

# Sunday 28th January 2024 - Sunday Service

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Date: 28 January 2024

Preacher: John Ross

[ 0 : 00 ] Very good morning to you. We'll find out about the prophet Joel next week.! Sorry about that. I've only limited to verse 16. Do you ever look back in your life and some of the key moments over the years?

Because the older you are, the more key moments you've got. But what are the landmarks on your journey? Was it when you left home for the first time? Do you remember that? Was it the first day you went to work? Or maybe when you got your award from college or university? Or was it the day when you were baptised as a believer? Do you remember that? Or was it the day when you got married? We husbands all remember that, don't we? Or was it the day, sadly, when things went wrong and you got divorced? Was it the day when a relative died? A close relative died? We often look back at our lives and look at the key events in our life.

[ 1 : 05 ] The Bible is keen to do the same. The Bible is built up on key moments of the past. Think of the landmark of creation. Think how often in the Bible, the psalmist, or in Romans chapter 1, or Jesus refers to creation.

Think how often they look back to God made the world. Then everything fell apart, didn't it? And the world was twisted. We call it the fall.

Nothing to do with autumn. It's to do with man falling into sin and degradation. That was a key moment, wasn't it? Jews look back at a very key moment for them.

It's when they came out of Egypt as slaves. And remarkably, they came across the Red Sea. And they came into a new land. That was very important to them.

They marked that exodus. And later on, there was the giving of the law at Sinai. Then there was that time when Jewish people went into captivity.

[ 2 : 08 ] First with Assyria and then into Babylon. All those moments, those key moments, were leading to the biggest moment of all. And the biggest moment of all was Christmastime, when Christ the Messiah came into the world in person.

God himself came here. He lived, he died, and he rose again. But that isn't the end of the story. The next key moment we come to is this one here in Acts chapter 2.

We call it the coming of the Spirit. When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. And suddenly, like the sound of a blowing violent wind from heaven, what seemed like tongues of fire, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, verse 4, and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them.

The Holy Spirit was given to Jesus' believers at a specific time, Pentecost feast, in Jerusalem. Given so that they might continue the work that Jesus began.

In fact, that's why Luke is writing Acts. He tells us at the beginning, doesn't he, in 1.1. In my former book, Theophilus, he wrote his former book to his friend Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up into heaven.

[ 3 : 32 ] And now I'm going to continue that and explain that further. This was a momentous event in biblical history. What do we learn, then, from the giving of the Spirit?

The giving of the Spirit. I want you to notice a couple of things. First of all, notice the fulfillment element in it. Notice the word, when the day of Pentecost came.

Or then the day of Pentecost came. We've been leading up to this day all the way through the Scriptures. And now the day has arrived. Look back at chapter 1 and verse 5.

John baptized with water, John the Baptist, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. This is the coming of the Holy Spirit. This is the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

It was prophesied that God would pour out his Spirit. And in fact, in the bit we didn't read, in the Joel prophecy, if you go to verse 17, you'll see that Peter picks up the idea of fulfillment.

[ 4 : 39 ] In these last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams.

Peter says, this is the day. This is the day that Joel spoke about. This is the day predicted. Indeed, Jesus himself had said, you should wait for this.

He said in John 16, when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. Here is the Spirit of truth coming on everybody. It's a momentous event.

It's part of God's progressive plan. And the astonishing activity around it grabbed everybody's attention in amazement. Did you notice that in 12 when Shilpa read it to us?

Amazed and perplexed, they asked. What does this mean? We're going to ask the same question. Well, it certainly led to Peter being able to speak about Jesus.

[ 5 : 44 ] That's the bit we haven't read, and that's the bit for the following weeks. But after the Joel quote, Peter stands up, verse 22, he says, fellow Israelites, listen to this, and he's straight in with Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth.

And the rest of it is all about Jesus. It grabbed everybody's attention, and it allowed Peter to speak about Jesus, especially about his resurrection, as we will see.

He's showing that Jesus is the only hope for the world. We are moving forward in God's timeline of history. I don't know if I can confess this easily here, but I will.

I am a Times reader. So sorry about that. If you take a different viewpoint, I'm sorry to hear that. But I think the Times is one of the most balanced and sensible newspapers going, and I don't write letters for it, and I don't get paid by it.

Shame. But I was reading an article the other day, online. Online because it's cheaper, of course, than buying the paper copy, but there you go. I was reading this article discussing Christianity and the Bible, and there are comments underneath in the online version.

