Acts 2:1–13

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Preacher: Bing Nieh

[0:00] The scripture text is Acts chapter 2, verses 1 through 13 on page 1007 in the White Bibles. Please stand for the reading of God's word.

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 one of us, in his own native language?
[1:16] Parthians and Medes and Elamites, in residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus in 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 they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, What does this mean?
But others mocking said, They're filled with new wine. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Once again, the warmest of welcomes to those who have found their way to Holy Trinity Church on this Sunday morning.
It's our joy to be together. My name is Bing. I have the opportunity to open the pages of the Bible and to proclaim it.
And before we do that, just a brief prayer. Father, we echo the words of the Apostle Peter. To whom will we go?
[2:36] Only you have the words of eternal life. Only you. And so we come to you seeking you, the word of life, seeking to hear the words of life, so that we may live.

Help us to that end. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. One writer writes, No text in Acts has received closer scrutiny than Acts chapter 2.
Entire theologies and denominations have been built up around the Acts chapter 2 account. The ATLA, the American Theological Library Association Religion Database, one of the premier resources in the field of theology and religion, biblical studies, and church history.
It serves as a portal to 2.1 million records and 1,900 academic journal titles. Nearly 800,000 journal articles dating back to 1908.
I decided to go to the portal and key in Acts chapter 2 and see what comes up. Well, I typed it in, and it resulted in 1,400 entries.
[3:57] To that, I said, I better get reading. I introduced our time this morning with these two statements because it gives us a sense of what we've actually entered into.

This chapter is incredibly dynamic for a handful of reasons. It's the birth narrative of the early church, the New Testament people of God. In contrast with the lowly, humble, arrival birth narrative of Jesus, the birth of the early church is actually filled with power, wonder, amazement, astonishment.
It's a public spectacle of sorts. It is the continual expression of God's desire to save the entirety of the world. The disciples began to learn the answers to the question posed in chapter 1, verse 6. It's, Lord, at this time you're going to restore the kingdom of Israel. The disciples were looking for some geopolitical ethnic kingdom. But Acts is presenting a kingdom that supersedes those

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categories.
The disciples longed for the restoration of their nation, their kingdom, Israel. They were a people who had been scattered, dispersed, oppressed, trampled upon, desiring their vindication.
[5:17] They wanted to see the kingdom of Israel. Instead, they would see the kingdom of God. And additionally, this chapter will reveal the very event that Jesus told His disciples to wait for.

God would reveal Himself again. He would show up. His promise would be kept according to Luke chapter 3. His power would be imparted. This would be the arrival of the promised power according to chapter 1, verse 8.
This would be the moment recorded by Luke that John the Baptist foretold long ago. That there would be someone whose sandals he would be unfit to tie, namely Jesus.
And that person, God Himself, would baptize His people, not with water, but with the Holy Spirit and with fire. This passage records for us this.
It is the Spirit of God and the people of God telling the mighty works of God. If you've ever questioned what God is doing in His world, you'll find the answer in this morning's text.
[6:25] If you've ever questioned what your purpose in life is as a Christian, you'll find the answer in this morning's text. What is God's purpose? What is my purpose? These 13 verses are here to establish this claim, and this premise, and this ongoing pattern for the entire church.

The Spirit of God is at work in the people of God to tell the mighty works of God. Well, to establish that, I'd like to provide us two headers to mark our time this morning.
If you were to press me for a title, I'd play off the familiar one and call it The Tale of Two Sounds. The Tale of Two Sounds. And you'll see the two sounds. They'll be very evident in our text this morning.
First, there is the sound of the Spirit in verses 1 to 4. And then you'll hear the sound of the saints in verses 5 to 13. Firstly, the sound of the Spirit.
The day of Pentecost was the name of the celebration that occurred the 50th day after Passover. It coincided with the celebration of the Feast of the Weeks that was implemented in early Israel.
[7:39] It's recorded in almost all the books of the Pentateuch, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It was central to their calendar. And during this Feast of the Weeks, they offered sacrifices and thanksgiving to God and His blessing in response to Him.

