

# THE POWER

## OF THE GOSPEL

### DATE

October 10 & 11

### WEEK

2 of 5

### OVERVIEW

Acts 2

### KEY VERSES

Acts 2:46-47

## SETTING THE STAGE

Jesus had ascended into heaven. The disciples were alone, or so it seemed. For over three years, they had relied on the physical presence of Jesus to lead, teach, and inspire them in every town and village. There was a dependence on Jesus that had become comfortable, and now He was gone. Before Jesus left, He told them He would send the Holy Spirit, and they would receive power in a matter of days.

He gave them no description of how the Holy Spirit would look or sound, nor was any detail given of how they would receive power. They waited day after day and then on the day of Pentecost it happened. "Pentecost" is a Greek word, transliterated into English, that means "fiftieth." This feast fell on the fiftieth day after Passover and the Feast of Firstfruits.<sup>1</sup> This was one of the three pilgrim festivals where Jews from all over would travel to Jerusalem to celebrate. To the traditional Jewish community, it had always been a day of thanking God for the early harvest, trusting in a later harvest. What was understood in the physical realm of the Torah was made manifest in the spiritual realm of new covenant times.<sup>2</sup>

When it happened, the roar of a violent wind came down with what appeared to be tongues of fire. It was unlike anything they had experienced before. In Acts 2:1-13, Luke describes these events and notes that people came from as far away as Rome, Crete, Asia, Medes, and other places. *Continue on page 16 >*

### LESSON OUTLINE

1. The Heart Pierced
2. The Mind Changed
3. The Hands and Feet in Motion

### THINGS TO KNOW

- The word *gospel* is derived from the Anglo-Saxon term *god-spell*, meaning "good story," a rendering of the Latin *evangelium* and the Greek *euangelion*, meaning "good news" or "good telling."<sup>3</sup>
- Gospel Unity comes by seeing our deepest commonality: a common problem (sin), a common solution (salvation), a common savior (Jesus).

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# THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

*Setting the Stage, continued* > In Acts 1:8, Jesus said they would be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, which is fulfilled progressively throughout the book of Acts. However, here at Pentecost, some had come from over 1500 miles away to be part of the festival, not realizing that they would see, hear and feel the power of heaven on earth as the church was birthed.

## Introduction

The supernatural dramatic sequence of events in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost caused the people to ask a similar question to what we have been asking all year in this Bible Study Series, “Is There More?” Acts 2:12 says, *And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”* This question serves as the springboard for Peter to preach with high confidence and boldness the first sermon in the book of Acts. Peter laid out the gospel of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. After the sermon, people asked another question in Acts 2:37, *“Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”* It is that question that leads us to the lesson today.

## 1. THE HEART PIERCED

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**ACTS 2:37** *Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”*

There are thousands of people gathered in Jerusalem from far away places, speaking different languages. Then, they all experience something no one expected: the supernatural coming of the Holy Spirit described as the sound of roaring wind and the appearance of tongues of fire. Then, the supernatural met the extraordinary with the hearing of the believers in their own native languages (Acts 2:1-12). It was in this context that they asked the question in verse 12, “what does this mean?”

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understand.

They were confused at first but not willing to leave this supernatural, extraordinary experience simply because they did not understand what was happening. Rather, the people asked a heartfelt question, seeking to understand.

How often do we want to run away from a circumstance, person, or conversation because we do not understand what is transpiring? How often have we wondered what God was up to in a specific scenario? Never be afraid to ask the question they asked 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem at Pentecost. Never be afraid to stay in an uncomfortable situation long enough to understand.

Their question led to an extraordinary sermon about the supernatural life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter preached with boldness and confidence approximately 50 days after he



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<sup>1</sup> [www.soniclight.com/acts](http://www.soniclight.com/acts)

<sup>2</sup> *The Complete Jewish Study Bible*, Henrickson Publishers Peabody, MA, 2016; p. 1560.

<sup>3</sup> [britannica.com/topic/gospel-new-testament](http://britannica.com/topic/gospel-new-testament)

had denied three times even knowing Jesus. Peter's sermon was the embodiment of the power of the gospel. He connected the writings of the prophet Joel as well as the Psalmist to show the overarching plan of God from ancient times to the present. (Acts 2:14-36)

The sermon not only touched their hearts, but Scripture says it "pierced" their hearts. The word used means to "prick below the surface."<sup>4</sup> The root word is the same one used to describe what the soldiers did with the spear in the side of Jesus on the cross. The power of the gospel pierced their hearts. It captured their attention to the point that they asked another personal question though in a gathering of thousands, "*brethren, what shall we do?*"

It is a question every person must ask when their heart is pierced with the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Throughout the centuries, people have asked that same question when moved in the depths of their soul after hearing the good news of Christ. The words of the gospel are words of hope, love, sacrifice, and eternal life. The power of the gospel is the power to pierce one's heart to ask the question, "what shall I do?"

