

## **Theme: The Greatest Miracle of Pentecost**

- 1. NOT the Speaking in Tongues**
- 2. But the Power of the Message**

### **Acts 2:14-21**

**14 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. 15 "For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 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.'"**

Would you ever go to an impressive fireworks display on the Fourth of July and come away from the event talking about how incredible were those little sparklers that the children were waiving around? Or what if you were at an air show and while the Blue Angels were putting on an incredible aerial performance your attention was transfixed on the little toy cardboard airplanes being thrown by the kids around you. Of course not! The real fireworks and the aerial tricks performed by the F-16 fighter jets would completely overshadow the "small-time" performances of the sparklers and the toy cardboard airplanes.

Why is it then, that we often "miss the forest for the trees," so to speak, when it comes to Pentecost? Through the Words of Scripture we hear the rushing wind, we see the tongues of fire above the apostle's heads, and we read of them speaking in many different languages to the multi-national crowd that gathered in Jerusalem and we gasp, "Wow! What a great miracle!" (And, no doubt, it was a great miracle!) But we often almost completely ignore the true power of the Holy Spirit Himself and miss **The Greatest Miracle of Pentecost**.

**The Greatest Miracle of Pentecost** was **1. NOT the apostles speaking in tongues** (different languages) with flames above their heads. Again, make no mistake, that was a great miracle that the Holy Spirit performed—but it was like the sparklers compared to the real firework display, or the toy airplanes compared to the power, speed, and skill of the F-16's. Even the nature of the miracle of speaking in tongues that took place on Pentecost should make it clear that it was not the greatest miracle performed by God that day. After all, what was the reason the apostles were given the ability to speak in tongues?

The people of the crowd answered that question for us in our Scripture reading from earlier in this chapter of Acts, "**Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another...'we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God'**" (Acts 2:7, 11). This should be our first clue that the speaking in tongues was not the greatest miracle of Pentecost. The miracle itself was done in order to do something greater, namely, to spread the Gospel and proclaim "**the wonderful works of God**" (Acts 2:11).

When Peter stood up to defend himself and the apostle's after they were accused of being drunk (Acts 2:13), he pointed out that the prophet Joel had, in fact, prophesied that the sending of the Holy Spirit would be accompanied by miraculous signs, but speaking in tongues would only be a part of them. The last verses of our text are Peter's quote from the Book of Joel (Joel 2:28-32), "**But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: '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. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above And signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.”**

The “**last days**” as they are defined by the Bible refer to the time after Jesus completed His work of salvation. In other words, after His ascension into heaven until He returns again on Judgment Day. That means the apostles who were alive on Pentecost were living in the “**last days**” and so are we. Although the Holy Spirit’s working among us is not usually manifested in the same way today as it was on that day of Pentecost, yet the Spirit still lives and dwells in the hearts of believers. God still “**pours out His Spirit**” (v. 17) on us through His Word and the miracle of Baptism. The last verse of the Gospel of Mark tells us that these miraculous signs and manifestations of the Holy Spirit were used to “**[confirm] the word through the accompanying signs**” (Mark 16:20). When we examine church history we see that after the New Testament Scriptures were completed the need for these signs essentially ended since the Scriptures themselves confirm their authenticity and truth, and are filled with promises of the Spirit’s presence in the hearts of all believers. That is why God could say through the Prophet Joel and the Apostle Peter, “**in the last days, says God, ‘I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and daughters shall prophesy... And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy’**” (v. 17-18).

The tongues of fire and the speaking in tongues were the *visible* and *audible* proof that God had indeed sent His Holy Spirit to His apostles, and as the prophet Joel had predicted, “**they [did] prophesy**” (v. 18). This word, “**prophesy**” first and foremost means to “*proclaim what God wants to make known*” (Friberg Greek Lexicon). We sometimes hear that word and automatically think of telling the future, but when God gave His Holy Spirit it did not always involve the foretelling of future events. It has always involved the preaching of a message that God wants to make known, especially the Gospel message of salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus.

The coming of the Holy Spirit is the last great miracle of God before the day of Christ’s return. Now, that great miracle began on Pentecost, but it continues today wherever the Gospel is preached; whenever God’s saving Word is shared, whether by men or women, young or old, kings or servants. **The Greatest Miracle of Pentecost** continues still today and won’t end until Jesus comes again.

**The Greatest Miracle of Pentecost** then is, of course, **2. the power of the message—the Gospel!** The astonishing power of the Holy Spirit is displayed most evidently in His use of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Through these Words He does the impossible: He creates living, saving faith in the stone-dead hearts of men and women, infants and elderly, rich and poor. Peter refers to this greatest of all miracles as he concludes his quote of the Prophet Joel in the last verse of our text, “**And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved**” (v. 21). Now that is a miracle! “**Calling on the name of the LORD**” is an Old Testament expression that means *believing* in the one true God, Jehovah—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Through the miracle of faith, created by the Holy Spirit, we are saved from the death that we deserved and given everlasting life in heaven instead! This greatest of all miracles happened in an incredible amount on that day of Pentecost. Later on in this chapter of Acts we are told, “**And that day [Pentecost] about three thousand souls were added to them**” (Acts 2:41). Three thousand souls that day were rescued from hell and were written in the book of life in heaven! Is there a greater miracle than that?

The greatest news is that this great miracle of Pentecost is still happening today. It has happened to each one of us through the power of the Spirit in the Word of God, and His power working through the Word and water in the Sacrament of Baptism, and in the Word and bread and wine in the Sacrament of Lord’s Supper. Our souls too have been rescued from hell and our names have been added to heaven’s book of life! Think of what an amazing miracle that is! A miracle God has performed for you, and in you!

So, what is the greater miracle: speaking in tongues, or the everlasting salvation of a human soul? That's kind of like comparing sparklers to a fireworks display, isn't it? As we commemorate and celebrate this day of Pentecost, may we always remember **The Greatest Miracle of Pentecost** and may we always be thankful that God's Holy Spirit has worked that great miracle within us. Amen.