[ 6 : 55 ] And many, many people saw that the Bible was just nonsense. It's random. It's irrelevant. It says nothing to us today. We should abolish it. Nobody, nobody commented that the Bible is a story that flows.

Nobody saw God's progressive plans for humanity and for the world. See, that's why at Christmas we said that Jesus came at just the right time.

So too, the Holy Spirit here is coming just at the right time. Everything is pointing towards a conclusion. A final day is coming. A day when everything will come to a head in Jesus Christ. Pentecost. And Pentecost is a key moment in the fulfilment history. It's fulfilment. There's something else I think we can observe here about it.

You've got to understand a little bit of the Old Testament. Hold a hand, your right hand preferably, in Acts, and come with me to Genesis chapter 11, the first book of the Bible. Come with me to Genesis chapter 11.

[ 8 : 11 ] Come with me 11. The writer to Genesis, probably Moses, said, now the whole world had one language and a common speech.

As people moved eastward, they found a plain in China and settled there. They said to each other, come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly. They used brick instead of stone and bitumen for mortar.

Then they said, come, let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves. Otherwise, we'll be scattered over the face of the whole earth. But the Lord came down to see, by the way, this is humour here, this is Jewish humour. Here is God up in the heavens. Here is a little man down on earth building his great, great tower. By the tallest tower he can and there is God peering over having a little look down.

You're meant to laugh at verse 5. It doesn't say so in the text but I think it's quite clear. I think it's clear. But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building and the Lord said, if as one people speaking the same language they've begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.

[ 9 : 33 ] Come, let us go and confuse their language so they will not understand each other. So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth and they stopped building the city and that's why it is called Babel.

A bit like the word Babel for children because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth. So Babel was a judgement. A judgement and people were scattered and languages were scattered. people couldn't hear and understand each other. What we've got in Acts 2 is a reversal of the judgement from Babel.

At Babel people elevated themselves. They built a tower to show their human achievement. So God came down and judged them. He scattered them all over the world and confused their languages. At Pentecost a reversal takes place. Look at Acts 2 and verse 7. They all heard them in our native language.

[10:47] There were 15 different language groups there. And they all heard in their own language. End of verse 6.

They heard in their own language. language. Now whether that was the person speaking in that language whether it was the listener hearing it but they heard in their own language. John Stott says that Luke is emphasising the international nature of the crowd. This diverse crowd. And they all heard in their vernacular language.

church. Yet the crowds thought they were just uneducated Galileans. The Galileans are from the north and I don't want to make a south-north distinction but they were regarded as less educated than those in the south.

They heard them. The uneducated crowds. Look at verse 11. We hear them declaring the wonder of God in our own tongues.

[11:56] The wonders of God in our own tongues. Each one heard clearly. Judgment has been reversed and languages are being understood. Now this unique work of God draws people together and causes them to ask the question in verse 12 what does this mean?

Indeed so. Don't we want to know that as well? Some of course mock it all and think they're just drunk. Verse 13. They made fun of them and said we're drunk but they all heard clearly.

Verses 6, verse 11. Yes, they spoke in other tongues. Verse 4. They began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them but they heard in their own tongue.

Now what do you think it means? Well, doesn't it first of all show that God is concerned to make him known to all peoples?

No group is excluded. The Spirit is now given. Yes, but what for? Answer, so that the gospel can go to all the worlds.

[13:13] isn't that the purpose of the coming of the Spirit? That the gospel is for the world, the whole world. You see, here are people coming into Jerusalem, the city, only to be sent out again with the gospel, once they've heard Peter speak, to take it everywhere.

They come in for the Pentecostal festival, the great feast of weeks, the barley harvest, 50 days after Passover, when people rejoice at God's goodness in providing food.

They give thanks and they present the first fruits of the early crop, the spring crops, but they go home rejoicing in the goodness of God that they've all heard him speak.

This one time when they come in, not so much to bring their sacrifices, although they do, but they come to receive the Holy Spirit. And they leave with the Holy Spirit pushing them out to take the good news into all the world.

Here at Pentecost, the centre of attention is not so much to tongues of fire, it's the explanation of the good news about Jesus Christ from verses 22 onwards.

[14:32] And it calls for a response. Just cast your eye over to verse 37, please. Peter's finished speaking, and when the people heard this, they were cut to the heart.

It affected them. And they said to Peter and the other apostles, brothers, what shall we do? 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. The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call.

