

Message #4
Acts

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JESUS CHRIST, THE MODEL PROMISE KEEPER ACTS 2:1-13

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Years ago when we were living in Connecticut, I brought my boys to visit the US Military Academy at West Point. We took a guided tour through the academy, and, as we were standing outside of the cadet chapel, I noticed a huge white building on the hill on the other side of the Hudson River. (DICK'S CASTLE) Our guide proceeded to tell us about it.

At the beginning of the last century a wealthy New York City businessman by the name of Evans P. Dick began an elaborate building project. He promised his family that he would build them a castle. Instead of starting from scratch, he found a castle that he liked in Spain. He dismantled it and began rebuilding it on the hill opposite West Point. The cost of the project was \$3 million.

As with any good enterprise Mr. Dick had a plan, a power, and a promise. His building plans were laid out. He appeared to have plenty of financial resources to implement the plan. And he had a promise to his family that in a few years they were going to be living in a magnificent castle. But in 1907 there was a recession. Mr. Dick's business suffered badly. He could not keep the promise that he had made to his family. The castle was not completed when Evans Dick ran out of money. Many began to refer to the place as Dick's Folly.

Over the years the building changed hands several times. (DICK'S CASTLE 02) Various attempts were made to complete the building. In 1986 the exterior of the 35,000 square foot structure was finally completed. But most of the castle was left without heating, cooling, plumbing, and electrical systems.

In 1992 a wealthy businessman from New York City by the name of Lee Balter bought the place for a second time. Various plans that he proposed fell through. There were conflicts with the local planning commission. Finally, in more recent years, the place was developed into seven condo units, and they were finished and sold. But for decades Dick's Folly remained a promise unfulfilled. It was a promise certainly which was never fulfilled for the family of Evans P. Dick. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Promises, by virtue of the human condition, always are a bit tentative. Financial reversals, recessions, accidents, natural disasters, death, memory lapses, and sin are all factors that may work against the fulfillment of promises that we have made, or that others have made to us. So usually there is some degree of doubt about the likelihood of the fulfillment of promises that have been made to us or that we have made to others.

In the big issues of life we would like to have some degree of certainty about promises that are made. The religions of the world make promises and assertions about the existence of God, about how we can be rightly related to Him (or them), and about how we can have a happy existence beyond the grave. We want a promise maker in these important matters who has a track record of being a promise keeper. Our passage today demonstrates that Jesus Christ is just such a promise keeper.

We have seen from our study of the Book of Acts that Jesus had made certain promises to His disciples. In particular He had promised them that they were going to receive supernatural power to carry out His building plans for the church. Today we are going to see what effect His absence from the church had upon His promises.

I.

First of all, I would like for us to consider THE FULFILLED PROMISE OF THE JEWISH FEASTS. (PROJECTOR ON--- THE FULFILLED PROMISE...) Verse 1 tells us, **“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.”** Verse 15 of this chapter tells us that it was the sixth hour of the day, or 9 AM, when the story unfolded. That the events which follow happened on the Day of Pentecost were not a coincidence nor an accident. The timing of these events was part of a divine plan.

Israel’s feasts were established by the Lord for the purpose of reminding God’s people about His faithfulness. Some of them were reminders of specific events in history when God had protected or sustained His people. These feasts also contained promises about the future. The fulfillment of these promises embedded in the feasts relates to events in the life of Jesus.

Most of you remember that the Passover feast commemorated God’s deliverance of His people from Egypt. When the angel of death passed over the houses of people living in Egypt, the blood of lambs that the Hebrews applied to the doors of their homes prevented harm from happening to them. The commemoration of Passover focused on a meal in which the Jewish People feasted on a lamb that was slain at twilight.

The New Testament describes Jesus as being our Passover lamb. According to the New Testament He died in Jerusalem at the time that the Passover lambs were being slain in the temple. Jesus was the fulfillment of a promise that was embedded in the Passover ritual. He was the Passover lamb who took away the sins of the world. His death provided the means of freedom from the worst slavery--- the slavery to sin. When His blood is applied to the door posts of our lives, we are forgiven for our sins. We pass out of the judgment of eternal death.

Immediately after the Passover the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread began. In connection with this feast the waving of the sheaf of the first fruits took place. (LEVITICUS 23:10) In Leviticus #23 vv. 10 & 11 the Lord said to Moses, **“When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, (LEVITICUS 23:11) and he shall wave**

the sheaf before the Lord, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.”

