying degrees of holiness, varying degrees of faith—but there are no varying degrees of being filled by the Spirit! Often times our differences lead us to jealousy, resentment, envy, or despair but take heart dear believer—you are filled with the Holy Spirit. And he has come to rest on you.

Do you understand the profound nature of that? Our world loves ideas of intimacy and fulfillment. We are told to live lives that fulfill us and yet no one seems to be filled with anything. But here's the wonder of this passage: while the tongues were divided indicating its ability to unite every believer, the Greek verb for "rested" is singular. That means that the Holy Spirit divided among the people was not divided himself. It's not a pizza cut up with everyone getting a slice—all were filled with the whole pie.

We, our little jars of clay, get filled with God himself. We are filled with God through the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit which enlivens the Trinity in all eternity dwells in us. Imagine you've got a sponge and you soak up all the water out of a dish—that sponge is filled with that water. That's almost like what we have here. But we are being filled with the infinite and endless God! Imagine instead that you, you in your weakened state, you when you feel alone, when you long for fullness and intimacy are a sponge in the ocean itself—fully full, and yet consumed by the nature of something that we can never ourselves contain. How might your life be different if you thought about the staggering nature of that?

God fills us with his Spirit so he might rest in permanence on us—but he does so also that we might live as his Spirit filled people. This is the second promise: ***The Promise of Universal Tool***. The Holy Spirit is the multitool that God gives to the church.

John Stott says it well this way: **"Without the Holy Spirit, Christian discipleship would be inconceivable, even impossible. There can be no life without the life-giver, no understanding without the Spirit of truth, no fellowship without the unity of the Spirit, no Christlikeness of character apart from his fruit, and no effective witness without his power. As a body without breath is a corpse, so the church without the Spirit is dead."**

Paul says it this way in **Romans 8:11**, "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."

The Spirit enlivens us for new life and gives us all that we need to do his work. Here, the Holy Spirit gave these faithful men and women exactly what they needed to be witnesses in the moment. I don't mean to have a discussion on tongues and if it's a gift that continues or not. It does bear mentioning that the tongues Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 14 is distinct from the tongues we see present here.

Here, it is obvious that the miracle God chose to grant—as part of his fulfillment of Israel from the nations—was to take these 120 Galileans and to give them the supernatural ability to speak in other known languages. It was a reverse Babel. At the tower of Babel, God limited sin by dividing people into language groups—but here God is overcoming that in a miraculous way.

Notice what the crowds said at this miracle: **Acts 2:7-8**, "And they were amazed and astonished, saying, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it we hear, each of us in his own native language?'"

Galileans didn't have much going for them. Once commentator said it this way: "Galileans had a reputation for being uncultured. They also had difficulty pronouncing gutturals and had a bad habit of swallowing their syllables when speaking; so they were looked down upon by the people of Jerusalem as being provincial."

My wife was talking to a sweet southern woman once and after my wife complimented her accent she responded, "I hate it, you have no idea what it's like to sound like an uneducated country bumpkin."

You might feel like that in your own way. That might be what keeps you from sharing the gospel with your co-worker. You might wonder if you can answer her questions. You might be worried that you don't know how to read the Bible with your kids. But if God took these uneducated hicks with accents and gave them the accent of the gospel through the Holy Spirit—you can bet that same Holy Spirit will show up when you walk in faithfulness as well. It probably won't look like miraculous tongues—but every act of Christian obedience is a miracle. Every act done out of a new heart is mighty—and God has chosen to give you the power to obey, to stand in boldness, and to trust him in all things. He is faithful.

You don't have what it takes. But God does, and he's given himself to you.

This leads us to our last promise: ***The Promise of Universal Message:***

What do you need to know in order to be a Spirit-filled ambassador to the nations? Well we saw that in **Acts 2:11**, "we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God."

You see the Spirit fills eclectic people, with various gifts, to go to every nation, in multiple languages—but with one message: The mighty works of God.

I love the account of Jesus healing a blind man in John 9. After Jesus heals this man, the Pharisees swoop in on him and start grilling him about theology. They ask about the nature of Jesus, and the ontology of sin. They call him to wrestle with issues of prophecy and issues of the hypostatic union. But this man responded saying this: **John 9:25**, “Whether [Jesus] is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

You might forget your microbiology class on how to code genetics. But you will never forget that you were born by your mom. Learning and remembering theology and apologetics is helpful and needed in many ways—but the heart of all of that is nothing more than saying, “I’m not sure about that, but God has done a mighty work in my life through Jesus—and he can do one in yours too”

Knowing how God saved you from sin, by grace through faith in work of Jesus and filled you with the Holy Spirit should be as simple as knowing the name on your birth certificate. And there’s good news—this is precisely what the Holy Spirit fills us to remember at every junction.

Brothers and sisters—there is a universal need for the gospel to go forth, but he has given us a universal provision, in the one message of God’s mighty work in Jesus Christ. There is no other name that saves. And he’s chosen to put that name in your heart, and on your lips so that you might run with it.

The most recent census showed that nearly 50% of our state lives within a 100 miles of our church. Don’t think that God’s not planning on reaching those people and that he’s not going to use us to do that. Moreover there are roughly 3.4 billion people alive in our world today who have yet to hear the message of the gospel--and how does God intend to reach those people?

Through his church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, sprinkled clean by the blood of Christ. John Chrysostom once said, “For wherever the Holy Spirit is present, He makes men of gold out of men of clay.”

So in the year of our Lord, ruling and reigning, let us live out these realities in light of our promise keeping God. May God be seen among the nations through us, because we have seen God in us by faith in his Son, through the filling of the Holy Spirit.

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