

Living In The Final Chapter

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[0 : 00] Well, I don't know if you like reading books, but if you do, novels, things like that, you'll know what it feels like to get to the last chapter of the book.

Avid readers, you know what I'm talking about. You turn that page and it's the final chapter of the book. You know that feeling. It's the climax of the story. Everything's going to come together. The hero is victorious. The villains are defeated.

And of course, when you're in that final chapter, when you get to that final chapter, you start reading it. You can't put it down, can you? Until everything's resolved. That's the chapter that keeps you up at night after everyone's gone to bed until you get to the end of the book.

Maybe you're not a reader. Maybe you're not into books, but the same kind of things happens in movies. You'll know. You know that last act of the movie where it's the climax, the whole story, the whole movie's been building up to.

It's that part of the movie that you're not going to just pause and go make a cup of coffee. You're going to watch it until it's finished. You're going to see it through. Well, as we saw earlier in that video, when we open up our Bibles, we read an incredible story. The true story of God's relationship with human beings throughout history.

[1 : 11] The story which all our little stories are a part of. The big story of our world. And it's a story that has a lot of different chapters, different phases in God's dealings with humans and his plan to rescue people from sin and to fix this world. Chapters in the story that cover thousands and thousands of years.

Of course, we know that the key chapter to the whole story is Jesus coming into our world and dying for sins. That's the key chapter, but that's not the final chapter.

The final chapter is the one that we are living today. Following the ascension of Jesus into heaven, we saw last week, the world has now entered into the very last phase of human history.

The last phase of God's plan. And it's here in Acts chapter 2 on the day of Pentecost, which is the beginning of this final chapter of human history.

It's here that we discover what that means for us today, that we're living in this final phase, what it means for our lives. And so turn with me to Acts chapter 2.

[2 : 27] Have a look from the beginning of the passage. So from verse 1 to 13, which was that first section John read for us, we read about some amazing events that happened on that day as the disciples of Jesus were gathering together on the Jewish holiday of Pentecost.

Suddenly a sound like a blowing of a violent wind came from heaven. And then verse 3, they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

Very weird things going on. But you see, wind and fire were always, throughout the Bible, they were symbols of the presence of God. And so what's happening here is that God is literally visiting these disciples in a very special way.

God is coming and making his presence known amongst these followers of Jesus. So why? Why does God come and make his presence known? What's the purpose? Well, we see the purpose in the very next thing that happened.

Verse 4, all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. And so here we have the first recorded instance of the gift of tongues.

[3 : 38] But I want you to notice something about this gift. It wasn't as commonly understood today. It wasn't just unintelligible ecstatic speech. They were actually speaking proper human languages.

Do you notice that? So verse 5, now they were staying in Jerusalem, God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard the sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment because each one heard their own language being spoken.

And so this gift that the disciples got that day, the gift of tongues, was in fact a supernatural ability to speak in foreign languages that they hadn't learned.

And we also see, as we read on, that God gave them this gift for a reason. So have a look from verse 7. Utterly amazed, they asked, aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?

Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamines, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the parts of Libya near Cyrene.

[4 : 44] Visitors from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans, and Arabs. Notice, we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongue, in our own language.

And so as we read that, it becomes clear, doesn't it, why God gave them this supernatural ability. You see, the disciples, in their time that they spent with Jesus, what had they seen?

What did they experience? Well, they experienced the wonders of God in the ministry of Jesus Christ. First hand, they'd seen Jesus' miracles, and they'd seen his resurrection from the dead.

And now, as eyewitnesses, they needed to declare those wonders of God. They needed to declare what they had seen to everyone around them. And so, because those gathered around were from all over the known world, God enables the disciples instantly to speak all their different languages, because what they had to say was that important.

You see, so this supernatural miracle actually points to the importance of the message, the wonders of God that they're declaring. You know, it's the same as when you see a warning sign.

[5 : 57] You know, you see those big orange or yellow warning signs, say for an electric fence. You'll notice that it's written in a whole lot of different languages, isn't it? Now, why is that? Well, because it's vital that no one misses the message.

