Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Birth of the Church, Part 2
Scripture: Acts 2:4-5
Code: 44-7

As you know, we are working our way rather slowly through the book of Acts, especially in the early chapters, because they're so foundational. But we come, again, to the second chapter of Acts, and I want to read you the opening four verses, because they're going to be the - basically the foundation of our discussion tonight.

Acts chapter 4, verses 1 through 4, "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly, there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other languages as the Spirit was giving them utterance." Now, we began to look at that in our last study, but we want to come back to it again tonight.

Prior to this, Jesus had made two promises – two very, very significant promises. One was the church. Way back in Matthew chapter 16 in verse 18, He said, "I will build My church". Future tense, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hell or Hades will not prevail against it." "I will build My church, and even death, itself, cannot stop it," is what He said.

And then, later on, He promised in the upper room discourse that He would send the Holy Spirit. In John 14, He said, "I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth for He dwells with you and shall be in you."

These are two monumental promises that Jesus made – to build His church and to send His Holy Spirit. Both of those promises came true at the same moment. The church was born, and the Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, the very event that we see identified here in Acts chapter 2.

The birth of the church and the baptism with the Holy Spirit occur together. They had to, because the baptism of the Spirit is defined in Scripture as the spiritual event that places believers into the church, into the body of Christ. They have to happen at the same time. The church is born on the day of Pentecost, and it is given its birth by the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

So on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit comes. The Spirit is placed inside the believers, which then becomes the norm throughout the rest of church history. And the Spirit who is inside the believers also immerses the believer into the church, which is in union with Christ so the church becomes the

very body of Christ. The birth of the church is inseparable from the baptizing with the Holy Spirit. The record of this great event is here in Acts chapter 2.

Now, the text is very straightforward and, frankly, unmistakable unless it gets clouded up with some strange teaching, and, unfortunately, that is the case. But if you just read the text of Acts 2, it's not confusing. It's not difficult to understand. And it's very straightforward as to what is happening.

Here is the birth of the church by means of the Lord, Himself, the Lord Jesus immersing these people in the Holy Spirit. Literally, they are engulfed in the Spirit. The Spirit takes up residence in them. And that places them into the common life of God through the Spirit and makes them possess a common life with each other so that they are one in Christ. This is the church. This is the church. This is what we're looking at. And I want to break these verses more than just the opening four, but I want to break this event into three sections – the evidence of the Spirit's coming, the effect of the Spirit's coming, and the explanation of the Spirit's coming.

Just a brief reminder, let's start with the first point, the evidence of the spirit's coming. The day of Pentecost arrived. And they were all together in one place. Who are they? The folks back in chapter 1, verse 15 – 120 persons who were gathered together. These are the brethren. These are the believers. There are 120 believers gathered in one place. We don't know exactly where that place was – large enough to contain them. They had been told to wait in Jerusalem until the Spirit came, and they had done that, and they were all together in one place.

It was the day of Pentecost when the Spirit came. Pentecost means fiftieth. Fifty days after Passover was the Feast of Harvest. Pentecost was a kind of feast of first fruits because the full harvest hadn't been brought in yet by Pentecost, but the first fruits of the harvest had begun to come – first fruits of the wheat harvest. And so this was a foretaste of the full harvest.

So here is the ay that the church is born, that the Spirit comes, and this is just a foretaste of all that the Spirit will do through the rest of the history of the church. And more than that, it is a foretaste for believers of all that the Spirit will do when He brings His own into eternal glory and all the blessings of everlasting life in Heaven.

On the day of Pentecost, the celebration of first fruits was conducted in an interesting way, as I told you last time. They took some of the wheat harvest, and they made loaves of bread. They were leavened loaves of bread, and they offered them to the Lord as an expression of thanks.

It is interesting to me that at the Passover, they had to make unleavened bread because the Passover symbolized Christ, and leaven is the symbol of sin. And unleavened bread symbolizes the sinlessness of Christ. Here, they offered leavened bread to symbolize the sinfulness of the church. We are far from sinless like Christ. All of these elements we talked about last time, but just a brief

reminder.

So on the day of Pentecost, when there was a celebration of the first fruits of God's promised harvest, that becomes a symbol of the giving of the spirit who is the down payment, the arrabon, the engagement ring, the first fruits, the guaranty, the one who secures us to God's eternal, glorious, heavenly harvest in all its fullness. The timing was absolutely perfect – absolutely perfect and fulfills Old Testament pictures.

