

**First Persons: Peter**  
Genesis 11: 1-9; Acts 2: 1-21  
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## **I Introduction**

These last three years have been the most amazing in my life. I will never forget the moment that my brother, Andrew, ran home to me and said, “We have found the Messiah,” and I ran out with him to see this man. He wasn’t exactly what I expected in a Messiah. He clearly wasn’t of noble birth. He didn’t appear to be a great warrior. He didn’t even appear to be part of the priestly class. He looked rather disconcertingly like I did, but there was something about his presence that drew you to him; some power that you felt when he looked at you that you needed to be a part of. The first thing he said to me was, “Simon, I’m going to call you Peter, the rock,” which I hoped at that moment was a testimony to my faithfulness and not to my intellect. Although in fairness, it could have been both.

So we followed him for three years, listened to him teach and watched him heal. At points, whatever he had seemed to rub off on us too. We did some healing and even casting out demons. It was all a pretty heady experience. Then we watched him die, and you all know that story and know how it turned out. After three of the most hopeless days in the history of the world, he was raised. For the next 40 days, he appeared to different groupings of us, teaching us and preparing us for what would lie ahead, until 10 days ago when he said his final farewells. We saw him lifted up into the heavens and then we did what he had told us to do.

## **II. Which Brings Us To Today**

We waited, which brings us to today, Pentecost. For those of you who are not Jewish, Pentecost is one of the three great holidays of the Jewish people. The three days during the year when Jews from all over the world were commanded to come to Jerusalem to sacrifice and worship. The name *Pentecost* comes from the fact that this celebration happens 50 days after the last day of Passover. It is a festival that celebrates the first harvest of the early wheat. So, all of Jerusalem was filled with people from all over the world.

I usually started my days in prayer and was reading some of the book of Genesis, that wonderful story of the Tower of Babel. You know how sometimes when you're reading Scripture, a word or a phrase or something jumps out at you as you're reading, and you know you're supposed to pay attention to it. Have you had that experience? The word that jumped out at me was this word "scattered." I was struck by how often Moses used it in this passage, that the people were trying not to be scattered. They wanted to stay in this place that they knew, with people that they knew, people who spoke their same language, a place where they felt like they had some control over what was going on. And then, of course, exactly that thing happens that God scatters them, scatters them across the face of the earth.

I spent sometime sort of ruminating on this today, just reflecting on it as the day unfolded. I'm not entirely sure why the Lord had brought that word to mind.

## **III. The Gift of the Spirit**

A bunch of us who were followers of Jesus had gathered in this room and we were praying, praying for Pentecost, praying for ourselves, praying that God would show the world what God had showed us in Jesus. All of a sudden, this monstrous wind sweeps through the room, and it was like something odd was happening in my eyes as I watched tongues of flames start to light on the heads of the men and women who are gathered there. And then everyone started speaking a different language and I knew all these folks. They didn't know Parthian or Latin. I didn't know what was happening.

And then all of a sudden it hit me that we were like the people at Babel. We had come together in this place where we knew each other. We were all sort of alike. We all had the same background and the same history and we had gathered in this place as one people. God wanted us to be scattered. God wanted us outside of our safe and secure and homogenous room. God wanted us to encounter the wondrous, breathtaking rainbow of diversity that surrounded us. God didn't want us to gather people together to hear about Jesus. God didn't want us creating a safe space where we could do our own thing and wait for people to find us. God wanted us to get out, to take the good news to every corner of the world, to get out into places that were scary and spoke different languages with people who didn't look like us and didn't worship like us, and to tell the story there.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

This revelation was so overwhelming to me. I did something I've never done before which is I stood up in the middle of this group and I started to preach. I said to

them, “Throughout our history, God has given the gift of the Holy Spirit to great men and women for specific purposes.” God has poured out the Holy Spirit on prophets like Moses and Isaiah. God has poured out the Holy Spirit on great leaders like Debra and David, but it’s always been on a specific person for a specific purpose. Today, what the Prophet Joel promised us was that the Holy Spirit got poured out on everybody. Not just a handful of people, but every man and woman and child who was part of our community was now empowered by the spirit to spread the good news. Not empowered to create a safe space of learning and worship, not to create a warm and comfortable community of people who loved one another, but empowered to get out into the world to preach good news to the poor and release the captives and recovery of sight to the blind and to proclaim the acceptable year, the year of Jubilee, when God would release everyone from their debts.

The Holy Spirit is here now. It has been released through the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and is available to every person, empowering us to get out of our rooms, to encounter those who are different from us, those who may look different from us, those who worship different from us, those who believe different things. To get out into the places that may frighten us, the places where we don’t know how to engage people, and has given us the gifts to share what God has done for us and for the world.

I don’t remember being as scared, ever, as standing up to preach that sermon earlier today, but I also couldn’t figure out how to not do it. I think God had given me this word and I just had to share it with the people. Apparently, I’m still feeling that same compulsion to preach. I wonder if you could make a career out of this. No.