It's vital that everyone who reads the sign is able to understand it. It's literally a matter of life or death when it comes to kind of an electric fence or something like that. And so, it's the same with the message the disciples were carrying, you see?

It was so important that no one could afford to miss out, and so God made sure everyone there got to hear it by giving the disciples this supernatural ability to speak their languages.

But, even then, we read on, not everyone realized what was going on. So, from verse 12, amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, what does this mean?

Some, however, made fun of them and said, well, they have had too much wine. I mean, they probably did sound like a bunch of drunk men. You can picture it all standing there, speaking all these different languages simultaneously.

[6 : 58] It would have been quite a scene. But Peter, of course, corrects those making fun. Verse 4, fellow Jews and all who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you. Listen carefully. These people are not drunk, as you suppose.

It's only 9 in the morning. Okay, clearly he had not been to South Africa because he assumes nobody gets drunk at 9 in the morning, which, unfortunately, is not the case here.

But it was there in Jerusalem. That definitely wasn't the reason for what was happening, says Peter. No, there's another reason. There's another explanation for what's going on.

And then he quotes from the Old Testament to explain what's going on. Listen to what he says. Verse 16. 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.

[8 : 04] All right. The dreams and visions that Joel, the prophet, was talking about were all associated with Old Testament prophets. Prophets were people who God gave special revelations to, special messages that he wanted the world to know.

And they were his mouthpieces, the prophets. They had special insights into God and his work in the world, which were invisible to others. And so that's why the prophets had to come and take these messages to people.

And they got these revelations from God through the Holy Spirit in dreams and visions. But the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament only ever came to a few select people who God chose to be his messengers.

But then Joel, himself a prophet, prophesies a time that he calls the last days when God would pour out his spirit on all people.

In other words, all over the world. And there would be prophets everywhere, left, right, and center. It wouldn't just be a few select people. There would be prophets wherever you go. Now, Peter, at Pentecost, is now saying, that's what's happening here.

[9 : 21] Joel's prophecy is coming true. God is pouring out his spirit, and all who receive that spirit are able to prophesy. In other words, are able to tell people about God and his work in the world that they didn't know before.

Which is precisely what his disciples were now doing as they shared the gospel in all these different languages. They were telling people about God and his work in the world, things that they had not known before when they were sharing this gospel message.

But you see, Joel said, all of this is going to happen in the last days. That's when this prophecy is going to come true. And so, from this encounter in Acts chapter 2, we learn two very important things this morning.

First, this confirms that the last days have indeed begun when the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost 2,000 years ago.

We are living in the last days. The final chapter in God's plan to save the world is unfolding in our world today. That's the first thing we learn.

[10 : 26] But secondly, we learn that the primary activity of these last days will be people all over the world who have received God's Spirit prophesying.

There will be prophets all over the place. That is, people who are sharing the revelation of who God is and what he's done. Which means, if you're a Christian, in other words, if you have received the Holy Spirit, you are one of those prophets that Joel was talking about thousands of years ago.

Because God has given you a special revelation about himself. Not through dreams or visions, but through the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is God's ultimate revelation.

The gospel is God's final message for the world. And he's poured out his Spirit in these last days on people all over the world to be prophets of that message. And that's what Christians are today.

If you're a Christian, you have a message from God that the world needs to hear. And so how are you going to tell them?

[11 : 41] How do you share that message? That God has given you, the gospel that you know and believe in. How do you share that? You see, it's the most important thing that we can do while we're on this planet.

And yet most Christians don't even know where to start. And maybe you're one of them. And you admit that. Maybe you feel just totally under-equipped in this task of sharing the gospel.

If the opportunity came to tell someone about Jesus, you wouldn't know where to start. Is that you this morning? Well, that is why we're running, as John was saying earlier, we're running this course, this term in our Bible studies, the course called Two Ways to Live.

And that's why, if you haven't been going consistently to a Bible study up until now, you should, at least in this term, you should go to this course to be equipped to do your job as a Christian, to know the gospel and be able to share it.