So there they were on the day of Pentecost, all together in one place. And suddenly there came from Heaven – and I mark out for you that this is a sovereign work of God on God's schedule on the day of Pentecost, not before, not after. That is to say, it had nothing to do with them asking for it, nothing to do with them praying for it, nothing to do with the qualifying for it. There's no indication that there was anything like that.

There are people today who would tell you that if you pray for, if you seek, if you put yourself in some kind of qualified position, you also can have the baptism of the Holy Spirit. That has nothing to do with either the baptism of the Holy Spirit or what happened on the day of Pentecost, which was a sovereign act of Heaven.

There came from Heaven a noise, a blast of God's breath, a noise that was like a violent rushing wind. There is a not a violent, rushing wind. There's no wind, but it's the kind of noise that a hurricane makes. And when you hear people interviewed who have been under a tornado or a hurricane, they talk about the fact that it was like a locomotive coming through their house. That's the noise of the breath of God. And the breath of God is no other than the Holy Spirit Himself. So there is an audible sound, like a violent hurricane – a noise. That sound fills the whole house where they were sitting and most likely spilled beyond that.

And then there appeared to them tongues as of fire. These would be like tongues, flickering like fire. When we talk about tongues here, we mean human tongues, just something like a tongue flickering. That is also a phenomenon, but not an audible phenomenon, but a visible phenomenon. And those little tongues are distributed among all 120, and one of them rests on each. This is an indication by this manifestation that the mighty rushing wind of the Holy Spirit has not come in some generic way, but has come to personally, individually rest on every believer the same way the Holy Spirit came to rest in the form of a dove on Christ at his baptism.

So this is this immense event that launches the church. When the Spirit who has been with them takes up residence in them, immerses them in the unity with Christ, gives them the common, eternal life, which all believers possess, and, therefore, makes them one with each other. He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. And the body of Christ is constituted at that point.

Verse 4 takes it a step further. As you remember, we're still reviewing. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit. That's something a little bit beyond the baptism. The baptism is a one-time event. It happened here on the day of Pentecost. Subsequent to that, it happens to every single believer at the point of salvation. That's what 1 Corinthians 12:13 says. We looked at that – that we are all at the point of our salvation baptized with the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ.

There had to be a first time. This was the first time. Every time a believer is saved subsequent to that, that same marvelous, non-experiential reality takes place, where the Holy Spirit takes up residence, saturating the life of that believer, granting the same eternal life that all other believers have, and, therefore, making that believer one with all other believers in the body of Christ.

Additionally, they were filled with the Spirit. The baptism occurs first. Jesus promised, in chapter 1, verse 5, "You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now," and then it happened. Additionally, according to verse 4, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. This is experiential. This is where the believer, under the control of the Spirit, begins to manifest the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, faith, gentleness, meekness, self control as Paul describes them to the Galatians. This is where the believer begins to experience the power of the Holy Spirit. The baptism places us into the body of Christ, places the Spirit into us. The filling is then the Spirit moving through us to produce the right attitudes and the right actions, the right attitudes and the right actions.

Every believer is baptized with the Holy Spirit. Every believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit. But Paul in Ephesians 5 says, "Be being kept filled with the spirit." And it's not a filling that's static, like filling a glass. It's a filling that's in motion, filling like the filing of wind in a sails. That's how that term is used. The idea is control, total control, yielding to the Holy Spirit. It's further defined in Colossians 3:16 as letting the word of Christ dwell in you richly, being dominated by the scripture, dominated by the revelation of God, dominated by the will of God, walking in obedience.

And at this point, of course, they were both baptized and filled at the same time. And I believe that happens at the moment of salvation for every believer, and then we go on through life endeavoring faithfully to yield and to be being kept filled with the Holy Spirit. That is an experience. That's not going to happen automatically all the time. That's not a once-for-all reality. As we see in the book of Acts repeatedly, "They were filled with the Spirit." "They were filled with the Spirit." "They were filled with the Spirit." That's a daily reality.

