

# THE SPIRIT BREAKS IN—THE KINGDOM BREAKS OUT

Acts 1:1–12; 2:1–47 • Char Brodersen

**Introduction:** Good morning, Church! If it's your first time joining us, welcome! As many of you know, we are spending this year building out our biblical theology—seeing how the whole story of Scripture fits together and finds its fulfillment and goal in and through Jesus Christ. We are now in our final series looking at the Story of the Kingdom. For the last weeks, we've been looking at the kingdom of God—What it is and how it is coming into this world through the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This morning, we are continuing the story of Scripture and seeing how Jesus ascended to the throne of God and now sends his Spirit to be present in this world, empowering his people to spread his reign to the ends of the earth until he returns.

We're looking at the Ascension, Pentecost, and the early church this morning.

## I. The Ascension

- A. In rehearsing and retelling the life and ministry of Jesus, we regularly speak of his death and resurrection but often leave out the ascension. But the ascension is really the piece that is of utmost importance for our lives today. Why? What does the ascension mean?
- B. The Bible teaches that Jesus didn't just disappear, or go up into the clouds, dissolving into the universe and is now with us in spirit and in our hearts wherever we go (as we often speak of our loved ones who have passed away). The teaching of the Scriptures is that Jesus has ascended to heaven, to the presence of his Father, and is now seated at God's right hand. The ascension means that Jesus now sits in the place of ultimate power over the universe.
  1. Theologians and missiologists Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen write, *"It is important for us to understand the significance of this place described as 'the right hand of God.' Though many Jews believe that the Messiah will share the throne of God, they expect God's throne to be in Jerusalem, from which the Messiah will rule a worldwide Jewish empire. However, the throne of the Messiah as Peter describes it (later in Acts 2) is not in Jerusalem at all: it stands entirely above the world, in heaven at the right hand of God. This is the place of highest authority and honor. God's kingdom has no boundaries of any kind. Jesus does not merely sit on the throne of our hearts and reign there: that is much too narrow a concept of his authority. Jesus reigns over all human life, all history and all nations."*—Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*
- C. Sometimes we can think of heaven in a non-material sense—that it is only a spiritual realm, almost a phantom realm. But in fact, it is not. N. T. Wright, in his book *Surprised by Hope*, reminds us that heaven is the other dimension of God's good creation. This is why the Bible regularly puts the two words "Heaven and Earth" together.
  1. He writes, *"First, heaven relates to earth tangentially so that the one who is in heaven can be present simultaneously anywhere and everywhere on earth: the ascension therefore means that Jesus is available, accessible, without people having to travel to a particular spot on earth to find him. Second, heaven is, as it were, the control room for the earth; it is the CEO's office, the place from which instructions are given. 'All authority is given to me,' said Jesus at the end of Matthew's gospel, 'in heaven and earth.'"*—N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*
- D. The ascension then means that a human being, the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth, now sits in the place of absolute power in the universe—enthroned as King over the world. And his power and rule

will not spread by a bloody conquest and the death of his enemies, but instead by his Spirit being poured out into the world to bring salvation, repentance, and the forgiveness of sins—to bring his kingdom reign to every nation and every heart. Jesus' kingdom reign will be shown by his sacrificial love displayed through his new community on earth. Like Paul the apostle writes to the church in Corinth—that same God who was in Christ—reconciling the world to himself is now at work in us by his Spirit: **“he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** —2 Corinthians 5:19–21

1. This spreading of the kingdom reign is exactly what Jesus told his disciples to do. John Stott wrote in his commentary on the book of Acts: *“It appears that Jesus' two main topics between his resurrection and his ascension were the kingdom of God and the Spirit of God. It seems probable that he related them to one another—Just as the prophets do. When God establishes the kingdom of the Messiah, they said, he will pour out his Spirit; this generous effusion and universal enjoyment of the Spirit will be one of the major signs and blessings of his rule; and indeed the Spirit of God will make the rule of God a living and present reality to his people.”* —John Stott, Acts
  - a. And this is exactly what we see happening next.

