

# **Acts: Claiming God's Deeds of Power**

## **Sermon 2-18-18**

### **By Pastor Curtis Dehmey**

#### **Acts 2:1-21**

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

<sup>5</sup>Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." <sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" <sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

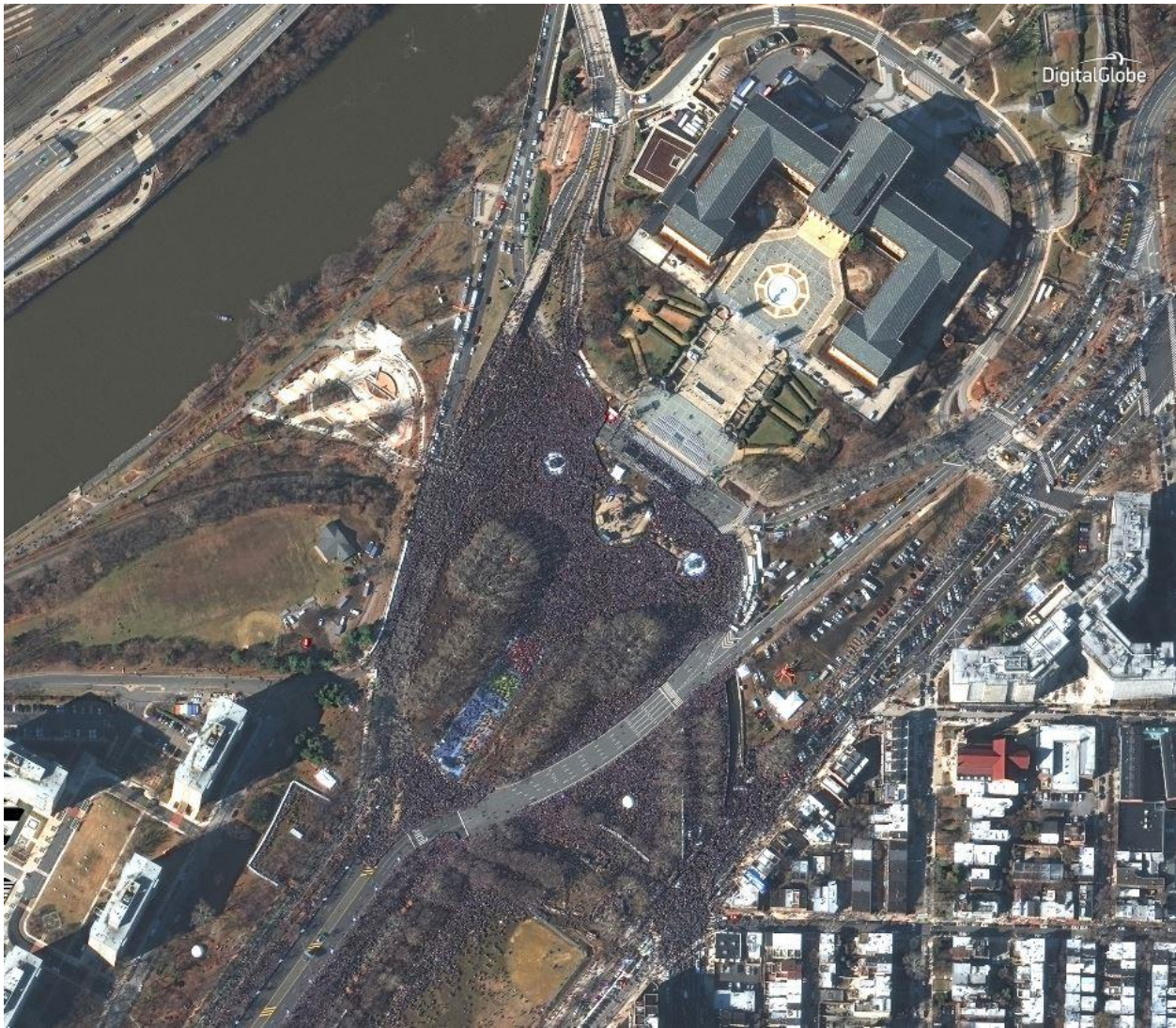
<sup>14</sup>But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup>'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. <sup>18</sup>Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. <sup>19</sup>And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. <sup>20</sup>The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. <sup>21</sup>Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

