

Introduction

Good morning. It's great to see you today. If you have a Bible with you, I want to invite you at this time to go ahead and take it out. Open it up with me and turn to the Book of Acts. That's in the New Testament; it's right after the Gospels... Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We will be in Acts chapter 2. If you do not have a Bible with you today, that's okay. You can certainly use the Bible that is in the seat tray right there in front of you, and if you do not own a Bible, then consider that Bible to be our gift to you today. Also, feel free to use the Bible that you might have downloaded to your Smart Phone or to your tablet. Whatever the easiest way it is to access God's Word, we want you to do so because we believe that the Scripture is indeed God's Word; it's the best way for us to hear from God and to know what it is that God has for us.

I would like to take a moment to emphasize what Pastor Jeremy shared in the video. We do have this curriculum "Release" that has been written for our Life Groups. Pastor Jeremy, myself, and some of your other team members worked on this. We are excited about this curriculum; it's going to be a really great tool for us as we move forward. We are focusing on our groups, helping them multiply, helping them see how it is that they are tools used to share the Gospel, so we are encouraging everyone to connect to a group so you can get access to this curriculum, and so then that you can be part of a group because we think the best way to understand with curriculum is to live it out in a Life Group. As he mentioned, please stop by the table that's right out here in the atrium whenever we conclude today, and you will get connected to a group so that you can participate in that. We've also visited with some folks who have said, "Okay, well, I have some friends or family or coworkers that would like to join in this study, but they are not going to be part of a traditional Life Group. We also believe that some folks who are watching us online would like to be able to participate in this, so we've also got these materials available for you to access so that you can share with those in your life or if you're watching online by heading over to the Church website. So, if you go to hnw.org/release then you will find this booklet in a PDF format. You can download it, share it, and use it there. You can also find the teaching videos available, and you can follow those and use those in your workplace or with your friends or at home so that you can watch and follow along as we go through this series. That's a great exciting thing that God is doing here through "Release." We are looking forward to this series and hope that you will be as well.

Today we are going to be in Acts chapter 2. Let me tell you a little bit about Acts. If you're new to the Bible, let me give you a brief introduction: The Bible is divided into two parts: The Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament gives us a record of God's people Israel and lets us know about their need for a Rescuer/a Redeemer. They called Him "Messiah." The New Testament tells us who that Messiah is; His name is Jesus. In the New Testament, we read about His birth, about His Life, His ministry, His death, and even then His resurrection. In fact, what we are reading today is a Book that picks right after Jesus' resurrection. That Book is called Acts. It's about the acts of the apostles... the people who followed Jesus and heard Him and what they did. So they are the people who help found the Church, who helped begin this effort in the Church. Those of us who call themselves the Church today, we are the spiritual inheritors of the things that have been proclaimed in this Book. So I want to ask you to join us in this study as we continue to go on. Today we are in Acts chapter 2, where we read about the coming of the Holy Spirit, and then we read about how that Spirit affected and changed things moving forward. I want to ask us if you'll pray with me, and then I'll jump into the Word of God.

"Lord, we want to hear from You today. God, we want to ask that Your Spirit would move in this place so that we could hear what You want to say to us through Your Scripture. God, I pray that your Scripture would bring us to a point of conviction, provocation, so that we would respond. Lord, we don't want to

simply hear but we want to act; we want to obey. So Lord, rise up an army of those who hear and obey in this place. Lord, we love You and we pray today, 'Show us how to obey.' In the name of Jesus, Amen."

Acts chapter 2, starting in verse 1... *"When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

"Now, there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.' And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others mocking said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

"But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

*And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;
even on my male servants and female servants
in those days I will pour out My Spirit, and they shall prophesy.
And I shall show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire, and vapor of smoke;
the sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.
And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'*

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it. For David says concerning Him,

*'I saw the Lord always before me,
for He is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;
therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;*

*my flesh also will dwell in hope.
For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One see corruption.
You have made known to me the paths of life;
You will make me full of gladness with Your presence.'*

Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne; he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

*'The Lord said to my Lord,
Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.'*

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.'

"Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.' And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation.' So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls."

I grew up in a Baptist church in a small town in Texas. And growing up in that church, I began to hear a scandalous rumor... whispers beginning to go throughout this church, whenever I was a younger man... people talking about something that grabbed my attention because it didn't sound like anything I had ever seen or experienced before in the church where I had grown up. They talked about something that was so scandalous that they wouldn't really want to talk about it out in public; they kind of wanted to do it off to the side in the coffee shops or the cafes. They didn't really want to talk about it out in the open, in the big room where everyone was... because they were talking about the Holy Spirit. I grew up in a church where the Trinity oftentimes seemed to be the Father, the Son, and the Holy Scriptures (Laughter) ...because we loved to focus on the Bible, in the Baptist tradition. But now when it comes to the Holy Spirit, we get a little bit weirded out. We get awkward. Whenever the Holy Spirit starts to come up, even though He moves throughout the Book of Acts and He is present throughout all of the Bible, whenever the Holy Spirit shows up, suddenly we are a little uncertain about how it is that we are supposed to proceed. But I want to speak about the Holy Spirit today because God wants us to know Him, and He has given Himself to us through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is God's gift to us so that we might be able to interact with Him, to know Him, to hear from Him, and to be able to do the things that God wants us to do. Many people oftentimes ask the question,

"What is it specifically that the Spirit is about? What is it that the Holy Spirit wants?" And that is the sermon today... because I think that Acts 2 gets right to the heart of what it is that the Holy Spirit wants.

1. The Spirit Wants To Provide...

(a) ...The Power For The Gospel To Spread. (v. 6)

The Holy Spirit wants, first of all, I think, to provide. And what is it that the Spirit wants to provide? Well I think, first, the Spirit wants to provide the power for the Gospel to spread. The Spirit wants to provide the power for the Gospel to spread. Verse 6... *"And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language."* The disciples have gathered. They've seen the resurrected Jesus, and they begin to pray because He told them to go and to wait. So they go into an upper room and they pray. They are waiting on a gift that Jesus promised them... the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit shows up. And what happens? Something pretty bizarre... something I've never seen personally... fire tongues appear over each apostle's head, and then they begin to preach in a language that is not their own. And all of the people who were there, who were gathered from around the world, there for the Feast of Pentecost, all of these Jews from around the world suddenly hear the Good News of Jesus in their native tongue, even though these uneducated, untrained Galileans are not able to actually speak these languages, suddenly the Holy Spirit gives them the power to do so.

Quick side note: What we are reading about here in Acts chapter 2 is not the same thing that you may have heard about in Pentecostal traditions where you hear about praying in the Spirit or speaking in tongues. I want to be clear. That doctrine has plenty of individuals who would say there is a biblical basis for it, so I want you to understand, I'm not saying that it's unbiblical... I'm saying that that's not what's happening in Acts 2. Because what's happening in Acts 2 is this is speaking of existing languages. So individuals who talk about speaking in tongues or praying in the Spirit are talking about, speaking in, or praying in a language that is only intelligible to the Lord or to the Holy Spirit.

They get their basis for this from verses like...

Romans 8:26... *"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with the groanings too deep for words."*

1 Corinthians 14:2... *"For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit."*

I've had individuals in my life... and maybe you have as well... who have said that they have this particular gift where they pray in the language that is only understood by the Holy Spirit. And these are the verses... they say this is clearly laid out in Scripture.

