

# CROSSROADS (EASTER2020): "CHRIST DELIVERED"

(Acts 2)

5.3.20

## INTRODUCTION

We have taken quite a journey this Easter season, haven't we? Here's where we've gone and what we've looked at:

- Christ resolved, determined to go to Jerusalem to fulfill His Father's plan of salvation.
- Christ arrived, entering Jerusalem and being worshiped by a crowd shouting Messianic praises.
- Christ obeyed, showing through the elements of the Lord's Supper what He was going to be doing for the sake of our salvation.
- Christ surrendered, choosing obedience to His Father over His own life.
- Christ arose, revealing who He truly was, and displaying His victory over sin, death and the power of the devil by the power of His resurrection.
- Christ prepared, teaching and ministering to His disciples and followers over a 40-day period following His resurrection.
- Christ ascended, obeying His Father's call to come home, noting that all the work of His earthly presence had been completed.

That brings us to today to our final story of Easter. Today finds us 50 days removed from the Passover in which Christ died *once for all - Hebrews 9:26b* by becoming, in the words of John the Baptist, *"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"- John the Baptist, John 1:29B*. Today finds us seeing and experiencing the fulfillment of Christ's own words, spoken to the disciples at the Last Supper, when he said: *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you"- Jesus Christ, John 14:18*. Today we will be talking about Christ delivering on that promise, as His Father delivers the arrival of the Holy Spirit- but before we get into the moment, we better rewind a bit with some background to help us really appreciate the story we're going to relate:

## BACKGROUND

All the action about to take place is happening in Jerusalem. It is just over seven weeks since Passover - not just the traditional Jewish holy day but also since Jesus of Nazareth was crucified. We are now entering into another holiday-the celebration known as "Pentecost." Now the word "Pentecost" simply means "fiftieth day," meaning this celebration starts 50 days after Passover. In the OT, it was also known as the Festival of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:10) and the Festival of Harvest (Exodus 23:16). Its purpose, as God said to Moses, was to *"[c]elebrate the ...firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field" - God speaking, Exodus 23:16a*, and it came at the conclusion of the wheat harvest, which was also 50 days after the barley crop had been reaped and bundled together. Huge parts of this included celebration - Jewish holy days were also holidays, where joy, celebration and thanksgiving for God's wondrous blessings were the foundation of the observance. It was a very inclusive time, when even servants and foreigners were invited to participate. And someplace in Jerusalem, a small group of people are gathered. The writer is Luke, and he starts this particular story like this:

## TEXT

*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place -Acts 2:1.*

## ANALYSIS

So, who exactly is "they?" Well, to answer that question, we need to go back to his account of Christ's ascension as he described it in the previous chapter. Luke wrote: ***On one occasion (during the 40 days between Christ's resurrection and ascension), while He was eating with them, He gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift My Father promised, which you have heard Me speak about" - Jesus Christ, Acts 1:4.*** And next in the timeline is what we talked about last week: ***When He had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, [Jesus] lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God - Luke 24:50-53.*** And then, Luke adds this piece to fill out the story:

***When they (the 11 disciples) arrived (in Jerusalem from witnessing the Ascension at the Mount of Olives), they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. [So] [t]hose present were [all 11 remaining disciples]. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women (meaning the women who had followed Jesus down from Galilee, listed in the various resurrection accounts) and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers -Acts 1:13-14.*** And, in the very next verse, Luke gives us the total number of believers present at this time as 120 - 10 times what Jesus started with but, as of yet, still a small, seemingly insignificant number.

Now it may be a bit subtle, but Luke's account gives us some great information about what that tiny group of people, the initial membership of the body of believers that would come to be called the church, was doing that would be an incredible model for all believers moving forward:

- 1) They were being obedient to the word of the Lord. He had said to them: ***"Do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift my Father promised."*** And Luke observes that they were doing exactly that - staying ***continually*** in Jerusalem by noting their constantly being found at the Temple in Jerusalem. The Greek enhances that picture by telling us that they were staying in Jerusalem "through all time," in other words, at every moment.
- 2) They were ***joined together constantly in prayer***. A couple of things here:
  - a) First, just as they remained physically in Jerusalem, they also were remaining in prayer. The Greek tells us that they were strong and firm in their praying, enduring and persevering with great diligence, and doing so continually, literally giving themselves to prayer. This was not prayer as a simple exercise, but prayer as an intentional passion, literally consuming them, with attention to nothing else. They were the personification of what the apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church to ***pray without ceasing - Paul, 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NKJV)***.
  - b) Second, they were praying ***joined together***. The Greek tells us that they were praying "in one accord," meaning that they were unanimous in their praying, literally praying with one mind. In short, they were praying in unity. Such a moment may have reminded them of what David had written some ten centuries before: ***How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! -David, Psalm 133:1.*** And the incredible importance of

unity in the body of believers was certainly something Paul had in mind when he wrote to the Corinthian church: ***Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace - Paul, II Corinthians 13:11a.*** Why was that so important? As he wrote to the Christians in Rome, ***so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God - Paul, Romans 15:6-7.*** Our unity is His praise!

