

Sermon—April 17-18, 1999  
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Power Encounters in the Book of Acts Series  
Acts 2:5-41

## The God Who Speaks

This week we are going to continue exploring the work of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. I am convinced that one of the keys to an individual Christian or a church having impact on its culture is a living vital experience of the Spirit. What has always made the difference in the history of the church is a church that is full of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that motivates and mobilizes the church for mission. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to get beyond our own preoccupation with ourselves. It is the Spirit that pushes the church out beyond itself, its own comfort zone toward caring about the least, the last and the lost on a very practical level.

Do you know the number one reason why people say that they have dropped out of church? You might think well, it is because they are always asking for money, or church is boring, or irrelevant. Those are all reasons that people list. But three quarters of the people who used to go to church and no longer do say the reason they stopped going to church is because they never experienced the presence of God at church. Three quarters of the people who used to go to church and don't any longer say that the reason they stopped going is that they never experienced the presence of God at church. Why bother if you aren't connecting with God?

The testimonies from people that I like the most are those notes and letters of folks who write to tell me, “Rich, I came to your church and I feel like I am connecting with God. I am connecting with God through the worship. I connect with God when you open the Bible. I connect with God when someone prays for me.”

The chief reason we gather at our weekend services is to provide a genuine encounter with Jesus Christ. And if that is not happening, then we need to go back to the drawing board. The presence of God is what makes a difference in people’s lives and is what folks are thirsty for and are searching out in a hundred different ways.

But you know, as we explore the work of the Spirit, it is important that his work not be reduced to an experience however wonderful the experience is. The experience of God is a part of what the Holy Spirit does. We considered that last week. God continues to touch people today so they feel his presence.

Nevertheless, as I said earlier, it is important that the work of God’s Spirit not be reduced to a feeling or an experience, however wonderful a feeling or experience is. The activity of God, the Holy Spirit always has content. There is something that God wishes to say. And we need to recognize the various ways that God wishes to speak. I have called today’s talk from Acts 2, “The God Who Speaks” because our God doesn’t just come to us to enliven our emotions or cause us to physically sense his presence. Our God connects with us by speaking to us. Let’s ask the presence of the Lord to be here and to speak to us through his Word.

Acts 2:5-13:

“Now there were staying in Jerusalem, God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment,

because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: 'Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!' Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?' Some, however, made fun of them and said, 'They have had too much wine.'"

Now let's recall the setting of this incredible occurrence where unschooled Galileans began speaking all of these different languages – the local language of the Parthians, Medes and Elamites; the Mesopotamians, the Cappadocians; people from Pontus and Asia. The setting was the day of Pentecost. We read that in v. 1. "When the Day of Pentecost came..." Pentecost, was the day where God initiated covenants with men and women. Jews believed that the covenant with Noah where God put the rainbow in the sky occurred on the Day of Pentecost. We read that in the intertestamental book called Jubilees. Jews in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century also believed that God gave Moses the Old Testament law, the Ten Commandments, on the Day of Pentecost. And so it is appropriate that God fulfills the New Covenant promise of writing his law on our hearts and giving us his Spirit on the day of covenant making – Pentecost. Jews also read the Book of Ruth on the day of Pentecost in the synagogues to reveal God's heart for the Gentile. Of course, the new covenant is more gracious than the old. For on the day the Old Testament was given, 3,000 died.

But on the day the new covenant was put into effect, 3,000 were saved. Pentecost has always been a missions holiday.

And it is appropriate that on the Day of Pentecost, which in the Old Testament was the Feast of First Fruits where people took their first gleanings from their grain crops and offered them to the Lord that God would give us the first part of our inheritance that we are going to receive in heaven. The first part of our future inheritance is the Holy Spirit.

So we see that on this Feast Day of Pentecost there is gathered in Jerusalem all these pilgrims from around the ancient Near East. Luke is working in a counter clockwise direction from Jerusalem. He starts off Far East and then moves to the North and then comes around to the West and South. So first of all, we read about Parthians, Medes and Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia – he is talking about people who would have lived to the East of Jerusalem by the Caspian Sea. And then he heads North and West in the second part of v. 9 to Cappadocia, Pontus, Phrygia and Pamphylia. All of those places are up in Turkey or Asia Minor. And then he goes Southwest to Egypt and parts of Libya near Cyrene. And then he talks about the far ends of the Earth with Rome and Cretans and Arabs and all of that.

