

## **Different To Make A Difference**

A Missional Awakening

Dr. David Platt

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### **A MISSIONAL AWAKENING Acts 1-2**

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open to Acts 1. I remember one particular game that Heather and I went to. It was Georgia versus Georgia Tech. Georgia Tech is one of our rivals. We beat them pretty considerably, but they're still kind of a rival in the state. We were going to the football game. Someone had given us tickets. It was in Atlanta at Georgia Tech's stadium. We got our tickets and we walked down to the seats. We didn't know anyone else who was sitting around us, but if you've been to a college football game, you know what it's like. You immediately become best friends with everyone you're sitting around with, united together in your love for Georgia football.

So we were sitting there, conversing and having a good time with most of the people there. There was a guy on my left who was a little weird, a little different; there was just something there... if you've been to a college football game, you know these guys; there's just something a little weird, so I was kind of keeping my distance from him a little.

When the game started, we stood up and started cheering. The first time Georgia scored a touchdown, everyone started going nuts. I start high-fiving a bunch of guys I've never met before. Then, all of a sudden I turned to my left—big mistake. In an instant, I find myself in this man's embrace. He hugged me and we started jumping up and down together. I thought he was going to kiss me; we had a moment right there, and this continued the whole game. Not me and him hugging and kissing, but just the intensity of that scene.

I remember at halftime, we were talking with some of the people around us. They were asking me what I did. I told them I was in the ministry. It was really interesting; their language changed after that, which was a good thing. Then I remember that all throughout the second half, there was this one particular lady behind me who, every time there was an intense, close play, when it came down to the wire, she would reach down, literally grab my shirt, get in my face, and she'd say, "Pray now! He'll listen to you!" The zeal, the passion, and the emotion of the fall.

Jonathan Edwards, at a time in history, church history that became known as the Great Awakening said this:

"Our external delights, our earthly pleasures, our ambition, and our reputation, our human relationships, for all these things, our desires are eager, our appetites strong, our love warm and affectionate. When it comes to these things, our hearts are tender and sensitive, deeply impressed, easily moved, much concerned and greatly engaged. We are depressed at our losses and we are excited and joyful about any worldly success or prosperity. But when it comes to spiritual matters, how dull we feel."

He said, "How heavy and hard our hearts; we can sit in here at the infinite height and length and breadth and love of God and Christ Jesus, of His giving His infinitely dear Son,

and yet sit there, cold and unmoved. If we are going to be excited about anything, shouldn't it be our spiritual lives? Is there anything more inspiring, more exciting, more lovable and desirable in Heaven or on Earth than the gospel of Jesus Christ? We should be utterly humbled that we are not more emotionally affected than we are in the church."

That is a radically different way to look at life in the US. My prayer is that above every other affection, emotion, or passion, that God would begin an awakening in this church; that He would open our eyes in a new and fresh way to see His infinite greatness and His awesome glory; that He would open our hearts to feel the weight of the mammoth needs of the lost and dying world; and that He would do that to the end that we would abandon ourselves, our lives individually, our lives as a church, that we would abandon ourselves to advancing His kingdom in Birmingham and among the billion people who have not even heard the name of Jesus.

I want us to talk about what we're going to call a "Missional Awakening." What I mean by that is that I am praying that God would wake us up in our church culture in the South, to see genuinely, truly, authentically, not artificially; to see His glory, to be captivated by His glory, and to surrender ourselves completely to His mission as the most important thing in our lives—the integrating, overriding priority of everything we do. I'm praying that God would do something different in our day and age, in this faith family that will have eternal, worldwide differences.

### **God, awaken our affections ...**

Acts 1 and 2 is where that is based, this idea of a "missional awakening," and I think that's exactly what we're seeing. What I want us to do is take a bird's eye view of these two chapters. Think of this prayer and how it relates to the text. "O God, awaken our affections so that we obey your Spirit and surrender to your worldwide mission." I want you to see how this prayer is rooted in Acts 1 and 2.

Acts 1, we'll start in verse 1, and read this first section here.