And as the 120 gathered in one place, suddenly, the passage tells us, there came from heaven a sound. It's not only a sound, it's actually also a sight.
There is a sound like a mighty rushing wind and a sight of fire resting upon each individual. A sound and a sight. And know that Luke is describing it via analogy.
He's describing, it's like a wind and it's as of fire. Both images are meaning laden in the Bible. Both are rich. Both are often described in the Old Testament to describe when there's these God encounters or these theophanies, when God shows up.
Perhaps the most memorable account coming out of Exodus, since we spent the last three summers there, as found in Exodus 19. The people of God have been delivered from oppression and slavery in Egypt.
[8:54] And they're out in the wilderness. And they come to the foot of Mount Sinai. And there, they're told to stay put. One million strong of them. And God arrives.

And the text is so vivid in the description. It reads, Now Mount Sinai was wrapped up in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire.
And the smoke of it went up like the smoke of kiln. And the whole mountain, the whole mountain trembled. The people didn't only, the mountain, creation, trembled. Exodus 19.
And it's likely that Luke is portraying this. That when God the Holy Spirit is coming down to earth, it's God touching down.
The effect is recorded in verse 4. You see it. As the sound filled the entirety of the room, the entirety of the room was filled with the Spirit.
[9:54] The sound filled the room. The Spirit filled the people. It was an impartial filling, meaning this, that none were excluded. As verse 3 highlights, the tongues rested on each person.

Another translation reads, the fire was distributed to all. The result of being filled with the Spirit was that they were enabled to speak in other tongues. And the elephant in the room, the question that you're asking is, what are these other tongues?

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Well, there's two, and I need to address it. I have to address it. Or I can leave it to Dave next time. But where are these other tongues? There are two main ways of viewing what's transpiring in verse 4.
Are these angelic tongues? Is this what is taking place? This uttering of a divine language unbeknownst to humanity. Those who take this line of reasoning will tether it to Paul's instruction later on in 1 Corinthians 13-14.
And Paul is well aware of this angelic language. He actually writes, opening up 1 Corinthians 13, he writes this, if I, referring to himself, if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, he recognizes there's this language that is of angels, but it's also of men.
[11:22] Another way of viewing the speaking in tongues is to view this in light of verse 6. They are discernible tongues, meaning they are the tongues of men. Human language is comprehensible and understandable.

It's the gift that we alluded to when we opened up, or I alluded to, when we opened up the book of Acts. It's what, if you were in, you know, the NELC program at the university, you would have loved this gift.
I want to acquire speaking in all these languages in a moment. These are human languages, comprehensible and understandable. So there's two ways of viewing it, and I'm going to go with the latter.
The latter. I will recognize that there are angelic tongues, and the question is, do they occur today? And as Acts unfolds, we'll learn more and more about it.
But this morning, I feel strongly that these are discernible tongues because the text interprets it that way. Luke surprisingly spends very little space describing the event itself.
[12:28] The event, the birth of the church, the arrival of the promise, the evidence of the Holy Spirit, is only recorded in four short verses. It leaves the reader with this feeling like, wait, that's it?

That's all? A sound fills the house, and the Spirit fills the disciples? Luke, I need more. Well, He's going to give us more. But He also reminds us, it's a private event.
It was a private manifestation. It has taken place behind closed doors. The 120 were likely assembled in the upper room, hidden from the public. And here we as readers are reminded of this. We're not privy to all the details that our minds are longing for. Because the point Luke is trying to make is, it's not the event that is the most significant.
Though it is, it's the birth of the church, the reiteration of God's promise, promise kept. But what's important to Luke is that you and I understand that the passage is more concerned about what happens or the response of those who observe this phenomenon publicly.
[13:36] I pause here to make a few remarks regarding the nature of a spiritual experience. The Lord will often choose to do things in private, behind closed doors, in your prayer closet.