## II. Pentecost and the Sending of the Spirit (Acts 2:1–40)

- A. Pentecost was the descent of the Spirit of God with life-transforming power—it is heaven's power come down to transform earth—particularly to transform human beings.
  1. Luke says that when the Spirit came, there was a sound like a blowing violent wind that filled the place where they were assembled and something like fire divided and rested on each of their heads, and the disciples are each speaking in foreign languages, and Jews from every nation in the known world at the time are hearing them declare in their native tongue the wonders or “mighty acts” of God. This is a reference to God's acts of salvation in Israel's history. So as God's Spirit is poured into them, praise, glory, and adoration for who God is and what he has done pours out!
- B. Why does God send the Holy Spirit down on Pentecost? Pentecost was the Jewish festival and celebration that commemorated the giving of the Law and Covenant to Israel at Sinai. It came fifty days (Pentecost means 50) after the festival of Passover. What we see here in Acts 2 is the New Covenant being inaugurated at Pentecost. God had said through the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, **“For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”** —Ezekiel 36:24–27
- C. Just as the giving of the first covenant had wind (a tempest), fire, and a divine utterance at Mount Sinai, so we see all these here in Acts 2.
  1. This mention of fire should immediately take the reader's mind back to God's presence in the Old Testament that was often depicted in fire—a burning smoking oven to Abraham, the burning bush to Moses, the fire and smoke on Mount Sinai, the pillar of fire that led the children of Israel by night. This picture of fire was a message of God's holy presence; often it was fatal, it was always overwhelming. As the book of Hebrews reminds us: **“Our God is a consuming fire.”** But here we see the presence of fire that was once unapproachable now resting on individual disciples of Jesus. Now every believer is a burning bush—filled with God's personal presence.

2. But Luke is also connecting the baptism of Jesus with the outpouring of the Spirit—just as the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus when John baptized him, so that he entered his public ministry “full of the Holy Spirit,” “led by the Spirit,” “in the power of the Spirit,” and “anointed by the Spirit,” so now the same Spirit comes upon the disciples of Jesus to equip them for their ministry and mission in the world. But the Spirit of God is not just about power, it is about God’s personal presence come to be with us—in fact, it’s about you and I being brought into the deep love of God.
  - a. Do you remember what the voice from heaven said when Jesus was baptized? **“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”**
  - b. Paul the apostle will later write to the church in Rome about the work that the Spirit does in the life of the follower of Jesus:
    - (i) **“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” —Romans 8:16**
    - (ii) **“God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” —Romans 5:5**
    - (iii) **“God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba Father.’” —Galatians 4:6**
  - c. What the Scriptures are saying to us, what Pentecost is all about, is the Spirit from the Father and the Son sent from heaven right to our hearts and very person, to make known God’s love and presence to us. Through the Spirit, the Father says to each of us “my beloved child in whom I am well pleased!” Through the presence of God’s Spirit in each of us, God is making known this great truth and reality. The Father says to each one: *“I love you, You are mine; I am pleased with you.”*
    - (i) So the work of the Spirit is to come into your heart and my heart, into our very person, and to make God’s great saving love known to us. Jesus says in John 14 that the Spirit will come and manifest these truths to us, he will make God’s love for us a living reality. But the Spirit will do more than that. Jesus said he would lead us into the way of Jesus who is the truth. That he would lead us into loving obedience. The work of the Spirit is also to form you and I and shape us in the image and likeness of Jesus.

### III. The Crowd’s Response and Peter’s Answer

- A. The crowd of people that came together, hearing these disciples of Jesus speak of God’s mighty acts, are asking, what is this? And some blow it off, saying that they are just drunk; but Peter stands up and tells them exactly what is going on—we don’t have the time to unpack Peter’s whole sermon but let me summarize it for us.
- B. In essence Peter tells them, God’s kingdom project, which you see and hear before you, the pouring out of God’s Spirit through the New Covenant, that was made known to you by the prophets, has come about through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, the Messiah. Yet you are a co-conspirator in the evil that is destroying God’s world and resisting his kingdom by rejecting and crucifying his anointed servant and king, Jesus of Nazareth. Yet God raised him from the dead and now offers you redemption—the forgiveness of sins—through Jesus’ work of salvation on your behalf—so turn around and choose God’s side—join his kingdom community and project.
  1. It’s hard to imagine what was going on in the mind of this crowd when they heard Peter’s sermon. They had been waiting for thousands of years for God’s Messiah, thousands more for God’s deliverance and salvation, and they just realized that when it came, they murdered the Messiah, their own King, the One they had been longing for, the bringer of all the promises of God. Now they stand not as the recipients of salvation but as enemies and those who resisted God’s kingdom.

