

Acts 2:1-21  
The Perfect Witness  
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7/14/2013

I experienced a tornado warning my first day on the job here. A week ago Monday I was sitting in my new church office. The first half of the day had gone pretty well. I had unpacked my library and met with Pastor Dana. But I was ready to study because I knew I was going to preach. So I sat down and began to read through the book of Acts. And then my phone vibrated. It was a warning message. It was a warning message about a tornado in Chelmsford. It said, "Tornado warning. Take cover now."

At first I thought this must be a mistake. I certainly didn't feel prepared to deal with a tornado. I had no idea where to go or what to do if the tornado came. I thought if the tornado hit the church, I could hide under my desk. And I definitely didn't want to stop studying to deal with a tornado. But I also thought maybe God was teaching me using a little irony. Do you know what I was reading when I received the tornado warning? I was reading Acts chapter two.

Acts chapter two is about the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. But it's not just any arrival. There is a "mighty rushing wind" and "tongues as of fire." The Holy Spirit shows up like a tornado. And the 120 believers who receive the Spirit go out and witness. But I wonder if any of them felt like I felt about the tornado. I bet they didn't feel prepared to deal with the Spirit. I wonder if any of them wanted to hide. But if they were afraid it didn't last long. Instead of hiding they went out and began to preach the good news.

With the Spirit's arrival they became God's perfect witnesses. The Holy Spirit in them was God's perfect witness. And the Holy Spirit in us is God's perfect witness.

Maybe you struggle with doubt or confusion about the Spirit. Maybe you doubt there even is a Holy Spirit or God. Or Maybe you find it difficult to trust the Spirit for your witness. Our text today touches on all these questions. Let's turn to Acts 2:1-21 and read about the coming of the Spirit.

What did God give to these new believers at Pentecost? What does God give to us today who also believe? God gave us the witness of the Holy Spirit. (v. 1-4)

God gave the church his Holy Spirit. At Pentecost we see God sending the Holy Spirit to the gathered believers. Last week we heard Jesus' prophesy in Acts 1:8 that the Holy Spirit would come. Now the Holy Spirit has come upon the church in Jerusalem for the first time. In Acts the Holy Spirit comes on Jerusalem, Samaria, and to the Gentiles. In chapter two and four Peter preaches and Jerusalem and Judea receive the Spirit. In chapter eight Peter lays hands on believers in Samaria and they receive the Spirit. In chapter ten Peter preaches and the Spirit falls on the Gentile believers.

In Matt 16:19 Jesus says to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." This does not make him the first Pope but it does give him a unique gift. We see that gift exercised in Acts as he brings the kingdom of heaven. When he preaches to Jerusalem, Samaria, and Caesarea, the Spirit shows up. Peter unlocks the kingdom for the Jews and then the non-Jewish Gentiles. Because he unlocked the kingdom we can receive the kingdom freely today. God used Peter to give the church his Holy Spirit which all believers

now have. Just as the Holy Spirit came to those initial believers, we too receive the Spirit. When we put our faith in Jesus, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). God gave the church his Holy Spirit.

But what does it mean that God gave us the witness of the Holy Spirit? How does the early church witness through the Holy Spirit?

God gave us the witness of the Holy Spirit. Verse 4 says, “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” In Acts 2 the believers begin to speak in something called “tongues.” And then verse 6 and 11 says the multitude hears them in their own languages. Now this was clearly an exciting and what some might call ecstatic event. But it also has an orderliness to it. Verse four says they speak “as the Spirit gave them utterance.” The crowds also seem to comprehend their words. Verse eleven says “We hear them telling in our tongues the mighty works of God.” The crowds could miraculously hear the believers witnessing in their own languages.

Throughout Acts and the NT we see similar miracles but never an exact pattern. When the Jews and Gentiles receive the Spirit sometimes they speak in tongues. Sometimes it's comprehensible and sometimes it's not (Acts 10:46, 1 Cor 14:1-25). But on other occasions they receive the Spirit and then witness (Acts 4:31). The Spirit also comes in power but the text doesn't say what that means (Acts 8:17) I think the Bible gives us a variety of examples so we don't put the Spirit in a box. Just because we see one example doesn't mean it's the rule.

The principle behind it all is that God gives us his Spirit to aid us. Sometimes it's purely an internal confirmation of God's witness. And other times it's external as the believers preach about God. God gives us the Spirit to witness to us and to enable us to witness to others. God gave us the witness of the Holy Spirit.

