

Expecting the Unexpected: Acts 2:1–13

Mark Rudolph

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1 Introduction

Before his ascension in Acts 1—apparently not fully comprehending what was about to happen to Jesus—the disciples ask:

Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?¹

Now that they have seen his power, it would be logical for them to think: “Ok, now we can get down to the real business!” And then Jesus departs.

During the last meal Jesus had with the disciples, he told them:

I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away.²

Imagine the reaction of the disciples to that statement. Perhaps some of them could have thought: “how in the world could such a thing be true?”

They had been told to expect something—but what exactly?

And so here we sit two millennia later. We likewise are to expect something, but what?

Turn to Acts 2 and we will see these things.

1. The promise is kept
2. The recipients are tasked
3. The church is built.

2 The Promise Is Kept

2.1 Helper to be Given

We see first that what was promised was also given: a helper. This promise was made several times in John 14–16.

¹Acts 1:6.

²John 16:7.

1. I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper (John 14:16–17).
2. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name ... (John 14:26–27)
3. But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father ... (John 15:26–27)
4. It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you (John 16:7–8).
5. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes ... (John 16:12–15)

2.2 Results to be Expected

1. he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, (John 14:16–17): **truth, presence of Christ, permanence of relationship**
2. But the Helper ... will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. (John 14:26–27): **teaching and learning, remembering, peace, fearlessness.**
3. He will bear witness about me. (John 15:26–27): **focus on Christ.**
4. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. (John 16:7–8): **the heart-work of conviction and change.**
5. He will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:12–15): **truth, understanding, continuity with Christ.**

2.3 Promise Fulfilled

When we come to the day of his ascension, Jesus repeats the essence of these same promises.

Wait for the promise of the Father ... you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. (Acts 1:5)

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses ... (Acts 1:7–8)

Were these promises kept? Yes!

We find them gathered together in “the upper room, where they were staying”, “with one accord ... devoting themselves to prayer”³, and ...

Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:2–4)

Every one of the promises of Jesus in John and more were demonstrated on Pentecost day. And the Holy Spirit was in the middle of all of them.

2.4 Applications

Church, does Jesus continue to keep his promises? Does the work of the Holy Spirit continue to this day?

3 The Recipients are Tasked

Second, we see that there is a reason for this gift. Jesus kept his promise to send his Holy Spirit, **so that** they would “be [his] witnesses ... to the end of the earth”. With the gift came the task; and because of the task, the gift was given.

3.1 What is the Spirit’s Task?

In order rightly to understand what job is that is given to us by the Holy Spirit, it’s important to understand what is **His** primary task. What Jesus said about the Spirit in John 14–16—all of those traits and characteristics essentially point to one task:

When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. (John 15:26)

All of the promises kept about the Holy Spirit ultimately point to the work of Jesus on our behalf. All of the other elements of the Holy Spirit’s work and purpose, whether the gifts of the Spirit or the fruit of the Spirit are grounded in this: that He points us to the work of Jesus.

The purpose and work of the Holy Spirit has long been a controversial and provocative topic. Speaking in tongues, various sorts of gifts, casting out demons, and a whole host of other topics, movements, and problems have existed and continue to exist in the body of Christ regarding the work of the Spirit.

And who can blame the church for being interested in such things? Don’t we want to see God work with power?

³Acts 1:13–14.

These discussions often fail to engage the real heart of the matter. In Scripture, such gifts do not appear everywhere and all the time. But when they do appear, they always have the same goal: glorifying Christ!

That fact points likewise to the task the Spirit passes on to us and enables us to do.

3.2 What is Our Task?

When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning. (John 15:26–27)

Acts 2 is an example of this special operation of the Spirit in us. Look at verse 4. “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” What’s that about? The context helps us understand this gift.

There were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?”⁴

Then follows a list of 17 different regions from which the crowd came, together with their associated languages, cultures, and religions.

The key point is this. The disciples did the same work the Spirit does: they pointed a finger to Christ. What was initially a small movement now began to impact a larger world. In fact, the book of Acts demonstrates that the disciples end up doing exactly that which Jesus said: that they would “be [his] witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”⁵

That is power with a purpose!