We also read in First Corinthians 14 that if anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn let someone interpret. Sometimes someone will say, "Well why isn't there speaking in tongues happening in our services?" Let me explain that to you... It's not because I'm saying that I don't believe in it. It's not that at all. It's actually because Scripture is very clear that whenever tongues are used in worship, that an interpretation must be requested. So if someone in a Bible study or a worship service where you might be present, begins to speak in tongues, First Corinthians 14 tells us that we should ask for an interpretation. And if there is someone with the gift of interpretation in that place, good... if not, then we

should move on. In a private setting... in a prayer setting... we don't get any instructions like that from First Corinthians. Again, this isn't saying that this doesn't exist; this is simply just a different sort of experience that is happening in Acts chapter 2. In Acts chapter 2 what we are seeing is that God has gathered people from all around the world, and they are there for the Feast of Pentecost. Pentecost... "Pente" meaning 50... was the festival that happened 50 days after Passover. So Passover is a remembrance of the deliverance from Egypt. Pentecost was a remembrance that God had given them a land and so they would have grain offerings, to remember that God had given them a land and given them a Law. So there is no accident that in this time, when people from all over the world would gather in Jerusalem, that God would choose to give His Spirit. Because in the time when the law and the land are remembered, those are about borders... about limitations. But the Spirit of God was about the expansion of God's work past those borders, past those limitations... moving in brand new ways. Now let me be clear: God is not, in this moment, doing away with the law nor is He declaring the land to be unimportant. But with the gift of Spirit, He is fulfilling His law and He is also saying, "I am now expanding my land to include people in all parts of the world."

(b) ...presence without borders. (vv. 17-18)

Once the nations had been gathered in, the Lord chose to move in such a supernatural way that all those who had seen and experienced Jesus could now communicate with all of the Jews who had been gathered there in that place simultaneously, because that is what the Spirit wants to do. The Spirit wants to take away barriers for the proclamation of the Gospel.

Several years ago, Cindy King... the wife of Tom King... Tom was a longtime pastor here at Houston Northwest... Cindy told me a story about whenever she and Tom lived in Wichita Falls, and Tom was on staff at First Baptist Wichita Falls. They went on Monday night visitation. Maybe you remember Monday night visitation. That was a program where you would go and visit people in their homes who had visited their church the day before. So Cindy and another couple of folks from their church went to go visit a family that had filled out a card... just to let them know they were glad that they had visited the church and were glad that they were in that place. They show up there and Cindy said that one of the people in her group with her was a student. I don't remember if this was a high school student or a college student, but they show up in this place, in this home, and knock on the door. This house... I believe it was actually an apartment... had twelve people who lived there, but all twelve of them were from Thailand, and none of them spoke English. So Cindy said, "Well... none of us in our group can speak Thai, so this is clearly a wasted visit." She said she was actually a little frustrated, so they all pack up their stuff and they go back down to the car. They are in the car, in the parking lot at the apartment complex, and suddenly Cindy said, "I felt the Holy Spirit speak to me in that moment and say, 'Pray and go back up.'" So they did. So they prayed... she said, "I know this sounds weird, but I think we need to go back up." So they go back up. Cindy, the student that is with her, and some of the other people from their church... they go and somehow they are able to communicate to the twelve people from Thailand that are in this room. "Would you all please sit down in a circle"...and they do that. Cindy is thinking, "Well, I don't know what we are going to do now that we've got them all gathered together... but here we are." So they sit down in a circle and then suddenly the student who was in the group with her begins to speak in Thai... and shares the Gospel... and nine of the people in this circle receive Christ. (Clapping) Incredible, right? So they get back in the car and she says to the student, "I didn't know that you could speak Thai..." And he says, "Me either!" (Laughter) We have now two possibilities: Number one... Cindy King is a liar. (Laughter) Cindy... if you're watching, I do not believe that that is the case. Number two... this actually happened. Why would God do that? ...Because God, through His Spirit, uses His Spirit here in Acts 2 and in other places throughout the

Scripture... to remove barriers so that His Gospel might be heard. In some instances it's about language. But in other instances, it's about the Lord removing the barrier of fear from our heart or prompting us to go and have a conversation, or preventing us even from speaking to people who aren't ready to hear the Gospel. I have shared story after story from this pulpit where the Lord has prompted me to go and to speak to someone and to say, "Share Me with them." That is what the Holy Spirit does. The Holy Spirit is about removing barriers, so God's Spirit wants to provide for us so that the barriers might be removed so that the Gospel could be heard. This is what Jesus' Spirit does.

