

**Pastoral Reading:** When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying. <sup>3</sup> They saw tongues like flames of fire that separated and rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup> Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them.

**Introduction:** We've heard a lot of chatter this last week about the need for "unity" and "healing." Without sounding pessimistic or cynical; I want to say that the world's system only offers superficial and temporary solutions to our disunity problem. And at worst offers that unity at a very high cost.

Folks we are going to talk about speaking in tongues today and what the meaning of that sign is. I for sure will not answer every question you may have on our subject today. What we'll do today is lay the foundation—we're going to pour the concrete and then build on it in future messages.

**Main Thought:** In Acts Ch. 2 we are witnessing God reunifying the human race under the Lordship of Christ by invading their lives with his transforming presence. There can be *no true (lasting, deep) unity* apart from the saving work of Jesus.

Any other form of healing we might otherwise achieve is going to be fragile, temporary, and shallow answer to what is really a deep problem. But only in Christ can we have the kind of world peace that all dream of.

**Let's take a few minutes here and unpack this passage before us.** The passage is going to prescribe the cure for our fractured culture and is going to challenge us to respond.

1. The Environment (see also Exod 3:2; 2 Sam 5:24; Job 38:1; Pss 29:3–10; 97:2–5; 104:3; Isa 29:6; 30:27–28; 66:15; Ezek 1:4)— portents and stormy images here evoke our memory of the various theophanies of God in the OT. The story begins as Luke sets the stage and scenery and set pieces draw our eyes to center stage. **The Sign Posts are advent signs, meaning, they accompany a major advent or coming of God.**

- **Feast**— Acts 2:1 When the day of **Pentecost** had arrived Pentecost (Lev. 23) was 50 days after Passover and was a celebration of God’s abundance in the wheat harvest. This would have been a celebration that **called for a public gathering to commemorate God’s abundance and grace. Thousands of visitors would have been present in the city from far off places, having made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.**
- **Gathering**— **they were all together in one place (Exod 19:8)** “And all the people answered Moses together...” Some of the more expansive homes in this very area of town that have been excavated could accommodate up to 200 people (e.g. the *cencalus*). Do not miss the importance of this statement—they were all together in to celebrate the feast. **God pours his Spirit out on a gathering of disciples who are obedient to his word (to wait); unified over the essentials of the gospel.**
- **Symbols**—<sup>2</sup> Suddenly a **sound** like that of a **violent rushing wind** (see Ezek 37:5-10) [in which God is blowing like a violent wind to reassemble the dead bones of his people—**to reanimate the dead and to reconstitute Israel**] **came from heaven and it filled the whole house where they were staying (Exod 19:16)** [All the gathered assembly trembled at the sound of God’s revelation]. <sup>3</sup> **They saw tongues like flames of fire that separated and rested on each one of them (Exod 19:18)** [Yahweh descends to the mount **in a flaming fire.**] In the OT that fiery manifestation was almost always a purifying flame.  
This is what the Spirit does in our midst—he purifies us from the unholiness and the impurity of our sin before a holy God.

**In Summary:** The environment of this outpouring is one of **celebration** (the Feast) of God’s abundance, **gathering** as an act of obedience to Christ (to wait for the promise); unified over the teachings of Jesus; **hearing and seeing advent symbols** of a coming outpouring of the Spirit signposts of a significant visitation of God in their midst.

**2. The Gift**—All the believers received the promise of the Father sent after Christ’s ascension to his heavenly throne—the gift of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>4</sup> **“Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit”**

**“They”** refers to **all** the **believers** in their company, the 120 and here’s why. **The interpretation of this sign by Peter (a little later) will be that this indwelling of the Spirit is for you**, your children and all those who are far off. So if it’s for those folks too then why would it not be for the original 120.

**“filled with the Spirit”**—John the Baptist prophesied Jesus would baptize his followers in the Holy Spirit and a purifying fire. Jesus again promises in Acts 1 that in a few days you will be baptized in the Spirit. So this is the fulfillment of that promise. **What does “filled with” refer to?**

- **Being filled with the Spirit is an initial experience of regeneration (Acts 2:4; 9:17).** Being “born again” describes one event in your past when you received the promised Spirit by faith in Jesus. In this sense, the phrase is equivalent to **“Baptism in the Spirit.”**
- **Being filled with the Spirit is an ongoing expectation of Christian fellowship (Lk 4:1; Acts 4:8; 6:3, 5; 7:55; 11:24; 13:9).** Eph 5:18-20 (Col. 3:16) **“And don’t get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled (as an continuous practice) by the Spirit: <sup>19</sup> speaking to one another (plural context) in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord (celebratory and instructional), <sup>20</sup> giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.** This filling of the Spirit happens in the company of believers among “one another.” This is an experience of the Spirit’s filling which results in His influence over our desires and choices.

**Being filled with the Spirit can refer to the initial experience of being baptized in and with the Spirit of God resulting in our salvation; or can describe the ongoing experience of living in the fullness of the Spirit’s presence through regular corporate worship.**

**3. The Sign—THE SIGN IS NOT THE GIFT.** The sign is a signpost of the Gift of the Spirit—but what does it signify? It is unfortunate that this gift has become so controversial in the life of the church over the last century.

**4b “and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them.”**

The nature of the gift: Spirit inspired speech signifying crosscultural mission (Acts 10:44-46; 19:1-6). They were given a supernatural enablement to speak in languages they had not previously learned. This is a powerful and appropriate sign to *confirm the crosscultural direction* of this mission because the Apostles would have had an ethnic cultural barrier to want to preach the Gospel to gentiles.

