

09b ACTS

Let's resume our study now in Acts chapter 2. We've taken something of a, and I apologize for something of a laborious introduction, but it's hard to just come out with a conclusion without laying some groundwork here. And one thing that we have seen, especially in our first study tonight, is that we are still very deeply in an Israelite mode. We are in the Jewish mode here in these early days of the church.

And the reason that's important to remember is Israel is steeped in ritual. Ritual is the teaching tool for Israel. God has ever used the ritual of sacrifice, the ritual of circumcision, all of the various ritual performances that were a part of the feasts, part of the law of Moses that was delivered to them as a nation in which they have practiced for 1,400 years before the birth of Christ.

It's all taught by shadows, by symbolic, substitutionary teaching tools. And this, of course, in the pre-technology days makes a lot of sense because you don't just have paper, you don't just have unlimited pieces of parchment to hand out individual copies of the Word of God. We live in a day where you can't move without running into a Bible somewhere.

The Gideons put one in every hotel room. We are blessed with just countless, untold millions of copies of the Word of God. But you put yourself back in these agrarian, agricultural times before any sort of publishing, any copies of a manuscript had to be laboriously put together by hand and kept by those who had developed that special skill.

Virtually no one was literate. There was no need. If you could make marks on a rock, you could keep tallies, you could keep crude records of business transactions.

But the kind of sophisticated language skills were reserved for the scribes and for those few who were educated in the princely... Why do you think Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible? He was about the only man in Israel who could write. Think about it. People have been slaves for a couple of hundred years.

And other than, like I say, keeping tallies or crude calendars and things like that, they can't express the grandeur and the majesty of the creation of God and the history of God's people down through fifty chapters of Genesis and the intricacies of the law that will come from God to Moses on Mount Sinai and be recorded in Exodus and Deuteronomy and Numbers and so on. You need a man who's got a command of language, who has facility, who can write it down, who can consult records and synthesize and edit and put that together. So he gets the old cuneiform tablets that were deposited in the libraries of Egypt by Joseph a couple of hundred years earlier.

He finds those and he comes to a knowledge of his Jewish heritage and of the heritage of the people of God and he writes this down for the people of Israel. So how are you going

to teach people who are not literate, who don't have access to any kind of a book, they don't have Nintendo, they don't have flannel graph, they don't have video, they don't have any kind of teaching technology. What are you going to do? You act it out.

You put it into symbolic activities, symbolic ritualistic things that will stick in someone's mind. I promise you, I promise you that if we took a full grown bull out here in Dan's front yard and tied it to an altar and slid its throat until it died and its blood went pumping out of its artery in its neck until it was dead, that would stick in your mind for the rest of your natural born life. You would never forget it.

You'd be an old senile person gumming their applesauce in the rest home and you would remember seeing that animal struggle and pump its life away through that fatal wound in its neck. You would never forget it. And then to see the priest cut it into pieces and take a portion and give to the priest and portions to give to God and do certain things that we're going to see in our study of Exodus in the near future, you would never forget it.

It would stick in your mind. It was a teaching tool. The same thing is true of baptism.

When John the Baptist came baptizing in the Jordan, he didn't have the internet and he didn't have DVDs and CD-ROMs and he didn't have 21-inch computer monitors to give people an instruction course in coming back to God. So what did he do? He took their bodies and dumped them in the muddy brown water of the Jordan. And when they came up, he explained, you have died to your old way of life.

You have been raised to a new way of life, a new commitment. You're starting fresh today. This is day one of your new life of commitment to the God of Israel.

It was a teaching tool. It was a memorable day. It was like a spiritual birthday for them to think back on when they recommitted themselves to the God that they had heard of and known and worshipped all their lives.

Well, this is in Israel. This is what you do in Israel. You teach by means of ritual.

And it's not going to change just because the day of Pentecost has come. Now, there is a great new ability. There's a great new feature that comes in on this day of Pentecost, and that is the universal presence of God's Holy Spirit.

Every person who comes to faith in Christ gets a gift from God. God, the Holy Spirit, comes and dwells in our soul. Why does he do this? So that we can yabber jabber and speak in tongues or do some other kind of weird activities like you see on television? No.

What possible purpose would God have for us to yammer and jabber? I saw, by the way, did you see this thing where they have a cure for stuttering? They showed a young man who was about 19 years old, had had a horrible stutter all of his life. And this was like,

did you ever see Mac's Headroom? You know how he would repeat real rapidly? And they do this sometimes on loops and mixes in rap music where they take a sample that's real short and they repeat it over and over. That's how this guy stuttered.

