

## Written Copy: Acts 2:17-21 “A Pentecost Eyewitness”

Pentecost Sunday  
Sunday, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023

### Text: Acts 2:17-21

<sup>17</sup> 'In the last days, God says, I will pour my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will speak what God has revealed. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams. <sup>18</sup> In those days I will pour my Spirit on my servants, on both men and women. They will speak what God has revealed. <sup>19</sup> I will work miracles in the sky and give signs on the earth: blood, fire, and clouds of smoke. <sup>20</sup> The sun will become dark, and the moon will become as red as blood before the terrifying day of the Lord comes. <sup>21</sup> Then whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

### The text's intent

The Lord makes the grand announcement that the Last Days have come in fulfillment of Scripture. The Lord's promised plan of salvation has been fully accomplished with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and He desires that this be made known throughout the world. As a way to kick-start the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel throughout all the earth, and as a way to announce the pouring out of the Holy Spirit to accomplish not only the proclaiming, but His presence in that message to accomplish the miracle of conversion, He comes with a mighty rushing wind and tongues of fire, both symbolic of the Spirit's presence, power, and work in the hearts of men. He gives a one-time gift to the Apostles to speak other languages to witness to the gathered crowd that what is happening is a miracle that could come only by the hand of God, and to proclaim the Gospel in their native (and thinking) language. Then Peter stands up and boldly declares this to be the work of God as promised by the Old Testament prophet Joel to prepare people in these Last Days for Jesus final return, so that all who call upon the name of Jesus as Lord and Savior will be saved from eternal death and receive forgiveness of sins and everlasting life.

### Focus Statement:

Our Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled the promised plan of salvation completely and perfectly through His life, death, resurrection, and ascension. In these Last Days He calls upon the Church to make known His gift of grace to all people. And to empower us to do so He pours out His Holy Spirit who cleanses our hearts through the Gospel Message, grants us faith to hold fast to it as the truth, and empowers us to be witnesses that share that message in which He is present to change hearts and minds to believe in Jesus, so that all who call upon Him as Lord and Savior will be saved, and receive His gift of eternal life.

### Function Statement:

#### Why it's important to know:

We are in the Last Days now and ever growing nearer to Jesus' return in judgment. Humankind needs the Gospel witness as no one can or will not turn to faith in Christ, and be saved. And any who remain in unbelief when Jesus returns will spend eternity suffering apart from God.

#### What the hearer should do as a result:

Recognize and rejoice in the powerful presence of the Spirit given through Baptism and renewed/strengthened in the Gospel proclamation. Recognize the imperative of this being the Last Days. Seek to be witnesses used by the Spirit to bring faith into the hearts of those He brings into our path, so that they might trust in Jesus and be saved from eternal death and given the gift of eternal life that we have.

### Subject Sentence: Empowered to be Gospel Witnesses in the Last Days

## **Introduction: Who I Am as a Eyewitness on Pentecost**

Shalom! Greetings! It is good to be with you here this morning. My name is Rufus. I was one of those gathered on the Day of Pentecost who witnessed the miraculous event your Pastor read about. Don't look so surprised that I am here! Consider just how mightily the Holy Spirit worked on that day. And even more so, consider the greater miracle that is Jesus' resurrection to everlasting life. The God who could accomplish that and more certainly has the means to bring me into your presence, even for a short time.

You should know that I'm not a Jew by birth. I was in Jerusalem that day, having traveled from my hometown in Mesopotamia, near the place where the Jewish exiles had been sent when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and the temple some 540 years earlier. Not all the Jews returned when King Cyrus allowed them to. Some remained and continued to worship the One True God Yahweh. My neighbor was one of them. He told me the true stories of what Yahweh had done for His people: saving them from slavery in Egypt, parting the waters of the Red Sea, the conquest of the land of Canaan by His powerful working, and even His moving unbelieving King Cyrus to allow the Jews to return home from exile. When I was a teenager, I came with them to Jerusalem to celebrate the 3 great festivals of the faith: Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths. It was on one of those trips that I become a "Proselyte": a Jewish convert, who studied the Torah, was circumcised, and cleansed through a ritual bath. As I grew, I continued to return to Jerusalem to celebrate each of the three great Jewish Festivals that called for devout believers to come to Jerusalem.

And so it was that I was in town for that celebration you read about. I had come to celebrate Passover, then as was my habit and many others, I remained near Jerusalem to celebrate The Feast of Weeks 50 days later. You know this festival by the Greek word for fifty: Pentecost. It was celebrated 50 days after Passover. It was a day to worship, sacrifice, and give thanks to God for the Barley harvest.

