

# IT'S NOT GREEK TO ME

ACTS 2:1-13    JUNE 19, 2019

Birthday parties are meant to be celebratory occasions. However, a quick Google search of “fights at birthday parties” will expose you to an ever-growing list of stories which chronicle the melees that break out in the last place they should. In 2010 there was a fight at a 3 year old’s birthday party, involving 75 people and requiring the intervention of no less than 20 police officers.<sup>1</sup> In 2012, ABC News published a story titled: *Chuck E. Cheese: Where Family Feuds at Birthday Parties Turn into Violent Brawls*.<sup>2</sup> “One Chuck E. Cheese location in Susquehanna, Pa., has had a lot of problems. According to Police Chief Robert Martin, local authorities [were] called to that location *17 times* [in the space] of *18 months*, starting in 2009.”

If you read or listen to a variety of teachings on the book of Acts, you’ll find that a big fight breaks out right here in chapter 2. Not on the page, but among Christian brothers and sisters who are interpreting the passage. We’ve seen already that Acts can be a *controversial* book. Whether it’s the selection of Matthias or Paul’s Jewish vow in chapter 18. The separation of Paul and Barnabas over John-Mark. Chapter 2 is *also* a bit of a lightning rod for doctrinal controversy, due to the arrival and activity of the Holy Spirit.

How the Holy Spirit behaves, relates to us and operates *through* us is a major point of division within the church. Often times a church’s stance on the Holy Spirit is a deal-breaker for people.

This evening, as we look at the text, we want to address some of the disagreement, but *hopefully* we won’t get too bogged down in that part of the discussion. Because, Acts 2 should be more than a melee. It records for us the birthday of the Church. The Church that you and I are part of *right now*. As we look at these verses, we can discover the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit. Not just the *gifts* He gives us, but He *Himself*, that blessed gift. That sweet Comforter sent from Heaven for us. If you’re a Christian, He is yours tonight! And throughout the Book we find that He is a gift so wonderful, it should endear us more and more to the Giver. Have you ever received a really great, unexpected gift? To get a gift like that creates an affection in your heart for the person who gave it. The same should be true as we ponder the gift of the Holy Spirit. We will see the wonderful, tender love of God on display. God who wants so badly to add to the Church those who are not yet saved.

When we begin in verse 1, we recall that there are about 120 disciples hanging out in Jerusalem, praying together, going over the Scriptures, but mostly just waiting.

**Acts 2:1 - When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.**

We can’t even get out of the first verse without some disagreement. What “place” are they hanging out in? Verse 2 will reference a “house,” but there’s some reason to think the term could’ve been referring to the Temple. Some feel that this scene is still taking place in the upper room of chapter 1. We don’t know for sure. What seems clear is that 3,000+ people can’t fit in the upstairs room of a house, and so either the disciples were in the Temple complex (Luke’s Gospel said they were there *continually* during this period), or they *were* in the upper room and, when everything happens, the disciples go downstairs to preach to the gathered crowd on the street.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oD-SqdTu5kE>

<sup>2</sup> <https://abcnews.go.com/US/chuck-cheese-family-feuds-birthday-parties-turn-violent/story?id=15803726>

But here, *finally*, 10 days after the ascension and 50 days after the crucifixion, it was time for the Church to be born and the Holy Spirit to arrive in a *new* way, ushering in a brand new dispensation in God's dealings with mankind.

If I had been one of the disciples, I'm sure I would've gotten impatient waiting for the Lord to give birth to His church. I remember when we were having our first child, he was a number of days past his due date, we just wanted to get the show on the road.

But God has reasons for His timing. Here, we'll find that there were great *practical* reasons for the timing of Pentecost and there were profound *symbolic* reasons. Let's look at the symbolic first. In the Old Testament, God established a calendar for Israel. There were a number of feasts on this annual calendar. You can learn a lot about them on our website. We've got a series titled *Fantastic Feasts And Where We Find Them*. But God's feasts were not just for *Jewish* benefit. They also were symbols and foreshadowing of the work the Lord would ultimately do for the whole world. Passover was the foreshadow of the Cross. Firstfruits was the foreshadow of the resurrection. And then, scheduled 50 days *after* Passover there was the Feast of Weeks. This was the foreshadowing of Pentecost. At the Feast of Weeks, God's people celebrated the wheat harvest and the giving of the Law. Now, in the Church age, Pentecost is fully realized. For the Church, it is the celebration of the giving of the Holy Spirit and the start of the greatest harvest the world has ever known - A harvest that reaches every continent in every century, and one that Jesus invited us to be a part of. The harvest of souls for the Kingdom of God.

**Acts 2:2 - <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.**

Tornado survivors often describe the sound as "a continuous rumble [and] roar,"<sup>3</sup> like enormous freight trains barreling through the center of town. The sound on that Sunday morning (it's about 9am at the time) traveled from heaven to earth, surrounding a group of *somewhat* unsuspecting believers. Of course, they knew the Spirit was coming, but they clearly did not know when and had no part in *bringing* Him into the room that day. They did not *conjure* Him, they didn't *convince* Him to show up. This was heaven's decision and heaven's timeline.

