

Title: The Day of the Lord is here
Text: Acts 2.14-21
Theme: judgment and rescue
Series: Acts #5 (or 6)
Prop Stmtnt: The birth of the church was a polarizing event.

Read text:

Imagine that you are being held as a prisoner of war by terrorists who have kept you hidden and have tried to prevent anyone from finding out who you were or where you were. And yet, one by one, the terrorists are being killed. Someone, something is taking them out. You see what is going on and you recognize that this was the work of the Special Forces. They have come, and it is only a matter of time before you will be rescued.

But now imagine that you were one of the terrorists. Your comrades keep dying and you don't know who is doing it, how it is being done, but it is terrifying because you fear that you are next. Do you see the point? The same event resulted in two very different responses. The coming of the Special Forces brought reckoning and rescue, execution and escape, judgment and salvation.

Throughout the Bible, we read about the Day of the Lord. This is a phrase that describes a ramping up or an intensive expression of the judgment of God and/or the blessing of God. In some cases, like the showing up of the Special Forces it is both judgment and salvation all at the same time. Therefore, the Day of the Lord is a decisive day that clarifies who actually trusts in God and who doesn't. So, in view of that, the Day of the Lord is motivation to be in a right standing before God. Do not think that life is a casual affair. Eternal issues are at stake.

The Bible speaks of several things such as, the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, the judgement of God on Babylon, the judgement of God on all the nations as, "the day of the Lord." Each of these events are called the day of the Lord. The coming of Christ to this earth, his return to heaven and his sending the Spirit is also the day of the Lord. The coming of the Spirit to form the church and launch this stage in God's plan is definitely a ramping up of God's activity both in judging the rebellious and in blessing those who trust in the Lord. One event – two reactions. We see this on the day of Pentecost when the church was formed.

The church was birthed on the day of Pentecost (a holiday and national celebration on the Jewish calendar). It happened because the Holy Spirit caused it to happen. The church did not form itself. God formed the church. God birthed the church. God created the church. Christ sent the disciples back to Jerusalem and told them to wait and while they were waiting (praying, preparing, anticipating, studying, discussing, etc) the Holy Spirit, (third person of the Trinity) was poured out on them. He baptized them, that is, He united them together by means of himself into a spiritual bond with one another and now together they were joined spiritually (not just ethnically and nationally) as one people with God. These were believers in Jesus Christ. From that time on, every person who comes to faith in Christ is placed into this union with other believers called the church. This was a new reality. This was a new phase in God's plan for this world. At that point in history the church became and in becoming, it became the focal point of God's activity in this world.

Now, throughout this series in the book of Acts, we are going to see not only how serious God is about the church, but we are also going to see that there are many organizations and institutions that call themselves a church and they are not. This ought to concern us deeply because we use that term. We call ourselves a church. Are we? Are we a church as God defines it? The church (true church) is his baby (actually his bride). Christ sent the Spirit to birth her, form her, grow her, establish her and cause her to flourish. Therefore, we should expect that the true church, established in controversy, resulting in polarization, to have a similar story now. The King has come and he is going to conquer. His kingdom will not end. He will have for himself a people from every tribe, language and nation, and the gates of hell itself cannot stop this. Jesus will not be denied his bride. The formation of the church happened right in front of people many of whom missed the significance of this event. In birthing the church, God was keeping a promise that he had made.

1. **The church is the fulfillment of God's promise to pour out the Spirit.** (14-17a)

A few weeks ago, a house, not too far from mine exploded. Apparently, someone had broken in and had stolen some stuff, like a water heater, and they didn't shut the gas off, so the house filled with gas. Two inspectors came, and when they opened the door, something ignited the gas and the house exploded. That concussion was heard and felt all around and of course, everyone wanted to know what that was. Well, that is similar to happened in this house in Jerusalem. There was this deafening sound of wind, followed by tongues of fire appearing on the heads of the people. People in the area all gathered, several thousand of them in order to find out what was happening. Some of the crowd heard these believers speaking in other languages and they accused them of being drunk. So, Peter answers the question of: what is happening?

Peter stands up and preaches his first sermon. This morning, we are looking at the first part of it in which Peter explains this event by telling his countrymen that 500 years earlier, the prophet Joel predicted this. This is an enormous event, predicted by God and is being fulfilled by God And you are witnessing this! Wow!

Peter's audience may have been a little more familiar with Joel than we are. So let me summarize the book of Joel. The nation of Judah had experienced a devastating invasion of locusts and was almost destroyed economically. The locusts were to be seen as a preview of God's judgment if they did not repent of their sin. The locust invasion pointed to the day of the Lord that would be judgement on those who were rebellious, but if they repented, it would be enormous blessing! And on the day of the Lord the blessing of the Lord would go way beyond a good crop and economic prosperity for the nation, the Spirit of the Lord would be poured out on young and old, rich and poor. They would all benefit! That day, that Joel predicted, is happening right now!