2. It says those who heard Peter’s message were cut to the heart. **What does that look like; to be cut to the heart?** When you realize that you have rebelled against and rejected not just God, the cosmic judge of the universe, but your Creator, your Father in the heavens, the One who loves you and wants joy, wants blessing and goodness for you more than any other. When you realize that you have betrayed, spit in the face, or just straight up ignored this amazing love—that’s when you know you’ve been cut to the heart. When you know it was your sin that Jesus gave his very life for to redeem and redirect mine and your life back toward God and his kingdom. When your sin and fallenness becomes personal, not just beating down upon your will and making you sad, but melting your heart, cutting to the core of your being. That’s when you know the Gospel has cut you to the heart and that leads to this last part—that you give your life, you give everything (the pearl, the treasure in a field), saying what must I do to be saved?
  - a. Theologian N. T. Wright says, *“When we learn to read the story of Jesus and see it as the story of the love of God, doing for us what we could not do for ourselves—that insight produces, again and again, a sense of astonished gratitude which is very near the heart of authentic Christian experience.”* —N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*
  - b. This is when you know the Gospel has really touched you in the core of your being.
    - (i) Sometimes we get caught up in these very philosophical conversations and debates—What is the balance of faith and works? How close can I get to the line and still be a Christian? What are the things I have to give up or sacrifice for Jesus in order to go to heaven? Sex, money, power?? I think that these kinds of questions don’t even begin to fathom the power and significance of the Gospel; they aren’t seeing the bigger picture. The good news of Jesus Christ is like a colossal asteroid coming into our orbit—it will alter and rearrange the whole world. The appropriate answer is—what must I do to get in on this? I’ll do anything!
  - c. As the words of Peter’s sermon cut to the heart of this crowd, you can hear the desperation of their question: **“Brothers, what shall we do?”**
    - (i) *Repent and be baptized*, is Peter’s response. He says, *this will result in the forgiveness of sins and the receiving of the Holy Spirit.*
    - (ii) Repent and get forgiveness—turn around and receive the lifting of your burden of sin.
    - (iii) Be baptized—baptism is about a new identity, a new family, a new community, a new creation. A whole new purpose and way of being, defined by Jesus’, Messiah.
    - (iv) Receive the Holy Spirit—a new power, a new operating system compelling you into the love and way of Jesus.

#### IV. The Result of the Spirit's Power and Presence—The Jesus Community (Acts 2:42–47)

- A. Luke’s exact words in verse 42 are very connected to the whole situation above. He is saying, because of what happened (being cut to the heart by the Spirit through Peter’s message, receiving the Holy Spirit power and presence), they devoted themselves.
  1. The word devoted, or the term “they were together,” is very strong. This is not cavalier, this is not a hobby or interest; it is often a word used for marriage in the Greek language. The idea is they gave themselves entirely, in constant diligence. This became the all-meaningful purpose of their lives.
  2. These people did not have to be reminded or coerced to gather together. They met daily, as often as they could; they were consistent, they were driven, motivated, dedicated. They were devoted. But what were they devoted to? You won’t find this answer put this plainly by Luke, but I believe it is clear that they were devoted to Jesus and to being a Jesus community.

## B. The Apostles' Doctrine or the Jesus' Story?

1. What is that? The simple answer is that the New Testament would be an example of the apostles' doctrine. The apostles were telling and retelling the Jesus' story again and again. They were teaching all that Jesus had taught them, about how all the Scriptures (Law, Prophets, and Psalms) pointed to him, about how all the promises of God and his kingdom were fulfilled by him and available only through him. They taught the Scriptures with Jesus at the center and as the goal, fulfillment, and life source to their very lives. They taught what the Jesus' story meant practically for the lives of this new community—the church. They were obsessed with Jesus—the Jesus' story so moved their hearts, they couldn't get enough of it.
2. **The Jesus' story** became the single focus, north star, and lens that defined reality for this community. They committed themselves to it. To be taught by it, to be transformed by it, to allow it to inform the whole of their lives.
3. But to be devoted to the apostles' doctrine, to Scripture, means it becomes the number one source of truth, information, and influence for our lives. It must become the greatest influence. It must become for us more necessary than daily bread if we are to be formed, transformed into Jesus' people—who reflect God's salvation, goodness, and wholeness.
4. Missiologist and pastor, Leslie Newbigin, wrote about the importance of deeply indwelling the biblical story, especially if the church is to be able to resist the power of the cultural story. He spoke of "remembering and rehearsing" the biblical story. He said, "*There is a burning need to soak ourselves in this story so that we more and more understand that it is the real story and that the story we are listening to on the radio and in our newspapers is to a very large extent phony. The only way the gospel will ever be credible is if there are local congregations who believe, live, and act on the Bible, including pastors who allow the Bible to shape the way they see the world and Christians who also learn to dwell in the Scriptures and see the world through biblical spectacles ... If the biblical story is not the one that really controls our thinking, then inevitably we shall be swept into the story that the world tells about itself. We shall become increasingly indistinguishable from the pagan world of which we are a part.*" —Leslie Newbigin, *Biblical Authority*
  - a. This is exactly what the early church did—they soaked themselves in the Jesus' story so that it captured their hearts, desires, minds, and imaginations. They were so enamored by Jesus—his love, grace, humility, power. To them it was the ultimate story. They wanted to know more, they wanted to hear it again and again and find their sole identity and purpose in it.