3.3 Application

This same task is ours today and we are likewise empowered to accomplish the task by the Spirit of God. We have all that the disciples had on the day of Christ’s ascension—and more! We have the revealed written word of God for a continual assurance and instruction. We number far more than the several hundreds of that day.

4 The Church Built

1. What Jesus promised, he gave.
2. With the promised Helper, Jesus gave us a task.
3. And third, that task has the ultimate purpose of building up the body of Christ.

⁴Acts 2:5–8.

⁵Acts 1:8.

4.1 Most Important Outcome

What is the most important thing that happened in Acts 2?

- The disciples were able to speak in languages that they had not otherwise learned?
- Or was it that God so moved, both the disciples and those who heard them, that by the power of the Holy Spirit over 3000 souls came to faith? Was it that the body of Christ was built up so incredibly?

Obviously, it was the latter. The first outcome—speaking hitherto unknown languages—that’s exciting, but short-lived! 3000 new relationships with God, that’s eternal.

And if we think about the impact on the relationships between men and women, parents and children, employers and employees, slaves and free, various races, languages, and cultures: how would one estimate the value of that? And couple those effects with the internal, less obvious, but even more impactful results of hope, courage, holiness, truth, unity, love of the brethren, love for God, “joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”⁶.

I point out that you are sitting here today, because of the work of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

4.2 Creedal Connection

Every Sunday we confess together that we believe in the Holy Spirit, the one, the holy, the catholic/universal, the apostolic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection from the dead, and eternal life.

Both the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds are purposely Trinitarian in nature. So why, when we come to the paragraph about the Holy Spirit, are the other elements there with the Holy Spirit? What does the Holy Spirit have to do with the church, fellowship, forgiveness, and so on?

- Don’t we want to be people who are grounded on the doctrine of the apostles?
- Don’t we want to be a church that is holy and set apart to God?
- Don’t we have the expectation that what we say, pray, sing, teach, and learn are the things that we also do?
- Don’t we want to have real fellowship, the kind that’s encouraging and lively, to bear each other’s burdens, and work together for the sake of God’s kingdom?
- Don’t we want to know and experience the forgiveness of our sins, not just in the theoretical way, but also experience it? Don’t you want to know that you stand righteous before God because of the blood of Christ shed for you? And don’t you want to be able to say with increasing confidence, “our father ...”, MY father?

⁶Galatians 5:22–23.

- And don't we want to have no fear of death, but the confident and unshakable knowledge that there is a resurrection from the dead and that there is eternal life?

That's what the Holy Spirit does in the body of Christ. These were and continue to be a direct outworking of the Holy Spirit in the midst of God's people. And dear brothers and sisters, it is absolutely impossible for us to experience these sorts of things unless the Holy Spirit is working in our midst.

5 Conclusion

1. What Jesus promised, he gave.
2. With the gift, came a task: that we might be witnesses.
3. And third, the purpose of being a witness is so that the body and family of Christ would be built up.

So here we are, 20+ centuries later. What do we do with these things? What are you expecting?

Pray that the Spirit continue that work in us which he has already begun.

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O GOD, Holy Ghost, Sanctifier of the faithful, visit, we pray you, this Congregation with your love and favor; enlighten their minds more and more with the light of the everlasting Gospel; graft in their hearts a love of the truth; increase in them true religion; nourish them with all goodness; and of your great mercy keep them in the same, O blessed Spirit, whom, with the Father and the Son together, we worship and glorify as one God, world without end. *Amen.*

1 Come, Holy Spirit, heav'nly Dove,
with all Thy quickening powers;
kindle a flame of sacred love
in these cold hearts of ours.

2 O raise our thoughts from things below,
from vanities and toys,
then shall we with fresh courage to
to reach eternal joys.

3 Awake our souls to joyful songs;
let pure devotion rise,
till praise employs our thankful tongues,
and doubt forever dies.

4 Come, Holy Spirit, heav'nly Dove,
with all Thy quickening powers;
come, shed abroad a Savior's love,
and that shall kindle ours.⁷

⁷Isaac Watts, 1707.