So on the day of Pentecost, they were both immersed in the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit took up residence in them, blended together in the body of Christ. And also the power of the Holy Spirit was released so that they had the right attitudes, the right virtues, and the right behavior. That's the pattern of being filled. There's more to say about that. Obviously, Ephesians 5, Colossians 3 – some wonderful things, and we may refer to them a little later.

There was a very interesting result immediately. Verse 4, “They began to speak with other languages as the spirit was giving them utterances.” You see the word – probably the word tongues occurs in your Bible, and that really is an unfortunate translation, and it just keeps surviving and surviving and surviving. It wouldn’t necessarily be unfortunate, because it’s a synonym for languages, except that has – it has been culturally loaded with some very confusing preconceptions. And I want to help you to get out of those preconceptions and those misconceptions and properly understand this.

The Charismatic Movement and the Pentecostal Movement has been primarily defined by quote/unquote “speaking in tongues.” By their own admission, whatever tongues is, it’s not a language. It’s a non-language. It’s gibberish. And this goes back to the earliest history of the movement.

You go back into the late 1800s, in the 1890s, and you have a group of people in Topeka, Kansas, led by Parham, who decides that the baptism of the Holy Spirit should be accompanied for everybody, for every believer – if you seek the baptism, it’s some kind of repeatable event, misunderstanding that, if you seek it, it’ll be attended with speaking in some kind of language. And so they sought these languages. They thought they were real languages. In fact, they make some bizarre claims that one girl in particular was actually speaking Chinese and writing Chinese. And there are photographs of the supposed Chinese, which is nothing but nonsense, like the scrawling of a two-year-old. But they started out thinking it was real languages because so clearly in the book of Acts, that’s what they are.

Eventually, when it became very clear that they could not speak foreign languages – and it became clear, because some of them were sent to the mission field and nothing happened. They couldn’t speak the languages.

So there was a retreat into redefining what this was, and they came up with the idea that it is some kind of ecstatic speech. This had never been a part of orthodox Christianity. It had never been a part of the true church. It had never been a part of sound doctrine. It had never been connected to the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the history of the church, going all the way back to the apostles.

Ecstatic speech, bizarre language had been, through the ages, connected to cults, false religions, like the Oracle at Delphi, even in a more modern time, Mormonism. There has been ecstatic speech associated with demons, demonic behavior, some forms of paganism, but never in Christianity. But, now, starting early on in the 1900s, there was the booming Pentecostal church, which eventually became the Charismatic church. And they were advocates of the fact that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a repeatable event, and if it really happens, you’ll speak in this non-language.

That has forced us to come back to this passage and to have to explain something that is patently not here. It's not here, and you can't really import it. But I need to help you to understand it so that you're not at all confused by it.

They began to speak languages – with other languages. Were they real languages? Go down to verse 8. The people are amazed in verse 7, because the believers, many of whom came from Galilee, are speaking these languages. "And how is it" – verse 8 – "that we each hear in our own language to which we were born. Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judaea, and Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans, and Arabs, we hear them in our own languages, speaking of the mighty deeds of God." And they all continue with amazement. This is shocking.

Now, who are these people with these language? These are all Jews. These are all Jews. This is Pentecost. This is a Jewish feast. But these are Jews that have come to Jerusalem from the dispersion, from the Diaspora, having been scattered all over the Mediterranean into all those places that are there listed – all over the Mediterranean area, west and north and east. And they're all hearing these languages, and they're hearing the wonderful works of God in these languages.

Now, the Jews have learned to speak those languages because they live in those places, but this is what's so shocking about it. Never have they heard praise to God in a Gentile language, never, because when they went to the synagogue, all their services were conducted in what? In Hebrew or in Aramaic, which is a variant of Hebrew.

This would be some kind of bizarre experience because they believed that Hebrew was God's language, and now they are, for the first time, hearing the wonderful works of God. What does that mean? Everything from creation right through the Old Testament. They're hearing God's attributes and God's works rehearsed to them by these Galileans, by these Jewish believers in Gentile languages. Never have they expressed praise to God. Never have they recited the Old Testament in any other language than its own language. This is shocking, absolutely shocking.

This is a sign. This is a sign, and a very important sign. The question is: what is it a sign of? Clearly, something is happening that is very, very significant. I'm going to answer that question for you, but before I answer that question, I asked this question just a couple of weeks ago of someone who believes in tongues as gibberish, tongues as non-language, some kind of irrational jabbering. And I said, "You have to answer a question for me. What is it a sign of? What's that a sign of? You don't know what you're saying. Even if you did, what's it a sign of? What is the point?" For which there was really no answer.

