

# Acts 2:38

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Presently, we all file into a large meeting room. Though I can't understand their words, people fellowship in animated talk . . . joyous really. We pray and then sing a worship chorus. The translator echoes the emcee who is saying something like, "We are here for one reason, for God to speak to us about how to have revival in this region."

We sing another chorus, and after some housekeeping announcements, the first speaker is introduced. His name is Mark Shutes. He reads a couple Scripture verses and begins to talk about miracles. The teacher then says, "Rather than simply give scriptural teaching about principles on healing, I want to show you how to pray for people."

We are engaged, and when he invites whoever needs a miracle to come to the front, four or five people approach and describe their needs. He quietly lays his hand on their foreheads in turn. Though there is no fanfare, two things happen. First, significant miracles of healing take place. Second, faith rises, and people begin to believe the miracles from the Book of Acts are not so distant after all.

I am the third speaker. My assigned task is to affirm how the Book of Acts can be a pattern for us to live. Though several different language groups are represented, the common language is Russian. I should say, it is the language everyone else has in common but me and a few others. I am totally dependent on my Russian translator. My PowerPoint slides have been translated into Russian, so I am hoping they say the right thing. I ask, "What was Christ's mission?" They look at me, supposing I will give them the answer.

I click the next slide, and something appears in Russian. I say, "John the Baptist introduced Jesus in a very specific way." The translator rattles off a couple sentences in Russian. I assume he is saying something close to what I just said in English and what appears on the slide. I continue,

“Why do we call John, ‘John the Baptist?’” I answer my own question. “Because he baptized people in water.” While the translator is speaking, I begin to worry some. Do they call him John the Baptist in Russian? For my sake, I hope so.

My turn again, so I repeat myself, hoping it makes sense. “We call him John the Baptist because he baptized. That was the central focus of John’s ministry.” A Russian echo follows. I wait and then continue when it is my turn. “According to John, while his own ministry was to baptize with water, the very purpose of Jesus’ ministry is to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” I repeat this several times. I don’t know if it is effective. To further emphasize the point, I have members of the audience read parallel Scriptures in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all saying the same thing. For good measure I throw in the two times it is mentioned in Acts.<sup>1</sup> I say it again, “Jesus’ ministry was to baptize with the Holy Ghost.” Most audience members are taking notes.

Then I ask the question, “How many people did Jesus baptize with the Holy Spirit in His earthly ministry?” They look at me, waiting for me to answer the rhetorical question. I respond, “No one, not any, zilch, none.” The translator simply repeats the same Russian word four times. *So much for emphasis*, I muse. *I am going to have to learn how to do this better.*

Then something happens that hasn’t happened to either of the two previous speakers. A man raises his hand. I call on him. Russian words ensue. He is animated, troubled about something. The interpreter says to me, “He wants to know about the woman at the well. Jesus said He would give her living water. What about her? Didn’t she receive the Holy Ghost during Jesus’ ministry?”

“That’s a great question,” I say. “Jesus did promise living water, and by living water, He did mean the Holy Spirit.” My translator offers an equivalent sentence in Russian.

I continue, “Jesus was speaking proleptically.” Now the interpreter looks at me. He can’t translate this into Russian because he has no idea what the word means in English.

I work to be understood. “Proleptic means speaking in the present tense about something that will happen in the future.” He says something in Russian. As far as I can discern, everyone in the room is now confused. I try another tack. I offer, “Not only did Jesus speak to the woman at the well about living water in John chapter 4; He spoke of living water at the feast of the dedication of the Temple in John chapter 7.” A Russian translation follows. I continue, “In John 7:38, Jesus cried, ‘He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ In the next verse, John explains Jesus was speaking of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

They look. I can’t tell if they understand. “No one could receive the Holy Spirit yet, for Jesus was not yet glorified. He spoke in the present tense of a future promise, one He guaranteed to be fulfilled! Think of it,” I say. “Jesus had to die, be buried, rise again, and ascend into Heaven. Only after He was glorified could the Holy Spirit be poured out.” The man who asked the question speaks to the man next to him. I don’t know if he is asking or answering a question. They don’t ask me anything.

I continue, “Through Jesus’ work on the cross, the Holy Spirit would be available in a new way—in a way no one had ever experienced before. He would restore us to God through Calvary. Then the Spirit would be poured out, just as it says in the Book of Acts.”

Still they look. Maybe less confused. Yet, no illumination in their eyes. In desperation, I try something else. I say, “Do you know what is going on in John chapter 7?” They wait for me to tell them. I pronounce, “The Jewish people were

celebrating that Moses gave them water from the rock in the wilderness. To celebrate, they had a wonderful ceremony. They took water from the pool of Siloam and formed a procession all the way to the Temple, singing and worshipping along the way.”

I get into a kind of rhythm with the translator. I say, “Yet, they were celebrating something else as well! They were not simply remembering the past. They were celebrating the future. They knew when the Messiah came, He too would give them living water.