What you'll find are these experiences are legitimate. And the, but what is, what happens to these private experiences is in our lives are they need to become public.
What the Lord does here internally to the 120 is not something they're gonna, they're gonna say, okay, we're gonna stay in this upper room. We got it. It's a gift. Let's just, let's just talk loud and converse in Chinese and Mandarin and in whatever French and English, whatever dialogue. They're not saying that because what the Lord does in private, if it's a genuine, legitimate, spiritual experience, flows out in public.
In a day and age when you and I are said, hey, what's true for you, leave it behind your door. Leave it at the conversation at your dining table. The Bible is saying if it is legitimate, it goes public.
[14:45] And this passage demonstrates this reality. A genuine experience of God leads to the public witness of God. When the Lord does something in your life, you're driven to testify about the mighty works of God.

This is what that segment on Mission Together is about. This is my hope that that space carved out in our worship service every week. It's an opportunity to proclaim the mighty works of God.
Have you heard what God has done? Have you heard what God has done in His saving of me? Have you heard what God has done in His sanctifying of me? Have you heard what God has done in compelling me to forgive my enemy?
Have you heard what God has done in preserving my marriage? Have you heard what God has done in my vocation? Have you heard what God has done in freeing me from these racist, hatred, hateful attitudes?

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Have you heard what God has done? Because these are the mighty works of God to be declared to all the world that belongs to God.
[15:49] The modern songwriters put it this way. I'm tempted to sing it. Shout it. Go on and scream it from the mountains.

Go on and tell it to the masses that He is God. Shout it. Go on and scream it from the mountains. Go on and tell it to the masses that He is God.
What took place in privately could not be restrained to the private domain and a personal realm. Rather, it became what some have called, Leslie Newbekin has called, public truth.
It's a truth that would be universally applicable. The heavenly sound heard only in a room would generate an earthly sound. The sound of the Spirit would result in the sound of the saints.
Verse 5 to 13. The sound of the saints. Beginning in verse 5, there is a shift from the private to the public realm. It's likely that they went from the upper room to the temple courts, and they continued to speak as the Spirit gave them utterance.
[16:55] The second sound is recorded in verse 6 and reaffirmed in verse 8 and again in verse 11. The sound is the 120 speaking in languages that were not native to themselves.

As Galileans, they weren't expected to speak Aramaic. Yet they were found to be speaking in various language and dialects, in the dialects of the audience. The sounds were not gibberish or indecipherable.
See what I did there, TJ? They were not indecipherable. Sorry. They were not indecipherable utterances. Rather, the text makes it clear that it was understood speech.
It's reaffirmed three times. Verse 6, 8, and 11. It was understood. Highlighting the fact that it was legitimate language being spoken. It was not drunken babbling or slur jabbering so that you and I are not mistaken to think that what is happening was drunkenness.
Luke records the crowd's response as bewilderment, amazement, astonishment, perplexed. There's a two-fold effect.
[18:08] They're in awe and totally confused. Now this multitude or a large crowd gathers. The crowd is composed, interestingly, of Jews.

In verse 5, Jerusalem Jews. Many who had taken up residency. Luke wants us to be aware of something quite significant. Namely, that much of the crowd were those who had returned from something called the exile.
One of the most, if not the most, significant event in the history of the Jews was the exile. It influences so much of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament.
If you were to dig into the realm of biblical studies, you'll actually see there's categories, there's a division given in the Old Testament. They're split into two.
Namely, people will write these are pre-exilic books and these are post-exilic books because the exile was so significant it showed up in their literature.
[19:10] You would be mistaken to think that Israel was some powerhouse dynasty or conquered others and established an empire. On the contrary, they were a small and quite insignificant group of people in the archives of history.

And at this point in time, Israel was not a sovereign nation. You'll find that shortly as the book of Acts continues. They're actually one little cog in the Roman Empire of the day.
And all that to say, 722 B.C. was a significant year in Israel's history. It was the year of their demise. It's worth turning there because of its significance.
2 Kings 17, verse 6. 2 Kings 17, verse 6. And I want to read it because it actually will frame what will unfold.
2 Kings 17, verse 6. 2 Kings 17, verse 6. 2 Kings 17, verse 6.
[20:09] It reads this. In the ninth year of Hosea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria where Israel was and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and he placed them on Hala and on the Habor and the river of Gozan and in the cities of the Medes.

