

Book of Acts: The Great and Magnificent Day

Acts 2:19-21

By [Rev. Kevin Chiarot](#)

We continue today with Peter's remarkable Pentecost sermon in Acts 2. The first proclamation of the gospel after the ascension, and the inspired apostolic interpretation of the gift of the Spirit. We saw previously that Peter sees the outpouring of the Spirit as a fulfillment of what was spoken through the prophet Joel. In fact, we left off in the middle of Peter's citing of Joel 2 at some length. We saw two things, monumental in their significance. First, the Spirit is given, from heaven, "in the last days."

Christ's appearance, the whole complex of his life, death, resurrection and ascension, culminating in Pentecost, that whole reality, ushers in the end, the age to come, the last days. And what Peter declares here, will become pervasive in the New Testament. It will be a basic structural feature of our relationship to God in Christ. The resurrection of Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection of the dead on the last day. The gift of the Spirit is the power of the age to come, the seal and pledge, the beginning, the down payment, the earnest of our future inheritance.

This life, tasted now, is not some different thing from what is to come, it is the beginning of what is to come. There is no facet of her life, no corner of the church's existence, which is non-eschatological, or merely historical. None. Precisely because the life of the church, at every point, is the resurrection life of Christ, through the gift of the Spirit — precisely because that is true — the church is an eschatological people, a people belonging to the end, a people living out of the age to come, a people living in the last days. Thus, the church is always in the last days. From its inception to the end of the age. All its days are the last days. From Christ's appearance to his appearance again in glory.

So, Peter tell us, the last days foretold by the prophets, have arrived. With the Messiah, comes the Messianic Age. This characterizes the church as a people who live in what is called the overlap of the ages. We exist in the tension between two ages. While we live in this age, we do not belong to this present evil age, or to the form of this world, which is passing away, but we belong already to the order of the resurrection, to the age to come; to heaven itself, to the kingdom of God which has come and is coming.

Secondly, we saw that in these last days God will pour out his Spirit on ALL flesh. We called this the democratization of the life of God. Regardless of sex, age, social status, the Spirit creates a royal priesthood, where all have sanctuary access, and all can speak forth the Word of God. Sons and daughters, young men and old men, male and female servants. All the saints of God have now drunk of the one Spirit.

This morning we will continue with Peter's unpacking of the citation from Joel. We will make two points, the day in verses 19-20, and the gospel in verse 21. The day and the gospel.

I. The Day

First, then, the day. Peter cites more of Joel's prophesy than we might expect. Pentecost is the fulfillment of what Joel prophesied, and that includes, Peter says, verses 19 and 20: And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent (glorious) day.

This language of celestial disturbances, of creation being shaken, is regularly used by the prophets of the historical judgments on a nation or a kingdom. But here Peter reminds us that all of those historical judgments, those "days of the Lord," are mere anticipations of a much greater and final day of the Lord, of the coming of a new creation. This de-creation language (sun becoming black, and the moon becoming blood) is used in Revelation 6, for example, where it clearly refers to the last day, the coming day of judgment. And not to a merely historical political judgment.

There are great signs: fire, angels, trumpets, clouds, etc. associated with the parousia, the coming of the Lord in various other New Testament texts. This language, thus, refers to the coming of the end, it refers to the last day of the last days. It refers to the coming of the kingdom, a central theme in Acts. More accurately, it refers to the signs preceding the kingdom coming in fulness.

Now, there were, at the time of Christ's birth, wonders in the heavens (angels and glorious light) and he surely did signs on the earth. At his death, there was an earthquake, and there was darkness over the whole land while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Saints even came out of their grave. The end, and the signs of the end of the end, were already underway in Christ's appearing. Because he ushers in the last days. And the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD (footnote to the death and resurrection of X) is also described in language similar to this language of celestial signs. It too is a sign that the end is at hand. 70 AD is not the end of the world, but it is how (foretaste) the world ends.

The signs associated with Christ's death, and the signs associated with the death of the Old covenant order in 70 AD, point forward to the signs Peter quotes from Joel here. And we know Peter has the second coming in mind, because these signs are all done, verse 20 says, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

This language is, of course, not a reference to our Lord's first coming, and it certainly is not a reference to 70 AD (the Book of Acts has zero concern for the events of 70 AD). This day of the Lord is THE day of the Lord, and by calling it THE great and magnificent day, Peter clearly is referring to the end of history. This day is great and glorious (ESV: magnificent) because this is the day of justice, of the vindication of the saints, of the rectification of the cosmos, the day of death's destruction. It is the day of Matthew 25 when the Son of Man comes in his glory, sits on his glorious throne, and judges the nations. This is the day the church yearns for. The blessed hope of the church is, Paul says, using both great and glory as Peter does here – same two root words – the blessed hope of the church is the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. The great and glorious day is, elsewhere in the New Testament called, the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (in 1 Cor. 1), it is called the day of our Lord Jesus in 2 Cor. 1, the day of Christ Jesus in Phil 1, the day of Christ (twice, once in Phil 1 and again in Phil 2). It is called the day of the Lord in 1 Thess. 5 and again in 2 Thess. 2.