“Jesus witnessed the procession. People were emotional as they sang and worshiped. Waiting for the Messiah. Waiting for the age of the Spirit. They lined up on both sides of the road as the priest passed them carrying a golden urn of water. One side of the street sang, ‘With joy we draw water,’ and the other side echoed ‘from the wells of salvation.’<sup>2</sup>

“But something was not right!” I say. “They were looking for a future Messiah, all the while Jesus stood right there! The Messiah would die for their sins. He would rise from the dead and go to Heaven. It was He who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit—that is, with living water. Jesus did this on the Day of Pentecost, the birthday of the church.”

A sudden inspiration hits me. I pick up a pot sitting beside the door. I say, “Okay, you on this side of the room, you sing ‘With joy we draw water,’ and you on the other side of the room, you sing ‘from the wells of salvation.’” The translator conveys this request, and more suddenly than I could have expected, they find a tune and sing it in Russian. First one side, then the other. I hold the pot high swinging it back and forth. They are still singing, and I start walking. Suddenly before I can think too much about it or feel stupid, we start moving in a kind of procession, singing and celebrating. They are following me, singing to each other and laughing. I am holding up the pot, swinging it back and

forth. And then, something happens I never expected. The presence of the Lord suddenly falls on the room and they accidentally understand what I couldn't quite convey—that because of the work of Christ, something new is possible that wasn't possible before. God will come near, and He will draw us to Himself and fill us with His Spirit.

Later that night a speaker makes the miraculous simple. He says, “You already have enough faith. Jesus died for your sins. He died for your healing. He died to give you living water. The same God who met you at your greatest need is here to meet you once again and empower you to change the world.”

I look at their faces. They believe. The speaker has already read in Acts where the Spirit fell in the upper room, and where they spoke in a language they had not learned as the “Spirit gave them utterance.” He continues, “This is not just a story of what happened long ago but what happens as well in the present.”

He then invites anyone who wants this life-changing experience to come forward. Almost everyone comes. One after another, as ministers lay hands on them, their faces light up in delight. They, too, are filled with the Spirit like in Acts and speak praises in another language they do not know.

It is difficult to express in concrete terms what is happening; impossible to quantify by any sort of ordinary computation. No instrument in the world can assess when someone's heart is filled with peace; no x-ray to gauge when our awe of God escalates; no barometer to measure newfound joy. Yet, this night the sweet presence of the Lord washes us with such peace and joy that any explanation is inadequate.

I look at the audience. These are quiet people; most with dark hair and eyes, bearing even expressions. They are not loud or outwardly exuberant. Yet, their delight and

wonder are almost tangible, their joy physically present in their radiant faces.

When service is over, the kitchen has a light snack prepared. Then, instead of heading to our rooms, some of us go down to the water. Standing on a dock that stretches out over the lake, we look up at stars shining brilliantly in an otherwise black night. I can see my breath. Yet, despite the crisp fall air, everyone is laughing and joking.

I fellowship in a new way via a translator. He not only interprets what I say, but also translates conversations others are having around me. They poke fun at each other, offering silly jokes about oppression and difficulties. I am not sure what I expected, but they are neither downtrodden nor discouraged. Quite the opposite. They are content. They are home. God is with them. All of this is beyond what I can fully understand or anything I have previously known. But I know one thing: I love them.

The next day, I speak a couple times. That evening, the speaker teaches on the power present in the name of Jesus, how every believer can pray for and receive healing and miracles in Jesus' name. Then, after showing them how all the people in Acts were baptized in the name of Jesus, he invites the group to experience the same thing. They understand, and all want to be baptized.

We go from our meeting and head outside toward a building with a pool. I see my breath, shiver as we walk, and wonder if the pool is heated. No one else is concerned. They are animated, laughing and talking. When we enter the pool house and take off our shoes, I discover what everyone else already knows. Not only is the pool heated; the whole floor has heat emanating from under the ceramic tiles. People joyfully make their way into the pool as they prepare to get baptized. The water splashes up on the ceramic tile and runs toward me. I step back so as not to get my socks wet.

Because of the high ceiling, the room echoes prayers and songs in a tongue I do not understand. Something new is happening, for the singing gets louder and more energetic. They are expressing joy in ways new to me. People are even giggling, and I am confused, for this seems to violate their culture. Then it comes to me. It's a party. A kind of holy party. The presence of the Lord sweeps through the room as the baptizing minister invokes the message of Acts 2:38 in another language, "I baptize you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins."

After they are baptized, some stay in the pool, praying for each other and praising and laughing. Some embrace in the water, and then, lost in the moment, they get out of the pool and hug everybody. They are not even drying off. Water is going everywhere. My socks get wet, and I am resigned to it, feeling God's dynamic presence. Unexpectedly, someone embraces me, laughing and crying as pool water runs down my suit pants and soaks my feet. I go with it, for by this time I no longer care. It feels like I am in Heaven.