So here in this historical account of Israel, it records that Israel fell and the people were taken into exile and I highlight they were taken some in the cities, into the cities of the Medes.
The nation had fallen, the kingdom was undone, the people who were now exiled from the land of divine promise and according to 2 Kings, some ended up in the cities of the Medes.
Fast forward 750 years and you find those who were once exiled back in Jerusalem. It is no coincidence that Luke cites the Medes in verse 9 for he is giving the meaning to this event.

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Much has been discussed about where Luke gets this list from. It's a composition that consists of peoples, types of people, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Romans, Cretans, and Arabians.
[21:25] But it's also composed of geographical places or lands. Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and Libya.

And some believe Luke might have actually been informed by zodiacal signs. Generally speaking, it moves from east to west, but the list breaks that pattern.
Was this the entire known world to Luke? Is he just listing every place he knows? It's unlikely because he forgets one of the most significant places, namely Greece. But this is what the text, I believe, is saying.
The locales indicate the scope of the Jewish diaspora. Apparently, in all these places resided Jews that had been scattered as a result of the exile.
Luke is trying to reiterate in a different way what he's already said in verse 5, specifically, that every devout men from every nation under heaven were there.
[22:38] There were Jews arriving from the east and west, north and south, even those from the islands, Crete. There were distant peoples from the outskirts, from Arabia, all back to Jerusalem.

which for the Jew was the center of the world. It is as if everyone associated from Israel from the four corners of the earth is here.
The comprehensiveness of this description and the emphasis on the return of the Jews from all directions highlights one of the expectations for the last days, that the exiles would return to Israel and it would be restored.
I don't know as we were singing together, I don't know if you saw those passages scrolling through, but the promise was made to the people of God in the Old Testament that even though they were scattered, dispersed,!
meandering the world, that the hand of God would bring them back and draw them in. And this is what is taking place in this passage.
[23:51] That God is reclaiming the people that are His. God is restoring a nation that has fallen.
You see, the question that the disciples were asking is are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel when the appropriate question is when are you going to restore Israel to the kingdom?

No, I'm not restoring Israel back to the kingdom. He is. He's restoring Israel back into the kingdom of God under the kingship of Jesus.
He's making the people of God whole. And you saw that last week because you're like, well, there's a team of 11 disciples that's pretty good because do we really need a 12? Yes. Because God is reconstituting His people.
And here again you see it. A nation divided, scattered, in diaspora. God says, I need them all. And He reconstitutes His people.
All under one king. Namely, Jesus. And you'll see it next week. The kingdom does not belong to Israel.
[25:01] The kingdom belongs to God. It is a kingdom that has no borders. No geographic borders. No political borders. No ethnic borders. No racial borders. No socioeconomic borders.

No intellectual capacity borders. Thank God. This is illustrated in the diverse crowd gathered. And they're all hearing about the mighty works of God in their own language.
Do you know the significance of this verse? We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty work of God. Of the two largest religions of the world, Christianity and Islam.
This is one huge distinction. Christianity is founded upon the premise that all languages are worthy of its transmission. Whereas Islam contends that it is corrupted when it's translated out of Arabic.
Professor Laminsana at Yale, originally from Gambia, formerly a Muslim, now a Christian, in his various publications, makes this argument that the Christian message is one that diffuses because of its translatability.
[26:04] translatability. Because from its foundation, all languages need access and get access and receive access. Meaning that Christianity is not tethered to a language or a culture in contrast to Islam.

In his book, Whose Religion is Christianity, he dispels the entire idea that our faith is Western. It's not a Western thing.
It's not a North American thing. It belongs to the world. It will never be American and never will be.

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And this gospel is for the world, accessible to every tribe, tongue, and nation under heaven. Isn't that what William Tyndale believed? Martyred for bringing the Bible into what? English.
Because his commitment was what? Just this. The Bible, the Word of God, must belong to the people of God and must be accessible.
[27:07] He had the rightful conviction that the mighty works of God should be freely accessed by the English-speaking world. If it's for all the world, then it must be made understandable to all the world.

