

The Power for Mission

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Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[0 : 0 0] Well, most of us will have been on holiday in another country where they don't speak our language. But I wonder if you've ever had the experience of being in another country and bumping into somebody, another country where they speak a foreign language, and bumping into somebody who comes from the same place as you.

I had this strange experience once when I was in Berlin Central Train Station, and I bumped into somebody who was from Aberdeen. I could hear the distinct tones of their accent from across the station, across the central bit, and I could hear the Doric, which for the uneducated is basically the dialect that people in Aberdeen and the Northeast speak.

So this person was spicking the spick, as they say, and I recognized them, and it was great to go over and meet somebody from Aberdeen. I'm surprised, but also delighted to hear my mother tongue being spoken somewhere else.

Now, something similar to this happens in our Bible reading when the Holy Spirit comes on the day of Pentecost. Because when a large crowd had gathered, as David read, the people were amazed to hear languages being spoken, their own languages being spoken from people they least expected.

Now, we've called our series, In Acts, To the Ends of the Earth, and it comes from Jesus' words in Acts chapter 1, verse 8, where Jesus says, So essentially, the book of Acts traces how the risen Lord Jesus, through his church and by the power of the Holy Spirit, accomplishes God's saving purposes in this world.

[1 : 5 8] And so here in Acts chapter 2, the power for the church's mission to the world comes with the Holy Spirit. Because there's no human explanation for how this small group of believers, just after the death and resurrection of Jesus, how they became the most powerful force in the Roman Empire.

Because the church, with its message of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, essentially turned the world upside down. And it was through the power of the Holy Spirit.

And so today we're going to look at the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. And it is really the continuation of Jesus' work in this world. The risen Jesus, the ascended Jesus, now continues to work through the Spirit.

And so where the Spirit came upon the church, and when the Spirit came upon the church, he enabled God's people to speak in languages that they had never learned, as witnesses to Jesus.

And so this is a significant moment in God's saving purposes for this world. And so we're going to look at this under three headings this afternoon. The first is how the Spirit came.

[3 : 1 2] Second, when the Spirit came. And then third, why the Spirit came. So how the Holy Spirit came. First of all, the supernatural phenomena. Verse 1 to 4. So something extraordinary is taking place.

We heard that in our reading. And it's extraordinary because this is the next stage of redemptive history. In other words, the next stage of what God is doing in his world.

And so it's hardly surprising then that there are these supernatural elements to it. So in verse 1 we read, when the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

Now there was already a day of Pentecost. Pentecost means 50th, because it was 50 days after the Passover. And so it was a special day in the Old Testament.

It was called the Feast of the Firstfruits. And it celebrated the firstfruits of the harvest. And the firstfruits, of course, indicates that there is more to come.

[4 : 14] And so this is appropriate for the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, indicating that the Spirit's coming would bring the firstfruits of the spiritual harvest across this world, as the gospel of Jesus Christ would advance out into the world and down through history.

And so the coming of the Spirit was accompanied by sudden supernatural phenomena from heaven. So let's see what that is.

Verse 2 to 4. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues. As the Spirit enabled them. So notice there were three observable wonders.

First, the Spirit came like wind. Second, the Spirit came like tongues of fire. And then third, the Spirit enabled the believers to speak in other tongues.

[5 : 21] So wind, fire, tongues. Now you notice that it was a sound like the blowing of a violent wind. And it was what seemed to be tongues of fire.

And perhaps it's described in this way simply because of the supernatural nature of it all. Because in the Old Testament, wind and fire were often signs of God's presence.

Wind was a sign of God's presence as Spirit. In fact, the biblical words for Spirit in the Hebrew and Greek can both refer to wind or to breath.

And they convey this sense of motion, of power, of energy and of life. And so the imagery here echoes the creation. Remember, where the Spirit of God hovered over the waters.

And that's suggesting to us that something new is happening here. This is the beginning of a new age and the coming of the Spirit. And then fire. Fire in the Old Testament was also a sign of God's presence.

[6 : 24] Especially in his blazing holiness and his purity. And yet now we're being told that God's presence comes and fills his people. And it's the baptism of the Holy Spirit that Jesus spoke about in Acts chapter 1 verse 5.

