

Living in the Last Days  
Acts 2:14-21

We just finished a series called “Hope of Heaven,” in which we contemplated what heaven will be like. We learned, for example, that heaven will be like a city, but not one of bricks and mortar. It will be a city made up of people in perfect union with God. It will be bigger than we can comprehend, and in it there will be no more suffering, no more tears, no more injustice. Only joy and peace. It will be the restoration of the created order. It will be the way things *ought to be*.

But what about now? What about this earth, this life we’re living day to day?

In Acts chapter 2 the Apostle Peter explains the context in which we now live. He calls it “The Last Days,” and he lays out for us the power, the tools and the mission we’ve been given as we move closer and closer to that final day, when the hope of heaven will become a reality.

Read Acts 2:14-21

***<sup>14</sup> Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and shouted to the crowd, “Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this. <sup>15</sup> These people are not drunk, as some of you are assuming. Nine o’clock in the morning is much too early for that. <sup>16</sup> No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel:***

***<sup>17</sup> ‘In the last days,’ God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. <sup>18</sup> In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants—men and women alike—and they will prophesy. <sup>19</sup> And I will cause wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below—blood and fire and clouds of smoke. <sup>20</sup> The sun will become dark, and the moon will turn blood red before that great and glorious day of the LORD arrives. <sup>21</sup> But everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.’***

This story took place on the Day of Pentecost, the end of a Jewish festival which celebrated the first fruits of the harvest. Peter, the rest of Jesus’ 12 apostles and several other followers of Christ had been waiting, as Jesus instructed, to see a promise fulfilled—the Holy Spirit, the *living presence of the power of God*, poured out upon them as a sign and seal of this messianic age, these “Last Days” between the time of Jesus’ coming and the time of His return. This outpouring had *just happened* when Peter began his speech to the “Jews and residents of Jerusalem.” After the disciples had been filled with the Holy Spirit, they entered into the public square and began celebrating, shouting out, and *speaking so that everyone could understand them in their own language*. In this energized confusion people in the crowd (larger than usual due to the Jewish festival) began speculating on what all the jubilation was about. The dominant theme: “They’re *drunk!*” Then Peter, probably in lighthearted response to a lighthearted accusation, replied “We *can’t* be drunk! It’s only 9:00 in the morning!! Then he launched into one of the most powerful and effective addresses in recorded history, starting with the words you read today.

1. Write down what you know of the Apostle Peter. If you need a refresher, here are some key passages in Peter’s life: Luke 22:31-34, Luke 22:54-60, John 21:2-7 and 15-17.

2. Peter was a simple fisherman, a blue collar worker who had followed Jesus, often putting his foot in his mouth and ultimately even *denying* Jesus three times the night before his crucifixion. What’s so striking about verse 14 in light of who Peter was? Where did he start, where did he end up, and what do you think changed his life?

3. Based on the Peter's experience, what would you say are some features of a true salvation experience? What happens to a person's priorities? Priorities? Vision for life? Risk tolerance?

4. Who "stood up" with Peter as he began his address? What does that say about the way we, as Christians, are to live and minister?

Peter stood up and "shouted out" to the crowd, saying listen carefully, Jews and residents of Jerusalem..." This would've been known to the Hellenistic (Greek) culture as the formal way orators addressed an audience. Peter wasn't just shouting out. He was making a statement about the gravity and philosophical validity of what he was about to say. He was communicating with the culture in a way they understood.

***Read vv. 15-17a*** <sup>15</sup> *These people are not drunk, as some of you are assuming. Nine o'clock in the morning is much too early for that.* <sup>16</sup> *No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel:* <sup>17</sup> *'In the last days,' God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people.'*

Here Peter quotes the prophet Joel from generations before. The passage can be found in Joel 2:28-32. Again, it's striking that Peter, an uneducated fisherman, not only holds this intimate knowledge of Jewish scripture but is able to exegete it—to draw out its meaning in light of this historical context. He makes an adjustment in the translation, changing "in the days following" to "In the last days." For his audience he expands on the theme of Joel, who wrote to ancient Israel, and demonstrates how this prophecy was both for them in their circumstance *and* was descriptive of the grander context, of this ushering in of a new messianic age, evidenced by the death and resurrection of Jesus (the Messiah) and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The concept of the "Last Days" appears in many other places in the Scriptures: Isaiah 2:2; Hosea 3:5; Micah 4:1; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1; Hebrews 1:2; 1 Peter 1:20; 1 John 2:18

5. When you read the phrase "in the last days" in the Bible, what comes to mind? What do you think characterizes "the last days?"