*In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, 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. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'*

*So when they met together, they asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'*

*After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven' (Acts 1:1-11).*

Now, as we come to this part of the book of Acts, we need to understand who's writing this. It is a guy named Luke. Luke also wrote the book of Luke. Luke ends up in chapter 24, the last chapter of the book of Luke, and picks up in Acts 1 in exactly the same place, in Jerusalem, with exactly the same promise: in Luke 24, Jesus promised that He will clothe His disciples with power from on high. In Acts 1 Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." The same plan is outlined there in Luke 24:47-49. They talk about how repentance, forgiveness of sins will be preached in all the world. That's exactly what is going on here, so we see it overlap, a continuation here from the book of Luke.

We need to get a hold of what's going on here in the mind of Luke, and I think we see that in the very first verse. I want to invite you to circle a word in verse 1. Don't circle it if it's not your Bible but if it's your Bible, I want you to circle it. "*In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus*" and here's the word: "*began to do and to teach...*" (Acts 1:1). The word "began." What Luke is saying is, I've written this Gospel of Luke, this story, about all that Jesus began. He just started to do, that's the beginning. Obviously, the implication is, as we go down the rest of this passage, that Jesus is continuing to do and to teach all of these things. He began in the book of Luke, now He's continuing in the book of Acts.

That makes sense until we get to verse 11, and Luke has just told us that Jesus is continuing to do and to teach these things, and in verse 11, Jesus gets out of here. In the rest of the book of Acts, we hardly ever see the presence of Jesus physically. So how did Jesus continue to do these things if He wasn't there throughout most of the book of Acts?

That's the beauty of what this passage is teaching. Because the Holy Spirit came down, it was the presence of Christ dwelling in them. This is exactly at why the end of John, Jesus could say, "When I leave, you are going to do even greater things than I have done." He had done quite a few great things, whether it's walking on water, feeding 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish, he'd done some amazing things, but He says "you will do even greater things." Why? Because He is living in each one of us in this room. He is just beginning in Acts 1. It is continuing today at the Church at Brook Hills in 2006. What an amazing picture.

### **The driving force behind the mission of the early church was the person of Jesus Christ.**

What I want you to see from the very beginning is the driving force behind the mission of the early church was the person of Jesus Christ. It wasn't a program, it wasn't a project that they were going to give themselves to. It was the person of Christ living in them, dwelling in them, and enabling them to accomplish this mission. As a result, Jesus was at the center of this mission.

A few characteristics of Christ that we see here in Acts 1, number one, Jesus is the risen Savior. In verse 3, he said, "*after his suffering, he showed,*" in other words, after going to the cross and dying there, "*he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive*" (Acts 1:3). He is not the dead Savior, He is the risen Savior. These guys had witnessed Jesus one day alive, next day dead, next day alive. They were

captivated by the resurrection of Christ. It was not just a mere doctrine that was in the past; that was something that was alive and living inside of them, this idea that Jesus had risen from the grave.

I remember I was talking just a couple of weeks ago with a teenager who had gone through some very difficult things in his life recently. He was talking to me, and he said "I lay down in my bed at night, and in the darkness I just feel the sense of death." He said some people around him had passed away and he said, "I feel this sense of death and it scares me to where I can't even go to sleep." I looked at him and I said, "You know there's one who has conquered death. When you trust in Him to save you then you need no longer fear death." That's good news. That's good news for all of us in this room, no matter how much cancer, no matter how much sickness or disease or no matter how many accidents that happen just randomly, we know that we have victory over death through a risen savior. That is more important than anything in this world. It is more important than how much money we make, or how we lead our families. It is the most important decision we will make in our life. How will we respond to a risen Savior? All of us have to answer that question. If you've ever answered that question in your life and said "I'm going to trust the risen Savior," I want you to know that not based on anything you do, but based on what Christ has done, and His death and resurrection, you can walk out of this room today, knowing that there's no more fear in death. He is the risen Savior.

Second, He is the exalted Lord. Four times in this first chapter, we see it emphasized that Jesus was taken up into heaven. You can underline them if you want. In verse 2 it says *"until the day he was taken up to heaven..."* (Acts 1:2). Then you look down in verse 9, it says, *"After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes"* (Acts 1:9). Verse 11, in the middle of that verse, it says *"This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven..."* (Acts 1:11), and then all the way over in verse 22, *"beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us"* (Acts 1:22).