The miracle that occurred is that pilgrims from all these different places heard God speak to them in their own language.

Now, just as a side note before we look at that, the tongues that were spoken on the Day of Pentecost are clearly different than the gift of tongues that Paul the apostle refers to in 1 Cor. 12 and 14. When Paul was writing to the Corinthians and talking about the enduring gift of tongues that the Corinthians received and the gift

of tongues that many people in churches all around the world have received today, that gift of tongues in Corinth and the gift of tongues today is different than the gift of tongues that the apostles received in Acts 2.

How is it different? Well, it is different first of all in direction. The apostles in Acts 2 were clearly speaking to men and women about God. In 1 Cor. the direction is not directed from God to man, the direction is from man to God. The apostle Paul said that the person who speaks in a tongue in 1 Cor. 14:2 does not speak to men, but to God. The gift of tongues today is a gift in which we are talking to God and not to other people.

And the gift of tongues in Acts 2 was clearly a gift that was intelligible, that was understood by the hearers. These were known languages and the hearers understood it. V. 8, "How is it that each of us hears them in our own native language?" V. 11, "We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues."

The gift that the Corinthians had and the gift that people have today is unintelligible, not unintelligent – unintelligible. That is, not understandable by people around unless there is an interpreter. That is the point of Paul's own argument in Corinthians – that no one understands the gift of tongues unless someone else interprets. This Pentecostal gift was a one time event. It was a prophetic thing. It signaled the birth of world missions – that the good news about Jesus was going to go beyond Israel and its natural borders. It was going to extend to everyone around the world.

But the gift in 1 Cor. and the gift today is not for the purpose of stirring world missions. The gift is for the purpose of building up an individual spiritually. It is for

the purpose of individual prayer and individual worship. I think occasionally God still gives a Pentecostal like tongues in a known language. I have known this occurrence on several occasions where people heard someone else speaking in a known language that the speaker had never learned. But by and large, the gift of tongues today is a gift of a totally unknown language – unknown to the speaker and unknown to the hearer. It doesn't signal world missionary activity, but is designed to encourage and strengthen the individual believer spiritually and to enable that individual to more effectively worship God.

With that as a long parenthesis, what was the miracle? The miracle was that people heard God speaking their own language. V. 8, "How is it that each of us hears them in our own native language?" V. 11, "We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues." Certainly, there is a reversal of the Curse of Babel going on here where men proudly tried to ascend into heaven and God judged them by confusing their languages. Here it is not man ascending into heaven, but God descending for the purpose not of scattering people, but of unifying them in his church.

One of the greatest miracles that occurs in an individual's life is the radical discovery that God speaks our own language. When people hear God speaking in their own language for the first time, when God connects with them – not just with the world, but with them – the results in their lives is just seismic. They are earth-shattering because most people who even believe in God believe in a God that is just sort of all around us - the God for someone else or for the whole world. There is a difference between believing that there is a God that sent his Son to die for the sins

of the world and experiencing the reality that MY God, not just a God, but MY God sent his Son to die for MY sins. Very often that little change of pronouns from everyone's sin to MY sin and from everyone's God to MY God takes place when people hear God speaking in their own language.

That's what happened to me. I first heard about Jesus through a woman, who is now my wife, Marlene. Many of you have heard me share this story before. But through Marlene's life and through her communication to me I began to understand the basic outlines of what God did in Jesus Christ. I began to understand something of the story of God coming and taking on flesh, walking around in Palestine as a man for 33 years. That this God was hung on a cross and died for sin and rose again.

But there was still this distance between that story and me until I heard God speaking in my own language. And for me as a Jewish person, that connection was made at a Passover dinner where a Jewish believer in Christ held up the plate of Matzos, the three cracker like thin pieces of unleavened bread that tastes like the bottom of your shoe. And at every Jewish Passover from time and memorial, Jews would place three matzos on a plate. This Jewish man said, "Do you know why Jews for thousands of years have put three matzos on the plate? Do you know what the meaning of these three matzos are?"