- 3) They remained ***wait[ing] for the gift [the] Father promised.*** They didn't get anxious or nervous. Instead, their focus was on the Lord. They knew that they could trust him - even when it was a circumstance in which they were totally unfamiliar and, in truth, likely had no idea what they were waiting for. So, they rested in the word of the Lord, which allowed them to wait in confidence for God's promise to come - His promise in His timing. Again, an OT Scripture would have been a great help to them to keep them focused (and I love the NKJV translation): ***Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths - Solomon, Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV).*** So, in other words, as Solomon says so well in the very next verse: ***Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord- Solomon, Proverbs 3:7a (NKJV).*** And they also may have leaned on God's word spoken through the prophet Habakkuk, given some six and a half centuries before their time (and the ESV words it like this): ***"For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end - it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay" - God speaking, Habakkuk 2:3 (ESV).*** They waited because it was God's direction, and His timing, that were the only things that mattered to them.

OK; now we've had the "appetizer." Let's get down to the main course!

## TEXT

***Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them - Acts 2:2-4.***

## ANALYSIS

In one shining, brilliant moment, their waiting was over. And notice something that God graciously allows in this moment of his revelation: He does it in a way that engages their senses - they heard a sound; they saw tongues of fire. This was not something of imagination - this was REAL! It brings to mind something that the apostle Peter underscored in his second letter as he remembered his experience as a witness to Christ's transfiguration; he wrote: ***[W]e did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to Him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased" We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with Him on the sacred mountain -II Peter 1:16-18.*** Peter's testimony is based on: We saw, we heard. In the same way, God in this moment was

also giving them an objective view of His fulfillment of His Son's promise - an experience to which they could objectively testify. It was just as galvanizing a moment as their Lord's appearances to them following His resurrection. It's what John shared in his first letter: ***That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched - this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard - I John 1:1-3a.*** That's what witnessing is - simply telling others what we have experienced, what, like Peter and John, we have seen and heard. Now all those people gathered in that room knew the truth because they had objectively experienced it. That would support and strengthen their testimony in the coming days - support and strength they would need in the face of the difficult and determined opposition that would be coming their way.

And then one more thing to absorb, something amazing: Luke writes that, even as they heard the sound of a mighty wind, even as they saw what looked like tongues of flame on each other's heads, one more incredible experience began setting in: ***All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them - Acts 2:4.*** They began to talk in other tongues, in other words, in languages unknown to them. This would be the equivalent of God giving me the ability to speak in Arabic or Chinese or any language which at the moment is completely unknown to me - I have enough trouble with English. But now they were given God's supernatural, divine ability to communicate with the massive crowds that would have been in Jerusalem at that time - pilgrims from all over the known world.

And think of what an amazing gift of God's grace this is. All of a sudden, His gift of salvation, offered through the recent sacrifice of His Son, providing the only means of relationship with God, is now able to be shared and explained to everybody there - some of whom may have absolutely no idea what so recently occurred in this very city in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. And certainly now, at this point, God makes sure His gift will be communicated. OK, so what does Luke tell us next?

## TEXT

***Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs - we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" - Acts 2:5-11.***

## ANALYSIS

Talk about making something real! Luke makes note of the fact that, not only was the arrival of the Holy Spirit audible to the believers in the room but, just as important, to nonbelievers outside the room. Luke writes that the noise like a violent windstorm was so loud that it

carried out to the crowds in the streets below. And immediately the crowds were hearing something else - people they thought were Galileans (which was not something to be proud of, incidentally; Galileans were generally looked down on as "poor country cousins" and bumpkins by the big-city folks in Jerusalem), speaking not in any Galilean dialect but rather in a language that all these people in town for the festival celebration could understand - no matter where they were from!

So, think of the people who were now able by God's grace to receive this story, to actually listen to it in their own language. Literally the entire Mediterranean basin is included. If we update Luke's "roll-call of nations, we find people groups hearing the gospel from east of the Tigris River all the way to India, modern-day Iran and Iraq, modern-day Turkey, parts of modern-day Egypt and Libya, the island of Crete, the western part of modern-day Saudi Arabia, and even as far west as Rome. Now that's what I call outreach!

So, what were all these people going to do with this moment? They couldn't deny what was happening because they themselves were experiencing what was happening.