We muffle the Holy Spirit when we are not listening for the Holy Spirit to prompt us and to ask the Spirit to remove those barriers. Many of us have never experienced the power of God speaking to us in the Spirit because we have never asked for God to do so... or we live as if the Spirit is not real. 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 [verse 19]... *"Do not quench the Spirit."* How do you quench the Spirit? You act like the Spirit does not exist.

But the Spirit doesn't simply want to provide for us so that barriers might be removed for the proclamation of the Gospel... but the Spirit also wants to give us the presence of God without any borders. Without any sort of thing that could stop the move of God, God's Spirit continues to move. As Peter begins to preach to the people, he quotes from one of the prophets... the prophet Joel. Quoting Joel chapter 2, beginning in Acts 2:17, he says:

"And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit and they shall prophesy."

What is it that Peter is attempting to emphasize? He is saying, "Look... all of these people are getting the Spirit so that they can proclaim the Gospel to all of these languages." What does that mean? He is saying, "This is a fulfillment of a prophecy given hundreds of years ago, that one day God would pour out His Spirit on all kinds of people." Look at the types of people that are mentioned in this prophecy. First of all, sons and daughters. The gift of the Spirit is not dependent upon your gender. He then says, "Young and old can receive the Spirit." The gift of the Spirit is not dependent on your age. He then says, "Servants." The gift of the Spirit is not dependent upon your socioeconomic status. Now, it is then preached to people from all around the world and in Acts chapter 10... 8 chapters later... we actually know that the Spirit will be given to people who are Gentiles... meaning that God's Spirit is designed so that the Gospel will move to all people, no matter their gender, no matter their age, no matter their socioeconomic background. God wants everyone everywhere to have access to the message of truth and grace and goodness. That is what He does.

Now borders... things that we have... borders are used to prevent movement and to claim possession of land. That's what borders do. You've probably heard of the organization "Doctors Without Borders." What do they do? They go in and they provide medical care to people who need it most, in situations often that are very war-torn scenarios. They do that because they want to say, "Borders don't keep us from getting in there." At the same time, you also are probably well aware that even "Doctors Without Borders" must wait on visas to get into the country that they want to go to. Why? ...Because there is still border control... check points.

I'll tell you a story about border control. You've probably have lived something like this out maybe in your life. A few years ago, we sent a mission team to Seattle to work with one the churches that our church had started ten years ago. And that church, Journey Church, was starting another church, Redemption Church. So we went to go work at this festival. So we were at this festival sharing the Gospel, telling people about the Church. I had told people that were on this team ahead of time, "Hey... I've never been to Canada, and we are in Seattle. That is super close to Canada. If we ever get the opportunity to go across the border... let's go do it." So a couple of willing crazies on our church staff... Pastor Dan and Pastor Darren... said, "Yah, we should do that." One night after we had finished everything, we hopped in the car, we took our passports, and we drove into Canada. Because we really planned out this trip really well... we didn't have any money and our cell phones didn't work once we crossed the border into Canada. We did manage to somehow purchase donuts at Tim Horton's at a gas station. Does anybody know about Tim Horton's out there? (Light Clapping) ... all six of you... you understand how great this was. Alright... that's good. It was a great moment. We drank coffee and ate donuts at 12:30 in the morning. I know that because I went and looked at the time stamp on the picture that I took in the gas station of these rather bleary-looking travelers that were with me. On our way back, we then turn around and go back to the border. We get to the check point, and we get to this marker that says: "Here is the United States... on this side... Canada on the other side." Do you know what we ought to do? We ought to do what anyone in the internet age with a Smart Phone would do... we ought to take a selfie. So it's the middle of the night. It's a pretty bad selfie... but there we are by this border check point taking a selfie. Then we pull forward and we talk to the Canadian Border guard. Suddenly what had been a very fun trip got very serious. "What were you all doing over there?" "Uhh... taking a picture..." "Of what?" "Uhhh... each other." "Why were you doing that?" "...never been the Canada before... We wanted a donut." He started to ask us, "What were you doing here? How long were you in town? You were only here for 30 minutes? Do you expect me to believe that?" All of a sudden we're like, "Oh my gosh... what have we done?" There were all these questions that had been generated. It was going to be really difficult for me to explain to the team why I wasn't helping the next day because I was in prison in Canada... (Laughter) At the same time, though, this border guard did eventually take mercy on us and let us back in, so it was good.