Anytime someone hears the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, there will be a response. Whether it is voiced or not, there is a questioning of "what shall I do" with what I just heard. The response may be to ignore the gospel. Perhaps the response is to be curious enough to listen to this gospel again in the future; or there is a stirring inside that cannot be shaken. For thousands of the people gathered there in Jerusalem listening to the power of the gospel from Peter's sermon, there was a stirring to the point of sincerity, with the asking what the next step would be for them. Their heart was pierced, but what about their mind?

## 2. THE MIND CHANGED

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**ACTS 2:38-41** *Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." <sup>40</sup> And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" <sup>41</sup> So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.*

Peter was very clear with his response to their question, "Repent." The Greek word for repent is "*Metanoia*," which means "to change one's mind."<sup>5</sup> So often, people think repenting is merely turning away from a specific sin or even lifestyle. But the meaning is more in-depth than simply changing directions; it includes changing one's mind. Peter realized that emotionally their hearts were pierced. The power of the gospel penetrates below the surface. However, the power does not end with the emotions; it also becomes a matter of the mind.

According to Dr. Thomas Constable, if a person thinks of repentance as just turning from sinful practices (reforming oneself), repentance becomes a good work that a person does. This kind of repentance is not necessary for salvation for two reasons. First, this is not how the gospel preachers in the New Testament used the word, as one can see from the meaning of the Greek word *metanoia* (defined above). Second, other scriptures make it clear that good works, including turning from sin, have no part in justification

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<sup>4</sup> [www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon](http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

(Ephesians 2:8-9). God does not save us based on what we do for Him but because of what He has done for us in Christ. Repentance, by definition, is not an act separate from trusting Christ. It is part of the process of believing.<sup>6</sup>

The next step is to change their minds so that their belief changes their behavior. Jesus wants a relationship with us as individuals, not just as people who “do or do not do” some action. The changed mind will cause a changed behavior. Peter challenged them to be baptized, not to be saved, but as a visual picture of what was happening in their mind and heart. To be honest, some have taken this one verse and tried to build a salvation doctrine that requires baptism. However, when looking at the totality of Scripture, it is evident that baptism is a way to testify to your salvation, to raise your flag in a public way so that others know that you are identifying with Jesus.

**The result of a changed heart, mind, and life is action.**

The result of a changed heart, mind, and life is action. It is not the acts themselves that provide salvation, just like baptism itself does not give salvation, but actions like baptism are a result of what has taken place in one’s heart and mind. Someone who identifies with Jesus as a Christ-follower understands the power of the gospel to set their feet and hands in motion.

### 3. THE HANDS AND FEET IN MOTION

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**ACTS 2:41-42** *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. <sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (ESV)*

This was the birth of the church, and it was a megachurch with 3,000 souls confessing, believing, repenting, and being baptized. The Holy Spirit had moved in such a way during Peter’s sermon that lives were changed for all eternity. However, these people did not sit back and simply soak it all in until the next sermon; they took action. In fact, the book of Acts is all about action.

Immediately, they took four key actions:

1. Devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching which for us would be going to Worship and Bible Study;
2. Participated in fellowship, which is about building community with other believers;
3. Broke bread together, taking communion remembering the Lord’s sacrifice followed by an actual meal together; and
4. Prayed, which caused them to focus on their personal relationship with God through Jesus, communicating with their Heavenly Father.

These actions became a lifestyle for this new church; and, there were more:

**ACTS 2:46-47** *And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (ESV)*

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Looking at the first phrase in these verses, we can see a blueprint of **what** a gospel community looks like practically and the unity it enjoys in action. From this passage, you can see three different rhythms at work in the church that contributed to their overall sense of unity: **consistency** (“day by day”), **corporate gathering** (“attending together”), and **personal connection** (“breaking bread in their homes”).

These three rhythms should not be too surprising, especially as you consider your own closest friendships. Whether it is weekly texts, phone calls, or meetings, you share at least a level of **consistent** presence and communication. You likely spend time with your friend in relatively large group settings and **corporate gatherings**, where you share social experiences and memories. And what makes your relationship truly close is the **personal connection**, the sharing of concerns, struggles, and blessings in a context of trust and vulnerability.

Unity in the church is the byproduct of a community demonstrating consistency, corporate gathering, and personal connection. The strongest church cultures are those who are not just doing one or two rhythms well but are executing all three rhythms in an equally, balanced way. And as the early church formed, we see all three of these characteristics operating together. They are meeting consistently and doing so in both larger, corporate groups and smaller, personal groups.