I was sitting there thinking that I really didn't, even though I had celebrated Passover for 18 years with my family. The Rabbis, I remembered, used to say that the three matzos symbolized the priests, the Levites and the people of Israel. Or they symbolized the three patriarchs of Israel – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But this man said that these three matzos represent God who is three persons – Father, Son

and Holy Spirit. And that in every Jewish home from time and memorial you always take the middle matzo and break it wrapping it up in a cloth and hiding it away. And he said, “Do you know the meaning of all of that?” He said, “Jesus at his last supper, the Passover Dinner that he celebrated with his disciples on the night he was betrayed, took the middle matzo, the one symbolizing the Son, and he broke it and he said, ‘This is my body, which is broken for you.’ And then he took the pieces of his body and wrapped them up in a cloth, that was his funeral shroud, and he put it under a pillow. That was his tomb. And later on it was taken out and displayed as in his resurrection.”

Well, some of you grew up in church and those words, “this is my body, which is broken for you” have long since lost their shocking power. But that was the first time I had ever heard those words and I heard them in my own language – in the language of a Jewish Passover. When God spoke to me in my own language, it was like a fist hit me in the chest. I think I audibly gasped, but I know I left that evening reeling, recognizing that God had come for me in the person of Jesus Christ.

Our whole understanding of the incarnation of God coming to us in the flesh revolves around this incredible idea that God in heaven speaks our language – not some heavenly language, not some far off spiritual thing or the language on Mars. He reaches out and connects with us. It is this idea that God works miracles by people hearing their own language that has fueled the Bible translation movement of this century. In the last few centuries, great missionaries like William Carey, Hudson Taylor, Henry Martyn, Adoniram Judson – they were all Bible translators.



But one the greatest missionaries that ever lived was a guy by the name of Cameron Townsend who founded the Wyclif Bible Translators in 1942. Cameron Townsend is known as Cam and died in 1982. Cam Townsend grew up in abject poverty and dropped out of college in his second year. He wanted to serve Christ and felt a calling to missionary service, so he went to Guatemala in 1917 during WW1. And he began selling bibles that were in Spanish in these remote rural areas where a couple of hundred thousand Indians, the Cakchiquel Indians lived. Where only a very few of the Cakchiquel Indians could read or speak Spanish and he began learning the Cakchiquel language. But the going was very slow in terms of the penetration of the gospel. Cam Townsend was confronted one day by this Indian man who said, "If your God is so smart, then why hasn't he learned the Cakchiquel language yet?" What Cam Townsend did was spend the next 13 years of his life translating the whole Bible into the Cakchiquel language. And it was out of this experience, this guy had had a year and a half of college, this guy who was no scholar or linguist, started an organization called Wyclif Bible Translators in 1942. Their mission is to provide the scriptures in every known language on earth so that people can hear God in their own tongues.

In the United States right now we have 50 different kinds of English Bibles – New American Standard, The Living Bible and the NIV (the necessary in Vineyard) version, The Message, The New King James Version, The Woman's Bible, the Men's Bible, the Student's Bible, the Spirit Filled Bible. There are millions of people in the world who don't have the Bible in their own language. It was just five or so years

ago that the Amish who live right up here in Holmes County finally got a Bible in their own language – the Pennsylvania Dutch. For almost four Centuries they were using Luther’s German Bible. And most of them couldn’t speak high German and didn’t understand the words until a Wyclif Bible translator took it on himself to translate the Bible into the language of the Amish.

Now we are not just talking about Bible translation when we think of the God who speaks our language. We are talking about the experience of people when they walk into a place and finally feel like “I’m home. This is what I have been looking for my whole life. This church connects with me.” One of the greatest compliments that I hear regarding the Vineyard is when people come up and say, “When I came I finally felt like I was home.” What they mean is that they finally found a place where God speaks to them in their own language and they don’t have to jump through 72 cultural hoops. Some of it is the dress, the music. England is becoming increasingly multicultural; the watchword of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will continue to be diversity.

As a congregation need to commit ourselves to the on-going task of speaking to people in their own languages because what we have going here in the Vineyard at this moment in time is not the language of many of the ethnics that live in our city. That is why in the next few years you leaders have to commit yourselves as a church to starting ethnic congregations – Asian congregations, Indian, Pakistani, Chinese congregations and inner city churches.