#### **Message:**

(Play <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdVYhVwHsDc&t=1s>) Isn't the day of Pentecost amazing? The day of Pentecost was originally a festival called the "Feast of Weeks." It was always 50 days after Passover. The "Feast of

Weeks” is a celebration of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments. 50 Days after God passed over the households with the blood of the lamb in Egypt long ago. This day, according to Israelite celebrations and traditions, was a day where the covenant with God is renewed. So this occurred 50 days after Jesus sat in the upper room with the disciples and broke bread with them. This is the day when many Jews from many nations were gathering in Jerusalem to celebrate. If you were watching the news coverage of the Eagles parade, you know that as the reporters interviewed individuals at the parade, people were coming from all over. People from Berks County, Lancaster County, Harrisburg, even as far as Florida and Oregon were coming to Philadelphia to celebrate the Eagles Super Bowl victory. Think of Pentecost like that. People from all over the place were coming for this celebration. When I saw on the news a sky view of the crowd in front of the Art Museum, it was incredible. I’ve been in Philly for things like the Philly Marathon. I’ve never seen the Ben Franklin Parkway so full. Here are two images just to give you a picture:





Those dots around the trees are people. Conservatively, they are estimating that 700,000 people were at the parade. Philly fans don't believe that because when the Phillies won the World Series in 2008, an unofficial estimate is between 1 and 2 million people at that parade. Bringing this back to our text, imagine that kind of crowd gathering in Jerusalem. Imagine that like the wave at a sporting event, this ripple comes over the crowd, like a "violent wind," and everyone starts to speak in a different language than their native language. It would be like me all-of-a-sudden switching to Chinese in the middle of this sermon. And yet, you would still understand me! Incredible! With this incredible and sensational action of the Holy Spirit, God renews his covenant. And this is where it gets even better, the Galileans are the main ones speaking in these different languages. Galileans were considered barbaric, uneducated and uncivilized. And yet the Holy Spirit came upon them to speak in these different languages.

Now, remember, from my sermon the other week, this is Peter's moment. This is Peter's moment to decide if he is going to commit to this sensational moment and the work of God. This is the moment where Peter is going to decide

if he is going to denounce or dismiss such a sensational moment. This is the moment where Peter has to decide, is he all-in or all-out. The text says, “<sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ <sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’ <sup>14</sup>But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning.’” Peter has decided not just to follow Jesus, but to claim God’s deeds of power. To live like Jesus. To proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. He goes on quoting what the Lord said to Joel, “<sup>17</sup>‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. <sup>18</sup>Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. <sup>19</sup>And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. <sup>20</sup>The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. <sup>21</sup>Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’” Pay attention to that phrase that Joel repeats twice, “...I will pour out my Spirit...” This event is a pouring out of God’s Spirit upon the people. A sensational and physical manifestation of God’s Spirit upon the people.

Sometimes we’re afraid of these sensational moments. We’ve seen a lot of damage done in the name of Christ by people claiming the movement of the Spirit when there was no such movement. We’ve seen leaders distort God’s voice for their personal gain. And no doubt, there should be some caution exercised when we talk about the movement of the Spirit. It should be checked by others, scripture and it should benefit the people of God. I wonder though, if sometimes we exercise too much caution. That we try to control so much, that we stifle the Spirit of God. That we stifle God’s movement among us. The sensational movement of the Spirit is so scary to us, that we try to push those moments away. I can’t remember where I read it, but Rick Warren at some point said, “You can’t have both growth and control.” “You can’t have both growth and control.” Meaning, we can’t want the Holy Spirit to move, but then want to control how, when and where the Holy Spirit moves. It defeats the purpose of the Spirit moving. Likewise, we can’t be open to the movement of the Spirit and then say, “This is too out of control.” Warren’s quote wasn’t intended to say that one is better than the other. Growth or control has their place at certain given times. I wonder though, what it would look like for the Holy Spirit to come over Providence in a mighty way? I wonder if there would even be a reception to such a movement? Would we be able to recognize the moment and respond with open hearts? I mean if you look at our text, it wasn’t the devout Jews who were overcome with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. It was those who were receptive to God’s movement among them.