However, what makes their unity, so astounding is that the communal context in which these three rhythms are taking place is not one of independent commonality. These were people from different cultures as far away as Rome and Medes. The early church was modeling a sense of unity with others with whom they did not share many commonalities. And as such, their unity was a sight to behold in a society generally fragmented by a lack of consistency, corporate gathering, and personal connection, and divided by its variety of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and background.

At Pentecost, approximately 3,000 people of varied backgrounds began living in unity according to these three rhythms. The largest facets of diversity—such as skin color, language, socioeconomic class, background—were not barriers for gospel unity **to** take place so much as they were indications that gospel unity **was** taking place! In a church so diverse yet so united, the Holy Spirit was lifting up the gospel for the world to see: a power that brings unity to all types of people.

How does the gospel practically create unity in the lives of believers, especially those unlike one another in every imaginable earthly description? The answer is in Acts 2.

As Peter preaches, he communicates that unity between all people is possible because all people share the most significant commonality with one another; namely, the **common problem** that we are sinners in rebellion to God. All people share a **common need**, salvation. And in Christ Jesus, we are indiscriminately and impartially given a **common Savior**—not by background, or class, or status, or deed—but by faith.

The Holy Spirit enables people to see the truest, deepest thing about themselves, that they are a sinner in need of a Savior. And therefore, they share more in common before God spiritually than any other commonality they could ever share **superficially** in the world.

When believers recognize this deep commonality in the gospel message, a type of unity takes action among them, practically, according to all three rhythms:

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- **“Day by day”** - The consistency of their diverse assembly showed that the church was truly a community of people, not just a one-time phenomenon.
- **“Together”** - The assembling of their diverse community in mass showed the world how the gospel brings together all different types of people and cultures, united on a common idea that supersedes worldly boundaries.
- **“In their homes”** - The sharing of a meal in the context of someone’s home showed that different people can not only unite around a common idea but that these people can share a personal connection because of the common idea. Church community extended beyond the walls of the formal “church building.”

They put their hands and feet into action in spiritual and practical ways, including charity to others. They were described as having “generous hearts,” which is often associated with financial situations. But it goes beyond mere financial assistance, becoming a lifestyle of sharing what you have with others. The early church in Acts was known as a group of people who helped those in need. Not to receive anything in return, but they helped because the power of the gospel changed their hearts.

Charity adopts the posture of Christ, who humbled Himself to become a servant, obedient to death on the cross. (Philippians 2:3-8) Charity comes at a cost, but that is the heart of the gospel message: “I will take the costs into myself so that I can have relationship with you.” Thus, charity happens towards one another when we take our unity with one another seriously.

Believers already share the most profound unity in Christ, which supersedes our smaller, less significant differences that might push us apart. Whether the difference is of opinion, of skin color, or of background, Christians can share unity because the blood of Jesus pulls us together and is stronger, deeper, and more precious than the sin and the differences that push us apart. In Christ, we have more in common with someone who does not share any earthly similarities than with someone without Christ, who shares every earthly similarity.

**If unity is what Christ died for us to share, then charity is what Christ died for us to practice.**

And charity happens when we act upon the unity that already exists. If unity is what Christ died for us to share, then charity is what Christ died for us to practice. Unity is charity in action.

This often quoted, memorable phrase comes to mind: **“In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.”** Meaning, it is of utmost importance for us to unite on things of primary importance, such as the gospel message. In areas of secondary importance, we can give each other the liberty to disagree; but in all things, we must be charitable towards one another and not divide over non-essentials.

The church saw dramatic fruitfulness because of their devotion to the teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer, unity, and charity. They made an impact on their community and beyond. Notice in verses 46 and 47 the phrase, “day by day,” their lifestyle was such that they saw people saved “day by day.” It was not just about numbers; it was about changed lives. Lives of individuals who came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as their hearts were pierced, their minds were changed, and their hands and feet were in motion to perpetuate the power of the gospel to others.

## HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

The power of the gospel is the power of heaven. God showed the early church His power at Pentecost. But that same power is still available today. The same Holy Spirit is with us today to empower us to live changed lives that make a difference in our community and country.

So often, we overcomplicate the gospel and over-program the message. Let us learn from the early church. Let us embrace the four guiding principles they embraced in devoting themselves to biblical teaching, fellowship, communion/ community, and prayer. We are to be the hands and feet of Christ.

The book of Acts is a blueprint of how the disciples carried the gospel of Christ to the ends of the earth. But it all started in Jerusalem. It all started when they realized the power of the gospel. God's plan for each one of us as Christ-followers is to live out the gospel with purpose "day by day" within our circle of influence.