But here is the thing. Borders are there to prevent movement... to stop things from happening. They divide up lands that are normally naturally joined together. They create a place where things can't move. They divide things up. That's what borders do. We are a dividing people. We are always creating borders. Politically: left and right, ultra-left, ultra-right, alt-left, alt-right. We are always dividing out into all of these sub-groups and sub-categories and trying to pit one another in these groups against each other. We do that because we think that it is good if we divide. We also are people that divide by race: "Well... if you're in this group or this group, then you can't cooperate with this group." So we say, "Well then, these folks are divided against this group because of a different culture or a different skin color." We are always dividing into tax brackets. "How much money do you make?" "Well... it's not enough." We divide up by education. We divide up by neighborhood. That's what we do. What we read in Acts chapter 2 is that God's Spirit is always wanting to unite. That's what His Spirit does. He is always moving beyond borders.

You see, Ancient Jews would have believed that the most likely person to hear from God would be a man... not a woman. Ancient Jews would believe that a child could not hear from God. Ancient Jews would believe that the most likely person to hear from God would be someone with financial means. They would also believe that it would be someone who would be Jewish. But here we read "men and women, servants, young and old, even Gentiles..." a few chapters later begin to hear from the Lord. What is the point? Anyone... anywhere... can hear from God and can receive His Word.

This matters today in this moment because I know, in a room this size, there are many people that are sitting here today wondering if they are actually received in this place. Listen to me... there is nothing you have done, there is nothing you have said, there is nowhere you have gone through your behavior... up to this moment... that is so powerful a border that it can stop the Spirit of God from pursuing you. God's Spirit does not need a visa to invade your life right now. (Clapping) God is coming after you. Are you someone who would say, "I can't stop looking at internet porn... even though I want to stop looking." God is after you. Are you someone who doesn't want to take a drink in the morning before you come to church on a Sunday, but you still reach for the bottle anyway? God still wants to pursue you. Are you someone who is ashamed at your marriage? Well, guess what? God still wants to pursue you. Are you someone who wanted kids so badly, but now you feel like you're a terrible parent? God loves you and wants you anyway. Are you someone who wants to be generous but you keep being greedy? Are you someone who wants to be peaceful but you're always angry? Are you someone who wants to be faithful but you're always afraid? Are you someone who wants to be bold but you're always cowardly instead? Are you someone who wants to love the people different than you, but you still find yourself struggling with such an idea? I have good news for you. It doesn't matter; God wants you anyway. (Clapping) That is the truth. I share that with you today so that you can hear, "There is no border to the love of God because the Holy Spirit wants entry." He wants entry into your life. He wants to gain entry so that He can let you know that there is nothing you have done because God is in the business... He is raising up an army right now... He is not raising up the most successful people in the world. He wants a bunch of rag-tag losers that He redeems and says, "Look what I can do with these people; imagine what I can do in the world." That's what our God does.

2. The Spirit wants to provoke.

So this Spirit who provides a way for the Gospel to move forward across all borders... this Spirit works. And the people who were there see something they have never seen before. And it provokes them. They see a miracle: People who don't come from our country speaking in a language that they shouldn't know how to speak. And because they see the Holy Spirit working, suddenly they are provoked and they say, "I need to know more about this." When the Spirit works, it provokes people who are not believers to ask, "What just happened?" So the Spirit provokes.