This is a phenomenon that had its moment, and it went on for a little while. Pentecost comes early in the ‘30s after Christ’s death, just a few weeks after that. So maybe it’s 30 AD if you calculate the calendar. 55 Ad, 25 years later, it’s still around. This gift is still being exercised by some believers, because it’s mentioned in the book of 1 Corinthians, and 1 Corinthians is written about 55 AD. But after that, never hear about it, never hear about it in any other book of the New Testament – never, all the way into the ‘90s when John writes the final New Testament books.

It had a short life. We could say it had a life of about 25 years. It was corrupted by the Corinthians, and if you read 1 Corinthians 12:13-14, you see Paul trying to regulate this thing. The people who had this ability to speak in languages they didn’t know were perhaps using it in a proud way, perhaps flaunting it, because, after all, it was miraculous.

There were other people in Corinth counterfeiting it and standing up and purporting to speak in another language – are you ready for this – and cursing Jesus Christ unwittingly, perhaps under a demonic influence. So Paul has to write to the Corinthians to regulate this, and he does that in those chapters, because it’s still in operation in those early years.

But 1 Corinthians 13:8 says, “Whether there be languages or the gift of languages, they will cease.” That’s what it says in 1 Corinthians 13:8. So if you look at history, the history of the New Testament, they ceased. They’re not a part of the pastoral epistles. They’re not a part of anything after the first letter to the Corinthians. They completely disappear. Tongues will cease.

Tongues is part of something that has a limited shelf life. Prophecy, that, too, will cease at a different time, because in the future, there will be prophecy in the Millennial Kingdom. But he’s comparing things that cease with things that are forever, like love, hope; the greatest of these is love. Those things, those virtues never cease. Other things cease. He doesn’t say when they cease. He just says there are things that cease, and things that don’t cease. Prophecy goes on, but it’ll cease, because when you get to Heaven, you’ll know as you’re known. Tongues will cease. They have a time, and they will cease.

All we have to do is look and see. Did they? The answer is yes, which then asks the question, what were they for? What was the sign? You say, “Well, it says, ‘They spoke the wonderful works of God.’” Was that what the purpose of tongues was? Languages? No. No, it wasn’t to speak the wonderful works of God, because the wonderful works of God are all written down in the Old Testament in Hebrew, and everyone would have understood them. And they could have stood up and spoken in Aramaic, and everybody would have understood them, right?

Why are they talking in all these languages? What’s the point of this? And to answer that, a very compelling question. I want you to turn to 1 Corinthians 14 – 1 Corinthians 14. Now, remember, I just told you the Jews had not heard the wonderful works of God declared in Gentile languages. Gentile

languages were merely part of the rejected outcast Gentile world – ungodly, pagan, outside the pale of God's concerns to the Jews, at least that's what they thought. So they would never denigrate God by speaking of him in a Gentile language.

When you come to 1 Corinthians 14, verse 20, the apostle Paul says, "You need to grow up in thinking." There's a good principle. You need to be mature. You need to think carefully. And look at Verse 21, "In the law, it is written" – "the law" referring to the Old Testament. Here's what's written in the law, "By men of strange languages, and by the lips of strangers, I will speak to this people, and even so, they will not listen to me," says the Lord.

So then languages are for a sign, not to those who believe – it's pretty clear, isn't it – but to unbelievers. We'll stop right there. Tongues are a sign to unbelievers – a sign. In the Old Testament, that particular expression, a sign, used in the Septuagint. Every time, it indicates a divine intention, a divine purpose. The purpose of this sign is to say something to unbelievers. We know exactly what it's intended to say, because in verse 21, there's a quote from Isaiah 28.