Barley was the first crop in the spring that became ready for harvest. Before it was harvested, a sheaf of grain was cut down by the priests. Then it was waved before the Lord in a religious ceremony which occurred in the tabernacle or, later on, in the temple. This waving of a representative sample of barley made the rest of the crop acceptable to the Lord. It was an act of worship that reminded the people that they were dependent upon the Lord for food, and that He was the ultimate provider of the crops.

By tradition the sheaf was cut down at the time at which the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the temple. It was also at that time that Jesus was being cut down upon the cross. The sheaf of grain, according to Leviticus #23, was to be waved before the Lord on the day after the Sabbath. Jesus died just before Passover began on Good Friday. The Sabbath began at sunset on Friday and lasted until sunset on Saturday.

The day after the Sabbath, when the sheaf was to be waved before the Lord, lasted from sunset Saturday to sunset Sunday. It would have been Sunday morning that the sheaf was waved before the Lord in the temple, signifying that the rest of the harvest was now acceptable to the Lord.

What else happened on that Sunday morning? Jesus rose from the dead, signifying that a harvest of people was now acceptable to the Lord. (1 CORINTHIANS 15:20) The Apostle Paul points out the spiritual significance of this in 1 Corinthians #15 v. 20, where he says, **“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”** The resurrection of Christ was the fulfillment of a hidden promise that lay embedded in this religious ritual of the waving of the first fruits. He was the first to experience the bodily resurrection from the dead. Others would eventually follow Him.

We come then to the Jewish feast of Pentecost. “Pentecost” is a Greek word that means fifty. (LEVITICUS 23:15) Look at Leviticus #23 vv. 15-17: **“You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. (LEVITICUS 23:16) You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the Lord. (LEVITICUS 23:17) You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked with leaven, as firstfruits to the Lord.”**

The feast involved a presentation of the results of the wheat harvest. It happened on a Sunday seven weeks after the waving of the sheaf of the barley harvest, fifty days after the Sabbath after the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The offering in the temple was to involve leavened bread. Leaven in the Bible often pictures sin. Perhaps the fact that two leavened loaves were to be presented was intended to represent sinful Jews and sinful Gentiles who would become acceptable to the Lord by virtue of faith in the Messiah.

More importantly the Jews have celebrated down to the present day the Feast of Pentecost as the anniversary of the giving of the Law to Moses at Mt. Sinai. Their traditional interpretation that this happened fifty days after the first Passover goes back to the time of Jesus, according to some scholars. At Sinai God came down and established His covenant with the children of Israel. On the Pentecost in view in our passage God was going to come down in the form of His Holy Spirit. This Spirit was going to apply a new covenant to the new people of God. The Holy Spirit was going to inscribe this new law in the hearts of the followers of Jesus.

(JEREMIAH 31:33) In Jeremiah #31 v. 33 God says, **“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”** That promise is yet to be fulfilled to the nation of Israel, but at Pentecost it was seemingly applied to the followers of Jesus. For Judaism Pentecost was the day of the giving of the Law. For the followers of Jesus it was the day of the giving of the Holy Spirit. It was the day on which the Law of God was written on the hearts of believers by means of the coming of the Holy Spirit. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The coming of the Holy Spirit was the fulfillment of promises that were tucked away in the meaning of the Feast of Pentecost. Luke recognized this. A more literal reading of the Greek that he used in v. 1 of our passage would go like this: **“And in the fulfilling of the day of Pentecost, they were together in one place.”** On that day the promise embedded in the Feast of Pentecost was fulfilled.

II.

In our passage we also find THE FULFILLED PROMISE OF BAPTISM of, or BY, THE HOLY SPIRIT. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE FULFILLED PROMISE OF BAPTISM BY THE HOLY SPIRIT) Verses 2-4 describe this. There were more specific promises made about the coming of the Holy Spirit than those that were tucked away in the feasts.

According to v. 1 the apostles, perhaps with other disciples, were gathered together in one place. Perhaps it was in the upper room of #1. Suddenly there was a sound that came from heaven like a violent, rushing wind. Notice that Luke does not say that there actually was a wind. Rather there was a sound that came that made a noise like a violent wind.

Also in v. 3 there were tongues that were like fire which came to rest upon each one of them. Again it was not actually fire. But it was something like fire. So there were both visible and audible manifestations of the coming of the Holy Spirit. The similarities of the signs to wind and fire no doubt caused these Jewish disciples to be reminded of the fact that fire and wind in the Old Testament were often associated with the presence of God, like they were at Mt. Sinai when Moses received the Ten Commandments.