That was Jews that were on the fringes, like the Galileans. People, most likely, who were not of the priesthood or who made it to the temple frequently. The devout Jews were the ones who were blind to the moment and dismissed this sensational moment as drunkenness. Is the Holy Spirit moving in our lives and in our midst, or have we dismissed the movement of God among us?

Francis Chan uses this illustration in his book, “Forgotten God”, “This may be a silly illustration, but if I told you I had an encounter with God where he entered my body and gave me a supernatural ability to play basketball, wouldn’t you expect to see an amazing improvement in my jump shot, my defense, and my speed on the court? After all, this is God we’re talking about. And if you saw no change in my athleticism, wouldn’t you question the validity of my ‘encounter?’ Churchgoers all across the nation say the Holy Spirit has entered them. They claim that God has given them a supernatural ability to follow Christ, put their sin to death, and serve the church. Christians talk about being born again and say that they were dead but now have come to life. We have become hardened to those words, but they are powerful words that have significant meaning. Yet when those outside the church see no difference in our lives, they begin to question our integrity, our sanity, or even worse, our God. And can you blame them?” Now, understand that Francis Chan is not a Pentecostalist or a person of incredible charisma. He’s a strong speaker, Biblicist, and theologian. He talks about how the church knows in their head about the Holy Spirit. We have this knowledge. But has our encounter with the Holy Spirit moved from the head to the heart?

Now, I’m not trying to tell you all that you have to be more charismatic or start dancing in the isles during worship. I’m not trying to say that we need to take venomous snakes, let them bite us and see if God heals us. I’m not talking about that kind of sensational movement. I understand that that might not be part of who we are. But what would it look like for us to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit like they were on Pentecost? How could the Holy Spirit express itself in us in miraculous and in incredible ways? What can we claim as God’s deeds of power among us? The devout Jews were able to recognize that these crazy Holy Spirit driven people were, “...speaking about God’s deeds of power.” When these people started to speak in different languages, it wasn’t just a “Hey! How is your day going?” No. They were testifying to God’s deeds of power in that moment and of all the moments leading up to this moment. Language can be an incredible barrier to sharing the gospel and in this moment, it was no barrier at all.

About a year ago, I told you my story of how I was miraculously healed from a broken ankle in high school. But I didn’t tell you the second half of that story. Just to give a quick recap, I broke my ankle playing soccer during my sophomore year of high school. I was on crutches and a hard cast for about a month. One evening, I went to a worship service. And the leaders of the service felt God calling them to heal individuals. My friends, strongly encouraged me to

go forward. As I went forward I ended up meeting with my high school bible teacher. He called me out on soccer being an idol in my life and that I needed to return to God as my first love and repent of this idol. So I did that. And they thought it would be really important to have a scripture to accompany this healing. And so my friend stumbled upon Psalm 51. The main verses being 8-10, “<sup>8</sup>Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. <sup>9</sup>Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. <sup>10</sup>Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.” As they prayed over me, I felt the movement of the Holy Spirit as this hot tingling sensation happened around my ankle. I knew in that moment I was healed. Fast forward a few weeks when I got the cast taken off. The first thing the doctor said to me when he entered the room was “Walk.” So I stood up and started walking perfectly. He was amazed and astonished saying, “I’ve never seen someone walk so perfectly after this injury.” He would normally recommend physical therapy, but he cleared me from any need for such things. Now, onto the second part. Fast forward 9 months to my Junior year of high school and I was on the varsity soccer team as a substitute. We were in the championship game of league play. If you’re an athlete, you understand that you dream of big moments where you can impact the game. Like, the Philly Special. I always dreamed of the big moment and this is how it happened. I was on the bench as a sub. We were tied 1-1 at half-time. With over 15 minutes left in the game, the other team scored to make it 2-1. We were losing. My coach called me off the bench to play center midfield. I was in the center of the soccer formation. I’ll let the news article tell the rest, “That’s when Dehmey got started. With 10:10 left to play in the game, junior midfield Austin Hess sent a crossing pass into the Raider penalty area, where it was misplayed by the Raiders defense. Dehmey was in the right spot at the right time and ripped the ball into the net to level the score at 2-2. Dehmey’s game winner was also a matter of being in the right place at the right time. With the clock winding down and overtime looming, senior midfielder Clinton Simmons took a throw-in deep in the Elco end of the field and winged into the penalty box. Senior defender Matt Eby got to it and used his head to flick the ball on to Dehmey, who then headed the ball past Mentzer for the go-ahead goal.” This was my biggest sports moment. We won the championship!! I felt so humbled by this moment. It’s the type of moment I dreamt of all my life. I believe it was a sprinkling of God’s blessing upon me. I believe that because I responded faithfully to God when my ankle was broken, that God blessed me with such an awesome experience. And now, I can claim God’s deeds of power in my life. You never know what might happen when you respond faithfully to the Holy Spirit. Things beyond your imagination will open up and blessings that you never could envision or control on your own open up.