### **TEXT**

*Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine"-Acts 2:12-13.*

### **ANALYSIS**

The Greek tells us that the crowd was confounded and amazed, and they marveled as they heard the story of God and salvation being shared with them in their native languages - all of this causing their minds to literally be in an uproar; they were besides themselves in wonder and astonishment. As a result, they were so overwhelmed that they had a hard time grasping what was really happening around them; a generation or so ago one of us might have said that this experience "blew their minds!" According to the Greek, that actually wouldn't be too far off.

But also note the wide variance of opinion: For all those who were truly astonished by this, others tried to dismiss it, joking that these were just a bunch of drunken babbling idiots. Now I don't know a lot about alcohol and drinking (never having been drunk myself), but I must admit I'm impressed that somebody actually thought that being under the influence could somehow allow you to speak in somebody else's language. I've seen people so drunk they couldn't even figure out their own language! But that's when Peter, recently restored to ministry by the Lord himself and strengthened in the love and confidence of his Master, stood up, along with the rest of the remaining original disciples, to provide some clarity.

Now Peter's sermon is too long to go over word by word, but we will look at the overall arc of his message, as Peter does some great things in sharing with the audience that has gathered:

- 1) He starts out by redirecting the crowd's perception of what might have been going on ("they're just drunk!") to what was truly happening- an outpouring of God's Holy Spirit, an outpouring that was promised in their Scriptures through the prophet Joel. That's incredibly important: Instead of saying, "They're not drunk because I said so," Peter focuses on Joel's words to essentially say: "You know those words from the prophet Joel? Well, this is what those words look like! This is what God's work looks

like! This isn't us; this is God through his Spirit in us! This is what he meant when he said through Joel: ***'I will pour out my Spirit'*** - Peter, Acts 2:17a (quoting God speaking, Joel 2:28a.)

- 2) Then, in sharing Joel's prophecy, Peter stresses how all-inclusive that prophecy, directly spoken by God himself, truly is; he points out that God would be pouring out his spirit ***on all people*** regardless of gender (***Your sons and daughters will prophesy***), or age (***your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams***), or social status (***Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy***-Acts 2:17b-18 (quoting Joel 2:28-29). And, if that prophecy is all-inclusive, how can the fulfillment of that prophecy not be all-inclusive as well? And his referring to the scope of Joel's prophecy also has the intentional result of letting everyone listening to him know that they are all included in this moment too - no exceptions!
- 3) Next, Peter connects that prophecy to the recent earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth, pointing out to them that, essentially, "You know who he was, you know what he did." He continues telling about Christ - moving into the story of his arrest and subsequent death on a cross. But his death on the cross was not the end; as he says, ***"God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him"***-Peter, Acts 2:24. He then amplifies the truth of the resurrection of Jesus by connecting it to a Scripture from some ten centuries before when David had written: ***"I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, you will not let your holy one see decay"*** - Peter, Acts 2:25-27 (quoting Psalm 16:8-10). But, as Peter so astutely points out, David was NOT writing those words about himself; as Peter makes sure is understood, David died, and remained dead, buried right there in a tomb in Jerusalem. David was talking about somebody else - Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was the one who would not be abandoned to the realm of the dead; Jesus was the one who would not see decay. Peter tells them that David's Scripture is speaking about Jesus because he was raised from the dead by God himself and, what's more, we've all seen it. We've seen him. All of us, every one of us standing up here before you, have seen him.
- 4) And then Peter brings to this moment one absolutely clear, unadulterated conclusion: ***"[L]et all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah"***-Peter, Acts 2:36.
- 5) And now that same Holy Spirit that had so empowered all those gathered in prayer and obedience, that same Holy Spirit that had arrived with such a display of power and glory, now pierced the hearts of thousands of people as they were confronted with this overwhelming truth that Peter had shared: ***When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"*** -Acts 2:37. And Peter had a ready answer: ***"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ/or the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and/or all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call"*** -Acts 2:38-39.

What an amazing day that was. And, by the time it ended, according to Luke, some 3,000 people had joined the 120 who had been obeying, and waiting, and praying, for the promise that Jesus had guaranteed his Father would deliver. And, just like every other day that contained a promise given by Christ, this day too, his word was true.

## APPLICATION

Wow; what a story! What an experience! OK; so, some 2,000 years after the events of that amazing moment, we are in the same position as they are: Jesus is no longer present on earth, but his promised Holy Spirit is. So, what does that mean for us today? Well, there is so much the Bible tells us about the Holy Spirit that we could do an entire sermon series on the Holy Spirit alone. But that being said, this story gives us some wonderful things to consider - and savor. So, what exactly does the Holy Spirit bring us?