And not just ethnically, but in terms of age. The language of baby boomers from 1980s is not the language of young adults on the eve of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Whether we are talking about our musical style or our graphics, people need to hear the

message in their own language. People need to hear that this message about Jesus Christ is not just for married people as they assume. They suddenly hear, “My goodness, you mean this applies to me as a single person?” As a divorced person? It is not just for the perfect American family, but it is for blended families. It is not just for men, but for women. It is not just for the old, but for the young. Not just the suburbs but for the inner-city.

Let me ask you a question, if you are a member of the church you can write this down. Do you love people enough to try to speak to them about God in their own language? Not everyone is a church person. Not everyone speaks Christianese. Do you love people enough to learn their language? The way they think? The categories they place things in? Do you love teenagers enough to speak to the needs of teens? Do you have a big enough heart that it also includes teens? Do you love kids enough to speak the language of a 5-year old? How about the language of the deaf? Do we as a church love people in this community enough to say, “You don’t have to just learn our language to come to God, we are committed to speak your language.” The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us that kind of love and passion. And who would call someone like a Cam Townsend to spend 13 years learning Cakchiquel in response to a simple question, “If your God is so smart why doesn’t he speak my language?”

We don’t only worship a God who speaks our language, we worship a God who speaks in scripture. We read in v. 14, “Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: ‘Fellow Jews and all of you who are in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as

you suppose. It's only nine in the morning." Now unfortunately the religious people missed what God was doing here on Pentecost. Religious people sometimes do fail to recognize the Lord. It's interesting that way back in 1 Samuel 1, Eli, another religious man, saw Hannah engaged in intense prayer and thought she was drunk. Let me ask you a personal question. Do you have a heart that recognizes and loves God's activity even if it comes in a form that is different than you expect or prefer? Do you love God's activity among conservative evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics, Pentecostal and house-churches, even when things are done in a way that you wouldn't do it? Even if it makes you flesh crawl, can you still say, "But I recognize that Jesus is there?"

I think Peter was kind of laughing when he said that it was only nine in the morning. I don't think he was offended. He is saying, "Friends, check it out. They haven't had time to drink." He says, "No this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions; your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"

Then a little later in v. 25 and following, he quotes from David in Psalm 16. And then he finishes up his message down in v. 34 when he says: "For David did not

ascend to heaven, and yet he said, "The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

What is Peter doing in this sermon? He is quoting the Bible, the Bible that he had in his day which was the Old Testament. That is what the Holy Spirit led him to do. The Holy Spirit led him back to the Bible.

Listen, I am always concerned about two types of people who begin to experience the Holy Spirit. The first is the person who has no Christian background, who knows nothing of the Bible, but who comes to Jesus and has a wonderful experience of the Holy Spirit. It is the person who from day one comes into a very vital experience of the Spirit and that person begins to get prophecies and dreams. They may begin to pray for the sick. I am always concerned for that person, if they don't get foundations in the scripture. Listen, if you are going to fire a canon, if you are going to be dealing with the power of God, then you need to build a really big and strong foundation to hold that canon blast. Some people, it is like firing a canon out of a canoe, I have said before. There is lots of fire power, but there isn't a foundation to hold it. I am always concerned about those who come into an experience of the Holy Spirit, but who don't develop rooting and foundation in the Bible.

But I am also concerned about that person who comes to us from a conservative evangelical background. They come here and are dried out. They feel like their Christian life is like week old bread. They begin to experience God the Holy Spirit in worship. They begin to see God do some things that they never thought God did today. They may see a healing or deliverance. Very often I have seen people like that

take their bibles and toss them up on the shelf saying, “You know, all I got for 20 years of my life was Bible, Bible, Bible memory and it is so stale to me.” Some of the silliest, and indeed, most unbiblical practices I have ever seen have come from conservative evangelicals who ought to know better, but who will come into an experience of the Spirit and take their bibles and throw them on the shelf.

