

MULTIPLY – Gospel Movements

Witness

Acts 2:1-41

Mark Vroegop

¹ When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. ⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Acts 2:1–8 (ESV)

³⁸ 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. ³⁹ 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." ⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. Acts 2:38–41 (ESV)

If you are a follower of Jesus, I want you to think about the moment when you clearly understood the gospel for the first time and the circumstances surrounding your conversion. Perhaps you were raised in a Christian home, and your parents shared the gospel with you. Perhaps it was a Sunday School teacher who helped you understand your need to receive Jesus. Maybe your conversion happened a bit later, and you were converted through a youth ministry, a Bible Study in college, or a grief-recovery group. Or maybe you were invited to church by someone, and you heard the gospel through a Sunday sermon.

Every person who becomes a Christian has the same basic story. Somehow, through someone, the gospel penetrated their heart. The Word of God landed on your heart. The Spirit brought conviction. You understood spiritual things in a new way. You believed. You were saved. It was a miracle!

I was reminded of this a few weeks ago during our new Elder orientation. I asked one of our new Elders about his conversion, and he told me that it was his wife's conversion, a line in a sermon, and through a Bible Study for seekers (unconverted people seeking to study the Bible for the first time), where he truly understood the gospel. He said:

In the midst of a broken marriage and our desperate need for help, a friend from IU invited us to a Bible Study for "seekers." My wife came home really late from that Bible study, and the next morning she told

me “something happened” at the study—that she had prayed to accept Jesus into her life. That moment helped me to realize that when God saves people, He actually “does something” in their heart. Second, I listened to the sermons on Colossians, and in one, in particular, you challenged people to memorize “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” For a couple of weeks after that I could not get that refrain out of my head. It was continuous and not something I had ever experienced before. It wasn’t long after when I trusted Christ as my Savior.

It amazes me that in about ten years time, this man has not only moved from unbeliever to believer, but he is also in seminary, feels a call to ministry, and has been affirmed as an Elder at our church.

That’s multiplication! And it starts with the next ingredient that we are going to look at today in Acts 2: witness.

Multiply: Gospel Movements

This is week three of a series of messages as we look at various passages in Acts 1-11. Our aim in this series is to answer three critical questions:

- 1) What were the ingredients for the missional movement of the early church?
- 2) What unique mission is God calling College Park to in 2018?
- 3) What is your Spirit-empowered mission?

We want to see if we can identify the key ingredients that marked the spread of the gospel in the early days of Christianity. How did the gospel message spread so quickly from eleven disciples and about 120 followers to an empire-wide church-planting movement?

So far, we’ve looked at the vision for multiplication, observing how quickly the gospel can spread as we set our sights on our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. Last week we considered the way that prayer is the fuel for gospel work. In the same way that the disciples saturated their lives and ministry with prayer, we learned that prayer is a vital component of fruitful gospel ministry.

Today we will look at Acts 2 and the story of Pentecost to seek how God works through people, especially through their words, for the gospel to spread.

A few years ago, we talked about evangelism, and I asked you to pray three prayers: “Open a door, open my mouth, open their heart.” I’d like to invite you to pray those prayers again. Here’s the reason, and it is the main thought for our time in the text today: **God works through words to reach the world.**

Let’s see how this works in Acts and then learn how it works in our lives. Because God still works through words to reach the world.

God at Work (vv. 1-4)

In the second chapter of Acts, we find the account of what the disciples had been promised by Jesus and for what they were waiting: the coming of the Holy Spirit. This is an important text because it

marks the birth of the church and the transfer of the earthly ministry from Jesus to His disciples. But before the disciples or any person carries this mantle, we see God granting them power for this ministry.

This event is called Pentecost. Before this event was connected to the birth of the church and the coming of the Holy Spirit, it was a Jewish celebration. This festival was called the Feast of Weeks. It was one of three pilgrimage celebrations where devout Jews would make a trip to the Temple to celebrate the completion of the harvest.¹ The name “Pentecost” means fiftieth because it was celebrated on the 50th day, or seven weeks, after Passover.² This popular festival would have included people from throughout the Roman Empire. Usually more people were present at this festival than even at Passover.³

At the time of Pentecost, the disciples are gathered together in one place (2:1). In light of chapter one, it appears that they are in the upper room. Given the report in 1:15, it seems that there were probably around 120 people present. And, as we saw last week in 1:14, they were gathered for the purpose of corporate prayer.

In Acts 2:2 we see the dramatic entrance of the Holy Spirit. The scene is meant to be memorable, involving both sight and sound.

² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. Acts 2:2–3 (ESV)

There are a number of important elements to note here. First, what happens next is designed to be seen as the dramatic invasion of God’s presence. Second, Luke attributes the source as “from heaven.” This is similar to what happened to Jesus at His baptism as “the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove . . .” (Luke 3:21-22). Next, we read about the sound of a mighty rushing wind—think a category five hurricane. Often in the Bible God’s presence is connected to a powerful wind, as in Elijah’s experience in 1 Kings 19:11, or Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones coming to life in Ezekiel 37. Jesus used the same metaphor with Nicodemus in John 3 to describe the miracle of conversion:

⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” John 3:8 (ESV)

The final element to note is the presence of fire. Throughout the Bible fire represents God’s activity or even His presence. Consider the burning bush in Exodus 3 or the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19. However, in this moment the fire comes into the room, and it separates on each of them (see NIV translation). It appears that there was a tongue of fire above each person’s head.

Previously, the presence of the Spirit was not poured out on a group of people in such abundance. The Spirit’s work was limited to singular people, and God’s manifest presence was located in particular

¹ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 97.

² Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Pentecost,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1639.

³ Polhill, 97.

places—like the tabernacle or the temple. This moment marks an important historical shift, where the Spirit dwells in all believers, making them collectively and individually the temple of God.

¹⁶ *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 1 Corinthians 3:16 (ESV)*

¹⁹ *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 (ESV)*

The first part of verse four brings us to the main thought for this point: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit . . .” Before we move into what happens next, Luke wants to make very clear that God is now working in the lives of disciples in the same way that He worked through Jesus.

Did you know that Jesus is said to be “full of the Spirit”? Let me show you:

- After the baptism of Jesus in Luke 3, we find Luke 4:1 saying, “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness . . .”
- The beginning of Jesus’ ministry is described in Luke 4:14 as “. . . Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee . . . and he taught in their synagogues. . .”
- In Nazareth and on the Sabbath Day, Jesus opened the scroll to the book of Isaiah. He quoted Isaiah 61:1,2, which said, *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

Jesus’ ministry was empowered by the Spirit. The disciples in Acts 2 are empowered by the Spirit. And the church is empowered by the Spirit. It is the way that God works in the world. It is the way He still works in the world. It is how we carry on the work of Jesus beyond the book of Acts—by the power of God through the Holy Spirit’s work.

So when you think back to the moment when you understood the gospel, that was the Holy Spirit at work in you. When the spiritual “light-bulb” came on inside your heart, it was the blowing wind of the Spirit. It is a miracle. It is God at work. And when you share the gospel with someone, you are being the conduit of God’s work in the world. The joy and passion of ministry is having a front row seat of seeing people come to Jesus from their sins. It is the thrill of knowing that the Holy Spirit is at work. And as we live in the power of the Holy Spirit, God works through us in amazing ways.

Here is how Francis Chan describes it: “The world is not moved by love or actions that are of human creation. And the church is not empowered to live differently from any other gathering of people without the Holy Spirit. But when believers live in the power of the Spirit, the evidence in their lives is supernatural. The church cannot help but be different, and the world cannot help but notice.”⁴

The church is birthed as the Spirit comes to work.

Through Words (vv. 4-36)

⁴ Francis Chan, *The Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 17, Kindle Edition.

What follows in Acts 2 is the bold declaration of the gospel message. Words of witness are the means by which the gospel spreads. In Romans 10:17 Paul says, “faith comes through hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ.” Gospel proclamation is *the* means by which multiplication happens. More than works of compassion, more than living godly lives, more than social engagement, more than attracting a crowd, and even more than miraculous “signs and wonders,” the gospel spreads as the people of God bear witness to the Word of God. There is no other way.

We see in Acts 4:4 that after these believers were filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak in other tongues. These were the actual languages of the Jews who had gathered in the city for the festival celebration. Verses 5-8 tell us that plainly. They are astonished that these Galileans are speaking their native languages. The purpose of this sign was to validate God’s mission to reach the world.⁵ We have a listing of countries and regions in verses 9-11.

Interestingly, and as if often the case, the followers of Jesus are mocked. In 2:12 it is suggested that they are drunk—“filled with new wine.” Take note of this for two reasons. First, there are some of you who think that opposition to your witness means you have done something wrong. And we see here, once again, that mocking often accompanies solid gospel witness. We should not needlessly seek opposition, nor should we avoid it, as if effective witness is conflict free. The second reason this should be noted is because the mocking opened a door. The accusation of drunkenness became the platform upon which Peter gave this very fruitful sermon. It may be that your moment of mockery—when people think you are crazy or delusional—could be your opportunity to talk boldly about the gospel. At one level, they already think you are out of your mind, so knowing what you actually believe probably isn’t going to make it worse!

From there Peter launches into his famous sermon. After pushing back on their assumption that the men are drunk, he preaches a wonderful gospel message. There are many verses here, so let me group some of the verses together while highlighting three characteristics of this and every good gospel witness:

It was scriptural. Peter quotes from Joel 2, Psalm 16, and Psalm 110. He uses each text as the basis for his gospel pronouncement. He saturates his witness with the Word of God. Don’t ever forget that it is the Word which pierces the heart (Heb. 4:12), and it is the Scripture (not our arguments) that are inspired (2 Tim. 3:16).