- 1) The presence of Christ. One of Jesus' most precious promises was also one of his last. The final verse of Matthew's gospel has Jesus telling his disciples: "**[S]urely I am with you always, to the very end of the age**" - **Jesus Christ, Matthew 28:20b**. This was the most basic fact of life with Christ for the disciples to hold on to, that, no matter what was happening, no matter the danger, no matter the circumstances, no matter the challenges, Jesus would be with them - not just in any particular moment of stress or need but **always**. The Holy Spirit was now going to be the means by which Jesus would accomplish this. But it was going to happen in a far more intimate way than anything they had experienced during their 3+ years of living with him. He was literally depositing himself, in the person of the Holy Spirit, into their very being, becoming with them always in a way they had never known before. Remember right before they went to Gethsemane when they were still together in the Upper Room? Jesus had told them: "**I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you**" - **Jesus Christ, John 14:18**. With the entry of the Holy Spirit into their lives, that promise was kept - to such an extent that Paul would be led to write: "**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord**-Paul, **Romans 8:35, 38-39**.
- 2) The power of Christ. One of Christ's most challenging reality checks was when he was still instructing them in the Upper Room; he told them: "**[A]part from me you can do nothing**" - **Jesus Christ, John 15:5b**. That is the very essence of Christianity - acknowledging helplessness, our complete and total lack of being able to do anything. But as Christ had shared with Paul: "**My grace is sufficient/or you, for my power is made perfect in weakness**" - **Jesus Christ, II Corinthians 12:7b**. In other words, our helplessness before God is not something to fight against; it is something to be embraced. Certainly, that is what Paul learned: "**Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong**-Paul, **II Corinthians 12:8-10**. Basically, Paul is telling us: When I am completely empty,

that's when God can fill me the most. So why wouldn't I always want to be empty of everything else, so that I can only be full of God? But what Paul also realized was that, with the Holy Spirit indwelling him, as he shared with the Philippian church: *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me-Paul, Philippians 4:13 (NKJV)*. In other words, there is literally no limit to what can be accomplished when we are living not in the power of us but in the power of Christ's Holy Spirit.

3) The pattern of Christ. In the Upper Room, after Christ had taken on the role of a servant, even a slave, *[w]hen he had finished washing [the disciples'] feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done/or you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" - John 13:12-15*. Jesus showed us what a life pleasing to God looked like. He himself had said: *"I seek not to please myself but him who sent me" - Jesus Christ, John 5:30b*. The greatness of Christ's life was that it was perfectly pleasing to God. And the greatness of God's plan of salvation was not only that Jesus purchased life, but he also showed us how to live that life. And, according to Christ, to come alongside us in creating a life pleasing to God, the Holy Spirit will be:

- a) An advocate, a comforter, who would come alongside us -just like Jesus: *"[The Father} will give you another advocate to help you" - John 14:16b*.
- b) The truth: Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Spirit of truth and added that *when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth." -Jesus Christ, John 14:16b, 16:13a*. The same truth that defined the Father's word (*As/or God, his way is perfect: The Lord's word is flawless-David, Psalm 18:30a*) and the Son's word ("*am the way and the truth and the life"-Jesus Christ, John 14:6a*) would also define the Holy Spirit's word.
- c) A teacher: *"[T]he Holy Spirit . . . will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" - Jesus Christ, John 14:26*.
- d) A confirmation of Jesus Christ: *"[H]e will testify about me He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you" - Jesus Christ, John 15:26b, 16:13b-14*.
- e) A coach: *"[D]o not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time, you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 10:16-20*.
- f) A grower: As Paul said: *[T]he fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self- control - Paul, Galatians 5:22-23a*. And finally ...
- g) A sealer/guarantor: As Paul wrote: *When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-to the praise of his glory-Paul, Ephesians 1:13b- 14*.



To put it simply, in every way that Jesus Christ was with His followers during His time on earth, through His Holy Spirit, He continues to be just as present in every way with His followers today.

## CONCLUSION

What an amazing moment! And once last picture of God's grace: This was all happening to people who were largely visitors in Jerusalem that day. Most of them would be going back to places scattered all over the Mediterranean basin - many of them now with new lives, based on what they had been able to hear in their own language. Their homes, their communities, their nations, would also eventually be hearing about the same Savior they had experienced this day - all because God met them where they were - right down to how they talked. Wow!

But 2,000 years later, we need to ask: Do we live our lives like Jesus is walking right beside us, every moment of every day? Do we live like all his power and strength and guidance and provision is right next to us? Or do we live like life is all on us - to provide the needs, to find the answers, to solve the problems?

Way back in the OT, Nehemiah reminded the Israelites in a rebuilding Jerusalem: ***"[T]he joy of the Lord is your strength"*** - ***Nehemiah 8:10b***. Folks, not only can we know that joy but we can live with that joy- every moment of every day. Can you imagine, in a world as strange and bewildering as ours is today, the impact "the joy of the Lord" can mean to those around us? Living with that truth, that confidence - and the amazing future that goes far beyond anything this present world could ever offer? Christ's Holy Spirit gives us that opportunity. So, live like He's real - He is! Live like He's present - He is! Live like He's Jesus – He is! Let's pray!