## C. Fellowship or the Common Life—The Jesus Way of Living

1. The Jesus' story wasn't something that they subscribed to intellectually, it was a way of life. It was something they practiced. Jesus is later described by Peter as, "**one who was anointed by God who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him**"
2. Their lives became marked by this same goodness of God—they bore each other's burdens, making sure that no one lacked anything, no one considered anything their own. Because when the Gospel cuts you to the heart, you have a whole new way of looking at other people. No longer do you look out just for yourself and your own interest. Why? Because you know that this is what God has done for you through Jesus, and you have been given God's Spirit. God, in Christ, did not look out for his own interest but made himself of no reputation and took upon himself the form of a bond slave—for you for me! You and I did not pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. No! It was him, it was all grace! How can we be selective in our love and service; how can we stand in judgment of someone's social class, ethnicity, or lack of provision when he took our judgment upon himself??

3. The Jesus community was a place where the effects of the Gospel were felt physically, needs were met, no one considered anything as their own, there were no divisions among them, they were simple, they were grateful, they lived in awe of God and his glory; signs and wonders were being done, and God was adding believers to the faith daily. What an exciting, amazing community to be a part of.
4. When Jesus' people value people over profit; when all are welcomed—whatever their color, creed, or class; when we love and serve the worthless person; when we forgive and love our enemies; when we sacrifice our own comforts for the sake of blessing others; when we care more about truth and right doing rather than popularity and praise; when we practice in our own lives and community the life of Jesus, that is when the kingdom of heaven and the Gospel begin affecting the social fabric of our world. When we live this way, we are a colony of heaven in the country of death. This is how the early Christians lived.
  - a. *“The purely verbal preaching of the story of Jesus crucified and risen would lose its power if those who heard it could not trace it back to some kind of community in which the message was being validated in a common way of life which is recognizable as embodying at least a hint and a foretaste of the blessedness for which all (humans) long and which the Gospel promises.”* —Leslie Newbigin, *Context and Conversion*

## V. The Breaking of Bread—The Jesus (Self-Sacrificial) Meal

- A. The breaking of bread refers to the fact that the early church was a communal church. They gathered together often, even daily. We are told they ate their bread with generosity and simplicity, they shared in meals together, they were like a family, as we saw and talked about last week. But more importantly, it wasn't that they were like a family, but what this family centered around, or who this family centered around. It was a Gospel family, a Gospel community. Luke calling this the breaking of bread is most definitely a reference to the church's practice of remembering the last meal that Jesus ate with his disciples on the night he was betrayed, the one we now call the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, or Communion.
  1. Fredrick Bruner, in his commentary on the Gospel of John, asks the question, “What is the Lord's supper?” He answers: *“It is the word becoming flesh again and again. It is the most earthy way that the heavenly Lord wants to be with us. The sacraments are not a second way of salvation; they are simply Jesus' one way of salvation scaled down, physicalized, individualized, simplified, and made concrete, from hearts to hands, from soul to body, from group to individual. He knew that we need not only spiritual things but also physical things in order to grasp him more easily, to ‘come’ to him more specifically. He is giving himself to us in this fresh new way in order to humanize and personalize his coming to us and to particularize our coming to him ... The Lord's Supper is a repeated Altar Call to ongoing conversion, to fresh commitments and entrustments of oneself to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life.”* —Fredrick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John*
  2. The Lord's Supper, or breaking of bread or communion, helps the Church remain Jesus-centered. Every week we are reminded, **“This is my body, given for you; take, eat, and be grateful! This is my blood, shed for you and for all human beings for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me.”**
  3. And this remembering doesn't simply mean we shouldn't let slip out of our minds. It also doesn't mean we reminisce on the sufferings of Jesus so we feel really thankful or really awful. The biblical call to remember—especially when tied to a covenant sign or ceremony—is a vibrant, powerful, and participatory concept where we recalibrate our lives according to what's being remembered. Communion is a homecoming, a regular returning to Jesus and his way of life.