So I want you to go back into your Old Testament to Isaiah 28, a fascinating Scripture. Now, remember, Isaiah is preaching judgment in the first half of his great prophecy – judgment on Israel for its apostasy and defection and unfaithfulness to God. And in chapter 28, there's a very, very dramatic and vivid prophecy of judgment. Israel is here identified under the name of Ephraim, but listen to verse 1, "Woe to the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim, and to the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is at the head of the fertile valley of those who are overcome with wine." This is a picture of a drunken brawl. "Behold the Lord has a strong and mighty agent, has a storm of hail, a tempest of destruction, like the storm of mighty overflowing waters. He has cast it down to the earth with this hand. The proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim is trodden underfoot. And the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is at the head of the fertile valley will be like the first ripe fig prior to summer, which one sees as soon as it is in his hand he swallows it. In that day, the Lord of host will become a beautiful crown and a glorious diadem to the remnant of His people, a Spirit of justice for him who sits in judgment, a strength to those who repel the onslaught at the gate. And these who also reel with wine and stagger from strong drink the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink. They are confused by wine. They stagger from strong drink. They reel while having visions. They totter when rendering judgment. For all the tables are full of filthy vomit without a single, clean place." My what a graphic description. This is Isaiah's description of Israel.

Now, let me give you the context. This is set in the latter years of King Hezekiah – King Hezekiah of Judah, southern kingdom. This is set in a period around 705 to 701 BC. Remember, in 722 BC, the Assyrians had invaded the northern kingdom of Israel and wiped it out and taken all the people captive. That's 722.

You move a few years later. It's now 705, and Isaiah is warning the southern kingdom, the rules of Judah, that the same thing exactly is going to happen to them, because of their drunkenness. This is emblematic of their sinfulness, their wretchedness. Even graphically speaking of them as if they're vomiting, and there's nothing on the table that's clean. The leaders of Israel are rebuked for the wretchedness of their lives. In other words, he calls them drunkards. They don't appreciate this.

So the best way to understand verses 9 and 10 is it's their response. To whom would he teach knowledge? And to whom would he interpret the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just taken from the breast? For he says, order on order, order on order, line on line, line on line, a little here, a little there." That is scorn. That is mockery. Who does he think he's talking to, a bunch of babies, that he repeats the same thing over and over and over, line on line, line on line, order on order, order on order. They sneer at him. They call his teachings simple and childish.

And then Isaiah responds in Verse 11. "Indeed, referring to God, He will speak to this people through stammering lips and a foreign language." "He will speak to this people through stammering lips and a foreign language." Hm. It happened. This prophecy – let's put it in 705 – was fulfilled finally in 586, about 20 years later, when the Assyrians came or Babylonians. They came in with a foreign language. This is 784 years before Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. Because of their unbelief, because of their apostasy, God, who spoke to them through the prophets, who spoke to them through the faithful prophets, like Jeremiah and Isaiah and others, and warned them and warned them and warned them and warned them, and spoke to them always in language they understood, God when His mercy and His patience is exhausted, will then begin speaking to them in a language they cannot understand. And that signaled the arrival of the Babylonians.

Starting in verse 15 in this chapter and running all the way through the really long chapter, all the way to the end there, chapter 29, there is more warning, more warning, more warning, more warning. Way back in Deuteronomy 28, Moses predicted the coming invasion of Israel if they were not faithful to God. And Moses, in Deuteronomy 28, verse 49 said that when that invasion comes, they will come upon you speaking a foreign language.

Jeremiah also warning Israel says in chapter 5, verse 15, "Behold, this is the word of the Lord. Behold, oh house of Israel," – says God – "I am bringing a nation against you from afar. It is an enduring nation. It is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say." Again, Moses warned of this, looking way ahead. Isaiah said it would come. Jeremiah says it would come. And it came in the form of the Babylonian hoards who came in and massacred the people of the southern kingdom of Judah, destroyed the temple, destroyed Jerusalem and hauled people off captive. And there they were being hauled off by people whose language they couldn't understand to a country whose language they didn't understand.

What did Israel learn, then, about a language they don't understand? That this is a sign of judgment. This is a sign, in Isaiah, in Jeremiah, and even in the writings of Moses in Deuteronomy, a judicial sign from God that judgment is coming because of unrighteousness, because of sin, because of unbelief, because of apostasy.

Now, with that in mind, go back to 1 Corinthians. And the Bible is so consistent and the writers of scripture so consistent. So when Paul is explaining the meaning of this gift of language, he says, "It is really what is prophesized by Isaiah, men of strange languages and the lips of strangers, I will speak to this people, and even so, they will not listen to me, says the Lord. So then languages are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers." Not to unbelievers only, but to unbelieving Jews – unbelieving Jews.