Four times in this passage alone, Luke is emphasizing that Jesus is not just a risen savior, but He is an exalted Lord. He ascended into heaven, where He is at the right hand of God the Father where He was giving gifts, bestowing grace on His people. He is the exalted lord. This is the same picture we get from Paul in Philippians 2:9-11, one day *"every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Phil. 2:10-11).

This was huge in the early church. They were about to face some very difficult times and they were going to face some fierce persecution, and some troubling and confusing times, and it would be good for them to know every step of the way that they could look up and see that Jesus was on the throne. Isn't that good to know--when we're confused, when things aren't going exactly the way they're supposed to go in our families, to look up and see that Jesus is the exalted Lord? That He is in control?

He's the risen Savior, He's the exalted Lord, and third, He's the coming King. These guys watch Jesus.... Imagine their excitement, they've got Jesus back, He rose from the grave, they spend a few days with Him, and then all of a sudden one day He takes the flight of all flights, and in an instant, He's out of there. Some guys appear and say "what are you looking at?" "What do you think we're looking at? Jesus just went into the sky!" These two guys say to these men, "Just as you saw Him go up, one day He is coming back." That's an awesome truth.

This world is not our home. No matter how trying it gets, no matter how confusing it gets, no matter how many hurts there are, and I know that in this faith family, even this last

week, being made aware and talking with some of you who are going through some very difficult things, and I know that there are many stories like that, and I want to remind you this world is not our home. Jesus is coming back for His people. He is the risen savior, the exalted lord, and the coming king. That is a God worth following. That is a God worth abandoning everything for.

**Passion for the kingdom is fueled by passion for the King.**

What I want you to see is that as we go into the book of Acts, as we start this thing off, passion for the kingdom of God is fueled by passion for the King. This is something we have got to get a hold of.

God has promised to bless the church that exalts His son, that sees His greatness and His glory and His majesty; who doesn't come in an artificial church game week in and week out, sing praises to something out there, when we truly begin to grasp the greatness of Christ, and He becomes the center of our lives and He becomes the center of our families and He becomes the center of the church, then we are assured the blessing of God. God, awaken our affections for Christ as our Savior, our Lord, and our coming King.

This is the driving force behind the entire book of Acts. God, awaken our affections.

**... so that we obey Your Spirit ...**

Second, God, awaken our affections so that we obey your spirit. I want you to go over with me to the next chapter, Acts 2. Now things really start to get good. Look at Acts 2, and I just want you to imagine this scene. Some of you may have heard this passage before; picture it like you're seeing it for the first time. Listen to this:

*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 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.*

*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 them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: 'Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own 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!' 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 2:1-13).*

These guys are loaded. What in the world is going on here? Awaken our affections, so that we obey your Spirit.

Now, these verses that we just read are so packed full of meaning. In order to understand what's going on here, we've got to understand some of the background of the Old Testament. We're going to do some turning for a couple of minutes, and I want you to see some things unfold in Scripture that are just amazing about the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church because there's not one detail in these 13 verses that is there by accident. It's just filled over and over again.

Let's start by turning to the left, go all the way back... You may need your table of contents for this. Ezekiel 37. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and then you come to Ezekiel. It's right before Daniel. I want you to look at Ezekiel 37. And when you turn there, hold your place in Acts 2 if you can because we're going to go back and forth some and you'll need to have them both ready. We're going to get a workout today in the Word.

Ezekiel 37. While you're turning there, what we need to realize is that this thing called Pentecost in Acts 2 was a Jewish feast that goes all the way back to the Old Testament. Pentecost literally means "fiftieth" because it was celebrated on the fiftieth day after the Passover. What we're going to see is some things happening at Pentecost that were talked about way back in the Old Testament that will help us understand the gravity of what's going on in Acts 2. First thing, when we saw in Acts 2 that this sound like a violent wind comes upon them, and just get the picture: it's not an actual wind, but it sounds like a wind, it sounds like a tornado or a hurricane going on, but you're not feeling anything, but you're seeing that, you're hearing that take place around you, this intense picture of a wind.