[illegible]

And they said, well here's a phenomenon. And so what they do is they've got this thing that goes in the ear that provides, and they have to tweak it and tune it to get the right kind of feedback. It produces a kind of feedback noise in their ear that simulates what happens when they're in a room full of people talking.

And it was amazing. I've never seen anything like it. This poor young man was embarrassed.

He was red as a bead. He was trying to read out of a book, 19 years old, yammering and stammering, couldn't get through the sentences without this almost mechanical sounding repetition. They stuck this thing in his ear.

He read like he'd been reading all his life. It was the most amazing thing I've ever seen. Bobby, they said, what's your name? Bobby.

Bobby. Bobby. Bobby.

He was just saying his name. He was so amazed. His father broke out in tears.

The guy had never been able to say his name his whole life. Anyway, God would not have any purpose in taking perfectly articulate people and turning them into yammering, stammering, incommunicative people. Why would He do that? Tongues never was that, and it is not that today.

Tongues in the Bible were spoken foreign languages that people could understand. Later on in Acts, we're going to see that they're in a household and some people are going to be filled with the Holy Spirit and they're going to speak with tongues. And you know what that is? This man has a cosmopolitan household.

He's got servants from all over the empire. And when they get excited, what do people do when they're excited? You take somebody that came up here from Mexico. I don't care if they lived in Texas 50 years.

If you startle them and scare them, if their ceiling falls in because the water, you know, I saw this happen one time, the water line for the ice maker and a refrigerator ran through the ceiling and it got cold and frozen, split, and then when it thawed out, the whole ceiling filled up with water. And of a sudden, the entire ceiling came down at once. Well, this will startle, this will unnerve somebody.

And I don't care how long you've been in the United States, if Spanish is your first language and you get startled, you will start going off in Spanish. People that get excited, people that get stressed, go back to their native language. Well, here are these people, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

They've got eternal salvation. They've come to faith in Jesus Christ. They get excited.

What are they going to do? They revert. They start speaking Cappadocian. They start speaking whatever they learned when they lived in Asia Minor or wherever else.

And so you have this cacophony of people praising God in their native language. That's all that is. There is no speaking in tongues in the Bible that is some goofy yammer stammer.

Never happened, doesn't happen. It is a decipherable, that's why, as I mentioned before, the word tongues is often found in the plural, speaking in languages. If it was yammer stammer, how do you tell this one from that one if it's all yammering? It has to be a distinct language or you can't have it in the plural.

If it's just babbling incoherently, there's only one kind of babbling, it's called babbling. Anyway, and there's a perfectly good Greek word for babbling. So I say all of that to say this, there is a new gift that God gives on the day of Pentecost forward, and it is the Holy Spirit.

Why is he there? Not to make people silly. It is to enable. It is for clarity, not for confusion.

With the gift of the Holy Spirit, you go to the epistles of John and he says, you have no need that any man teach you because you have the Holy Spirit. Doesn't mean that you don't need a pastor, you don't need someone to spend time in the languages and studying theology and so on. What it does mean is that we don't have to rely on ritual anymore.

We don't need teaching rituals. We don't need the law of Moses with all of its symbolic activities. We don't need a feast schedule anymore.

Why? We can read about that and God the Holy Spirit can take the word of God and make it real and active and powerful in our souls. He can transform our minds from the inside. We don't need something on the outside to teach us.

We have someone on the inside to teach us. Now this is one of the most frustrating things about Christian faith and Christian church and Christianity in general. You just get plump, sick and tired of even looking at Christianity at all.

Is people saying, here's how you ought to live. You ought to be praying and reading your Bible and giving money and you ought to be doing this, that and the other. But they don't tell you how.

Where is the power for me to resist sinful urges and temptations? Where is the energy come from to not give into the same old thing that I've always given into before that other people give into? Where is the ability to live this different life to which we are called? It comes from God's Spirit. That's why He's here. How does He do that? He changes our mind.

Let me give you an example. Here's a good example for you. If I told you that Ed McMahon is going to be showing up here at this house in an hour and he's going to have a million dollar check for each one of us.

All you have to do is stay here. Hour from now, Ed McMahon coming in. Stack of blank checks.

Just going to write each one of our names in. Million dollars each. We'll each be a millionaire an hour from now.

What would be your level of enthusiasm and motivation for staying here for an hour? You'd say, well, I don't really care if Sam keeps talking or not. I've got an hour to kill until Ed shows up and brings me my check. So, talk away.