There's nothing more important than you can do in your life if you're a Christian. You know, God has left us in this broken world for that one reason.

[12 : 48] In this world of earthquakes and xenophobia and violence, why are we still here? Because we have a message to share. And so each of us need to know how to share that.

But even before that, before you can share the gospel, it's vital that you first know the gospel, isn't it? You can't share the gospel if you don't know it.

Every Christian should know the foundational ingredients of what make up the gospel message. You know, imagine you're asked to make a cake, but you don't even know the first ingredients. You don't know what on earth it's made of.

You wouldn't get that far making a cake, would you? And it's the same with the gospel message. If you're ever going to be effective at sharing that message with your friends and family, you need to know the main ingredients of it.

And what's great about Acts chapter 2 is it's right here in Peter's speech at Pentecost that we see each of those major ingredients. And so for the rest of our time this morning, I just briefly want to extract from this passage three key ingredients of the gospel message.

[13 : 50] And so are you ready for them? Let's have a look. The key ingredients of the gospel message. Firstly, the facts. The facts.

Whenever we communicate the gospel message, we need to start with the facts, don't we? That's exactly what Peter goes on to do. So have a look at verse 22. Fellow Israelites, listen to this.

Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did among you through him. As you yourselves know, this man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge.

And you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

And so you see what Peter's doing here? He's starting by laying out the facts, the historical facts. The man Jesus, his life, his miracles, his death, and his resurrection. That's the start, the fact.

[14 : 49] But Peter doesn't stop there. He then goes on to prove that these facts are in fact true by calling in witnesses. And his first witness, from verse 25, is King David, who as a prophet, wrote about Jesus hundreds of years before Jesus actually came.

And David prophesied that this man Jesus, this Messiah, would rise from the dead. And that was, in fact, just one of the many prophecies in the Old Testament about the coming of Jesus.

All of which serve as proof, witnesses, of who Jesus is before he even came. You know, our Bible is packed in the Old Testament with prophecies and stories about Jesus hundreds of years before he came.

And those serve as witnesses, proof that when he came, the prophecies validate who he is. And that's Peter's first witness. King David, who represents kind of all the prophecies of the Old Testament about Jesus.

But then Peter's second witness, I wonder if you noticed it, his second witness he calls in are in fact the disciples, the very disciples who are standing around him. Look at verse 32. He says, God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of it.

[16 : 05] And so not only were the facts of Jesus spoken about in the Old Testament, but we have eyewitnesses that they really happened. And as Christians today, we must never forget that.

We must never forget that our faith in the gospel is based on facts, on historical evidence. You know, it's not only the evidence that we have in our Old Testaments, thousands and thousands of years of prophecy, but also the evidence of the eyewitness accounts written by people who were there in our Bibles.

You see, the message we are to share is not some abstract religious idea. It's facts. Facts about Jesus, who he was, and what he did on earth.

That's where the gospel starts. That's the foundation of it. But, that's not all. Peter doesn't just tell people about what Jesus did and stop there. He also then goes on to explain what that means.

In other words, the results of those facts. So that's the second ingredient, the results. You see, the message of Jesus' life and death and resurrection doesn't make any sense unless a person knows what it means for them, what it means for you, what it means for us today.

[17 : 20] And so that's what Peter then goes on to describe towards the end, there in verse 38. Have a look what he says. Peter replied, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And there in a summary, we have the ultimate results for us today of the life and work of Jesus 2,000 years ago. Forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

That's the summary of what Jesus has done for us today. And notice that each of those two things is made possible by the two facts of what Jesus did on earth.

You see, forgiveness of sins is only possible because Jesus died as a human for human sins. So that if you are a Christian, you can know that your sins against God have been paid for, they have been washed away, and so the way to God and the way to life is now completely open for you if you put your trust in Christ.

Forgiveness of sins is completely washed away. But, that's not the only thing. More than that, the second result of Jesus' work is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[18 : 41] You see that? And so where forgiveness washes us clean of our past sins, the Holy Spirit helps us to steer clear of future sins and to live the way God calls us to.