Now all throughout the Old Testament, wind is often used to symbolize the presence of God, even the very breath of God, His presence living among His people, and that's exactly what's being talked about here in Ezekiel 37. I want you to look with me at verse 4. This was at a time where the people of God were going through a lot of trials, and they had disobeyed God and they were basically dead in their religion. Look at what happened in verse 4:

*"Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to these bones and say to them, "Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord"' (Ezek. 37:4-6). The picture here is a valley of dry bones, of deadness; it's symbolic of God saying "I'm going to breathe life into that." That's what He does in the next few verses.*

Then come down to verse 12. After that happens, the Bible says, *"Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves'"*—take your deadness basically—*"bring you up from them. I will..."*—check this out—*"put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord'" (Ezek. 37:12-14).*

### **The Holy Spirit enables us to ...**

The first thing the Holy Spirit is enabling us to do in Acts 2 is to experience God's presence. All throughout the Old Testament, at different points, we see the Spirit of God coming upon people, but He didn't stay upon them. He would come and leave. When we get to Acts 2,

this wind comes and it's a symbol of the presence of God just like Ezekiel 37, verses 13 and 14; He said, "I'm going to put my spirit, not with you, but in you. The Spirit of God is not just going to dwell among you; the Spirit of God is going to live inside of you." That's exactly what we see happening here in Acts 2—the Spirit of God coming to dwell—not just among His people, but in His people. The Holy Spirit enables us to experience the presence of God. The Holy Spirit fills us, shows us the beauty of Christ. We talked about awakening our affections. We can't have our affections awakened by a playing good music and having a good speech. That alone does nothing. It's necessary to have the Holy Spirit to experience God's presence. That's the first thing we're seeing.

Then it gets even better. I want you to look at what happens next. Not only does the Holy Spirit enable us to experience God's presence, but the Holy Spirit enables us to obey God's commands. Now, I need you to follow along with me here. Pentecost, 50<sup>th</sup> day after Passover. This feast they would celebrate, and it came to be known and the tradition was that at Pentecost, they would celebrate the giving of the Law, Ten Commandments way back in the Old Testament, when the Law was given by God to His people. Pentecost was the day when they would celebrate when that happened. It was a celebration they had 50 days after Passover.

Now, we come to the New Testament—that's what we see in the Old Testament--we come to the New Testament, and Luke 22:24 says Jesus died during what time? The Passover. That's when Jesus died. It's when He was crucified. Just by coincidence, 50 days later, we see the Holy Spirit coming. This is interesting. That starts to alert us maybe there's something going on here.

Now remember, this was a feast, all these Jews from all these places had gathered together to celebrate to remember the day when God gave His Law to His people. I want you to hold your place here in Acts 2, and turn with me back to Exodus 19. It's the second book in the Bible. I want you to look at Exodus 19. Here's where it gets really good.

This is the story of the people of God encountering Him in a place called Mount Sinai. That's where God gave the Law. I want you to look at Exodus 19:16. I want you to think about this; I want you to picture this and see if you see any similarities between this and what's going on in Acts 2.

*"On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain" (Ex. 19:16-17).* Imagine this: Moses has led us out, we're standing at the foot of the mountain. *"Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in" (Ex. 19:18)—what? "In fire."*

*The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him. The Lord descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up and the Lord said to him, 'Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the Lord and many of them perish. Even the priests, who approach the Lord, must consecrate themselves, or the Lord will break out against them' (Ex. 19:18-22).*

Here's what's going on: God is encountering His people at Mount Sinai. He reveals Himself in this fire on the mountain. It's a fire that basically said to the people, "Stay back. You need not come up the mountain. Don't go hiking today, because the greatness of the glory of God, you cannot come face to face with in this way. Apart from some mediator, because of your sin, because of the fact that you are separated from God by your sin, you can't come face to face with God like this with the glory of God like this in this picture of fire."

When we get to Acts 2, on the day when they are just happening to remember that, when they couldn't even approach God because fire was being sent down on this mountain, all of a sudden they look up and what do they see around them? Tongues of fire. That's cool, isn't it? They're seeing the fact that things are changing here. They are able to come into the presence of God. How could that be? Jesus is the risen savior, He is the exalted lord, and He is the coming king. Because of what Christ has done, now the Holy Spirit was being given to His people and the presence of God was coming face to face with His people in a new way.