And it's also the coming of the Holy Spirit that Jesus said would happen in Acts chapter 1 verse 8. And so what Jesus had promised is now being fulfilled.

The believers were filled with the Holy Spirit as the next stage of God's saving purposes for this world. And what's the result? Well, we read that they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

But what does it mean that they began to speak in other tongues? Well, the word translated tongues can also be translated as language.

And that's the sense the word has here in Acts chapter 2 and also in verse 11 later on in our reading. And so as the believers are filled with the Holy Spirit, they could speak in other languages.

[7 : 33] And so this is different from the tongues that we read about in 1 Corinthians, spoken in the Corinthian church, which had to be interpreted in order for them to be understood. So here in Acts chapter 2, the Holy Spirit comes in this unique supernatural way, just as Jesus said he would.

And so Pentecost is a unique event in God's purposes. And while Luke uses different terms to describe the coming of the Spirit, they don't describe different experiences of the Spirit.

So if you look down, Acts chapter 1 verse 5, we read of being baptized with the Holy Spirit. Acts chapter 1 verse 8, it says, When the Holy Spirit comes on you.

In Acts chapter 2 verse 4 in a reading, it speaks about all of them being filled with the Holy Spirit. In Acts chapter 2 verse 38, later on in Peter's sermon, it says, You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So what do we see? The Holy Spirit baptizes, he comes on, he fills, and he is received. All of which is essentially describing the same experience, where you can't really distinguish between them.

[8 : 49] And so all the believers on the day of Pentecost were baptized or filled with the Holy Spirit. And so when some would speak of baptism of the Holy Spirit today, we're not to misunderstand what that means.

It's not some kind of second experience of the Holy Spirit that comes after somebody is a Christian. And so to suggest that there's some kind of post-conversion experience of the Spirit that you need in order to be a proper Christian is to misunderstand true conversion.

Because becoming a Christian or being saved is when the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the life of the believer. Which is a great assurance.

It's wonderful whether you've been a Christian for a very short time or for a very long time. You are filled with the Holy Spirit. And so the same Holy Spirit first poured out at Pentecost now dwells in every believer.

The Spirit works and he unites us to Christ and immerses us in all of his benefits. And so while Pentecost was a unique experience for the early believers, it was also a unique moment in God's work.

[10 : 14] But because of its uniqueness, that doesn't mean that we don't share in the work of the Holy Spirit today. Abraham Kuyper, who was former Dutch theologian and Prime Minister of the Netherlands, he gave a good illustration of the experience of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and then afterwards.

And so he describes a city without a proper water system. Where the citizens of the city are drinking water from their own cisterns. There's no central water supply to them.

But then a reservoir is built in the city so that water can be supplied into every home. And then one day the work is complete and the water can run through this great elaborate system of pipes and into every house.

And so the main distribution of the water took place once on the opening day of the waterworks. But it continued to supply water for every new house that ended up being built in that city.

Because when new houses came, the new connections were made to the same water system. And so they would receive the same running water just like the rest of the city.

[11 : 28] There's no need to repeat the opening day of the waterworks. It already happened. But then everybody gets the ongoing benefit of what took place on that day.

And so Kuyper is describing the opening of the waterworks as essentially the day of Pentecost. It's a one-off, unique event for the believers at the time. But one that has continued to benefit every believer ever since.

And so as we read about the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 2, some of what happened has never been repeated, whereas some aspects have.

Because while the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost is a once-for-all event, being baptized with the Holy Spirit is the experience of every believer.

And that's why we shouldn't get too distracted by the supernatural phenomena. As we need to look next at what happened when the Spirit came. So first, how the Spirit came, the supernatural phenomena.

[12 : 33] Second, when the Spirit came, the international crowd. And verse 5 to 11. So we understand why the tongues were in other languages when we know what was going on in Jerusalem.

So verse 5, now they were staying in Jerusalem, God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. So Pentecost was basically festival time.

So just think of the Edinburgh Festival in Edinburgh every August. The place is heaving with people from all over the world. You need to experience it if you never have. This was Jerusalem.

It was full of people from all over the world. And Luke states that there were Jews from every nation under heaven. And so this is a multilingual crowd coming together.