Peter himself calls it the Day of the Lord in 2 Peter 3. There is no doubt that what Peter is referring to here is this same day that he and Paul referring to elsewhere. The day of the LORD is the day of the One who, this very sermon will tell us, has been made Lord and Christ, the One who, the rest of Acts will tell us, has been appointed to judge the living and the dead. The Last Days last until this Day. The church, male and female, drinks of the Holy Spirit until this last day. The Supper proclaims the Lord's death until He comes, that is, until this day. And the church preaches the gospel until this Day.

Again, we might ask, why does Peter include these verses from Joel? They don't seem to be part of the Pentecost event (although there was fire from heaven). The answer is, and I hope we can guess or intuit this by now. The answer is that the coming of the last days in Jesus and the Spirit, is the coming forward of the END, of the great and glorious DAY. It is the inbreaking of the eschaton, the final judgment into our time. Pentecost means both: the empowering of the church for mission, and the day of the Lord is near at hand. That's the day.

II. The Gospel

Our second point is the gospel. Between Pentecost, and the great and glorious day, the church has a mission. It is quite simply to preach the Word, to proclaim

the gospel. That's it. No partisan political agenda. No being taken captive to other agendas however noble. One grand calling, regardless of current events. Preach the gospel. She has been given the keys of the kingdom. Not the keys to America or to anything else. Through the ministry of the Word she opens the kingdom to the repentant and shuts it to the unrepentant.

Thus, between Pentecost and the Great Day, verse 21 tells us: it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. The "Lord" in "the day of the Lord" and the "Lord" whose name is called upon for salvation, are one in the same. What was Yahweh's prerogative, belongs now to Jesus, who, God has made Lord and Christ.

And this Judge is also the Savior of his people. To call upon the name of the Lord means simply to believe the gospel, and to this confess the name of the Lord Jesus. As Paul says in Romans 10: If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. His exaltation, and his pouring out of the Spirit, mean he is Lord of all, Lord of Jew and Gentile, thus Paul continues in Romans 10: For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For – and here he cites our text --- for "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

As long as the gospel is being proclaimed and people are calling upon the name of the Lord, the great and magnificent day has not come in fulness. But the fact that this happens in the last days, in the shadow of the day of the Lord, intensifies the urgency of the summons.

Now, I hope this doesn't surprise you, but all preaching is eschatological preaching. Meaning: It is done in light of the end. We've already seen that, at Jesus' baptism, John the Baptist says of him: He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

There is an eschatological sifting happening by means of the gospel, before the final sifting of wheat and chaff comes on the great and glorious Day. We are proclaiming the gift of eschatological life, and deliverance from eschatological judgment. Not from the judgment of 70AD, not from cultural marginalization, but from the wrath that is to come, because that wrath has been borne by the last Adam. Thus, Paul charges Timothy in this fashion: I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season. Preaching is before the one who is to judge the living and the dead, and, get this: BY his appearing and his kingdom.

The appearing, what our text calls the day of the Lord, is what charges preaching with its significance, its fire. Preaching, like all of Christian existence, is done from out of the future, back into the present. Thus, in light of the coming day, we preach, we bear witness to Christ the Lord, for there is no other name under heaven given whereby we must be saved.

Let me make two points in closing:

First, The Day and the Gospel are locked together, and when they are separated (gospel now, eschaton later) the church loses its heavenly fragrance... it becomes captive to this age, to partisan politics usually, and to mere historical jockeying for power in the name of Jesus. Preaching becomes either moralistic – we should try and be good people – or therapeutic– here’s some helpful spiritual stuff for your own healing --- or preaching becomes mobilizing for the culture war (do our job), which is, of course, where all the passion lies. The church without an eschatological message (not tacked on, but all the way down) is just another lobbying group. A pathetic one at that. In short, it sets its affection on things below, and not on things above. Visible and not invisible.

Second, and last. We should notice that this passage is profoundly Christ centered. The gift of the Spirit should not lead to all sorts of strange mysticism, or to a preoccupation with strange phenomena, for the Spirit cannot be detached from the worship of the ascended Christ.

The Spirit, in short, always directs us to Christ. He mediates Christ to us. When the Spirit comes, Christ comes. And thus our eyes are directed to where they belong. To Christ, transfigured in glory. The mighty gift of the Spirit is the gift of the ascended Christ. It is Christ who, through the Spirit, fills the church and gifts it for service and worship. And here the Day of the LORD is none other than the day of CHRIST. And the gospel proclaimed in light of that day is the gospel of Christ. His is the name, the divine name that we, and all flesh, must call upon for salvation before that great and magnificent day. The last day of the last days. Amen.

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