In *any* discussion on the Holy Spirit we must always remind ourselves that He is not "the Force" or a magical power, where if a person will *focus* enough, they will be able to summon abilities like Thor shooting lightning out of his hammer. The Holy Spirit isn't a *force*, He's a *Person*, a *real* Person who knows you and loves you and wants to have a relationship with you.

Why was *wind* the sound? Why not the sound of rushing waters? Or the sound of a great army of soldiers?<sup>4</sup> There are a lot of wonderful, symbolic reasons. The wind is an *invisible* power. The wind comes and goes as it pleases. But, also, the wind, by its very nature, *scatters* things. Things like *seed* which travel, sometimes long distances, to be planted in some far field to grow and bear fruit.

**Acts 2:3 - <sup>3</sup> Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.**

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-does-tornado-sound-like-3970162>

<sup>4</sup> 2 Kings 7:6

The image is that a flame came down, then *divided* itself piece by piece, traveling to rest over each individual believer in the place. 120 times the fire went right to the spot where one of God's precious disciples were and gently sat where they sat. This emblazoning wasn't just for Peter or the 12. It was for *all* of them and *each* of them. They all received the same, *equal measure* of this activity.

Did you know the same Holy Spirit is alive in you as lived in Charles Spurgeon? Or George Mueller? Or Amy Carmichael? Perhaps our *giftings* are different. Of course, our individual callings are just that: *individual*. But, if you're a Christian, you given the Holy Spirit in *equal measure* to all who have come before you. God does not play favorites. Paul wrote:

**1 Corinthians 12:13 - Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.**

This isn't something you have to *apply* for or get proper certification for. Pentecost wasn't just for 120 it was for *all* of us. As a member of God's church, it is your birthday present from heaven.

**Acts 2:4 - <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.**

Notice that a *second* thing has happened here. The fire came down, we recognize this as the *baptism* of the Holy Spirit and now something else has happened: They were all *filled* with the Spirit.

We could spend a *long* time on this verse, but suffice it to say this: The baptism with the Holy Spirit is a one-time occurrence that we, as Christians, *receive* from the Lord. And then, the Bible talks about being continually *filled* with the Holy Spirit, which we will see happening *multiple times* in the book of Acts. We are *commanded* to be filled with the Spirit, indicating that, unlike the *baptism* with the Holy Spirit, the *filling* we *cooperate* with or *refuse* to cooperate with. While the signs of verses 2 and 3 were a once-for-all action, verse 4 serves as an *illustration* to us of the way God the Holy Spirit works in the experience of believers during the Church age. *Not* that we all will speak with other tongues, but that the Holy Spirit's work is to *fill* those who have been *baptized*, as they faithfully walk with God, and this filling dynamically empowers Christians to glorify God and serve Him, day-by-day, in ways that would otherwise be *impossible* without the filling of our Helper, the Holy Spirit.

That day, the Holy Spirit announced His arrival with a supernatural manifestation (wind and fire), but then *immediately* got to the work of *activating* Christians to fulfill their Great Commission.

**Acts 2:5 - <sup>5</sup> And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven.**

Earlier I mentioned that God's timing is often *symbolic*, but here we see it was also very *practical*. Being that it was Pentecost, Jerusalem would be swollen with multiplied *thousands* of pilgrims who had come to offer worship. God's timing ensured the largest possible crowd would witness what the Lord was doing.

We're told that they were there amongst "devout men." There's a lesson here: *Devout* doesn't mean right. *Devout* doesn't mean a person *knows* everything. In fact, we'll see that *all* these devout men were confused, many of them were downright cynical. Don't be intimidated by "devout" atheists or "devout" Mormons. Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

All these men, from *all* these nations, had a common need. It didn't matter if they were from a poor country or a rich one. It didn't matter if they were spiritually near or far from the Kingdom. *All* of them were *outside* of the Church, and so *all* of them needed salvation. And God loved them, so He sent a rescue team for them.

**Acts 2:6 - <sup>6</sup> And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language.**

Back in mid-March, many of you probably heard a loud bang on a Friday afternoon. It was shocking and alarming, though it only lasted a second. When things like that happen I sometimes open up the NextDoor app and see people start reporting in what they heard and what they think it might be. Turns out, "an F-18 Super Hornet based out of NAS Lemoore [had] inadvertently broken the sound barrier."<sup>5</sup> It got a lot of attention.

Imagine a noise like that, only louder, and *unceasing*. And try to imagine what it would be like to hear such a roar when you're a stranger to the sounds of mechanical industry, freight trains or the like.

A star directed the wise men to the home of Jesus. Now a sound directed seekers to His new home: the Church. The roar of the wind acted as a beacon, saying "Come over here and see what God has done!" God's desire is to *announce* Himself through the lives of His people.

Here we're told the nature of the particular miracle that morning: The disciples were suddenly speaking in *known* languages that they had never learned. Languages that *just so happened* to fit with the particular members of the crowd gathering around them.