**Inspired speech is characteristic of Luke-Acts.** Luke mentions speaking in unlearned languages (tongues) prophetic preaching (Acts 2:11ff); spontaneous praise (10:46); predictive prophecy (19:6); boldness to testify in one’s own language (4:8, 31). Spirit-anointed and inspired speech is characteristic of the ongoing mission in Acts.

**It’s practical significance:**

The Story of the Church progresses Geographically in Jerusalem-Judea; Samaria; Greece and Rome. This gift shows up right at the frontiers of those geographical and cultural boundaries.

- Acts 2—Jerusalem and Judea.
- Acts 8—the Samaritan Pentecost (implied because Simon has already seen lots of miracles; but when the Apostles lay hands on believers and they receive the Spirit it says (when Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands).
- Acts 10:44-46 and the House of Cornelius “God accepts everyone from every nation who fears him.” Peter’s understanding was that this gift signified God’s acceptance of repentant Gentiles. Starting with a Roman Centurion and his family.
- Acts 19:6 and the Ephesian disciples; “We have not even heard that there was a Holy Spirit.” The Apostles laid hands on them and the Spirit of God filled those Ephesian believers and they burst into speaking in previously unknown languages. As a signpost confirming the Apostles’ crosscultural mission.

**The gift shows up right at the frontiers of the Spirit’s mission crossculturally to confirm the acceptance of that new group.**

## The theological significance: It is a sign of God's world-righting, world-unifying salvation

At Babel, God fractured a single language into many, creating confusion; at Jerusalem the Holy Spirit made it possible for many languages to be understood as one, creating unity. At Babel, language was used to promote a human agenda ("Let us make a name for ourselves."); at Jerusalem, the "new" language was used to announce the "mighty works of God" (Acts 2:11). At Babel, God scattered the people in judgment (Gen 11:9; Gk *diespeiren*); at Jerusalem, God brings humanity back into the one family of God).<sup>1</sup>

### Babel

(Gen 11:1, 6) One people and one language

(Gen 11:4a) United to build a tower to heaven

(Gen 11:4b) Purpose: for their fame and glory

(Gen 11:5) The Lord "descended" to see the Tower

(Gen 11:8-9) Confusion of language, understanding lost

### Acts

Every nation divided by language and vocabulary

(Acts 1:9) Christ has ascended into the clouds of heaven

(Acts 7:55) Purpose: for the fame and glory of Christ

(Acts 2:1-4) The Spirit descended at Pentecost

(Acts 2:7-8) Initial confusion, then understanding

## You want to see it? Here's where we're headed folks.

Revelation 7:9-10 After this I looked, and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and **language**, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> And they cried out in a loud voice:

Salvation belongs to our God,  
who is seated on the throne,  
and to the Lamb!

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Anthony Spina, "Babel (Place)," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 562.

This is God's world-righting, and world-unifying salvation.

## Application

**1. How's your environment?** The Spirit wasn't poured out until the environment had prepped them for what was coming. They were faithful to wait in obedience. They were faithful to pray together and responsible to conduct business while waiting.

- If you're a skeptic, the best environment for you to be in is in this public gathering right here in order for the Spirit to reveal the truth of the Gospel and warm your heart to it. So that you can be filled with the Holy Spirit into a new creation in Christ.
- If you're a believer, this local, public gathering of believers is the most important date on your calendar.

**2. Don't get conned by offers of false or shallow unity.**

**We are called to be civil and blessed as peacemakers.**

**All the calls this week to unity and healing...at a deep and vital level—that will never happen in any system the world offers.**

**Illus. If you've ever been suckered; maybe you bought a house that turned out to be a money pit.** Or maybe you bought a car and didn't read the fine print on the contract—now a far more hefty payment than you planned on is due.

**Our culture is making us an offer to have unity and peace.** But at what cost? As we read the fine print on the contract—if the cost is that we can have cultural unity so long as we choose not to preach what the Bible says about the nature of a human being. This is where the controversy lies.

**If we choose to answer the question “what is the nature of a human being” biblically**—we will find ourselves naturally and necessarily at odds and indeed antagonistic to our culture because they have rejected that truth.

- **By design and decree**—God has made every person in his image. Meaning that a human life, from the womb to the grave, has value and is precious. This is why most of us are pro-life.
- **By design and decree**—God has made every person in his image, Meaning that human sexual relationships should happen in the context of a male and female marriage. That’s the only sexual relationship that God has sanctioned, both by design and by decree.

Jesus’s cross is the fulcrum of human history. And the message of the cross—the gospel, is the dividing line between spouses, siblings, families, friends and nations. You either believe Jesus the King died on the cross for our sins and rose the third day in vindication of those claims. Or you don’t. You either believe Jesus’s teachings about what leads to human flourishing or you don’t.

If the cost of our unity is *me compromising God’s truth*—then I’m sorry no deal.

On the day of Pentecost 2000 yrs. ago, God began the project of saving and reunifying the human race under the Lordship of Christ by invading their lives with his transforming presence. There can be *no true, lasting, enduring unity* apart from the saving work of Jesus.

**Prayer:**

**(1) If you’re an unbeliever and a skeptic—our plea with you is to put your faith in Jesus**

**(2) If you’re a believer, my exhortation is to mind your environment;** are you regularly gathering with the Church to be instructed through psalms hymns and spiritual songs?

**(3) Let us not recoil at supernatural signs, particularly tongues which had the practical effect** of confirming God’s crosscultural mission for the Apostles; and has the theological effect of unwinding the curse of a deeply fractured humanity.