Why did the Holy Spirit come at Pentecost? Is there anything significant about the Pentecost festival?

The Holy Spirit brings the harvest. (v. 1) Pentecost was a Jewish festival meant to celebrate the harvest. Israel called it the “day of firstfruits” because they presented their new grain to God. It came on the fiftieth day on the Sunday following the Passover. Jesus ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives forty days after his resurrection. And ten days later on the fiftieth day after his resurrection the Holy Spirit comes. So why does the Spirit come on a day meant to celebrate the harvest? Because he is about to bring a new harvest of God. The flood gates of the harvest are about to open wide. When the Holy Spirit arrives, he brings the harvest with him. We see this throughout the entire New Testament as the believers pour in. Because we have the same Holy Spirit we also have access to this harvest. The Holy Spirit can bring the harvest to our town and communities. When we go out on mission trips this summer the Spirit can bear fruit. When we witness about Christ to people the Spirit can bring change. The Holy Spirit brings the harvest (Luke 10:2).

I once worked on a ranch for 128 days. Now I've told others, but never you, so our second week together is about time. Some people would call 128 days a summer but it felt longer than that. The days weren't numbered because of the deep blue sky or rolling weather. The days weren't numbered because of the lovely chickens or intelligent cows. The days were numbered because I was allergic to the work. I am allergic to hay and pretty much every kind of farm animal.

But that summer I persevered as I helped prepare for the harvest. When the fall arrived my boss asked me to help him with the harvest. So I climbed onto the back of a tractor and helped him bale hay. In front of me was the tractor and behind me was the hay bailer's claws. As we drove along the claws raked the hay off the ground. So if I fell down and got caught in the claws I would die. But I was also pretty certain that if I stayed where I was I was also going to die. I was sneezing and wiping my nose and my face looked like a train wreck. That day I went home and got sick for a week from my allergies. The lesson I learned is don't sign up for the harvest if you're allergic to the harvest. No part of me wanted the harvest that fall.

Do we want the harvest here? Do we want the harvest of the Holy Spirit at Immanuel? Maybe we say we're preparing for the harvest. But internally we don't want to be harvesters. Maybe we say we want to see God save the lost. But in reality we act like we're allergic to sinners. Maybe we want the Holy Spirit's presence. But are afraid of what he'll ask us to do. Do we want God's harvest? The Holy Spirit brings the harvest.

But what will the harvest be like? Will many respond to our witness?

Many will doubt the Holy Spirit's witness in us. (v. 5-13) Many will doubt the Holy Spirit's witness in us (v. 5-13). In verses 5-13 people from across the ancient world hear the Spirit's witness. But even though they hear the witness in their own language they are confused. Verse six says "they were bewildered because each one was hearing them speak in his own language." And verse 12 says they "all were amazed and perplexed." The disciples have gone out as witnesses in the city and temple. And they are witnessing by the power of the Holy Spirit. But people are still doubting and are still confused. A miracle is happening right before them. They know the disciples are native Galileans. But they can hear them speak their own language. And yet they can't bring themselves to believe. Ever wished you could perform miracles so people would believe? Don't bet on that working because people will still not believe. Some in the crowds go so far to say it must be the wine talking (v. 13). They discredit the believers because they don't want to understand the message.

Culture today discredits Christianity because it doesn't want to understand our message. People don't understand Christianity but they don't want to understand it. The popular thinker Richard Dawkins is at the forefront of intellectual atheism. I listened to the apologetics podcast Reasonable Faith talk about him this week. Dawkins likes to compare God to the flying spaghetti monster and garden fairies. He makes some good points that there are bad things done in the name of religion. He gives true examples of evil deeds done in the name of God. But he takes that and then says all of religion is evil. But some evil done in the name of religion doesn't make all religion evil. Some mistakes done in the name of Christ doesn't make what Christ said false. To believe that is to find any reason to ignore the truth claims of Christianity.

And how do we know that the evil done in the name of religion is actually evil? Where did we get our moral compass from? How can we tell the difference between right and wrong? If all we have is natural selection than there is no right and wrong. There are just social standards we should probably abide by. But nothing about that rings true. We have a moral compass because a moral God created us. God calls us to witness to people like Richard Dawkins and his followers. God calls us to give his message to a culture that doesn't want the message. It's a good thing we don't witness on our own. We have the Holy Spirit to help us witness.

But how good is the Holy Spirit's witness in us? Wouldn't it be better if the Spirit just witnessed on his own?