And as they come together, the Holy Spirit enabled the believers to speak in the languages of all of those people who were present. And so we read verse 6.

[13 : 32] When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked, aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?

Then how is it that each of us hears them in our own native language? It's no wonder they were bewildered because nothing like this had ever happened before or since.

It was miraculous. Not because it was a miracle of hearing, but because it was a miracle of speaking. The Spirit enabled the early believers to speak in languages they didn't even know.

That's like being able to speak fluent Mandarin or fluent Dutch or fluent French or Russian or Persian without ever having had one single lesson in that language.

It was remarkable. Further indicated by the comment in verse 7 when the people say, aren't all those, sorry, aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?

[14 : 32] Now the inference is that the Galileans were basically the backward country folk as opposed to the sophisticated city dwellers like us. In other words, it was the Tutchers who were speaking all these different languages.

How could that possibly be? But the tongues they were speaking weren't some kind of incoherent babbling or some kind of special worship language.

No, these tongues were definite, discernible languages that were being spoken. The languages of everybody who had gathered in Jerusalem. And I guess it sounded like a great big rabble at first, but then people's ears were attuned to their own mother tongues.

And Luke is keen to point out that people came from everywhere. So look at verse 9 to 11 again. Parthians, so from the western frontier of the Roman Empire, from the Tigris River to India, far away from Jerusalem.

Medes, modern-day Kurds from Media, Elamites, from Elam, north of the Persian Gulf, which is part of modern-day Iran, Mesopotamia, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which is modern-day Iraq, Judea, so the Jewish homeland, including Judea and Galilee, Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia.

[15 : 58] These are parts of Asia Minor, so modern-day Turkey. Phrygia and Pamphylia, again, parts of modern-day Turkey. Egypt, you know where Egypt is, Libya, North Africa, Cyrene, province of Libya, Rome, at the time, capital of the Roman Empire, Cretans, from the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea, then Arabs from Arabia.

So Jews, can you see, came to Jerusalem from north and south and east and west, from every direction. So there could not have been a more comprehensive gathering in Jerusalem than this.

And then after Pentecost, of course, what happened to all these people? They went back to their homeland in every single direction. And so this is a momentous event as God is rolling out his saving purposes for this world.

Because as the Holy Spirit came, as the power for mission, he came to enable the good news of Jesus to spread out throughout the world. Remember in our first introduction and overview to Acts, we thought about the ripple effect when you drop a stone into a river or a stream or a lake or a loch and you see those concentric circles appear.

That's what would happen as the Spirit came upon the early believers, they spoke the message of Jesus and the church would spread and grow. And it's exactly as Jesus said.

[17 : 32] So Acts chapter 1, verse 8, Jesus said, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

And so the crowd say here, in verse 11, we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues. It's literally saying they hear the mega deeds of God, the great things that God has done.

And so the Holy Spirit indwelling these early believers didn't mean these early believers completely lost control of themselves. No, being filled with the Spirit led them to declare the wonders of God in a way that people could understand.

So this was opening up the way for the gospel of Jesus Christ to spread to all nations. And so what this international crowd at Pentecost is, is essentially a foretaste of the people from every nation that will gather together in heaven.

Because Revelation speaks of a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

[18 : 48] And what are they doing? They're all crying out in a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. So Pentecost signals the reversal of God's curse on humanity a way back at the Tower of Babel.

Do you remember that? In Genesis chapter 11, the whole world had one language and a common speech. But then the people united and they rebelled against God by building a tower.

And so what did God do? Well, God confused their languages and he scattered them all over the world. But here at Pentecost, what have we got? We've got the reversal of Babel.

People are being brought together again, reconciled, despite coming from different nations and speaking different languages. Why? Well, because the arrival of salvation in Jesus Christ means the nations are coming together as one, as the people of God.

Israel is being restored and God's promise to Abraham that all people on earth will be blessed through you is coming to fruition. And so there's a unity in the spirit as the gospel begins to break down barriers between races and nations and languages.

[20 : 08] Because there's a sense in which what's happening here on the day of Pentecost is the church's first worship service with the church's first sermon. But with what culture and in what language did the church begin?