Historian Mark Knoll writes, this translation implies that the receiving cultures, with their languages, histories, and assumptions are worthy of God's attention.
They're actually worthy of the recipients of God's love. This is the common testimony of the world upon reception of the Bible in their native language. You only have to Google people receiving the Bible for the first time.
They're in tears. They cry. Why does the God of heaven love us so much that He would impart His very words to us in our language?
Not in angelic language, though there is, but in our language. Why? Because it's the love of God, the mighty works of God spoken over them and declared to them.
[28:17] All have the right to hear, to hear the voice of their heavenly Father pronouncing His love to His children. I don't know if you've come across these viral videos. They're viral for, well, the reason they're viral will be made plain, but it's these young children hearing for the first time.

I'm sure there are many, but it generally goes along the lines of this. There's a young child born without the capacity to hear. And when they reach a certain age and are strong enough to endure surgery, through God's kindness in modern science and technology, they are given these cochlear implants to enable them to hear for the first time.
And the result is always the same. The cam, or the camcorder, the phone, most likely, is focused upon the child.
The device is connected and enabled. And there you see it. Mom and dad looking at their young child, saying their name, professing their love, their affection, their adoration.
And you see the child light up. Because that which was unavailable to them has been made available.
[29:34] It always ends the same. The child's response is, of giddy delight and joy. And you and I, the viewer, are left with tears streaming down our face. Why?

Because we share the conviction that all deserve the right to hear that they are loved, welcomed, received, adored.
Everyone has the right to hear. To hear the love, praise, and affection due to them. If that's true, how much more so does the world have the right to hear the mighty works of God?
Oh, does not the world need to hear the love of God pronounced over them? Does not our world need to hear the forgiveness of sin offered to them in Jesus Christ? Does not the world deserve to hear the wrath of God appeased through a substitute victim?
Does not the world need to hear the glories of life everlasting, spared from death, mourning, pain, and suffering? Does not the world need to hear the coming restoration of the world?
[30:38] From all, does not the world need to hear about the mighty works of God? Well, they do.

They do have the right. According to Acts chapter 2. And they will. And we know that. Because a multitude is gathered.
Or will be gathered. one day, before a heavenly throne, uttering the mighty acts of God in redemption and salvation, comprised of those from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, according to Revelation chapter 7.
They will hear. This will be the outcome of the Spirit of God at work in the people of God to tell the mighty acts of God.
We are heirs of this message. May we become heralds of it. A sound filled the house. The Spirit filled the people. The accusation was that they were filled with new wine.
[31:49] And the outcome is actually later in Acts chapter 5 verse 28. Jerusalem is filled with the teaching of the Gospel. It's the pattern of the church. The Spirit arrives, fills the room, fills the people, the world says, oh, they're filled with wine.

And then they accuse us of filling the world with the Gospel. Oh, my time is done. My manuscript continues, though.

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Well, let's close with this. from the outset of the New Testament church, we find that the Gospel, the good news of Jesus is not captive or constrained geographically, linguistically, culturally, or ethnically.
It's a message for all people at all times, in all places. It is total in scope and span. One theologian puts it this way, the church was born universal.
Do you see what this account does? Well, of all the purposes in life that you may have been given, of all the purposes that you may be driven by, may you be driven by this, infused and indwelt by God's Spirit.
[33:07] May you tell and declare the mighty works of God in His creation, in His redemption, in His upcoming consummation. May our prayer be that of George Whitefield where he says, Glorious God, unloose my stammering tongue to tell of Thy love immense, unsearchable.

Let's pray. Father, that is our prayer. That we are a people that have been given the Spirit of God. to be a people of God.
I speak of the mighty works of God. We are representative of that. And Father, would you hear this prayer?
May you unloose our stammering tongues so that we may speak and tell of Your love which is immense and unsearchable.
To Your glory we pray. Amen. I invite you to stand as we sing in response to God this morning.

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