That means that we are in "the last days." This is supported by Hebrews 1.2 which identifies "the last days" as being that era that started with the coming of Christ to the earth. The church is the vehicle that God has raised up, birthed and ordained to carry out his mission on this earth in these last days. The pouring out of the Spirit was what God has done. Later in this sermon (v.33)

Peter says that it was Jesus who poured out the Spirit. So, yes, Peter is making it very clear that Jesus is God who pours out the Spirit.

This is pretty fascinating. Imagine if you were one of the people who either lived in Jerusalem or were visiting Jerusalem for the holiday, and you heard this commotion and witnessed this event. Then you realized that what you were seeing was something that God had predicted 500 years before. I think you would realize that this was very important and that it had something to do with you.

This text tends to be overshadowed by the different view of the role of the gift of tongues and the role of visions and dreams. Those are in reality secondary issues. The two biggest points in Peter's sermon are 1) The Spirit of God has come in fulfillment of God's promise and 2) Jesus is the Messiah that you crucified, but whom you have to trust for salvation. Our text this morning is focusing on that first part. God made a promise to pour out his Spirit and God has kept that promise. This is how trustworthy God is. He is willing to make a commitment.

Look, you and I know from experience that a person who is not willing to make a commitment is not worth trusting. Girls, if a guy keeps stringing you along, stringing you along, stringing you along – dump him. That is not godly leadership. God goes on the record. He told his prophets to write down his words. They wrote them down and he preserved them so that when he fulfilled them we could see that God is worth trusting. Our gathering right now as a church, is the result of this promise that God made. So, God not only makes and keeps his promises, but the promises he makes and keeps are phenomenal and therefore, worth banking everything that you are on them. Joel's prophecy is an example of this.

2. **The church is a new phase of God's program.** (17-20)

The pouring out of the Spirit marked the birth of the church. The birth of the church marked a new phase in God's program. In the past (OT) the Spirit came upon men and women for certain seasons for specific purposes. We saw this with the Judges in particular. But now, instead of coming on a select few for a season, the Spirit is poured out (like a refreshing torrent of rain that ends a season of drought) upon all flesh. Now, when Joel said "all flesh" he was saying what God had said. God said that he would pour out his Spirit on all flesh. So, not only would the Spirit come in a way that he had not come before but he would come to people that he had not come before.

a. Global – all flesh

"I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh." This is the story of Acts. This is the mission of the church. Go into all the world and preach the gospel. Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. What God commands you to do, God equips you to do it. One gospel, the same Spirit, one message, one power, in order to have one people from every tribe, language and nation serving and enjoying one God and King forever and ever. This is the vision and mission of the church. It is also an incredible challenge. How do you have unity among people who are naturally born enemies? How do you have harmony and love from people who come from traditions and backgrounds of distrust and enmity? As long as the only believers in the church

were Jews, it was a little easier to maintain unity, wasn't it? But, when the Gentiles started showing up, it forced the Jews to face the question of: what do you love more – being a Jew or being a Christian? This was the occasion for some of the church's greatest griefs and greatest blessings. More on that in the chapters ahead. But another huge change that the church brings is on how much of the hierarchy is removed. Peter quotes Joel who predicts that there will be a great equalizing that takes place when the Spirit is poured out.

b. Equalizing – prophets, priests, kings

Sons and daughters will prophesy (v.17). Male servants and female servants will prophesy as well. Young men and old men will have dreams and visions. Do you see the point? This era is going to be marked by God raising up the common person to be part of his plan. While there are men and women (differences in gender), and young men and old men (differences in age) and servants (differences in jobs and economic status), what we are going to witness is that in the church every believer is a saint. Every believer is prophet who is commanded to speak God's word. Every believer is a priest who prays for one another and every believer is a king (little "k") who is preparing to rule and reign with Christ.

Peter does not yet understand the significance of all of this. Later on, when Paul writes to the believers at Ephesus he tells them that God has raised up leaders in the church (not to be served) to but to serve the church by equipping them to do the work of the ministry. While there are leaders who have to lead, they lead by serving the church and they lead by being accountable to the church. We are all on this together. The young men and old men are united by their visions. The men and women are united by their gifts. The slaves and free are united by their gifts as well. That is the point. Here is our challenge. We should let this text say and mean all that it says and means; not any more, and not any less.