6. What are the *implications* of the idea that we're "living in the last days?" What does that mean to you in everyday life? How does it influence your decisions about family, security, career, material things?

7. What do you think it means when God says "I will pour out my Spirit on all people?" If the Holy Spirit enters a person when he or she repents and receives Christ as savior, what do you think this means here—that God pours out His Spirit on *all people*?

***Read vv. 17b-18*** *Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams.* <sup>18</sup> *In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants—men and women alike—and they will prophesy.*

8. In your understanding, what happens when the Holy Spirit is “poured out.” What is the evidence of this?
  
9. In your understanding, what is “prophecy?”
  
10. What do you think it means, in this context, to “dream dreams?”
  
11. What purpose do/did these kinds of activity—prophecy and dreams—serve?

The Holy Spirit is *the living presence of the power of God*. The Holy Spirit lives and moves and works in us, through us and in spite of us to carry out God’s gospel plan, His work to restore His creation. The Holy Spirit “fills” a new believer, taking up residence in our hearts. But He also “fills” people for specific tasks or moments in time to accomplish his unique purposes. The Holy Spirit has also been “poured out” in a unique way during these “last days,” this Messianic Age, as a “sign and seal” of God’s covenant to save the World through Christ. The Holy Spirit “fills the earth” during this age in an active way not previously understood before Christ’s resurrection and ascension to heaven. The Holy Spirit does not discriminate. He is available to and works in the lives of all people, no matter what their race, gender, age or social status. Finally, the Holy Spirit is God’s *proof*, his evidence that Christ is at work on this earth and will return in power and justice to fix what’s broken, to make all things eternally new. Followers of Christ have ready access to this power.

12. Have you accessed the power of the Holy Spirit? In every circumstance, ask the Holy Spirit to “fill you” for the task at hand. Write down a “moment” or task coming up in your near future in which you need the filling of the Holy Spirit to succeed. Pray for that.

***Read vv. 19-20 And I will cause wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below—blood and fire and clouds of smoke.<sup>20</sup> The sun will become dark, and the moon will turn blood red before that great and glorious day of the LORD arrives.***

These “signs and wonders” are common ancient biblical language used to describe the “end times.” They are quoted here by Peter, again, to point to this new age and to the growing urgency for following Christ. They are a formal way the Jewish community would’ve understood to say “The signs are upon us.” We’ve seen what we need to see. The One we’ve been looking for has come, and the wheels of this Messianic Age are in motion. The end is imminent.”

***Read v. 21 But everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.”***

13. What is God's purpose in all this? Why the laws, the ceremonies, the temple, the miracles, the prophecies, the Savior, the sending of the Holy Spirit, the "signs and wonders," the Church? What is God's purpose for His creation?

14. What does "salvation" mean in terms of ALL of God's creation?

-Morally (how we stand before God):

-Socially (think Justice, mercy):

-Physically (think human suffering, disease, death):

*We are living in the Last Days. God is working out the salvation of not just us but of His entire creation. He has sent His Holy Spirit to us to encourage, equip and empower us for this work. It's the only work that matters.*

*Go to [www.riovistachurch.com](http://www.riovistachurch.com), click on "resources," and get the "Find Your Thing, Do Your Thing" packet. Work through it to see if you're well aligned, in this season of your life, to use your gifts, skills and resources to be a part of this "Last Days" activity—the building of this City of Heaven. Are you "doing your thing" alongside your community of faith, as Peter and the disciples were on that Day of Pentecost, to help bring about the moral, social and physical salvation of this world?*