I’ll tell one last story. It’s Joni Eareckson Tada’s story told by Francis Chan in his book “Forgotten God.” “Recently I was asked, ‘Who is the most Spirit-filled

person you know?’ My response: Joni Eareckson Tada. A 1967 diving accident left then-seventeen-year-old Joni a quadriplegic. Lying in a hospital bed, she was filled with an overwhelming desire to end her life. The thought of spending the rest of her years paralyzed from the neck down and relying on others to care for her basic needs was staggering. But Joni did not end her life that day. Instead, she chose to surrender to God. Little did she know that the Spirit of God would transform her into one of the godliest women ever to grace this earth. God gave her a humility and a love that enabled her to look beyond her own pain and to see others’ hurts. She is a person who consistently ‘in humility count(s) others more significant than herself.’ I don’t even know where to begin with all that she has done. While undergoing two years of rehabilitation after the accident, she spent many hours learning to paint with a brush held between her teeth. Her detailed paintings and prints are now highly sought after. Her international best-selling autobiography, *Joni*, was later made into a full-length feature film. She founded Joni and Friends in 1979 to increase Christian ministry to the disabled community throughout the world. The organization led to the establishment in 2007 of the Joni and Friends International Disability Center, which currently impacts thousands of families around the globe. Over the course of each week, more than a million people listen to her daily five-minute radio program, *Joni and Friends*... In 2005, Joni Eareckson Tada was appointed to the Disability Advisory Committee of the U.S. State Department... (She) has appeared twice on Larry King Live sharing not only her Christian testimony but a biblical perspective on right-to-life issues that affect our nation’s disabled population. And on top of all that, Joni has written more than thirty-five books. Yet it is not because of these accomplishments that I consider her the most Spirit-filled person I know. Actually, it has nothing to do with all she’s accomplished. It has to do with the fact that you can’t spend ten minutes with Joni before she breaks out in song, quotes Scripture, or shares a touching timely word of encouragement. I have never seen the fruit of the Spirit more obviously displayed in a person’s life as when I am with Joni. I can’t seem to have a conversation with Joni without shedding tears. It’s because Joni is a person whose life, at every level, gives evidence of the Spirit’s work in and through her.”

Is the Spirit at work in your life? Has the Spirit of God ever swept you off your feet? Has the Spirit of God ever surprised you? Is it evident that the Spirit of God is at work in your life? The devout Jews heard the people speaking in different languages proclaiming God’s deeds of power. Peter responded by dispelling the devout Jews dismissal of the Spirit’s event. Peter preached the gospel. And then 3,000 people came to Christ. What does God want you to claim as His mighty work? What deeds of power is God orchestrating in your life that you are ignoring? When you think about your story, I can probably guarantee that all of you have experienced at one point or time God’s deeds of power. Did you

claim it? Or did you ignore it? If you claimed it, what happened next? I'm sure God moved in a mighty way in your life. I believe God wants to continue to move at Providence in a mighty way. If we are open to His Spirit, a movement like a violent wind may come upon us. And because God's sensational work among us, we can claim God's deeds of power. We can claim the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus died on the cross, defeated death and rose again, ascended to heaven and on this day, the church was born by the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. God wants to continue to birth the church in new ways like He did on Pentecost. Let us stay open to movement of the Spirit and testify to or claim God's deeds of power. Amen.