So, I was present and witnessed this Jew named Jesus being convicted of inciting insurrection before Pilate and witnessed Him being crucified. Now I was one of the devout people who was looking for the Messiah to come. But in my mind, at that time, it obviously wasn't Him. After all the religious leaders of our day, the ones who were supposed watch for and point to the Messiah when He came were the ones who offered up this Jesus to the Romans. And even though some said He had done miracles; He certainly didn't seem able to save Himself from death. And I had heard the stories spread by the guards sent to keep watch over His tomb that the disciples had stolen His body and claimed He had risen from the dead. That anyone could rise from the dead was a pretty wild story in my mind at the time, so I didn't buy into it. But after what happened to me on that Day of Pentecost, everything changed for me.

## What I Was Eyewitness to That Day

I remember that day clearly even now. My family and I were packing up and getting ready to head home when we heard the sound of a mighty wind, the kind that comes with those storms that have tornados. It was the kind of wind that could knock down buildings and sweep you off your feet. Except it was just the sound, nothing was blowing around or being disturbed or blown over.

I along with a large crowd, thousands of people, began to gather together in the streets near the place the sound of this mighty wind seemed to be coming from. We were all milling around together, asking one another what that sound could be; wondering how there could be the sound of such a mighty wind, yet no damage. Then from out of one of the buildings came these men and women who were followers Jesus. For the last 50 days they had kind of been keeping to themselves. I figured they didn't want to draw too much attention to themselves; afraid that what happened to their Rabbi might also happen to them. But here they were coming out into the open.

And not only did they come out, but they came out doing something that was simply unbelievable. Now keep in mind these are all Galileans. They were from the north around the Sea of Galilee. To put it nicely they weren't known to be the most highly educated folk. (*Speaking with a southern drawl*) "Yer Pastor said you'd be fixin to understand what I'm talking 'bout ifin I talked atcha like this." They spoke with a Galilean accent. And to most in Jerusalem that meant uneducated simpletons. Except what they were doing was far from acting like uneducated simpletons.

These uneducated men and women were speaking in languages they could never have mastered. They were speaking in the native languages of many of those who had come to Jerusalem from all over the Roman Empire and beyond. Now most of us gathered spoke Aramaic because that was the language of conversation for the Jews. And we knew some Greek since that was the language of commerce, as well as the language the Scriptures had been translated into. But those of us from far away grew up speaking the language of our place of birth. This was the language that we thought in, and then translated in our heads into Aramaic or Greek as we needed to. And these simpletons were speaking in our native language, talking about wonderous things. They were sharing with us all the miraculous works that the Lord had done, and of course the most miraculous that was raising this man Jesus Christ from the dead to everlasting life. They told how He was indeed the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and did so by dying on the cross and rising again.

This was all too much: the wind with no damage, these simpletons speaking languages they could not know, and even more so the wonderous things they gave witness to. We were looking for a logical explanation for this, but there was none. This was a supernatural event that we were witnessing. But if that was the case, what was the purpose of it? It was at that point that someone near me cried out in a loud voice “They’ve had too much of the sweet wine! They’re drunk!” Others around me agreed saying, “Yep. That’s got to be the case.” It sounded good at first. But then I started thinking about what a person who’s drunk sounds like. They struggle to articulate in their own language. How impossible would it be for a drunk to speak articulately in a language he didn’t know.

## **Why This All Was Happening**

It was at this point that the Apostle Peter stepped forth and called us to listen to him. Now I knew a thing or two about this guy Peter. When confronted on the night Jesus was arrested, word has it he denied he knew Jesus not once, not twice, but three times. This Peter who was supposed to be the one in charge behind Jesus swore he didn’t know him. Now here he was stepping out and saying: “Listen up my brothers and sisters. What I have to say needs to be made known to you, so pay attention! What you are witnessing is not a bunch of people drunk on sweet wine. Look at the hour, it’s only 9:00 AM. We haven’t even had breakfast yet, not for another hour. And as good Jews we won’t have wine until the evening meal.

Then he explained how what was happening was the fulfillment of what had been written and proclaimed by the prophet Joel some 800 years earlier. What we were witnessing was the LORD proclaiming to us that we were now living in the “Last Days”. Now your Pastor told me that when you think of the last days you might picture a crazy looking guy, maybe one dressed like me, on the street corner, with a sign that says, “The End of the World”. But as I came to learn that’s not what Joel meant by “The Last Days”. These were the Last Days because all that had to be accomplished in the Lord’s plan of salvation was completed. That promise that He made to Adam and Eve in the garden, that was kept alive throughout the following centuries with the Patriarchs, promise of what all the animal sacrifices pointed to, all had found their fulfillment in Jesus. They all pointed to Him. And that was why, in His final breath (as I learned later on from these Apostles), He cried out “It is finished.” God’s plan to save all men had been completed.