What did it mean on the day of Pentecost when all of a sudden all these believers were taking the place of a prophet and starting to speak in Gentile languages? Any Jew who knew his Old Testament would have reason tremble, because God, who had always spoken to them in their language, was now speaking a language they couldn't understand.

What is the point of this sign? It is a sign of judgment on Israel. What is the judgment on Israel. Listen, Israel is at this point set aside, and the church is born to take her place. You see that. This is a judgment on Israel. That's exactly what Scripture indicates. It is a judgment on this people – verse 21 – this people, meaning God's people, the same people to whom Isaiah spoke.

In the day of the birth of the church, Pentecost, and in the day of Paul writing 1 Corinthians, and the 25 years in between, God, for that 25 years at least, continued the use of this sign to declare to the Jews in Jerusalem and in synagogues wherever they might be that they were going to be set aside as a people for their unbelief and apostasy. This is a sign of judgment on Israel.

Moses warned. Isaiah warned. Jeremiah warned. And the judgment came. The apostles warned, and the apostles warned, and the Holy Spirit gave some the gift that would continue to be a warning, and in 70 AD, the judgment came. Jesus predicted it. Luke 13:35, "Your house will be desolate." In the Olivet discourse, this city, this nation will be destroyed.

When you talk about the languages on the day of Pentecost, to somehow convert that into some kind of self-edifying gibberish is alien to everything here – everything. And whatever this gift was, in the book of Acts, it is the same in 1 Corinthians. And rather painstakingly, I might say I have gone through 1 Corinthians 12:13-14 phrase by phrase by phrase, and you can read the details of that explanation in the commentary on 1 Corinthians.

Sadly, the prophecy, and back to 1 Corinthians 14, "I will speak in strange tongues to this people" – and it all started on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem – "even so, they will not listen to me. That

sounds like an echo of Isaiah. That sounds like an echo of Jeremiah. That sounds like an echo of Moses. The principle, then, is clear. Languages were used in the Old Testament for a sign of judgment. And they're used in the New Testament for a sign of judgment. In each case, judgment on Israel for their apostasy which reached its apex when they cried for the blood of their Messiah. Can't get more apostatized than that.

That city was full of Jews, who were hearing a pronouncement of judgment, as God was setting aside Israel and carving out a new people. The body of Christ, Jew and Gentile. And in Christ, there's neither Jew nor Greek, right, Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, male or female. No more a nation but a people from every nation – that's the church.

I want to add a footnote here. Has God forever set aside Israel? No. Romans 11, "God will one day save a remnant of the nation Israel." And even now, Jews are being saved daily along with Gentiles, but the middle wall is down. It's no longer an ethnic people. It's no longer a single nation. They forfeited that right. They forfeited that privilege. You might say, speaking in these languages then becomes a sign of a final violation of a covenant with God when people start babbling in a language that's not the language of God. Your house truly is left desolate. Can Jews still be saved? Yes, 3,000 of them that day, but they're just not the exclusive national ethnic people of God. It's the church. It's the church.

This is a profound day when the church is born. So you have to ask yourself what of gibberish? There's no biblical place for it. What's it a sign of? Nothing, pointless. It has a role. According to 1 Corinthians, it has a role in a service. Two or three people might be used by God to speak in a foreign language to pronounce a judgment on Israel, to awaken them. But it would always have to be interpreted. And, oh by the way, women could never do it, because they're forbidden to do that, 1 Corinthians 14. There's no sense in making that statement again now, is there? That was made when it needed to be made at the time of the birth of the church.

But I don't want to leave it just at that point. I want to add something. Speaking in these foreign languages while to Israel was a sign of judgment, to the rest of the world, it was a sign of blessing. To the rest of the world, it was a sign of blessing. What it was saying is, "Israel is set aside, and God is going to make his people from every tongue and tribe and nation." That's the positive side. As God turns from Israel, he turns to the church. That's why Paul, in Romans 11, says, "The fall of them, the fall of Israel is the riches of the world." The fall of Israel, the riches of the world.

This Corinthian assembly was getting carried away with the use of this, and it was making people proud. So in verse 23, Paul adds – 1 Corinthians 14:23, "If the whole church assembles together and everybody speaks in these languages, and ungifted men or unbelievers entered, they're going to think you're crazy." You don't need to do that with believers. You don't need to do that in the church with believers. You don't need to pronounce judgment on believers. You don't need to misuse that.