The truth is that the time you need the Bible the most is when you are experiencing the presence and life of the Spirit. That is when the Bible is most alive and most fresh. Every time I experience the Holy Spirit in a new and fresh way, different aspects of the Bible and different statements jump off the page at me. I think, “Where was that phrase before? Where was that section before? Why didn’t I see that?”

I have heard churches say, “We are in a time of renewal and refreshment, so we spend all of our time just soaking in the presence of God. We don’t have that much opportunity for Bible teaching or preaching.”

Friend, that is precisely the time where we redouble our efforts to preach – during times of refreshment. You can’t get any more charismatic than teaching the Bible in the power of the Holy Spirit. Think about this with me. What are the two charismatic high points in the New Testament? I mean the two times when the Holy Spirit came down in power? The two charismatic high points are Jesus’ baptism when he was baptized in the Holy Spirit at the River Jordan and the Day of Pentecost, when the Spirit of God fell on the only church and baptized them in the Holy Spirit. Those are the two high points.

Now, what happened on each occasion? We have the quoting of scripture. When Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan and the Spirit came down on him like a dove, there was a voice from heaven from the Father and what did the Father say? The Father from heaven, at that charismatic moment, quotes the Bible. He says, “This is the Son that I love” quoting Psalm 2, “with him I am well pleased” quoting Isaiah 42. The whole content of the speech was simply a referral back to scripture. Scripture now made alive by the Spirit, given new fresh meaning. What does Peter do at the charismatic high point of the early church when the Spirit just falls on the church? Most of his message is quoting scripture and giving scripture fresh meaning, fresh insight. “This what you are seeing was prophesied about.”

All lasting renewal, all enduring revival is built on the return to the Bible. Lasting renewal is not the result of someone just having a new experience. Lasting renewal is the result of a Spirit enlivened fresh insight drawn from the eternal Word of God. It is Lutheran-Calvin rediscovering the message of justification during the Protestant Reformation, that revival. It is John Wesley rediscovering the message of the new birth during the Great Awakening. It is the Pentecostals rediscovering the spiritual gifts at the beginning of this century. It is John Wimber rediscovering the message of the Kingdom of God. That is what creates enduring revival – fresh insight, fresh application of the scripture. See, the Bible says that all flesh is like grass and all of men’s glory is like the flower of the grass. The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of God endures forever.

I will tell you what won’t endure. The latest findings of modern psychology won’t endure. The latest church growth technique won’t endure. The latest

management technique, the latest management fad won't endure. The latest proposal to re-engineer pragmatic solutions won't endure. The latest pop psychology, the self-help book, the latest technique, the latest diet – everything that comes from the minds of men – all flesh is grass, it's all dying. The only thing that ever endures is what is built on the Word of God that lasts forever.

Let me ask you, are you putting something that lasts in your life on a daily basis? Do you get into the Bible for yourself personally? Don't just think short-term, think long-term. Friends, you can't grow in an experience of God long-term unless you are spending time every day reading the Bible. Start with the gospels, if you have no plan. Read a couple of chapters every day. Write this down. Make a commitment to God today. I will begin to read a couple of chapters of the Bible every day. Start underlining verses that speak to you. Pray before you read and say, "God, talk to me through this book." Start memorizing passages of scripture. I have begun doing that again after a long time of not memorizing. Just this week I committed myself to memorizing a certain chapter of the Bible. Hide God's Word in your heart. If you want a foundation for your kids, talk to them out of the Bible. That is what is enduring.

And any church that wants to be eternally relevant is going to be a biblical church because I have watched this over the last 25 years of my Christian life. Churches swing out here and swing out there. They experience this and that. Do you know what they always end up doing? They always end up coming back to the Bible. The most biblical person is always going to be the most relevant and insightful person.



God not only speaks in the Bible, but God speaks today. Peter says, “Fellow Jews and all of you who are in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you. Listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning. No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days, God says...’” (verse 17).

The hour on your watch is not important. What is important is the period of time that we are living in. Peter says that the time we are living in that follows the coming of Christ and continues until he comes again is the last days. We are living in the last days, just as he was. The last days are not only the day or two before Jesus returns, it is the period of time when God pours his Spirit out. It is the period of time where God wants to rescue as many people as possible and bring them into relationship with himself. He wants to adopt an enormous family to connect with billions of people as Father, so that he can call billions sons and daughters.