It was clear. Peter’s presentation of the gospel laid out the basics. Within a few verses, we find Jesus, sin, sovereignty, crucifixion, resurrection, exaltation, Lordship, and messiahship. Now his message was tailored to his audience, but the essentials are there. Mark it down somewhere in your mind: People cannot receive Jesus if they don’t really know who they are or who He is. Be clear.

It was bold. Peter has no problem using language that pushes them to understand what is at stake. For example, we read: “This Jesus . . . you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23)

⁵ I take the other two instances of tongues in Acts - Acts 10:46 and 19:6 - in the same manner. The tongues served to validate the new ministry to the Gentiles (10:46) and Paul’s apostolic ministry (19:6).

and, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus who you crucified" (Acts 2:36). We will see this boldness continue in the next verses.

We'll look at the effect of this message in a moment, but I'd like to pause here and have us take inventory. I'd like for us to consider our witness.

There are some of us who need to consider where God has placed us and how we are using those opportunities for gospel witness. You may be so afraid of being mocked, being looked down upon, or being uncomfortable that you've isolated yourself into a Christian ghetto of sorts. Maybe your action step needs to be finding a way to engage in your community, your neighborhood, or your workplace in a way that takes a risk. Join the book club, invite your neighbors over, befriend the soccer coach, socialize with lost people. The point is to not live in fear.

Others may need to consider how much Scripture you actually know or have memorized. I think every believer, without exception, should be able to quote two or three verses that summarize the gospel (for example: John 3:16, Romans 3:23, 6:23, 10:9-10, 1 John 1:9, John 1:12, etc.). Why not set it as a goal to have these verses memorized so that you'll be ready?

Still more need to begin to pray for the next 30 days for boldness when God opens an opportunity. Ask the Lord to swing doors wide open for conversations about the gospel. That may be in your own home. Don't neglect both the sharing of the gospel with unsaved children and rehearsing the gospel with children who have come to Christ. But this also means asking the Lord to bring open-hearted people across your path. If you don't know where to start, you could simply ask someone (if appropriate to the moment) if there is any way you can pray for them.

In order for multiplication to happen, we need to embrace the "witness" role of the church and the empowerment for that mission by the Holy Spirit. God sent His Spirit to the church so that His church could be sent out into the world. And our mission in the world is to bear witness through words.

To Reach the World (vv. 37-41)

Our mission to multiply happens as God works through words to reach the world. In verses 37-41 we see the amazing effect. It is a signature moment in the life of the church, and there are multiple lessons to be learned.

I love the wording of verse 37: "and when they heard this they were cut to the heart." Other translations say "distressed, convicted, pricked in their heart." The idea is that you feel something pressing on you. The ancient Greeks used this for horses stomping the earth with their hooves.⁶ It means you feel the weight, the seriousness, and the power of what you are hearing. For those of you who are followers of Jesus, you know what he is talking about. It is the realization: "It's true!" And it is also this sense that you are being drawn. I pray that it will be true for some of you for the first time today. Perhaps even now you feel the weight, the conviction, and the sense that God is calling you. Why not do something with that?

⁶ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 140.

These people did. They asked Peter, “What shall we do?” If you know someone who is a follower of Jesus, why not ask them that same question. Ask them “what happens next?” Well, I’m going to tell you what Peter told them. Here’s what he said:

³⁸ 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. ³⁹ 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.” Acts 2:38–39 (ESV)

He called them to turn from their sin and trust in Christ. He called them to acknowledge the name of Jesus Christ. He invited them to leave what they were trusting in before. That’s what it means to repent. And he invited them to go public with their faith, to confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord. And then he offers assurance to them. It doesn’t matter how far you’ve drifted; if God is calling you to Himself—come!

But Peter continued beyond the specifics that we have in Acts 2. According to verse 40, there were many other words that he said as he begged them to be saved from this crooked generation. This is referring to a world that is off track, under judgment, and full of ungodliness.⁷ You know, don’t you, that nothing has changed? We live in the same kind of world. Our internal problems and our external actions have not changed. We need to be saved from our crooked generation as well. You need to be saved from this crooked generation.

Well, our text closes with an amazing response. According to verse 41, there were three thousand people who were converted and baptized on that day. It was a remarkable moment of witness.

If you are not yet a believer, why not follow Jesus today? Why don’t you respond to the beating heart that you feel and a sense of conviction that is undeniable? If God is drawing you, why wait?

And if you are a believer in Jesus, can I just remind you how unbelievable it is to see the Lord at work through your Words. You experienced it personally when you became a Christian. How long has it been since you’ve seen it happen in someone else?

In order for multiplication to happen, we have to be on God’s playbook: He works through words to reach the world.

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⁷ Bock, 146.

Mark your calendars for the Worship-Based Prayer Nights and Congregational Meetings of 2018.

Worship-Based Prayer Nights will begin at a new time of 5 p.m.

January 28*

February 25

March 11

April 22

May 20*

June 24

July 22

August 26

September 23*

October 28

November 11*

December 16

*Congregational Meeting will follow Worship-Based Prayer Night.