Now here's what happened here in Exodus 19. When you get to the next chapter, we get the Ten Commandments. Then, from chapter 20 all the way over to chapter 31, the Law is given. For the next eleven chapters, we see the Law given. Now, I want you to come to Exodus 31, and I want you to look with me at verse 18. Look at Exodus 31:18. This concludes the giving of the Law. The Bible says, "*When the Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God*" (Ex. 31:18). God is giving him the tablets.

Moses goes back down to his people and if you remember what happened in Exodus 32, the people had turned against God in the time Moses had been on Mount Sinai. They had taken a golden calf and were bowing down and worshipping it and offering gifts to this golden calf, making an idol before God. The judgment of God comes on them, and if you come to chapter 32, look at verse 28: The Bible says, "*The Levites did as Moses commanded,*" and listen to this, "*that day about three thousand of the people died*" (Ex. 32:28). On this day when they think about when the Law was given, Moses came back down the mountain, he found they were worshipping a golden calf. Three thousand of the people of God died under the judgment of God that day.

In Acts 2, they're thinking about that, they are remembering that feast that that day with this feast in Acts 2 when you come over to verse 37, after Peter preaches, the Bible says, "*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). We skip down to verse 41, and what does the Bible say? "*Those who accepted his message were baptized*" (Acts 2:41), and how many people were added to their number that day? Coincidence? On the day when they remember three thousand people dying under the judgment of God, three thousand people receive life through the grace of God. The Bible's good, isn't it? God bringing His presence to His people, God bringing His grace to His people.

The comparison between the Law and the Spirit continues throughout the rest of the New Testament. 2 Corinthians 3:7-8 talks about how the Old Testament law was given on these tablets of stone that only brought death because nobody could measure up to the that law—we couldn't do it. Jesus came He measured up to the Law, He gave His life, then He sent His Holy Spirit, and 2 Corinthians 3:7-8 says now, in comparison to the old tablets of stone, we have the spirit of God writing the Law in our hearts. The picture in the Old Testament is that you couldn't fulfill that Law, you couldn't do it, so you needed someone to intercede for you between you and God. In the New Testament, Jesus has done that, and then He sends His spirit, who enables us to obey everything God has called us to do. The Holy Spirit is pretty important. He enables us to obey God's commands.

Third thing, it gets even better. The Holy Spirit enables us to experience God's presence, obey God's commands, and finally, to fulfill God's purpose.

Now, one more turning exercise: We come back to Acts 2, and the Bible says in verse 5, "*Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven*" (Acts 2:5). Every nation under Heaven, God-fearing Jews, and it lists those nations and it lists those different languages, and in fact it says that people began to speak in other tongues. There's been a lot of discussion throughout church history over what kind of tongues these were. Were these some languages that are not able to be understood by anybody?

Well, obviously not that's not what's going on here. This is not some mysterious language. These guys are sitting here from all these different nations and they're saying "these Galileans"—which is basically a group of people who were not highly respected in that day—"these guys are speaking in all these other languages that we understand."

Now, I want you to think about the background that goes into that and the purpose of God that helps us understand this. Hold your place here and turn back to Genesis. I want you to look at Genesis 11. I know you're doing a lot of turning today and I want you to look at Genesis 11:1.

What we see in Genesis 10 is a whole list of different nations. I want you to look at Genesis 11:1. I want you to remember what happened here. It says,

*Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, 'Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.'*

*But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The Lord said, 'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.' So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth (Gen. 11:1-8).*

What happens is, again in the Old Testament, we're seeing the judgment of God come upon these people when they, in their prideful arrogance and disobedience to God's mandate to make His glory known, and God's mandate to multiply throughout the earth, He says, "I'm going to scatter you," all these different languages, and they're divided by their different languages at this point.

Then you get to Genesis 12. We've looked at this before, verses 1, 2, and 3, where God's promise to Abraham and God said to Abraham, "I'm going to bless you," and in verse 3 He says, "Through you I'm going to bless all the peoples, all the nations of the earth." So what we see is the judgment of God in chapter 11, and in chapter 12 we see God promising: "I've

got a purpose, I'm going to use you, Abraham, to bring blessing to all the peoples of the earth."