These were now the Last Days because Jesus had earned salvation for all people; for you and for me. Jesus suffered for all your sins that would keep you apart from God for eternity. That was why He suffered so horribly on the cross. It wasn’t because the Jewish leaders or the Romans defeated Him. The actual truth is He won. He defeated sin, death, and the devil for you and for me. And His resurrection and His ascension to heaven are proof positive that He is who He claimed to be and did all that He said He would for you and for me. He is your Lord and Savior, and my Lord and Savior

## **The Spirit Comes to Create Eyewitnesses**

So how was it that these uneducated Galileans were able to speak languages they never knew before? How was it that Peter, a simple Galilean fisherman was able to articulate such a summation of the Lord's work of salvation? He wasn't doing it on his own. It was a very special gift given to Him by Jesus Himself. The gift I learned Jesus promised these followers before He ascended to the right hand of the Father. This gift is not a what. It's a Who. It's the gift of the Holy Spirit!

I learned later on that when we all heard that mighty rushing wind, a greater miraculous event was taking place inside that building where Jesus followers were gathered. With the sound of the wind appeared balls of fire shaped like human tongues grouped all together above them in the middle of the room. Then from this group individual flaming tongues separated and came down to rest above each person there: men, women, and children. These flames didn't consume their hair or burn their bodies. As the Apostle Matthew later described it to me, I thought of the fire that Moses encountered with the burning bush where he could see the fire, but the bush was not consumed. These tongues of fire represented the coming and giving of the Holy Spirit.

Now it wasn't as if the Holy Spirit hadn't come before. He was the One that worked through Moses and the prophets of old. He was the One given when Jesus blew upon His disciples in the Upper Room, giving them the power to believe in His death and resurrection. But this was the Holy Spirit coming with a power and authority as He never had bestowed on mankind before. He came upon them and caused them to speak in these languages. He came upon Peter and gave him the ability and fearlessness to preach that powerful sermon to all of us gathered on that day. And He came down upon each of us as we heard Peter's testimony about Jesus; about how He was the promised Messiah that was not welcomed but put to death, and yet raised by the power of God Himself, because He was not just a man, but as the Apostle John told me later, He was the Word of God made flesh.

He came upon me and moved me in my heart to see myself as a poor miserable sinner with no hope of ever pleasing God or earning eternal life. Then He opened my eyes to see and believe in Jesus as the One who came to save me. He came upon me and entered my life, just as He did in the lives of those three thousand other men, women, and children who were baptized on that day. He came upon me and gave me the power of faith to know and trust that all Jesus did was for me. He came to make me an eyewitness to the powerful work that He came to do in my life and in those around me. It is by His presence and the power He gives to me that I stand here and witness to you my testimony this day.

## **Conclusion**

Your Pastor tells me you still practice the right of Baptism. How many of you here today have been baptized? Raise your hands. Know that all of you have received the Holy Spirit. He has come upon you with the same power to work the mighty miracle of conversion in your heart. The fact that you believe in Jesus and trust in Him as your Lord and Savior means He is already at work in you, just as He has been in me.

He has come to you to make you a precious child of the Heavenly Father, just as I am. He comes to you to call you because you're living in the Last Days too. All has been accomplished by Jesus. He wants you to hold fast to that faith. And He wants you to go and share it with whoever He puts in your path. He wants you to share just as I have done; to share how He has changed you. Perhaps you've never seen the tongues of fire; I didn't. Perhaps you didn't experience the speaking in tongues or hear firsthand Peter's sermon on that day. But you have the same power that filled those Apostles that day, that also has filled me. It came to you in your baptism. And you have His voice speaking to you this day from His words of Scripture. And you have His real presence in His Supper, the same one we celebrated as we met together for worship after that day of Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit sent me back home to Mesopotamia, but I didn't go alone. He went with me. And He moved me to share my eyewitness of what happened with my neighbors, friends, and relatives. And I invited them to join me in worshipping Him. He sends you out to do the same thing too. He sends you out to share the works He has accomplished to protect your body and soul and the comfort and strength He provides you with every day. He sends you to share who Jesus is and what He has done to save you from eternal death and give you everlasting life. Remember: You are not alone. He goes with you. And by His power alone you are made eyewitnesses of His Gospel Message.

It's the Last Days. Each day we draw closer and closer to Jesus;' return. On that final day, I pray that you will stand as an eyewitness to your faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Until that day, may His Spirit work in you, as He has in me, to be His tool, His eyewitness of who Jesus is and what He has done to those He puts in your path. Thank you for listening to me. Shalom!