And we read that the mark of these last days is that God’s Spirit will be poured out on all people and they will prophesy.

You know, people are confused about prophecy. For a lot of people it is one of these really far off things that you have to be part of the spiritually elite. The mark of receiving God’s Spirit in the New Testament is that you prophesy, that you get dreams and visions. Let me put my cookies on a little lower shelf. What I think God is doing in the new covenant is he is making an offer to all people of friendship. He is drawing near and he is making us an offer of friendship. I get my definition of friendship from Jesus in John 15 where he says, “I no longer call you servants, because as servant doesn’t know what his master’s business is. Instead, I have

called you friends for everything I have learned from my father I have made known to you.” Jesus’ definition of friendship is someone who lets you in on their business. A friend is someone who allows you to see them as they are, to get on the inside. A friend is someone who is vulnerable to you. Who is transparent, who doesn’t keep things hidden. A friend is someone who entrusts you with their secrets. Friends are people who just don’t speak in superficial conversation or just tell you that everything is fine when everything isn’t fine. A friend is someone who says, “here is what is going on with me. I want you to see my heart.” This passage tells us that God wants to be friends with us through visions, dreams and prophecies, through quiet inspirations and dramatic encounters. God by his Spirit reveals his heart to his people. He is saying, “Here I am. Here are my purposes. Here is what I am doing. Here is what I am like.”

I want you to note a few things about God’s offer of friendship. It is an offer made to everyone sitting here – to men and women, to old and young, to the rich and the poor. It doesn’t matter where you are on the social ladder. It doesn’t matter where you are in terms of your position in the church. It is so foolish of people today to restrict the offer of friendship to the apostles as if the passage says, “In the last days, I will pour out my Spirit on all apostles” Or “In the last days I will pour out my Spirit on all great leaders.” Or on those who are particularly charismatically oriented and have that type of loosey goosey, oozy personality. The offer of friendship through knowing God’s mind as a result of dreams and visions and prophecy is an offer to everyone.

This is the great difference between the last days and the earlier days. In the earlier days in the Old Testament you had to be a somebody for God to speak to you. You had to be a king or a prophet or a judge or a priest – someone special. But in the last days God speaks to everyone without distinction and makes an offer of friendship to anyone who turns to him in faith.

And the offer of friendship is revealing of God's mind by visions and prophecies and dreams. It is not some optional extra like a sunroof on a car or a driver's side airbag. Or automatic locks. Some of the packages with your car have them and some cars don't. Prophecies, dreams and visions are standard equipment on all the Christians that God makes. They are like the steering wheel or the front tires. Followers of Christ don't roll off of God's assembly line without them. Because every follower of Christ is a friend of God. God wants us to know his mind.

But you know, the reason these things are essential equipment – prophecy, dreams and visions, hearing God speak today through these things, is that we will never see the kind of expansion of God's kingdom through healings, evangelism, church planting unless we embrace God's Word to us today. Are you interested in seeing people healed? Are you interested in seeing anyone saved? Do you believe that God is not through in Central Ohio just because he has gathered a few people into a church like this? Prophecy, dreams and visions are God's tools for spreading his reign beyond the church walls.

The pattern in the book of Acts couldn't be clearer. Philip has a vision in Acts 8 and the gospel spread to an Ethiopian Eunuch. Ananias had a vision in Acts 9 and

the apostle Paul's sight is restored. Peter gets a vision in Acts 10 and the gospel goes to the Gentiles.

See, the Christian life is not just us running around doing things and afterwards saying, "God will you bless what I did over here and will you bless what I did over there?" The biblical pattern is like this: God in the Bible tells his friends what he is doing. He speaks to his friends. And then they do that. He says, "I am over here in Macedonia in Acts 16, send some men over here." He tells his friends, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul." He tells his friends to keep on preaching. Paul, don't be afraid (Acts 18), I am with you and no one is going to attack you.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to know what God was involved in? Don't you think you would be more effective as a Christian if you had God as your in-house consultant? Wouldn't it be great to gain God's mind regarding your children, if you have kids? Regarding difficulties in your marriage? Wouldn't you want to hear from the Lord regarding what you are going to do with your life, what he has made you for. Shouldn't churches want to hear from God regarding what it is that God is going to touch and bless, who they should hire, how they should proceed. We need to hear God's Word in the scripture, but we also need to hear God's Word today – where we go; who we speak to; when we say; what we say.