In v. 4 Luke relates this experience to the filling of the Holy Spirit. Our passage does not specifically call it the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But we can prove that it was by looking

at v. 5 of #1 when Jesus said that they were supposed to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Also in #11 Peter refers to this experience at Pentecost and calls it the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The term “filling of the Holy Spirit” in the New Testament refers to the control, or guidance of, someone by the Holy Spirit. The term appears several times later in Acts. Usually the experience is not accompanied by the manifestations that we see here. The point is that baptism of the Holy Spirit is not the same thing as the filling of the Holy Spirit. Christians are commanded in the New Testament to be filled with the Holy Spirit. They are never commanded to be baptized with, or by, the Holy Spirit. The reason is that the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit happens at the moment of salvation when an individual trusts in Jesus Christ. At Pentecost, however, these early Christians were both baptized with the Holy Spirit and filled with the Holy Spirit. They were brought together into the church of Christ and they were controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Verse 4 also notes that the baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was accompanied by a speaking in tongues. The key thing to notice here is that both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ made specific promises that this baptism of the Holy Spirit was going to happen to the followers of Jesus (LUKE 3:16) In #3 v. 16 of Luke’s gospel the author says about John the Baptist, **“John answered them all, saying, ‘I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’”**

John’s gospel has additional information about this. According to #14 vv. 16 & 17 of The Gospel According to John (JOHN 14:16) Jesus said, **“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, (JOHN 14:17) even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”** John’s gospel quotes Jesus another time predicting this coming of the Holy Spirit. In #16 v. 7 (JOHN 16:7), Jesus said, **“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”**

Then finally here in Acts back in #1 v.5 we saw that Jesus said to the apostles just before His ascension (PROJECTOR OFF), **“...for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”**

What we have in our passage today is the fulfillment of a specific promise about the coming of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist died, but his promise was fulfilled. Jesus Christ died on the cross and later disappeared from the earth, but His promise was fulfilled.

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit are inseparable from the foundation of the church of Christ. (PROJECTOR ON--- 1 CORINTHIANS 12:13) In 1 Corinthians #12 v. 13 the Apostle Paul writes, **“For in one**

Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”

The church, the body of Christ composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, was an entirely new thing. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost established it. The baptizing work of the Holy Spirit began to unite true followers of Jesus into one spiritual body of believers. The Holy Spirit had been active in Old Testament times. But never had He permanently lived in true believers. Never had He baptized believers into one spiritual body, or church. In doing this He fulfilled promises made by John the Baptist and Jesus Christ.

III.

There was another promise that was fulfilled at Pentecost. Verses 5 & 6 refer to THE FULFILLED PROMISE OF TONGUES. (III. THE FULFILLED PROMISE OF TONGUES) These two verses may give us the impression that the crowd of people were mostly pilgrims who were visiting Jerusalem for the feast. But the Greek verb that Luke uses in v. 5 when he says, “**Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews...**”, implies a more permanent living situation.

The fact that they were also called “devout” suggests that these may be Jews who moved from other parts of the Roman Empire to Jerusalem for religious reasons, for the purpose of having access to the temple of their God. There were always additional Jewish pilgrims who showed up for these feasts. Some claim that there may have been as many as a million who came to Jerusalem for these three big annual feasts..

The noise of this coming of the Holy Spirit and/or of the disciples all speaking in different languages attracted these religious Jews to the followers of Jesus. They heard these Christians speaking in the languages of their various countries of origin.

The coming of the Holy Spirit upon individuals in the Old Testament often was accompanied by prophetic utterances. Here the Christians speak in other languages. The word for “languages” here is *dialekto*, from which we get our word “dialect.” These Christians were speaking in recognizable human languages. Later references in Acts to the experience of speaking in tongues refer back to this experience at Pentecost. It would seem that this speaking in tongues involved speaking recognizable human languages that the speaker did not naturally know.

Polytheistic idol worshipers in Asia Minor who were part of what scholars today call mystery religions as well as non-Christian religions in various parts of the world today have experiences where individuals utter strange sounds, often while in fervent states of religious ecstasy. The thing that seems to mark the genuine speaking in tongues that happened at Pentecost is the presence of real human languages.

What is especially relevant for our purposes here is to see that speaking in tongues was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. (1 CORINTHIANS 14:21) In 1 Corinthians #14 vv. 21 & 22, Paul says, “**In the Law it is written, ‘By people of strange tongues and**

by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.’ (1 CORINTHIANS 14:22) Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers.”