And that is only possible, why? Because of the fact that Jesus rose from the dead and is alive today working through the Holy Spirit in us, in His people.

And so you see that we have the two major results for us today of what Jesus did when He was here. Forgiveness and the Holy Spirit.

Also known as justification and sanctification. The theological terms. And so those are in a summary the results for us today if we are Christians.

The results of Jesus' death and resurrection. But Peter doesn't stop there. There is now one final ingredient that Peter includes in explaining the gospel to people and that is the response.

[19 : 45] The third ingredient. Look at verse 37. when the people heard this they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the apostles brothers what shall we do?

What shall we do? You see they realized that if all of this was true they need to respond to it. They need to do something about it. And if you believe this is true the death and resurrection of Jesus that has earned forgiveness of sins in the Holy Spirit.

if you know that to be true you should be asking what must I do about it? What is the right response? You know people need to realize today as we share the gospel with them that the gospel message can't just be heard it must be responded to.

You can't just come to church and hear the gospel and go home you need to respond to it. And so what is the right response to the gospel message? Well Peter tells them in verse 38 in answer to their question Peter replies repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ.

So first to repent is the first part of the response and repent just means to change direction that's what the word means to change direction in our lives to recognize that we are heading in the wrong way and to turn back to God and live his way that's what it means to repent.

[21 : 10] And then the second is to be baptized and baptism is the sign of trusting God's promise to wash away our sins signified by the flowing of water and it's also baptism is also the sign that enters us into the new community of believers.

That's what baptism signifies. And so you see these two responses repent and be baptized actually they go hand in hand you can't have one without the other. it's by being part of God's community God's family that you are helped and supported to keep turning to God and living to him in repentance.

And so that in summary is the response to the gospel repent and be baptized but notice in closing how Peter summarizes all of this at the end of his sermon in verse 40 and this is important he says save yourselves from this corrupt generation.

That's really the summary of Peter's call to people in responding to the gospel. Save yourselves from this corrupt generation. He pleaded with them save yourselves from this corrupt generation.

You see what he's saying here is vital. He's saying that in order to be saved into God's family into his people you first need to be saved out of the world and its priorities.

[22 : 38] And this is a key part of responding to the gospel because I think too many Christians have one foot in the kingdom and one foot in the world still chasing after worldly goals and desires chasing after happiness the worldly way but you see Peter is saying to be saved we must save ourselves from this world.

now that doesn't mean we must leave the world but it does mean as Jesus puts it we must be in the world but not of the world not share its priorities and goals and focuses.

It means living no longer for ourselves and our desires but for Jesus and the mission that he has given us. You see Peter is saying the Christian life is all or nothing.

To be in God's people you need to be out of the world. You need to turn around. Turn your life completely around and live for Jesus. That's what being a Christian is. It's all or nothing.

And so there in summary we have the gospel message. Just to review we've got two main facts the death and the resurrection of Jesus which leads to two main results the forgiveness that he gives us through his death and the gift of the spirit he gives us being alive today and then we have two main responses repentance and baptism out of the world and into God's new people.

[24 : 11] And so I leave you with one question this morning. Have you properly responded to the gospel message? you may know the facts you may even understand the results of what Jesus did but perhaps you've still not responded perhaps you've still not changed direction out of this world and entered into God's people through baptism and decided to follow Jesus come what may and so if you have not done that then speak to me please speak to me because there's only so much time that God has given to give you a chance to respond to the gospel make sure you do before it's too late save yourselves from this corrupt generation let's pray heavenly father we are reminded this morning that we are living in the last days and we thank you for pouring out your spirit for establishing in every country of the world

Christians who are there to declare the gospel message oh Lord help us here at St. Mark's in Plumstead to declare the gospel message like we should help us to do the job that you've put us here for help us to know the gospel help us to believe it help us to respond to it in repentance and faith and then we pray Lord help us to share that message with all we come across for your glory in Jesus name Amen the gospel to have a love on their band and to have a Nolan in Jesus brings together