I'm sticking around here for another 59 minutes until I get my check, right? You have a piece of knowledge that you believe. And because you believe it, it changes your priority. You say, I'm happy.

You mean all I have to do is sit here for an hour and I'll have a million dollars? I can do that standing on my head. Heck, I can hold my breath for almost that long. Bring him on.

You see what I mean? You have a piece of information that you believe and it affects your priorities and it affects your actions and what you decide you're going to do with your time for the next hour. Now, if I told you that that's all true, but 45 minutes from now, a Muslim terrorist bomber is going to drive a truck bomb into this room and obliterate everything and everybody for a half block radius. Are you going to sit here and wait for Ed? If I had certain knowledge, the CIA comes in and says, look, people, we've got knowledge.

There's a guy right down the block here. He's driving like a bulldozer. He's coming across.

He's going to come right through here. We can't stop him. If you stay here, you will be killed.

Now, what is your priority? Well, but Ed's coming. I've got to stay. You see, if you have information that you believe, it affects your priorities and it affects your actions.

It affects your decisions, right? So why do we have the Holy Spirit? What is he here for? He takes the information that is in the word of God. He makes it real and understandable to us. It lives as reality in our soul.

What is faith? You go to Hebrews chapter 11. Faith is the substance, something substantial, something concrete of what you're hoping for. You hope that there's a hereafter.

You hope that there is a happy life ahead after death. Faith makes that real. It's believable.

It's tangible. You can bank on it. You can act on it.

You can build your life on that. It is the evidence of what you can't see. Where do we get that evidence? Where do we get that hope? It comes from God's Holy Spirit taking the things of the Lord Jesus that are in the word of God and making them real to us.

We can't do that for ourselves and we can't get excited about the things of God. We can't decide that this life is worth living for God on our own. We need that ministry of God's Holy Spirit.

That's why He's here. That's what He does. Now, He is anxious to do that.

He wants each one of us to believe what's in the word of God and to act on it. But we can say, just like I could tell you about Ed McMahon and you could say, Sam, don't be telling me that. I don't believe that.

Stop. Stop saying it. I don't care how many times you say it.

I'm not going to believe it. I do not find you to be a credible source of information. So, forget it.

We can do the same thing to the Holy Spirit. The Bible calls it grieving the Spirit. He's trying to tell us something and we say, you know, I appreciate the information, but I really have got another priority.

I really have something else I need to be doing here. So, just hush on that subject. Leave me alone.

I don't really want to hear it. Well, God is courteous in the sense that He does not force

Himself on us. He leaves us the option of choosing against Him.

And a lot of people do. In fact, most people do. That's why Jesus said, there's a wide road and a broad gate that leads to destruction and there's a big crowd on that road.

He said, there's a narrow gate and a narrow road that leads to life and there's only a few people that find it. There's going to be a comfortable amount of room in the kingdom because most people don't really feel like listening to God's Spirit. Most people don't feel like paying attention to what God's Word says.

And most people are going to miss the great things that God has for us. We have the chance to beat those odds. We have the chance to take advantage of God's grace and God's love and everything that Christ died to give us.

So, Peter is telling these people on the day of Pentecost, he says, look, listen, you Israelite men, change your minds and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Baptism is a teaching tool for Israel. It wasn't always.

They had the law of Moses. They had the sacrificial system, the feasts and all of that. Right at the end of their age, this baptism thing comes up and John the Baptist uses it legitimately.

And it communicates something. You need to change your mind. Water baptism is all about change your mind.

You need to die to your old way of thinking. You need to be resurrected and born anew to a new viewpoint, a new way of seeing life. And this water baptism will be a memorable way of teaching you that truth and teaching you how important it is and giving you a marker in your mind of when it happened.

It carries forward into the early days of the church. Peter says that same kind of thing that John was doing and reminding you that you need to have a change of mind if you want to have a fruitful life. We're going to do it here.

If you have a change of mind, let's do this water ritual and communicate it to you. How many New Testaments does Peter hand out here on the day of Pentecost? He doesn't have any. There is no Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

There are no epistles. There's no book of Revelation. There's nothing.

What do you give converts? How are they going to know what happens when they come to faith in Christ? You're going to use the same kind of wordless book that they used in the Old Testament days. They're going to use a ritual. They're going to use the ritual of water baptism.

And you're going to see it throughout Acts that they use water baptism as a substitute

for the Bible because they don't have a Bible to give anybody. But as the Scriptures come into being, as pastors and teachers begin to teach the truth that pertains to the church age, you're going to see water baptism wane away. Just as you see the gift of speaking in foreign languages fade away.