There is an aspect to this dreams and visions and prophecies thing that I don't want you to overlook. In the Bible our friend the Lord not only reveals what he is up to, but he shows what our enemy, Satan, is up to. We stumble blindly into all of the enemy's traps because we regularly have a deaf ear to what our friend is showing us. Our friend, God our Father, is regularly giving up warnings as a church and as

individuals, “Don’t do that” “There is a trap” “There is something that the enemy is trying to wrap you up in” – “Avoid that. He is trying to get you to self-destruct.”

Over and over we read in the Bible about being warned in a dream. Joseph, Jesus’ father, fled from Bethlehem. Paul was warned in dreams about certain enemies. Have you ever had God speak to you a Word of warning? You have, if you are tied into him. He warns his friends. If you pursue this relationship, it is really going to be disastrous. Break that relationship off. Don’t go into that part of town. Don’t take that job. Don’t get hooked up with that person.

And the Lord still warns in dreams today. On a number of occasions I have personally been warned in dreams about areas of my life that God was trying to address and I know that many of you could say that you have very troubling dreams at different times, maybe recently, where God was trying to speak to you regarding some area of your life or some aspect of your behavior or your choices. Sometimes you will get a troubling dream about another, where the Lord wishes to warn them. Parents will sometimes get dreams about their children. Or you might get a dream about a friend.

Not every dream is to be taken literally. Some dreams are just the pizza we have eaten the night before. But God does use these means to communicate, to use words of warning, words of direction. And I believe that many Christians walk around blind, stumbling in the dark, because we don’t have open ears and hearts to what the Lord, our friend, is saying to us.

And then we see that God speaks to us about Jesus. Peter says, “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth...” The Spirit of God directs attention to Jesus. V. 23,

“This man was handed over to you” V. 24, “But God raised him from the dead” V. 25, “David said about him” V. 36, “Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this, God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

You know the Spirit of God is active when attention is drawn to Jesus. The focus of the Holy Spirit’s concern is Jesus.

And you know, we have not presented Christianity to a friend, to our parents or to our kids by talking with people about their behavior or abortion or talking about sex outside of marriage or just helping someone with their relationship or talking about divorce or ethics or politics. It is all good stuff that many of us spend a lot of time talking about, even arguing about. All good things, but you haven’t talked with someone about Christianity until you talk with them about Christ. This man was delivered up. God raised this man from the dead.

And so Peter shows us that the whole Bible points to him. All these prophetic words from David – David was talking about Jesus. The prophets were talking about Jesus. Jesus was pointed to by his miracles. V. 22, “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs.” The Holy Spirit, when he falls on people, will direct them to Jesus. That is what John 15:26 says, “When the counselor comes,” Jesus said, “Whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, he will testify about me.” The counselor will testify about me.

Then the very next verse, v. 27 of John 15 says, “And you also must testify.” What is the message? It is about Jesus. What specifically about Jesus? Well, many people don’t know the Jesus Story and so in the New Testament there is a story that the

Holy Spirit has inspired us to tell about Jesus. It starts with the prophecies about him in the Old Testament. Jesus is the fulfiller of prophesy. It precedes on to talk about Jesus' life, especially his miracles and his teaching. And then his death. The focus of a lot of the New Testament message is on the death of Jesus. His death is as the result of wicked men and his death in accordance with the purpose and foreknowledge of God.

So we talk about Jesus' life. We talk about Jesus' death. We talk about Jesus' resurrection. And we talk about Jesus' ascension. Where is Jesus now? He ascended into heaven. And from heaven Jesus offers two things: forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. V. 38, "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

For too many evangelicals, they speak so much of one gift, the gift of forgiveness, but they forget the other gift – the gift of the Spirit. God the Holy Spirit speaks, he primarily speaks about Jesus. And when you speak on behalf of God, you need to speak about Jesus. How are you doing in that regard? Are you often telling people about Jesus? Not about politics, not about helpful hints for their relationships – witnessing points to Jesus.