The answer, all of them. The launch of Christ's church is multilingual, multicultural and multiracial. Because Christianity is not just for one group of people who can speak one particular language.

No, Christianity is the only religion that is truly international. The good news of Jesus Christ is for people of every tongue, tribe and nation. And that's why the church is the only group of people on earth that can truly achieve cultural and racial integration.

Because Christianity is the one religion that transcends all human barriers and all human cultures. Which means if you're here today and you're just inquiring, seeking, wondering whether Christianity is for you, wondering even if God could ever accept you into his family, then the answer is yes.

No matter what your background, your language, your country, despite what you have done in the past, Jesus Christ is for everybody.

[21 : 37] He came to live and die and rise again to save people like you and like me. And so we can be accepted by God and we can be welcomed into God's family through turning from our sin and trusting in Jesus.

And that is good news. It's the good news our world needs to hear. When the Spirit fills believers, they are constantly pushed out to new places to conquer new areas to spread the word, the message further and wider.

And so that means, well, the mark of a Spirit-filled Pentecostal church, which actually is the only kind of church there possibly can be, the mark of that kind of church, it's not that it displays the supernatural phenomena of the day of Pentecost, but that it depends on the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit in its proclamation of Jesus Christ.

Because the only way a person can be converted is through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are powerless without the Holy Spirit. And as a preacher, I am well aware of how hopeless and weak my words are, nobody will come to saving faith in Jesus through human words unless the Holy Spirit is at work.

And so we can witness to Jesus with confidence because the results don't ultimately depend on us. And I should encourage us as a church to have an outward face to the world because no one is out of reach of the Holy Spirit's power to transform their lives.

[23 : 25] Which means we should find creative ways of telling others the good news of Jesus because people need to hear about him so that they can respond to him.

And so what is one surefire way to know that we are filled with the Holy Spirit? How do we know the Spirit fills us, indwells us?

Well, it's when we have a desire to tell the people around about us about Jesus. Our family, our friends, our neighbours, our classmates, our colleagues, anyone.

That's how we know we'll be filled with the Spirit. He came to the church to enable us to share the message of Jesus. But did you notice how the Spirit's coming at Pentecost impacted those present?

And with this we close, verse 12 and 13. 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.

[24 : 28] So everybody's amazed and perplexed, but there are two different reactions. Some were asking, what does this mean? In other words, what's the significance of these people declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues?

They were struck by the supernatural work of God. They knew something amazing was happening and they were perplexed. And so that's why next week we'll look at Peter's sermon as he stands up to address the crowd to explain to them what is going on.

But there's also another very different reaction because others were mocking and saying they've had too much wine. So they reckon these believers, because of what they were saying, they reckon they were drunk and so dismissed what was happening as complete and utter nonsense.

Now, remember, this was the once for all coming of the Holy Spirit when God showed up in a quite remarkable way. But some weren't even interested and they made fun of the whole thing.

And yet often, that is the way it is when people are confronted with the reality of God. Some in the church will say things like, well, if only we could go back to those good old days, you know, the good old days of the early church and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost.

[25 : 50] If only we had a movement of the Spirit like this today, then everybody would believe. Sure they would. But they wouldn't. They didn't then. So they won't today.

There will always be resistance to and rejection of Jesus Christ. And so it's never a smart move to fight against Jesus because through the power of the Holy Spirit, what is Jesus doing here in Acts?

He is building his church. And he will keep building it till the ends of the earth until he returns again. And so his mission is unstoppable regardless of who rejects his message and who tries to stand against him.

And I guess you really need to know this if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian today because it is futile, stupid, to try and stand against the work that Jesus is doing.

He will always win. He is building his church. His mission is unstoppable and it is indestructible. So it is foolish to stand against him.

[27 : 02] But if you would call yourself a Christian, then you need to know that the risen and ascended Lord Jesus has sent his spirit not only to be our individual experience but so that he might empower every single one of us to witness to Jesus Christ.

Because we can't do it on our own. So thank God for the coming of the Holy Spirit. and may God give us a desire to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that we might declare the wonders of God boldly to Glasgow and beyond Glasgow to the world.

Thank you. Thank you.