You're going to see the gift of healing fade away. You have the gift of prophecy and of supernatural knowledge fade away. Why? These were stopgaps.

These were temporary things to fill in this transitional time until God gets the new age underway. Once the apostles have been out there, once the next generation of pastors have been trained and can teach, these things aren't necessary anymore. And turn with me to 1 Corinthians 1. 1 Corinthians 1, verse 10.

This is the Apostle Paul. He says, I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you. How many denominations have we got? My handbook of denominations I counted in the index.

There's like 437. Not supposed to be any divisions. Speak the same thing.

Be perfectly joined together. Same mind, same judgment. It has been declared to me, to you, by these in Chloe's household, there are contentions among you.

Some of you say, I'm a Paul. I'm a Paulite. I'm a Paulist.

Others of you say, no, I'm an Apollist. And another says, I'm a Cephasist. I'm a follower of Peter.

Another one says, oh, well, I've got you all beat. I'm just a follower of Christ. I'm a Christist.

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? Look at verse 14. I thank God that I baptized none of you, except Crispus and Gaius and the household of Stephanas, lest anyone should say I baptized in my own name. I don't even know if I baptized any other, for Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.

People say, well, now he's not saying that we shouldn't have water baptism. He's just saying that that's not his main emphasis. Does Paul ever say, Christ did not send me to pray? Christ did not send me to preach? Christ did not send me to serve other believers or any of the other legitimate Christian functions that you can name? Why on earth, if baptism is legitimate, would Paul say, I'm glad I didn't do it? It's because it's passe.

He says, you know, baptism served a purpose. It was a teaching tool. But now, instead of teaching, it's become a stumbling block.

And we're leaving it off. He says, I don't even baptize people anymore. And the few of you I did baptize, I'm glad there weren't any more.

I'm not here to baptize. Baptism was a temporary little wordless book New Testament for you. But now it's over with.

We don't need it anymore. Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach. It's the word that you need.

Because the real baptism in this age is not water baptism. It is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians says, there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of us all.

Now, if the Holy Spirit baptizes us into Christ and there's one baptism in this age, do you want a water baptism or do you want baptism into Christ? Which one do you want? I would prefer to be baptized into Christ spiritually, to be joined to him for time and eternity so that my salvation is secure. I don't want to give over that baptism and say, no, the real baptism is some guy sticking me down in the water. Modern day water baptism is not practiced according to the New Testament standard any more than tongues today is practiced according to the New Testament standard.

Water baptism in the New Testament days was practiced publicly in public places, public fountains, public pools of water out in the open where people could see it. And often after this ritual was performed, the temporary manifestations of the Holy Spirit would appear. People would speak in foreign languages.

They would show other manifestations of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Now, they had the Holy Spirit ever since they believed in Christ. But these temporary manifestations would appear in the saint right after you do this temporary teaching tool.

We'll see that as we go through Acts. Christ did not send me to baptize, Paul says. So here's the point.

The eleven disciples do a lot of baptizing. They baptize when Jesus is in his earthly ministry. They baptize immediately after.

Why? Their field of endeavor is Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. It's an Israelite thing. It's what they understand.

They know what it means. It's a teaching tool for them. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, says, you know, I baptized a couple of people and then I quit because I realized that that's not something that continues.

That's not the issue for me. Christ didn't commission me to go to Israel and use the baptism teaching tool for Israel. He sent me as the apostle to the Gentiles.

And we don't use the baptism thing with the Gentiles. Now, you can go to Acts 19 and you find here and there where baptism takes place. But it is the exception rather than the rule.

And it's early in the days of the church. Here's the real test. When Paul says, I'm about to be poured out like a drink offering.

I'm about to go to my heavenly home. I'm turning over the running of the church and the teaching ministries to Timothy and Titus. And he writes them these three letters.

And he says, Timothy, you and Titus, here's the instructions for what you should do in the church. Preach the word. Be faithful in season, out of season.

Rebuke, correct, exhort, instruct. Don't lay hands on any man speedily. Take care of the widows and orphans.

He gives all of these instructions for how to run a church. Does he ever mention baptism? Not once. Not once.

Qualifications for an elder. Does it say the man must be baptized? Not once. Letters to the seven churches.

Jesus Christ talking to the churches. Some of the last information we have to get us through the church age in Revelation chapter 2 and 3. Ephesus and Thyatira and all these others. Does Jesus ever say, some of you have not been baptized and that's why they're weak and sickly among you in many sleep.