The Holy Spirit in us is God's perfect witness. (v. 14-21) The Holy Spirit in us is God's perfect witness. (v. 14-21) It was always God's plan to send his Holy Spirit. He always intended to send his Spirit on his people. We see this in the Old Testament book of Joel. Peter addresses the crowds by quoting the prophet Joel. Joel was a prophet from about 586BC. That's over six hundred years before Pentecost. And yet Joel accurately predicts Pentecost. He says God will "pour out [his] spirit on all flesh." He also says the young men and women will prophesy. Here in Acts two we see the pouring out of the Spirit. And we see the church at Pentecost prophesying. We can trust that Pentecost actually happened. If it were made up, the author would have said everyone believed. But the author records people doubting and not believing. The Holy Spirit used the church at Pentecost to be his perfect witness. And now two-thousand years later we still have the Spirit.

God could have sent his spirit into the world without us. But he decided to send his spirit to the church. By ourselves we are not enough to share God. We are too imperfect and sinful to do any good on our own. But with God's Spirit we are more than enough. With the Holy Spirit speaking through us we are adequate. The Holy Spirit makes us into God's perfect witnesses. The Holy Spirit in us is God's perfect witness.

How long are we to witness for? What is the end of all of this?

The Spirit's witness is a gift for now but a judgment soon. The book of Joel was written to the nation of Israel. They were suffering from an invasion of locust. The locust were ruining their economy and society. But Joel says this is just the beginning. Because the locust symbolize a much larger threat. God is going to send an actual army to judge the people. They have rebelled against God and turned from him. Joel is calling for repentance. The day of the Lord is coming. And Joel is calling for the people to get ready. Peter quotes Joel but he ends in an interesting place. Acts 2:17-21 is a direct quotation from Joel 2:28-32a. Peter only quotes the first half of Joel 2:32.

Joel 2:32b ends, "For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be *those who escape*, as the Lord has said, and *among the survivors* shall be those whom the Lord calls." Now why does Peter cut the quotation off here before Joel talks about the survivors? Why doesn't he continue into chapter three's judgment of the nations? Because the church and us are in the in-between time. Christ has come but he hasn't yet come in final judgment. Just as Christ darkened the sky and shook the earth at the cross. So he will darken the sun and shake the world when he comes again. God extends his grace by the power of his Holy Spirit. But only for a short time longer. For now his Spirit acts as a witness. But soon those who deny the Spirit will themselves be denied. Don't deny the Spirit of God. The Spirit's witness is a gift for now but a judgment soon.

I preached my candidating sermon here about a month ago on June 16<sup>th</sup>. As part of my sermon I shared a story about the Spirit using me to share the gospel. It was the story about sharing the gospel when I was at the airport in Croatia. And after I shared that story a few of you came up to me afterward and shared your stories. One of those stories belongs to Ron. Now I'm not sharing this story so you can see how great Ron is. But so you can see how great the Holy Spirit is when he uses us.

Ron was on a business trip to the upper Peninsula. Now I didn't know where that is but apparently it's northern Michigan. And he had about three or four flights to return to Chicago. But when he got on the commercial airplane there was only a handful of people onboard. The flight crew was actually larger than the number of passengers. And after the plane took off the flight attendant walked by Ron. And out of nowhere she asked, "Why do you look so happy?" And without any hesitation Ron answered, "Because I got Jesus in

my life.” And then he thought, “Where did that come from” Because like most of us that’s not something Ron would usually say.

Then the flight attendant sat down and said, “Tell me more.” And for the remainder of the trip Ron shared the gospel with her. Scripture came pouring out that he didn’t even know he had inside. And on every single stop to Chicago nobody got on or off the plane. The Holy Spirit had arranged their whole time together. When Ron left his hotel that morning he took its copy of the four spiritual laws. And it turned out that the church left its contact info on the pamphlet. And that church was in this flight attendant’s hometown. The flight attendant put her faith in Christ on that flight. Apparently she was crying and the crew and passengers were giving Ron all sorts of weird looks.

But isn’t it encouraging to see what the Holy Spirit did? He used our brother in Christ to witness when he was least expecting it. I share this story so you can be encouraged by someone from your church family. This story took place quite a while ago. So I want to hear new stories of how God is using us. I want to hear new ways God has used us as his witnesses. The Spirit used Ron and he can use you and me if you’re willing. Let’s continually invite the Holy Spirit to use us for his witness. The Holy Spirit in us is God’s perfect witness.