Paul was quoting Isaiah #28 v. 11. That verse appeared in a context where God was warning of coming judgment upon Israel. That judgment was going to come from the Assyrians who would speak a language strange to the ears of the Jews. The inspired apostle sees in the experience of speaking in tongues in the early church a further fulfillment of that Isaiah prophecy. Jewish people would hear Christians miraculously speak in their native languages, but they still would not respond to their message. Here on Pentecost unbelieving Jews from many different cultural backgrounds were hearing strangers speak in many languages, some of which were the languages of their native countries. The languages of many of these Christians they could not understand.

The Pentecost incident was a fulfilled prophecy, or promise, that was made in the Old Testament and fulfilled here. The Pentecost experience also fulfilled a promise of baptism by the Holy Spirit. And it involved fulfilled promises embedded in the Hebrew feasts.

IV.

In vv. 7-13 we find THE RESPONSE TO FULFILLED PROMISES. (IV. THE RESPONSE TO FULFILLED PROMISES) Verse 7 says, “**And they were amazed and astonished...**” Five different Greek verbs are used in these verses to describe the reaction that observers have to this phenomenon.

Verses 9 & 10 indicated that these Jews were from all different parts of the Roman Empire. Specific mention is made that there were visitors from Rome among them. The fact that these Romans were singled out as being visitors gives additional support to the idea that the others were not visitors but rather permanent residents. Keep in mind also that Luke was writing this story to Theophilus, who was a Roman official probably living in Rome.

Whoever they were, the thing that amazes these Jewish observers is the fact that these Galileans are speaking in their own native languages. The reference apparently is to the 120 Christians mentioned earlier, most of whom are from Galilee. The Jewish observers are witnessing something miraculous. They don’t know quite what to think about it.

Verse 11 tells us that what the Galileans were saying in these different languages had to do with statements of praise to God. Christ had been accused by the Jewish leaders of being guilty of blasphemy against God. Here His followers are heard to be praising God.

So in v. 12 these Jewish witnesses are asking each other what is the explanation for this. Miracles are not necessarily self-explanatory. The claim of the gospel is that Jesus rose physically from death. If this is true, there needs to be some explanation for what it

means. Most of the Jewish onlookers at Pentecost wanted an explanation. The Jewish Christians were saying words of praise to the God of Israel in these different languages. In the following verse Peter explains what all of this means.

Verse 13 says that there were some skeptics in the crowd who wrote off what they witnessed as being the result of drunkenness. Apparently the rest of the crowd was more open to hearing an explanation from these Jesus followers.

Still today we see the same kinds of reactions to evidences of the claims of Christianity. Friends and relatives see a person whose life has been changed by the gospel, and some are curious and receptive. Others are critical and write off the new Christian as being on some kind of religious kick. Some who are exposed to an effective, clear presentation of the claims about the death and resurrection of Christ respond with serious consideration and reflection. Others snicker and say how ridiculous it is to believe that somebody could come back from the dead. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Looking back at the events of that Pentecost Sunday 2000 years ago most of us can probably have a greater appreciation for the significance of what happened than these early witnesses and even than the participants themselves. The coming of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the church involved the fulfillment of promises, both specific and implied, that had been made by God.

The fulfillment of those promises centered upon the work of Jesus Christ. Before His death He had promised to build His church. He had promised to send the Holy Spirit. After His resurrection Jesus again promised that the Holy Spirit was coming. Then He disappeared from off of the earth. The coming of the Holy Spirit still happened just like He said that it would. Death and physical absence from the earth could not prevent the fulfillment of His promises.

If I told you that I would meet you for lunch at McDonalds on Wednesday, the chances are pretty good that I would indeed show up. But it is possible that I might not. Once in a great while I have forgotten to write down an appointment or forgotten to look in my appointment book to see what was on the schedule.

But when Jesus tells His disciples, "I'm going to have lunch with you in Galilee," even death cannot keep Him from making His appointment. He showed up in Galilee to meet the disciples.

When Jesus says, "You are going to get this Holy Spirit baptism deal in Jerusalem in a few days," even that fact that He was not physically present could not keep Him from the fulfillment of His promises.

All of this has implications for our faith in Jesus. If death cannot prevent Him from keeping His promises, if absence from the earth does not make Him one minute late for His appointments, do we not have someone whom we can trust? Is there any reason why we should not trust the other promises that He has left us?

When He says, "I am going away to prepare a place for you," can we believe Him?
When He says, "I will be with you even to the end of the age," can we believe Him?
When He says, "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest," can we believe Him? When He says, "You will see Me come back to earth in the same way in which I left," can we believe Him?

Will we trust Him as the great Promise Keeper? Will we trust Him as Savior? Will we trust Him as Lord of all of our life?