The last days have come with the coming of Christ. He sent the Spirit who's coming fulfilled God's promise for a new covenant people who would be people marked by the Spirit. People, who heretofore were separated by class, age, race and gender, are now unified and given equal standing because they are in Christ. Here is the power of the church. It is a body, a union, a marriage, a bond of people who are naturally separated, but are now spiritually (Spirit) made into one. In being people of Christ, we are people of the Spirit. They go together. Even the signs that Joel predicted were, for the most part all seen in Christ, particularly during his crucifixion, that many of these people in Jerusalem would have well remembered.

Is Joel's prophecy fulfilled at Pentecost? I believe so. And yet, I think that this fulfillment points to another. But, some day when I preach through Joel we will get into that. But, look at verse 21.

3. **The church is forever linked with the gospel.** (21)

God made this promise 500 years before, so that people would turn from their sin and trust in Christ. Now, this promise has been fulfilled in the birth of the church so that the good news will be understood and believed even more passionately and now globally.

When Joel preached this, the Jews were wondering if they were going to survive. The locusts had just destroyed everything. They had no crops. Their economy was in ruins. If they were able to borrow from the surrounding nations and somehow survive for a year and plant next year's crop, how would they now that the locusts wouldn't return? The message is clear! Turn to the Lord. Trust in the Lord. But, the problem of locusts is not the biggest issue. The locust plague points to a deeper problem and therefore turning to the Lord points to a greater salvation. The book of Acts will unpack what it means to be saved and we will see that this is our message. This is what we are built by, built upon and held together with. The church is forever linked with the gospel. Jesus came to this earth in order to rescue us from our sins because we could not save ourselves. Just as the nation of Judah was powerless before locusts, the entire human race is powerless before sin. Sin wrecks us. Sin devastates us. We are sinners because we rebel against God and our rebellion wrecks us. It destroys relationships. It causes distrust, envy, greed, violence, murder, hostility and addiction. It creates loneliness, depression, grief and anguish. We are a broken people who live under the curse of our own rebellion against our Creator. God sent Christ to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Jesus lived the life we couldn't live and died the death we could not die and he did all of that in our place. When Jesus died on the cross he paid the price for the sins of every single person who would ever believe on him and he did that because he wanted to. Redemption is his idea and he did it for our joy. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

A. The gospel message of the church has a universal appeal.

Everyone is young, old, male, female...all flesh. (story of young man killed attempting to bring the gospel to tribe)

B. The gospel message of the church has a personal appeal.

Everyone who calls – no one can do it for you. You must call upon the Lord. Which means you have to recognize that Jesus is the Lord that you call on because he is the Messiah who died for you, was buried and rose again and is the King who reigns and will return. Calling on him is an act of confessing your need, your trust and your submission.

C. The gospel message has a glorious and unbreakable promise.

Shall be saved! Saved from sin and saved to God. Saved from this world and saved to the people of God – the church. Saved from being a stranger and saved to being a friend. Saved from hell, and saved to heaven. Saved from being lost and saved to being found.

Takeaways:

- The gospel has to be preached and lived. (Peter)
- The church is God's idea and God's plan.

This has huge implications for those who want to treat it casually or apathetically. You cannot carry out God's plan in this world apart from your commitment to and participation in a true local church. I want you to see that the NT does not have a category for a person who calls

himself a Christian who is not a member of a local church. Calling yourself a Christian and not being a member of a local church is like saying you are married, but you don't have a spouse. You cannot carry out Christ's commands in your life apart from membership in a local church.

Look, of all people, I know and have experienced the challenges of life in a local church. I know what it is like to be lied about, misrepresented, betrayed, hurt, used and slandered. It is not always convenient to be a member of a healthy local church, but it is right and it is obedient and therefore, in the long haul, it is good. The very reason that some people have for not really being all in with the church is one of the very reasons for the church. If you are all in, you put into a closer relationship with other people and other people may disappoint you, rub you the wrong way, and put expectations on you. Yes! They will. And when they do that, it will reveal something that you need to know and address. You need to know just how selfish you are. Your selfishness does not reflect Jesus. Your selfishness is ugly. Jesus is worth a beautiful bride. Jesus died for the church, not because we are beautiful but because he chose to set his affection on us and his affection is so powerful and so consistent and enduring that overtime his love will stretch us and shape us until every wrinkle is smooth, every blemish is clear and you will not be able to hardly tell the difference between our beauty and the glory of Jesus! That is what God has promised for the church! I know that some of you do some pretty extreme things in the name of beauty treatments. Here is something a whole lot more effective than putting cucumbers on your eyes. Get involved in the very life of this church because you are a person who is in need of change who helps other people in need of change look more like Jesus.

This also has huge implications for those who want to abuse the church for self-glorifying ends.

- A church will stop being a church when she stops preaching and believing the gospel.
- The power of the church is found in the power of the gospel and the Spirit. (we have what we need)