4. Just as Paul says, “**he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.**” —2 Corinthians 5:15
5. The breaking of bread or communion is the opportunity or invitation to trust/believe by weekly reorienting our lives around him, making him the center of our universe, making him our home, making him our sole identity.

## VI. The Prayers (Access to the Father through Jesus)

- A. The prayers mentioned here are most likely a reference to the Psalms, which is the Jews’ prayer and song book, but it would most definitely include Jesus’ prayer that he taught his disciples—that prayer that is directed to God as Father, and about his name being known in all the earth, about God’s kingdom, his will being done on earth as it is in heaven.
- B. But in Luke mentioning this devotion to prayer, I think there is something more to what they were doing. Remember what we said before—Jesus, the human, their friend and teacher, their Savior and Lord, was the one who now sat enthroned over the cosmos, and they could talk to him as to a friend. They knew now because of Jesus’ finished work that they had the ear of their Father in heaven, they had direct access to God—to praise him, to thank him, to lament to him, to ask for his continuing power and presence in the face of adversity or persecution or whatever need.
- C. Jesus had taught them that they were invited into God’s work and world (thy kingdom come, thy will be done), and they now regularly invited God into their world (give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our debts, do not lead us into temptation). They understood that this access to prayer was not just about their comfort and joy but about the comfort and joy of the whole world, about this partnership that they had been invited into through Jesus Christ and the sending of his Spirit!
  1. *“When Jesus directs us to pray, ‘Thy kingdom come,’ he does not mean we should pray for it to come into existence. Rather, we pray for it to take over at all points in the personal, social, and political order where it is now excluded: ‘On earth as it is in heaven.’ With this prayer we are invoking it, as in faith we are acting it, into the real world of our daily existence.”* —Dallas Willard

## Conclusion

Luke records the effect of this Jesus’ community:

*“Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who 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 2:43–47

## A Jesus-Centered Community

Each time I read the story of the early church as recorded in Acts, I am moved and convicted by the centrality of Jesus.

You can see from what we’ve read that it was their Jesus-centered lives and community that produced powerful witness to the kingdom of God and resulted in many people coming to faith and allegiance in Jesus Christ.

## **My deep conviction as I read Scripture is that Jesus Formation + Jesus Community = Mission**

**The mission of God, to spread his kingdom reign in word and deed, is something that flows from the life of a disciple and the Jesus community.**

The early church was all about Jesus and his kingdom—this is what Christianity is supposed to be about, but the church has often lost its way throughout its history—the way of Jesus and his kingdom.

Even in our own history as Calvary Chapel—it has been said that when Calvary Chapel was a Jesus movement, it thrived and bore such beautiful fruit for the kingdom of God. But when it became A Calvary Chapel movement it became insular, judgmental, and it lost its way, it's real power and fruitfulness.

To center our lives or our church community on any one thing besides Jesus—we will miss the same thing. It's like what C. S. Lewis said about aiming at earth and missing heaven, but aiming at heaven and getting earth and everything thrown in as well. When the church centers its life around the person, ministry, and kingdom of Jesus, everything else gets thrown in!

The priority and the order are hugely important. More than anything, God desires to transform the character of his people to reflect that of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus might be put on display, so that he might draw people to himself to rescue, redeem, and transform them. This is why our aim is to be a Jesus Formed Community on Mission.

Keeping Jesus as the center of our lives, forming our way of life to his way of life, living this way of life out with one another, this begins to flow out to the world around us as a witness to God's kingdom presence and power here and now. As we continually and faithfully live in the way of Jesus, God will overflow our banks. The goodness of God will be known and felt in our cities and communities because Jesus is present in and through his people. And where Jesus is, there is life, there is healing, there is power, there is renewal, there is forgiveness and reconciliation. There is the kingdom of God breaking out on the world.

### **Communion**