

Acts – Lecture 2

I want to thank Carol for giving me the honor of developing a lecture for one of the most amazing chapters in all of Scripture. As a reminder, we saw in Chapter 1 the risen Lord offering a promise to the disciples in Acts 1:8: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." This was appropriately our memory verse last week as it is the theme verse for the entire Book of Acts.

To give you some perspective on where we are in time at the beginning of Chapter 2, it has been 50 days since Jesus' resurrection. The reason we know this is verse 1 tells us, Acts 2:1 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. The Day of Pentecost was one of seven feasts that were designated *by* the Lord and *for* the Lord. Leviticus 23:1-2 tells us, "And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts."

The Hebrew translation for "feasts" means "appointed times". In Kevin Howard's and Marvin Rosenthal's excellent book, "The Feasts of the Lord", they comment, "The idea is that the sequence and timing of each of these feasts have been carefully orchestrated by God Himself. Each is a part of a comprehensive whole. Collectively, they tell a story." They go on to say, "These seven feasts typify the sequence, timing, and significance of the major events of the LORD's redemptive career." For those of you biblical numerology geeks like me, the number 7 should ring a bell - it is the number of perfection or completion. Therefore, the seven

feasts provide us the complete story of Jesus' ministry in His first and second coming.

The first feast is the Passover. Leviticus 23:5 "On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD's Passover". This feast marks the time when the Lord had proclaimed the 10th and final plague upon all inhabitants of the land of Egypt. However, for His chosen people of Israel, He offered an escape from this death sentence by telling them to sacrifice a pure and spotless lamb, take the blood of the lamb and sprinkle it on the wooden door posts of their homes, and then take and eat the sacrifice. If they believed God and obeyed, they would be spared.

God delivered on this promise - as He does on all His promises, so He institutes the first feast to be the Passover to commemorate this first great act of love, mercy, and grace to the nation of Israel. The Passover is symbolic of Jesus' sacrificial death - taking upon Himself our past, present, and future sin. If we believe He is the only begotten Son of God, He did die for us, and was raised from the dead, then we are given eternal life - we are spared from having to fear death because of The Lamb of God's blood that was shed on the cross.

The second feast was to occur the next day after the Passover - the feast of unleavened bread. Leviticus 23:6-8: "And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it."

In the Bible, leaven symbolizes error or sin. It is the agent that causes fermentation. For all of us, when we die, our bodies will decay and ultimately return to dust

(unless we choose to be cremated and speed the process up). This wouldn't be the case for Jesus. Psalm 16:10 reminds us, “For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” The feast of unleavened bread proclaims Christ's body - the Unleavened Bread of Life - would not experience the ravages of death while in the grave.

The third feast was known as the Feast of the Firstfruits. Leviticus 23:9-10: “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.” This feast actually was marked on the second day of the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread. So Passover occurs on the 14th day of the month of Nisan (part of the Jewish Lunar calendar - by our calendar this is either March or April), the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was on the 15th day, and the Feast of the Firstfruits occurs on the 16th day.

The barley harvest - the first crop planted in the winter - is now, in the spring, beginning to ripen. The first sheaf (firstfruits) of the harvest is cut and, in a carefully prescribed and meticulous ceremony, presented to the Lord. The LORD's acceptance of the firstfruits is an earnest or pledge, on His part of a full harvest. Therefore, the Feast of the Firstfruits is symbolic of the resurrection - the symbol of the Father accepting His Firstfruits' offering - His Son.

Finally, we get to where we are now in our story –the Feast of Weeks - also known as the Shavuot in Hebrew. Leviticus 23:15-16b says, “And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath”. Seven sabbaths equals seven weeks - or 49 days.

Then we're told to count the 50th day as after the seventh sabbath. There's that number seven again. It is to occur precisely 50 days after the Firstfruits - the resurrection of the Messiah. The Feast of Weeks is also known as Pentecost.

This feast was marked by bringing two loaves of bread - baked with fine flour and leaven. These loaves were symbolic of the Jews and Gentiles coming together to form the church. Interestingly, this bread is to be made with leaven - the symbol of sin. This signifies that the church would be made up of sinners saved by grace. The remaining three feasts are:

- The Feast of Trumpets - (Rosh Hashanah)
- The Day of Atonement - (Yom Kippur)
- The Feast of Tabernacles - (Sukkot)

The first four feasts speak to the LORD's first coming and are held in the Spring. Interestingly, the final three feasts speak to Jesus' second coming, and they are observed in the Fall. Now it is very clear we don't know when the Lord is going to return, but it is kind of fun to speculate that if Jesus' first coming lined up in the Spring season with the first four feasts, then could it be that His second coming will line up with the Fall feasts? What time of year are we in??? Like I said - it's fun to speculate.