1 Corinthians 14:24, 25... *"If all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you."* Do you see that? When people who do not believe hear the Word of God and see the Spirit lived out, they are provoked to say, "This God is real." So this is the reason that we must make room for the Spirit.

Last week in my Life Group we took a moment where we prayed and we said, "If the Holy Spirit moves in your heart to encourage someone in this group, then do that. And people began to feel God impress something on their heart, and they shared things with other people in the group. They shared things that they should not know, but God's Spirit put it in them. Why do I tell that to you? ...Because some of you hear that story and you say, "How would that happen?" I share that so that you will know God works and God is real. God is not dead, and God is not done working in our day and age.

I want you to know that, as we pray for healing. We pray that God will give us impressions and leadership. We pray that the Holy Spirit will move and lead this church. We pray for miraculous provision, and we believe that God does those things, so that when God does it, people who do not believe see it and say,

"What just happened?" And then we must be ready. If you see in verse 12, they ask a question. In verse 12, after seeing this miracle, they suddenly then say *"What does this mean?"* What does it mean that God would do this? I just saw something I can't explain... what is this? And Peter then stands and preaches the Gospel. He wants them to understand: "What you just saw is only explicable because of what God did in Jesus Christ." So verse 23, *"...this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God..."* It means that Jesus was crucified according to God's plan. Verses 30 and 31... *"God swore an oath to him that He would set one of his descendants on his throne, He foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption."* It means that God kept His promise to His king David that he sat on his throne years ago, that our God sees the future. Verse 32... *"This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses."* It means that the resurrection is real, and God did do something in Jesus. Verse 33... *"Having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this Spirit that you yourselves are seeing and hearing."* It means that the God who poured His Spirit on Jesus Christ will also pour it out on you, if you place your faith in Him. It means that Jesus Christ truly is Messiah. It means that eternal life is within your grasp. It means that God's kingdom is in this place now... if you will believe. That's what it means. They hear that and they go, "Whoa..."

In verse 37, they ask another question. *"Brothers, what shall we do?"* And he says, *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* Do you hear that? When you place our faith in Jesus Christ, when you repent, and when you are baptized, you get this gift too because God doesn't intend to hold this gift in. He wants to give it to everyone. The power of God in you... now God wants to release it... That is what "Release" is about... God's Spirit in all who have faith.

So Peter says, "This is what you do... Repent." What does repent mean? It means, "Turn around, stop doing the things that you're doing." Stop living the life of addiction. Stop living the life of sexual promiscuity. Stop living the life where you are so broken that you don't know what you have. Stop living the life that you have been living in rebellion to God; whatever that might be... stop it. Turn around and instead follow the way of Jesus instead. Follow the way... follow the way of peace. Follow the way of forgiveness. Follow the way of joy. Do these things. Repent. And then he says, "Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." Why be baptized? ...Because this is a way of taking your faith public. Many of us today, in the Christian Church, are people who secretly follow Jesus, but many people do not know. Baptism is a way of taking your faith public. When you get dunked and you come up out of that water, anybody there knows that this is a real thing to you. Baptism is a public sign of washing where you declare this is real.

So how does this happen and who is this for? Verse 39... *"For the promise is for you and for your children..."* (listen to this) *"...and for all who are far off."* ...For all who are far off. I don't care who you are in this room... I don't care what you were smoking last night, I don't care what you were snorting last night, I don't care who you were sleeping with last night... it doesn't matter. God will take you right now. All who are far from God. And so he says, *"Everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself."* If you are here right now and you are listening to my voice and you feel like God is drawing you in... guess what? That ain't me preaching; that's God's Spirit moving. He is calling you to Himself. He wants you right now; He is drawing you in. This Jesus is the source of goodness. He is so good. We need to recognize His goodness. We deserve hell and death, but He carries us in His hand and prevents us from passing into death so that we have an opportunity to respond and repent to this good message of grace that has been given to us. This God... He doesn't need to give us the things that we have... the material possessions that

we have... but He is good and He gives them to us so that we might respond and repent. This God... He is so good... He doesn't have to give us health or breath, but He does that because He wants to keep us alive so that we have an opportunity to respond to Him and to live for His Kingdom. He doesn't have to give you a marriage. He doesn't have to give you children. He doesn't have to give you a job. He doesn't have to do any of those things. He does any of those things... everything that you have is a gift from His hand because He is good. And now as you hear that He is good and you feel that tug in your heart and your spirit... that is God drawing you in and He is saying either:

- a) Today, place your faith in Me... or
- b) What you need to do, you need to now follow Me.