This is why some of you have not been doing what you're supposed to and I have a few things against you. Not all of you have been baptized. Baptism never comes up in any of the, 1st, 2nd and 3rd John.

Is there any baptism? No. James, any baptism? No. Peter, 1st and 2nd Peter, any baptism? No.

Why? It's early. It comes in late. It's one of the last things that happens in the age of Israel and it's one of the first things that happens in the age of the church.

What does that tell us? It's a band-aid. It's a transitional thing. It covers over the seam between these two dispensations, between these two ages and it accomplishes a great purpose.

It's a wonderful thing. Water baptism was great. The Lord Jesus submitted to water baptism.

Why? He was our substitute. We never complete the change of mind that is the ideal that God is looking for. In the same way that we can never atone for our own sins, the

Lord Jesus begins with a substitutionary act.

The first thing he does in his public ministry is undergo baptism to fulfill all righteousness. The last thing he does is undergo the baptism of the cross to fulfill all righteousness, to pay for our sins. Both of those are substitutionary acts.

Jesus didn't need baptism. He didn't need a change of mind. He had no sins to view.

So why would he do it? To fulfill righteousness? I have not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it. Why is he doing all of that? On our behalf. He's our substitute.

He's our example. The life he lived, he lived to God. And that pleased the Father.

We partake of his life just as we partake of his death. There's bread and the cup, body and the blood. Body speaks of his life.

The blood speaks of his death. We partake of both when we celebrate the Lord's table, which is, by the way, a legitimate ordinance for the church and the only one that we have because it shows forth the Lord's life and his death until he comes. It's a memorial.

It looks back and it looks forward. Water baptism is not an ordinance for the church any more than speaking in tongues or healing or any of the other temporary things that you find in Acts. If you want to start taking those, you need to go and follow the rest of what was temporary in Acts.

They had all things in common. They were communists, for crying out loud. They pooled all of their stuff.

They sold their earthly goods and pooled it and lived like communists. We are not communists. And we've not been called to communism.

But this is what they did in the early days of the church. There are many other things that we're going to see as we go through Acts that were a part of this transitional time. Say all of that to say this.

Water baptism is something just like the Israelites passing through the Red Sea. We'll take a quick look next time in Hebrews where it talks about water baptism and its symbolic value. We learn from it by reading about it in the scripture.

We don't need to undergo it any more than we need to experience the supernatural gifts of the Spirit or the supernatural workings of God in the Old Testament. We have the Word and we have the Spirit and everything we need to know comes from that. We have that which is complete.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13, in his day, we see through a glass darkly. He says, we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is complete is come, that

which is in part will be done away.

Baptism was a partial revelation. The sign gifts were a partial revelation. We have the complete canon of scripture to teach us everything we need to know.

And we no longer see through a glass darkly. We now see face to face in the Word of God. And that is our privilege in the church.

We have a foretaste of what Israel will only get when they're resurrected and get into the millennial kingdom. Then they too will have a complete canon of scripture, which they never had. But they'll be raised to have it.

But we're like the younger son who gets the inheritance ahead of the elder son because the elder son was faithless and missed his opportunity. And we have the scripture and it is far more valuable for us to understand everything that happens with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Everything that is a part of union with Christ.

Dying to sin. Living to God. Sixteen chapters in Romans.

And so on. So, this is the reason that we do not practice water baptism in our church. I freely tolerate and encourage people who do believe in water baptism and understand their scripture differently by all means.

God go with you. Be baptized. Doesn't hurt a thing.

But it's not an ordinance of the church. It isn't a part of forgiveness. It isn't a part of spirituality.

You are no less a believer if you have or have not been baptized. It was a teaching tool. And if we can look at the scripture and learn everything that was a part of that ritual, why do we need the ritual? It just has no purpose.

Well, that is our summary study of what Peter says in Acts chapter 2 about water baptism. We will resume next time in the closing portion of Acts chapter 2 and move into chapter 3 where we will see the communal aspects. We will see some of the devastating consequences of dishonesty and move smartly onward in our study of Acts.

But let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, we do thank you that you have given us the gift of your word and your spirit. You have not left us as orphans as the Lord Jesus said.

He has sent us the comforter. He has given us the gift of your word. And we have not only the information but also the ability, the power to live the life to which we have been called.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress these truths on our hearts. Help us to live

in a way that is pleasing in your sight and glorifying to the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray it in his name.

Amen.