Well - think we should get into Chapter 2?? This chapter can be separated into two sections: 1) The Coming of the Holy Spirit; and, 2) Peter's great and fruitful first evangelistic sermon. This is truly the beginning of the church - the commencement of the process of identifying the bride of Christ which is still going on today. It has been 50 days since the resurrection and 10 days since the ascension. What are the disciples doing? Waiting on the Lord. Acts 2:1 tells us, "When the Day of

Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.” This is the second time Luke mentions they are all with one accord and in one place. There's no more mentioning of strife between them, no one asking who is going to be the greatest, and no separation of them. They are united in prayer, submission, and obedience. Very good things tend to happen when God's people are united like this.

Acts 2:2-3 paints a mind boggling scene, “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.” The first thing that happened is they heard from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind. This isn't a breeze in the trees - have any of you ever heard an accounting of what a tornado sounds like? A common description is as if there's a large train roaring right at you. My guess this is more what it sounded like.

Next, they see something like divided tongues of fire. Now this isn't really fire as these guys would have been pieces of toast! The order of the description is worth noting. The first thing that is noticed is audio - sound from heaven. What got my attention in the process of my becoming a Christian was first hearing the Word of God. It was only then that I could see God's working. The disciples went from hearing from heaven to seeing something from heaven.

We then see a manifestation of the Holy Spirit in verse 4, “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” In the book of Genesis, we have Isaac who is a symbol of Christ, and his servant, who is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, goes out looking for a bride for Isaac. When the servant identifies Rebekah, the first thing he does is give her valuable gifts. So it goes for us when the Holy Spirit identifies us as a part of the bride of Christ - He gives us gifts of immeasurable value.

1 Corinthians 12:7-10 provides us a list of these gifts, “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same a Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.”

The issue of speaking in tongues is a controversial subject within the church today. There are those segments of the church who hold to the position that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit – miracles, healings, and speaking tongues was specifically reserved for Biblical times, and they were used for the purpose of establishing the authority of the apostles. Once the church reached a certain size and the apostles died, these gifts were no longer available. They hold to the position that the Spirit moves in different ways at different times. There is another segment of the church – typically led by the Pentecostal and Charismatic sectors that believe all the gifts of the Spirit are available today. They claim that if God is the same now as He was then, then why wouldn’t these gifts be available now?

I’m not going to go any farther on this topic as it is not the focus of this chapter. The gifts of the Spirit are awesome things, but they are to be used *solely* for the building of the Kingdom of God. Personally, from a self-examination of my walk with God, it isn’t whether or not I have whatever gifts that He has given to me out of His grace, it is what I’m *doing with them* that really matters. In other words, it is not the gifts of the Spirit I measure myself against, but the *fruits* of the Spirit that reveal where I am in my relationship with Christ.

Galatians 5:22-23a provides the list of the fruits of the Spirit, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” If you want to do a reality check of where you are in your relationship with God, honestly ask yourself – or more scary – ask a trusted friend – if you are walking *each* day with these at the forefront of your actions – not just on Sunday. This is not meant to be an exercise to build up condemnation in you if your not exhibiting these, but it is meant to be a reminder that this is how we *can* live if we allow ourselves to fully surrender to the truth of God’s love and grace and let the Holy Spirit guide our actions.

Because this is one of the feasts of the Lord which calls for Jews from all over to come to Jerusalem, there are many devout men from different countries – and they’re witnessing what is going on with the disciples. They’re freaking out because some of what the disciples are speaking are dialects native to the devout men’s homelands. They know these guys are simple Galileans, so how can they possibly be speaking in their native languages? This is the first of what we’re going to see time and time again of the demonstration of the power of God – signs and wonders – to further reveal the truth of the gospel that Jesus was the Christ – the Messiah.

Acts 2:13 says, “Others mocking said, “They are full of new wine.” As we so often find with people who reject the truth of God, they can’t let it go – they have to become antagonistic. A common method of this antagonistic behavior is mocking – making fun of people who have faith in God. We saw it with the people who mocked Jesus on the cross, and now there are some knuckleheads who can’t accept the reality of what is going on with the disciples, so the mockers accuse them of being drunk.