This is what this Jesus is calling you to because He wants you to have His Spirit as well. So who would ever turn that down? ...But people do it every day. Now that you've heard that truth, will you say "Yes" to this Jesus? Let's find out.

Would you bow your head with me? If you're here today and you would say, "Steve, today I'm ready to go public with my faith. I'm ready today to say 'Yes, Jesus is for me.'" I'm going to ask you to do something. Nobody looking around. You're just ready to say, "I'm ready to follow this Jesus." That's it. Just raise your hand and say, "This Jesus is for me today." Would you say it's time? Alright... I see your hand, sir. Who else is ready to say, "This Jesus is for me. I'm ready to follow him"? Anybody else? For the first time you are ready? Okay... ma'am, I see your hand; sir, I see your hand. Who else? Okay, anybody else? For the first time you're ready to say, "It's time for me to follow Jesus." Yes, ma'am; I see your hand. Who else? I have seen four. Who else? Okay... there's another man; I see your hand. That's five. This is your moment. He is calling you; don't stop. Okay. I can see five. There may be more. You can put your hands down. Everybody look at me. This is what I want to ask you to do. The way that we follow up with you is that we need to visit with you. ...Because you know what? I just read it... you repent and you are baptized. There's a baptistry over here, and we want to baptize you... not because that makes us look awesome but because it shows that you're serious about following this Jesus. This is what I want you to do. I want you to take this card or I want you to use the App on your phone; I don't care which one. But take this or use the App, and I want you to fill it out, and on your way out, I want you to hand it to me or to one of our team members. Or just go to the Connection Center, hand it to them, and we are going to talk to you about what's next for you. This is important. If you don't fill out the card, then we don't know who you are, we can't followup with you, and we can't help you take those next steps. This is your moment. This is your step. Take the card or use the App... fill it out and turn it in. That's your step today. That's what we ask you to do.

Now others of us who are here, the question that we need to ask is this: If the Spirit is about removing barriers, what is the barrier that God wants to remove in my life that I am preventing Him from removing? What is it that He is trying to remove so that He can share the Gospel with people in my life or in my circle? What is it that the barrier is that is preventing me from full obedience to Him? That is the question. I want us to think on that, reflect on that, and go from this place today ready to obey whatever it is that the Lord has given to us.

So, I want to invite us at this time now to bring our worship service to a conclusion. I am going to pray a benediction over us here in a second. "Benediction" is just a fancy Latin word that means "good word." I'm going to say a good word over you. If you want to find out more information about Houston Northwest, come to our Connection Center. We would love to help connect you. If you need to join a Life Group, go to the Life Group table. If you want a shirt or a decal, you can go out there and do that. But make an

opportunity to obey whatever it is God has told you today. Would you stand with me at this time? I'm so glad that you have decided to join us in this place today. I'm so glad that you're ready to hear what it is that God has for us and to move and do what it is that He says.

"Father, we love You. We thank You for Your goodness and Your grace and so with that we now say this... May the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord cause His face to shine upon you and give you His peace... peace which comes through this good truth... that God gives us Himself across all borders... physical, spiritual. He does it so He can pursue us and have us. That's the Gospel. We grow in our knowledge of that Gospel, repenting of the old ways and turning to the new, and now we go into the world declaring that there is now only one name under heaven and on earth by which men and women might be saved... the beautiful, glorious, powerful name of Jesus Christ. Amen and amen."

[Doxology sung]