Now, in light of that background, we come to Acts 2, and we see the Holy Spirit come down. Some have said that, in Acts 2, we see this Tower of Babel thing in Genesis 11 overturned. That's obviously not the case. They're not all speaking the same language now. They're still speaking different languages, but don't miss it. This judgment that we've seen in Genesis 11: by speaking different languages, they were divided; In Acts 2, they've still got different languages, but they're united in one thing: it's the wonders of God that are being declared and the gospel of Jesus Christ that Peter preaches. What you've got is still all these diverse languages, but you've got unity—an incredible, beautiful unity, in the middle of all that diversity. In Genesis 11, you've got diversity that's spread them out and caused division between all kinds of different people, and we see the evidence of that all over the world today. The purpose of God is to use the seed of Abraham, the Jewish people, just like we see here in Acts 2, to bring unity in that diversity, and the unity comes around the gospel, the truth, the message of Jesus Christ.

"Now, what you do you mean, the Holy Spirit enables us to fulfill God's purpose?" Can I remind you that Revelation 7:9-10 says there's coming a day when a multitude from every nation, every tribe, every people and every language will bow around the throne of Jesus Christ and they will sing, "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." That's the whole purpose in all of a eternity. There's going to be a day when people from Iran and Iraq and Lebanon and Israel and China and North Korea and Brazil and the United States are all going to gather around the throne, and in all different languages as one we're going to sing praises to Christ. That's the purpose of God, and it was the purpose of God in Acts 2, and it's still the purpose of God today. That's why the Church at Brook Hills cannot be content to reach this place for Christ. We were created to impact all peoples all languages, all nations with His glory and His goodness, and the Holy Spirit is in us for that purpose. The Word is good.

### **When the Spirit fills the church ...**

We experience God's presence through His Spirit, we obey His commands through the Spirit, and we fulfill His purpose through the Spirit. Now, look at what happens when the Spirit fills the church. Two things happen in this passage in Acts 2. Number one, the church stands in awe.

Can you imagine this happening in this room? They only have 120 people there, but if you could just imagine, all of a sudden this weird tornado-hurricane sound comes and we really don't know what's going on, and then we see what seems like tongues of fire resting on all of us. People are thinking, "Man, Brook Hills is really going all out today, this is rocking!" And then all of us start speaking different languages that 30 seconds before we didn't even know. The church stands in awe when the Spirit fills His people.

Not only does the church stand in awe, but the world stands amazed. All of these people come rushing and they're amazed at what they see going on among these people. I pray that God works in the Church at Brook Hills in such a way that people in this community are amazed. I'm not talking about being amazed by great music or a great speaker, but amazed by the Spirit, the power of God among His people, that we would be known as a church in which the Spirit of God is strong.

What I'm about to say, I want to be very careful to be clear. When we come to Acts 2, this is a one-time event in the history of the church. It's the inaugural coming of the Holy Spirit upon His people. We don't have to pray for another Pentecost. See, here's the deal: the rest

of the New Testament teaches that when we place our faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in all of us. So if you've placed your faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit is dwelling in you. He is living in you. Exactly what we see is these realities in Acts 2; we've already got that.

However, at the same time, throughout the history of the church, there have been times when God's Spirit has moved in unusual, fresh, unexplainable ways among His people that have brought great change in the church and brought many people to Christ. In 1806, a guy name Samuel Mills and four other guys, college students, began praying for God to pour out His Spirit on them and on their campus in an unusual way. They commit to praying over and over and over again.

One day they were praying off of campus. A storm was coming, and they began to run back to campus, but they couldn't get back in time. They hid under a haystack, and there they knelt and they continued their time in prayer. It became the known as the haystack prayer meeting.

In August 1806, exactly two hundred years ago, these guys do this and they begin to pray for a fresh outpouring of God's spirit that would cause them to go into the nations on mission. At that point, America had never sent a missionary overseas. These guys started praying for it, and in the years that followed, between one-third and one-half of all the Ivy League schools—Yale, Princeton, Dartmouth—they had between one-third and one-half of the students there saved—came to faith in Christ. What happened was the beginning of a mission movement that sent the first American missionaries overseas—a missional awakening.

