

Acts 2: Entering the End Times (part 2)

1. This passage centers on **spread of news of God's love**, as shown in his forgiveness, and "deeds of power" (11)¹. Thoughts out evangelism will energize some Christians and leave others feeling guilty and discouraged; everyone loves a good miracle account but sharing the gospel can be challenging in the modern West.

It can be helpful to compare our challenges with those of sisters and brothers from the Church throughout time:

Period	Challenges	Opportunities
AD 35	Friction with non-believing Jews; Romans generally considered monotheism treason (though exceptions were made)	Roman culture was very open to new (and regional) gods; Christianity enjoyed protected status as a form of Judaism
AD 65	Occasional but harsh persecution; exclusion from guilds	The gospel resonates with slaves and attracts female benefactors
AD 330	The faith is commonly mapped onto pagan belief structures (e.g. priests, altars)	The faith is officially sanctioned; everyone wants to imitate the emperor
England, 1300	The Bible is only in Latin, a language most can't read; clergy/laity divide	We are all Christians (so it's okay to talk about it)
America, 1950	We are pretty much all Christians... right? (Belief assumed, which can serve as inoculation against conversion)	Most attend the church and hear the gospel; widespread biblical literacy
China, 1970	Harsh persecution	People hungry for hope; Spirit moving in power
Now	Suspicion of organizations, esp. churches; faith as underwear (encouraged but private); rise of Christian nationalism	Openness to "spirituality" and personal narrative; openness to cultural diversity

How can we Huddlers leverage the strengths of our culture to share the good news?

¹ As Foust points out, this passage is all about hearing and speaking: the sound like rushing wind, tongues as of flame, speaking in different languages, the listening crowd, all culminating in Peter's address.

2. Pentecost, even more than the Passover which preceded it, marks a transition to the **last days** (17), an epoch of unprecedented power and intimacy with God, characterized by periodic explosive spread of the kingdom, as first seen in this passage. The Bible presents the marked changes in the last days:

Pre-Pentecost	Post-Pentecost
God worked through key leaders	God indwells all believers (1 Cor 3:16)
The Spirit dwelled (primarily) in the Temple	The Spirit dwells in each believer (Jn 4:14)
Torah is taught	The Law is written on believers' hearts (Jer 31:33-34)
Temple worship	Distributed worship "in Spirit and truth" (Jn 4:24)
When you don't know what you pray, you pray the Psalms	When at a loss for words, you may also depend on the Spirit to intercede for you (Rom 8:26)
The presence of the Spirit was dangerous	The Spirit's presence is exciting and comforting (Rom 5:5, 8:11, etc.)
God works through one nation	God works through all nations (1 Tim 2:4)
Israel is a light on a hill	Christians carry the light to all nations (Mt 28:19)
Unholiness is contagious	Holiness is contagious (Jesus' table fellowship)
Sacrifices; pilgrimages; temple service; forgiveness culminating annually in Yom Kippur	Our lives are a "living sacrifice" (Rom 12:1-2); forgiveness is a permanent state
You are born into God's people	You are born by the Spirit into God's people (John 4; Eph 1:14)

What's more fun, Luke has woven into Luke-Acts several concrete examples of the *before* and *after* of Pentecost. In each of the following, what is the "after"?

Before: Judas learns he's crucified the messiah and hangs himself; *after:*

Before: Peter is afraid to be discovered as a follower of Jesus; *after:*

Before: Jesus leads the disciples in person; *after:*

Before: The Spirit rests on Jesus at his baptism; *after:*

Before: Jesus is empowered by the Spirit to prophecy; *after:*

Can you spot any others? Which of the "afters" (in the table or the list) is most exciting or meaningful to you?

3. If Luke is all about Jesus and his teaching of the **kingdom**, Acts is the laboratory component to the course, showing in real time what Jesus taught.²

A thumbnail of Jesus' teaching of the kingdom is found in the kingdom parables:

Parable	Meaning
Sower (Mt 13:1-23)	The kingdom grows by spread of a message
Weeds (Mt 13:24-43)	The kingdom's arrival doesn't mean an immediate end to "sin and all who do evil", given the existence of "sons of the evil one"
Mustard seed and leaven (Mt 13:31-33)	The kingdom begins small, grows rapidly (note mustard trees are annuals) and to large size and permeates (leaven)
Growing seed (Mk 4:26-29)	The seed grows on its own with or without our understanding
Pearl and hidden treasure (Mt 13:44-46)	Some search for the kingdom, some stumble upon it. It is worth sacrificing everything to obtain, and brings great joy
Children in the marketplace (Mt 11:16-19; Lk 7:31-35)	The joyful message of forgiveness should be freely celebrated, not dampened by legalism. The solemn message of repentance shouldn't be ignored, but taken seriously

How does the account of Acts 2 model Jesus' teaching of the kingdom (above)?

² In case we are in danger of missing this, Acts begins and ends with focus on the kingdom; cf. Acts 1:1, 6; 28:31.

4. Peter's speech has four parts:
 - I. The disciples' prophesying (tongues) shows the last days are here (Joel 2:28-32)
 - II. Jesus worked miracles, showing he was from God, but you killed him (oops)
 - III. This was God's plan, as that Jesus be resurrected (Ps 16:8-11—and clearly this can't refer to David, who *is* decaying at the time of Peter's speech, but must refer to "great David's greater son," the Messiah)
 - IV. God, as anticipated in Ps 110:1, has exalted Jesus beyond even David, making him "Lord" (a title elsewhere reserved for God the Father)³

Why does Peter quote a prophecy from Joel only *part* of which have been fulfilled? What does this imply? Why does Peter feel the need to tack on III and IV?

5. **Extra credit:** Churches often celebrate Pentecost by having members of the congregation speak simultaneously in different languages. How is this a fitting memorial? How is it also the exact *opposite* of the miraculous tongues of that event?



Fun fact: "Galileans had difficulty pronouncing gutturals and had the habit of swallowing syllables when speaking, so they were looked down upon by the people of Jerusalem as being provincial." —Richard Longenecker, quoted by Ben Foust.

Fun exegetical fact: When verse 2:24 refers to God releasing Jesus from the "agony of death," the word translated "agony" is the Greek *ōdin*, literally "pangs," a word usually used to denote the pains of childbirth. As Fernando writes, "Because he is the Messiah, he *cannot* remain dead. G. Bertram describes beautifully what Peter is saying: 'The abyss can no more hold the Redeemer than a pregnant woman can hold the child in her body.'"

³ Peter uses Psalm 110's famous and enigmatic "thy Lord said to my Lord" to show that the Messiah must be exalted beyond even David, worthy to be called "Lord," a title elsewhere reserved for the Father. "While the same word is used in the Greek both times for 'Lord' [in Ps 110:1], the Hebrew of Psalm 110:1 reads, 'Yahweh said to my Adonai.' Peter sees this as God speaking to Jesus, who is David's Lord" (Ajith Fernando's Acts commentary). Use of "Lord" (Gk *kyrios*) for Jesus was a groundbreaking development.

Background and Leader's Notes:

Ajith Fernando's commentary has some good exegetical points and is worth reading. A central point to bring out here are the many parallels (and anti-parallels) between