Last thing – the God who speaks must be responded to. Let's read v. 37-41 in finishing up. "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'"

God speaks in our consciences. He not only speaks in the scripture and through prophecy, God speaks in our consciences. He cuts us to the heart. What does that

mean to hear from God in such a way that you are cut to the heart? Well, being cut to the heart is not simply being sorry about the consequences for what you have done wrong.

You know, I didn't study and now I have an F and I am really bummed out that I can't play sports.

I didn't work hard and I did something stupid at my job and now I am fired.

For years I neglected my spouse and now she wants a divorce.

I repeatedly did some stupid things in my relationship with my boyfriend or girlfriend and now they want out.

I made some major mistakes as a parent and my kids have turned out terribly.

Being cut to the heart doesn't just mean being sorry about the circumstances you find yourself in as a result of your bad choices. Being cut to the heart is not even recognizing that what you have done is wrong. Being cut to the heart concerns a recognition of what we have done with Jesus as a result of our sin. A person is cut to the heart when they recognize that they have been rejecting Jesus; that they have been resisting Jesus. You are cut to the heart when you see yourself having slammed the door in Jesus' face. When you look back and see a pattern of rejecting Jesus' offer of friendship and blessing. You are cut to the heart when you see that what you have been doing is resisting Jesus at some point in your life.

Let me ask you something. Is there any point in your life that you are currently resisting Jesus over? Is there anything at all that tonight [today] you would say, "Here is where I have been resisting Jesus. Here is where I have been crucifying Jesus." See, the message they heard was that God had made this Jesus, whom you



crucified, both Lord and Christ. A person is cut to the heart when they see that that is what I am doing by my resistance. I am just taking nails and pounding them into the hands of Jesus. By my resistance and my sin, I am spitting in Jesus' face. By hardening my heart to what Jesus is saying, I am one of the one whipping him.

Is there any point at which you are resisting Jesus? Is there secret sin in your life that you have to turn from and say, "Enough. I want to be friends with you, Jesus, instead of constantly being your enemy."

Are you resisting some call on your life where Jesus has repeatedly said, "This is what I want you to do. This is a ministry. This is where I want you to go. These are people I want you to care for, to love and to minister to." And you keep resisting.

Are you resisting Jesus about a divorce or separation where he is saying "no" and you are saying "yes."

Are you resisting Jesus in the area of your sexuality? Where you know that God doesn't approve of what you are doing sexually, or living with someone outside of marriage? But you keep rejecting the Lord.

Are you resisting Jesus who is calling you to be reconciled to someone that you don't want to be reconciled to? Someone you don't want to forgive? You don't want to try again.

God speaks to us. He cuts us to the heart. He shows us where we are rejecting Jesus. And the only response is repentance. The people cry out having been cut to the heart, "What shall we do?"

Peter said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

There are two things we need to do in responding to God when we find ourselves rejecting him. First, we need to repent. It means to turn from your rejection of Jesus. To turn from continually resisting him. To stop resisting. To stop rejecting. To come into agreement with God's judgment regarding Jesus. God said that Jesus was right and should be obeyed. Jesus is Lord. We come into agreement with the idea that Jesus is Lord and has the right to be obeyed and the right to rule us.

Baptism is the outer evidence of our repentant faith. Baptism is like a wedding ring. It is not what makes you married, it is the evidence that you are married. In the New Testament these things were all tied together. Repentance, faith, water baptism and receiving the Spirit – Spiritual baptism – they were all tied together as part of the conversion package.

In the church in America today everything is chopped up. Someone believes and then 15 years later they repent and then 20 years after that they get water baptized and then they hear about the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament it is all wrapped up together. Salvation is a matter of repenting and believing. We stop rejecting Jesus and we accept him as God presents him – as Lord. And then we evidence our new relationship with Jesus as our bridegroom by putting on our wedding ring. That is baptism.

Some of you need to sign up for water baptism. You have not evidenced that you are married to Jesus. You are not wearing your wedding ring. You haven't been water baptized as believers. We have a baptism class following the service.

God wishes to speak. This is how he comes to us – through the Holy Spirit. Let's pray.