Almost exactly one hundred years later, in Wales a guy named Evan Roberts began to read about these things, and he started to pray that God would do it in his day. He began to preach. He preached a message one day to 17 people on turning from our sin and asking God to bring an awakening among His people. God did something in that day that created more opportunities and more opportunities, and within 3 months in Wales, 100,000 people had come to faith in Christ. Within three months. An unusual outpouring of God's Spirit, and it didn't stop there.

It began what came to be known as the Layman's Missionary Movement—in other words, normal church members taking responsibility for impacting the world with the glory of Christ, and they took it on and they began to scatter to other nations. In Indonesia, the Christian population tripled in just seven years. In India, the Christian population grew seventeen times faster than the Hindu population. All around the world, they saw the evidence of the outpouring of God's Spirit.

Now, I'm not saying in any way that we should live in the past, or that we should always look to the past. I don't believe the Bible teaches us to do that. I am saying this, and I believe the Bible teaches this: I want God to do it again. I want us to pray that God would pour out His Spirit. We can't manufacture a movement like that. We can't organize a program like that, but we can get on our faces and ask God to pour out His Spirit in This place in such a way that all nations would see the glory of Christ. I pray that God would do that in our day, in our generation.

### **... and surrender to Your worldwide mission.**

Awaken our affections, God, that we obey Your Spirit and surrender to your worldwide mission. Basically what happens, we have already seen in Acts 1:8, the Gospel is going to go from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth. Some people look at that many times as an outline for how the gospel... But don't forget that was said to specific guys in a certain place, and it basically said "you're going to go from Jerusalem to the world; you're going to impact the world." There's still a billion people who haven't heard the name of Jesus, so the ends of the earth are still the goal, based on Acts 1:8.

When you come to Acts 2, though, I want to read one final passage. Verse 42: "After all of this took place..." I want you to look at what happens, the Bible says, "they devoted themselves," as these 3,000 people were saved, they're all gathered together, the first picture of the church.

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47).*

That first picture that we see of the early church is going to drive the rest of our time in this series about "Different to Make a Difference." I want you to see that this early church prioritized some things in their lives, and there are some things that I want to challenge us to prioritize.

#### **The priorities of the church ...**

Priorities of the church, number one, speak boldly. "*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching*" (Acts 2:42). That's the whole story we see happening in Acts 2. We see the people of God propelled out into the streets. They gather together in this small room praying for the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes, they are propelled out into the streets where they proclaim truth in their culture. And it wasn't a popular message. We must be a people who know truth and proclaim truth in a culture marked by religious pluralism and moral relativism and biblical skepticism like we have in our country today. Will we be a faith family who knows truth and proclaims truth? Speak boldly.

Number two, care sacrificially. "*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship*" (Acts 2:42). We're going to dive in to what that word means and how that takes place over the next few chapters in the book of Acts. It basically means a community that wasn't artificial. It wasn't just going through the motions; it was a community that cared for each other, loved each other deeply, and sacrificed for each other, gave to each other as anyone had need. I want us to talk in the next few weeks about how, yes, we will speak boldly. I would describe it as: we need to be a church that's theologically conservative and yet culturally liberal. Some of you that might scare a little bit, but I want you to hear that we need to be deeply passionate about meeting the needs of those who are lost around us.

We need to care about the things God cares about when it comes to the oppressed, and the orphaned, and the widows. Speak boldly; care sacrificially.

Third, worship wholeheartedly. "*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread*" (Acts 2:42). That was basically an allusion to the Lord's Supper, which was the center of their worship. We're going to dive in to the meaning of the Lord's Supper. We've done that with baptism; we're going to do the same thing with the Lord's Supper—understand what this means, and see how I believe it has a lot to teach us about the worship life in the church.

Fourth, pray desperately. "*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer*" (Acts 2:42). They prayed like it mattered. They prayed like they were on mission. I want us to dive into the book of Acts, and see what that kind of praying looks like in the church.

Then finally, "*the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved*" (Acts 2:42). Speak boldly; care sacrificially; worship wholeheartedly; pray desperately; and multiply exponentially. Daily, people were being saved. In the book of Acts, we do not find them building buildings, or building miniature kingdoms. What we do find is them advancing, multiplying the Kingdom of God on the face of the earth, and that's what the church is supposed to be about. Multiply exponentially.