Ephesians 5:18 states, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit”. Have you ever noticed that drunk people get more powerful? Maybe not more powerful, but more bold – more talkative. I believe if we would allow the Spirit to fill us completely, it will be easier for us to be more bold and powerful – and more talkative – reaching out to people who need to hear the truth of Who Jesus Christ is. It certainly worked for Peter as we transition into the second half of this chapter.

In Acts 2:14 which says, “But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words.” Peter is being obedient to the command of Acts 1:8 which tells them of their mission to be witnesses unto Him first in Jerusalem. He then tells the crowd they’re not drunk – it is only 9:00 in the morning. Clearly, these guys didn’t go to the same college I did!

So step 1 of his sermon is he identifies his audience. We need to remember this when we’re looking to speak to people – we need to identify with them to help us understand how to proceed with our witness. The second step is to proclaim the truth of who they are – in this case, who they’re not. They’re not drunken Galileans in town crashing a feast of the Lord – they’re here to deliver a serious message.

He wisely uses the Word of God to defend what is going on – he quotes the prophet Scripture from the second chapter of Joel in Acts 2:16-21: ¹⁶ But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams.¹⁸ And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy. ¹⁹ I will show wonders in heaven

above and signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.²⁰ The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.²¹ And it shall come to pass *that* whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved.’

This puts to rest the mocker – Peter is proclaiming that what has just happened is a fulfillment of prophecy. In actuality, the complete fulfillment of this prophecy will not happen until the Great Tribulation – this was kind of a sneak preview of coming attractions.

Peter continues in Acts 2:22-24a: “²²Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—²³Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; ²⁴whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death.” This is amazing preaching – in verse 22 Peter sums up the life of Jesus; in verse 23 he talks about the death of Jesus, and in verse 24 he spoke of the resurrection of Jesus. He presents the entire gospel in less than 30 seconds!

Verse 23 presents a bit of a challenge as it states that it was God’s foreknowledge that Jesus would be crucified, but He then says that the people have crucified Him. We see God’s sovereignty at work, yet he makes them accountable for their actions. Jon Courson says it well, “God is sovereign, yet man is responsible.” God knew everything we were going to do wrong before we did it, and He modified His original plan, which was void of sin, to factor in our behavior. We are accountable for our actions – even if God in His sovereignty already knew about it.

Peter then makes critical doctrinal statement in Acts 2:24b: because it was not possible that He should be held by it [the grave]. Romans 3:23 tells us that the wages of sin is death. Since Jesus never sinned, death could not hold Him.

Peter demonstrates the power of the Holy Spirit as he draws on Scriptures to present his message – this is always the best way because God’s Word has power. Acts 2:25-29: ²⁵ For David says concerning Him: ‘I foresaw the LORD always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. ²⁶ Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. ²⁷ For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. ²⁸ You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.’ He’s quoting Psalm 16:8-11, but what is interesting about this passage is it is really Jesus talking to the Father about this very moment in history.

Peter goes on to remind us that David wasn’t just a king – he also was a prophet. In verse 30 he points out that David foretold that the Christ would come from the fruit of his body – Jesus would be a descendant of his.

A key point Peter makes in verse 32 is that not just he, but all the disciples had personally witnessed the resurrected Lord. This is significant because any story you tell gains great credibility when you can say you were a witness to the events of the story. Eye witnesses can be the cornerstone of making a case for or against something. For us, while we were not witnesses of the resurrected Christ, we are witnesses to the power of God through His Spirit in lives today. It’s not always in signs and wonders. It can be a restored marriage or a victory over an addiction. Proclaiming to be a witness to God’s power is one of the most effective weapons we have when sharing Christ with non-believers.

Peter then goes on to explain that the power that everyone just witnessed was the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. He then goes in for the powerful concluding statement of his sermon in verse 36, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” The address is to all of Israel, he doesn’t sugar coat their accountability in the story, and then proclaims the truth that Jesus is the Messiah.

The sermon landed where all sermons should be focused – on the heart. The conviction of the truth of Peter’s sermon cut their hearts, and they ask what they should do. Peter tells them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins – and they, too, will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. He then makes sure they hear this promise – the promise of the Holy Spirit is available to their children and anyone else whom the Lord will call. That same promise is available today.

We then are told that 3,000 souls were added to the church that day. That number might ring a bell. In Exodus 3:28 we’re told 3,000 people died the day the law was given. We again see the picture of new life – of life restored – with 3,000 lives now being saved. Isn’t that awesome?