And if unbelievers do come, they're not going to understand that in a Gentile church like Corinth.

No, I think we all need to understand that the fabrication that has been passed off as if it were some spiritual gift sadly is meaningless. Mumbling something that you've learned to mumble because somebody taught you how to mumble it has no value. Yielding up yourself to something worse, like demonic babble, which would be true of cults and perhaps people possessed, is frightening.

And I don't want to overstate the case. If you have a choice between mumbling and gossiping, mumble. [laughter] I mean, let's be clear. The fact that you don't speak nonsense, the fact that you don't speak non-language, but you do speak evil, far worse. But what's so sad for me is this didn't exist before the early 1900s, and we've had to struggle to try to unpack this passage from all this unnecessary baggage. And so, we literally missed the whole magnificence of this text, and we got a lot of people running around lose, thinking that the key to spiritual growth and development is some kind of babble, just bizarre, just bizarre.

Well, that's probably enough for tonight. Go back to Acts 2. And to just comment on verse 5, this sort of seals the interpretation, there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under Heaven. It was about the Jews. It was a sign to this people, of judgment, but it was also a sign to the Jews that the wonderful works of God were now going to go to the Gentiles, and that's the church.

So that is the incredible evidence of the arrival of the Holy Spirit and this staggering miracle of people speaking languages they didn't even know. And, apparently, some of them being able to continue to do that, so that even 25 years later, there's a legitimate gift as a proclamation of judgment to Israel and a welcome to the Gentile world. So that's point one, the evidence of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Now, next Sunday night, I want to talk about the effect, and we'll look a little bit more closely at those languages and how they responded to them. And you know what their response was, that they thought they were drunk. I don't know how being drunk explains anything. It doesn't explain rational language, but it does explain you hearing something you don't understand. There were people who heard their own language, but the same people who heard their own language, heard all those other languages, and wouldn't know how to interpret that. So it's an amazing event. We'll look more at it later.

Let's join in prayer. Father, we are just so grateful to see the consistency of your divine revelation. We know the means of spiritual growth is through being filled with the Spirit, being controlled by the Spirit, being born along and moved by the Holy Spirit. We know that that occurs when the word of Christ dwells in us richly. When we walk in the Spirit and do not fulfill the lust of the flesh, when we're filled with the fruit of the Spirit, that's being Spirit-filled.

That is the New Testament paradigm. That is the New Testament theology of sanctification, not some esoteric, irrational – esoteric in the sense that it's really transcends normal realities, not some abnormal, unreal, fantasy experience that's not cognitive or clear. That doesn't do anything for anyone, ever. We pray, Lord, that you would rescue people from that, because that's a false paradigm of sanctification that cannot, cannot restrain the flesh, cannot give victory over temptation and sin.

And we thank you for the wonder of the birth of the church. We thank you for its stunning place in redemptive history, as you temporarily set aside and apostate Israel and brought life to a church, your church, of which Christ is the head and we are the body.

The falling of Israel truly is the riches of the world. But we know that that same Israel that was broken off and the church graphed in to the stock of Abrahamic blessing, that same church must not think that you would be unfaithful to your unilateral unconditional promises to redeem Israel, for in the future, all Israel will be saved. They will come as a purified nation, look on the one they pierced, mourn for him as an only son. The fountain of cleansing will be open to them, and they will experience salvation and the fulfillment of all the promises given to Abraham and David. And we'll all together enter into the fullness of kingdom blessing and everlasting blessing in the new heaven and the new earth.

Thank you, Lord, that you have made us a part of the church, that you have Baptized us with the Holy Spirit, immersed us into His life, making us one with all others who possess that same life, and that the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in us to secure us into eternal glory and empower us for ministry and faithfulness. What an amazing reality to be a part of the church.

May we be faithful to take this high and holy privilege, this really up-to-now, the high point of redemptive history, for us to participate in this. May we take that and embrace it for the gift that it is, for the privilege that it is. And may we use every means of grace, every opportunity to be faithful, to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, to stimulating one another to love and good works, to using our gifts, to serving, to evangelizing. May we truly be filled and born along by the power of the Holy Spirit. That's our prayer, and we ask it in the name of the Savior. Amen.

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