Using this text, many conservative commentators mount a campaign which seeks to dismiss and destroy what is known as the "gift of tongues" in the New Testament. The gift of tongues, spoken of at length in 1st Corinthians, is *not* the miraculous speaking of *known*, foreign languages. It is the speaking of an *unknown*, heavenly language, to God in prayer. However, taking their stand upon Acts 2:6, many well-meaning teachers try to make the case that there's no such thing. But here's what Paul says:

**1 Corinthians 14:2 - he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands *him*; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.**

What we are seeing here is *not* the gift of tongues in the 1st Corinthians sense, it is a miracle being worked by God through His people. But, just as we break from those who try to dismiss the gift of tongues, so too must we break with those on the *other* end of the spectrum, who suggest that Acts 2 gives us a pattern "proving" that *every* genuine Christian *must* speak in tongues if they are really born again. Acts 2 is *not* tongues in the Corinthian sense. And it is *not* a pattern. Paul says *clearly* that not all Christians will be given the gift of tongues.

**Acts 2:7 - <sup>7</sup> Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?"**

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.yourcentralvalley.com/news/local-news/what-was-the-loud-bang-sound-in-lemoore-the-naval-air-station-explains/>

Galileans were backwoods hillbillies of their day. Just like we don't expect Cleetus to start speaking Latin, this crowd was mind-blown to hear what they were hearing.

It's significant for us to remember that, unlike the culture around us, we are not *defined* by our background, but by the Body we are a part of. Our identity is not what class or cultural group we're in, but, rather it is *Christ*. Our society is so wrapped up in what group you're *in* or *not* in, what sort of victimhood you can claim for yourself. But that sort of mentality is lethal to the kind of ministry we're seeing here. "A Galilean can't engage with me! You don't know where I'm coming from!" In the Church, we've been unified *together* from all backgrounds and walks of life. We're new creations and our message is so great it doesn't matter where we're from.

When Paul Revere carried the message that "The British are coming" no one stopped him and said, "Now, hold on a minute. Who are you to say that to me? Some kind of silversmith trying to tell me how to live my life." (By the way, Paul Revere never said "the British are coming.")<sup>6</sup>

Your identity is in Christ. And the Holy Spirit empowers you to be able to minister to anyone in *all* situations. If you want to celebrate your heritage or some particular aspect of your background, go for it. But wrap yourself up in the Lord, not in some worldly identity and be encouraged that God can do really amazing things, even through Galileans like us.

**Acts 2:8-11 - <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? <sup>9</sup> Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup> Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God."**

All of these people spoke a *common* language: Greek. Meaning, God didn't *have* to use this miracle to get their attention. But He *did*. And in that we see the Lord's tender, personal love for the lost. Each person heard in his own language. At least 15 different ones were represented in the list.

A fair question that comes up a lot is: What about those who haven't heard about Jesus? For every one of them, God has *proven* that He knows their name, He knows their language, He loves them dearly and will be found by anyone who seeks Him.

There's a good reminder here for us as well as we look to minister to people: Ministry should be *personal*, not generic. The Holy Spirit works *personally*, not programmatically. And, we see also that ministry is *universal*. A Galilean *can* minister to an Arab or a Roman.

As the disciples praised God in languages they had never learned, people were drawn in. Now, think about this: What was their commission from Jesus? To go into all the world and make disciples. But then what happens on the very first day of Church history? God *brings* the nations to *them!* It's like when Noah was told to gather the animals and bring them on the ark, but then they started streaming in on their own, miraculously brought by the power of God. This is the kind of King we serve. One who says, "I command you to do *this*" and then yokes with us to to accomplish what He desires. These disciples weren't doing *anything*. They had no plan, no program, no strategy. But once the Spirit filled them, miraculous ministry started to happen.

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<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul\\_Revere#%22Midnight\\_Ride%22](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Revere#%22Midnight_Ride%22)

**Acts 2:12-13 - <sup>12</sup> So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “Whatever could this mean?” <sup>13</sup> Others mocking said, “They are full of new wine.”**

When God is on the move, some seek, others scoff. We should notice that for *either* group, the miracle itself was not enough to convert them. They needed a clear explanation of what was happening and a clear presentation of the Gospel. As we'll see next time, the disciples were ready to preach, ready to explain and introduce these lost souls to Christ.

The Christians weren't full of new wine that day, they were full of the Spirit in a new way. The same Spirit who wants to fill you and me to continue the work. In the book of Acts, when the Spirit fills a person we see them do wonderful things for the Lord. Sometimes they preach. Sometimes they wait tables. Sometimes they are just full of praise. Our aim is to be people who are *filled*. Not to be caught up in chasing particular *experiences* or caught up in *controversies*, but to celebrate the wonderful works of God, the amazing gift of the Holy Spirit, the matchless Giver who loves us enough to do all this for us. And then what *He* sees fit to do with our lives as His vessel will be wonderful, amazing and truly powerful in ways we can't anticipate.