Verse 42 gives us the framework for the church, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” The church was never more dynamic than it was in the beginning, so it is reasonable for today’s churches to follow these simple four objectives:

1. Continuing steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine – this is the constant teaching of the Word of God

2. Fellowship – God’s people need to be together – regularly – not just on Sundays
3. Breaking of bread – not only do God’s people need to be together, but they need to get to know each other – the breaking of bread in Biblical times was a serious gesture of intimacy between people.
4. Being in prayer – we simply cannot pray enough

The common theme of these four objectives is communication – communication with God through His Word; communication with each other to share what God is doing in our lives; and communication with God through prayer. God wants to hear from us. The people did just these things, and the church exploded. Please note the clear statement in the last verse of this chapter that it was the **Lord** who added to the church – not a church program, not a killer worship service, not an awesome new facility – it was the Lord adding to the church out of His grace.

There were many different ways I could have summarized this chapter, but I feel compelled to go in a direction that may seem strange. I’m finding as I get older and read the Bible, I’m focusing a little less on the knowledge aspect of Scripture and spending more time on the “what this means to me” component. From this perspective, I want to consider Peter. It has been just 53 days since he suffered the most crushing moment in his life. This big strapping tough guy fisherman who had promised the Lord he would die for him gets confronted by a young girl who calls him out for being associated with Jesus. Three times he denies even knowing Jesus. One of the gospels tells us that Jesus is present when this happens and He looks at Peter when he denies him the third time. Remember, Jesus told him he would do exactly what he did.

I believe the Lord's process of restoring Peter began with this look. I don't believe it was a look of anger or shock but a look of "it's ok, Peter, I knew this would happen, and I still love you." Is there anyone in this room who hasn't suffered a deep wound in their life? Maybe it's something you did, or maybe it's something that someone did to you. Either way, the wound was so deep it has crippled part of who you thought you were even to this day. If this is true, I feel terribly for you, but I'm here to tell you that it doesn't have to be that way. You can be free of the guilt, shame, anger, hurt, or whatever it is that you've been carrying around today.

How can I say such a thing? You may want to say to me, "Dan, you don't know what I've done." Or "You don't know me, and you don't know how much pain I'm in." You're right – I don't know and don't understand. What I'm saying is that it doesn't matter. Look at Peter – he's had this life shattering moment and just 53 days later, he is speaking in power the gospel – reaching out to thousands of people – I would guess not just a few knew of his failure. We're looking at a totally transformed human being. How did he do it?

I see him accomplishing it in four steps:

- 1) He would BELIEVE. He believed who Jesus was – he had spent the previous three years of his life day in and day out getting to know Jesus and witnessing His power and goodness. For us, that means we need to truly spend time in the Word of God getting to know Jesus. I promise you if you do this, your belief in Him will deepen.
- 2) He would RECEIVE. He received the forgiveness that Jesus gave him. For many of us – including myself – this is a very hard step. The kind of forgiveness Jesus offers is complete – there's no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. I recently heard a great comment about Jesus'

forgiveness – if He went to such an extent to forgive you and take away your sins, why on earth would He want to bring them back to remind you of them? Because it's not God telling you that your forgiveness is bogus, it's the devil. Peter fully received Jesus' forgiveness.

- 3) He would PROCEED. With the burden of guilt, shame, pain, and everything else Peter may have been carrying now gone, he was free to move forward. How many of us have been unable to truly move forward in our lives because of what we're holding onto that Jesus already took care of? Allow yourself to imagine life without the bitterness, anger, and every other burden of the sins you have committed or were committed to you. It's as if they were never there in the first place. This isn't easy because for many of us we have built our identities around our pain, so the thought of not being shackled by it opens up a door that seems totally foreign. I'm here to tell you it's real.
- 4) He would FEED. With the freedom to move forward, Peter's devotion and appreciation for Jesus' forgiveness and love compelled him to obey the Lord's commandment to feed His sheep. Remember the Lord asking Peter if he loved Him, to feed His sheep? It was the least Peter could do – moreover, He wanted to please His Lord. I've found that when I take the focus off of me and think about whom I can minister to, I start to forget the junk that was holding me back in the first place. I believe that is one of the mysterious blessings of serving the Lord – He's healing you while you're working for Him healing others.

He would believe. He would receive. He would proceed. He would feed. My friends, Peter's life was transformed when the Holy Spirit came upon him and cemented all the promises of his Lord into his heart, soul, and mind. He became

free of his guilt and became a powerful servant for the Lord. I would like to end by asking the Holy Spirit to come upon each of you and cement the truths of the promises of God and free you of what holds you down. Let's pray.