### **God promises to bless the church that works according to His plan.**

Now, what I want you to see, and this is so key in this whole thing, is these different priorities. These are things that Jesus modeled for them; He taught them, and they were putting them into practice, and they were convinced of this truth that I want us to look at: God promises to bless the church that works according to His plan. Notice that when you get to verse 47, it doesn't say "they drew a crowd every day." It says, "*the Lord added to their number*" (Acts 2:47), the Lord blessed them, the Lord gave and increased in the church. Day after day after day, the Lord was doing the work. God will bless the church that lives, that works, that operates, that serves, according to His plan.

Now, here's where we miss this: we create the idea in our church culture today that we need to come up with new plans or new methods to reach more people, and what we do is we begin to organize all that we do as the church, and we end up starting to organize those things so that we look like the world. For example, we organize our worship services to look like performances just like the others in the world. We organize community almost like a social club. We do these things in an effort to reach more people, and we actually end up becoming like the world, and looking like the world.

What I want you to see in the book of Acts 2, and in the weeks that follow, is that these guys did not imitate the culture around them. They were counter-cultural in just about every way, but at the same time as they were counter-cultural, there was something that was going on there that the Holy Spirit caused people to stand in awe, and to look back, and people started to be added to their number daily. What happened is the gifts and personalities and ideas and plans of all the people were put on the back burner, and the gift of God and the personality of God and the plan of God was put on the front page. God says, "When that happens, I will bless that church." He has promised... It's a guarantee in Scripture, when we give ourselves to what He says is most important. He will bless us.

That means we have to sacrifice our ideas and our agendas on the altar and say, "We're going to give ourselves to that which you say is most important." That's the essence of being different to make a difference; if we begin to look just like the rest of the world, and

we cater to what the rest of the world says is important, then even in that effort to reach more people, we end up missing out on that which is most unique about the church. The beauty and the integrity of the church get hidden in the secularism with which we robe ourselves.

I want to challenge us to look at the early church over the next few weeks and say, "God, how can we be a people who are different—not just for the sake of being different, not just to have a new plan or a new style of music or this or that—but different so that people in This place come to faith in Christ, and so that we start missions-sending bases all over this planet that are proclaiming the gospel in all nations. How can we be different to make that kind of difference?

### **The Bottom Line ...**

The bottom line is, and we'll close with this: the Spirit wants this place and the world for Christ. That is the message of Acts 1 and 2. The Spirit wants this place and the world for Christ. The Spirit's passion is to exalt Christ in this place, and the Spirit's passion is to exalt Christ in all the world. The question we've got to answer in this faith family is: are we going to get in on this?

Here's what I want us to do: we've talked about a prayer that God would awaken our affections so that we obey His Spirit and surrender to His worldwide mission. I think it would be the most appropriate thing for us to close out our time in God's Word in prayer, and I want to ask you one central question, as an individual and then for us as a church. It goes back to the very start of this prayer: is Christ at the center of your life right now? Is He the central passion? Is He your risen savior, exalted lord, and coming king, or have you let other affections and other emotions and other desires drown out the center?

What I want us to do is to have a time where we as individuals and whoever you are with, come before God—honestly, and say "God, awaken our affections for your Son, God bring your Son to the center of our lives and our families and this church." What we're going to do is, in just a second, I'm going to pray, and then I'm going to invite you to continue in prayer, whether that's in your seat, this area at the front that is open or on the sides. I just want us to have a time where we pray that God would awaken our affections for Christ. I want us not just to sing of the greatness of Christ, but I want us to let God awaken our hearts for the greatness of Christ, and bring Him to the center of everything that is going on in this place. Will you bow your heads with me?

Dear God, we want to see you move in power in our faith family and we want to be apart of something that counts for eternity, and we want to see the name of Jesus exalted in this place. And so God I pray that during these next few moments that you would bring your Son to the center of our attention; to the center of our affection. And God across this room, men and women, children, students, God across this room—that we would come to the point where we fix our eyes and our hearts completely on you. God help us not to be distracted even in these moments. God help us to fix our eyes on the greatness and the glory of Christ. And we pray that your Spirit would work among us, that you would cleanse us of sin, that you would draw us to yourself, that you would even draw some for the first time into a relationship with you. And God we pray that the name of Christ would be exalted in the Church at Brook Hills.

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