The tongues, wind and fire draw them in. The Spirit sends them out. So Pentecost signals that the good news of Jesus is for everyone.

And all Jesus followers are to be world missionaries. our task as Christian believers is to take the good news of Jesus Christ to the world.

[ 15 : 42 ] Here in Acts 2 is the beginning of world mission. It was promised in Acts 1.8. Do you know Acts 1.8? It's a good memory verse.

It's a theme verse for the whole book. Acts 1.8. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem here and in all Judea and further afield in Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

That's the motto of the whole book. Here's the start of it. Now some Jewish people I gather when I was reading up on this, some Jewish people think that this Pentecost celebration is a celebration of the giving of the law.

The law on Mount Sinai. And they often use this occasion, Jewish people use this occasion to say that God has spoken and given us his law. Or here he's written the law on our hearts they might say.

Here is fulfilment of the written law. God who still speaks addresses himself not merely to our minds but to our hearts as well.

[ 16 : 54 ] We're to feel him. And they often use the wind and fire to explain that. In fact it is worth looking at the wind for a moment. Did you notice that they sound like, so we don't know if it's a wind, it's only a sound like verse 2, the blowing of the violent wind comes from heaven and fills the whole house where they're sitting, a sound, they heard something like the blowing of a violent wind and they weren't actually tongues of fire, they only saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

But it was enough to draw attention, the noise and the sight. Now they're significant features those two things, the wind and the fire. Because in the Old Testament, in Elijah's day, God was often seen in his power in the wind.

If you're taking notes, well even if you're not, it's 1 Kings 19 11. 1 Kings 19 11 is the Elijah reference.

It's worth a look. I'm going to look it up, even if you're not. Because I've got the reference down and I can't remember the verse exactly. 1 Kings 19 11.

This is the Bible that hasn't been used very much, I can see here. I've got here, I'm flapping through the pages. 1 Kings 19 11, showing the power of God in the wind.

[ 18 : 30 ] Look at this. This is Elijah. Elijah is told, go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord. God's was not in the wind.

After the wind there was an earthquake and the Lord wasn't in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire came a gentle whisper. And that's when Elijah heard the voice of God.

But it showed the power of God, didn't it? The wind and the fire? Showed the power of God, huge power. power says Dr. Luke in chapter 3.

Very interestingly, if you come with me to Luke 3.16, that's easier to find, isn't it? Luke 3.16. Look at this little reference here about John the Baptist getting things ready for Jesus.

[ 19 : 36 ] Luke 3.16. See, John answered them, I baptise you with water, but one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I'm not worthy to untie, he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

See, there's the fire linked with the Holy Spirit. This is the power of God. This is the extraordinary characteristic nature of our God.

He's like wind and he's like fire. fire burning up our sin. The Holy Spirit is given so that the gospel can be made known to all.

But how? How? By believers being filled with the Holy Spirit. We cannot take the gospel to the world without the power of the Holy Spirit.

With what the Bible calls being filled with the Spirit. The Spirit empowers us as it did then. Yes, we go in obedience.

[ 20 : 39 ] Yes, we take the Great Commission seriously to make disciples of all nations. But we cannot go without the work of God's Spirit both in us and working in the people we're talking to.

Convicting them and convincing them of their rebellious nature. The gospel will not make headway without the Holy Spirit. Lives won't be changed without the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost says we desperately need the Holy Spirit. It's part of God's purposes. He is essential in gospel progress. Now our western danger I think, tell me if I'm wrong, preferably afterwards, but our western danger I think is that we think words alone will change people.

That's why we read newspapers for example, for those of us who do. we think that all you need to do is reason with people and they will be different.

But I'm not sure that's right, is it? Do you not have to have word and spirit together? Do you not need some kind of convicting power upon people?

[ 21 : 53 ] Like the wind and like the fire? I mean is that what you pray for, for your friends? That we will make the good news of Jesus known to you verbally, yes, yes, yes, but the spirit will do his work changing them internally.

We go with love and we go with compassion but we cannot go unless we're empowered by the spirit and they cannot change unless the Holy Spirit changes them. So Acts 2 raises a rather important question for us I think.

and a rather dangerous question. Do we need a similar experience of being baptised in the spirit before we can take the gospel to the world?

Do we need a similar experience of being baptised by the spirit as they were before we can take the gospel to the world? And my answer is a very simple yes and no.

we certainly need to be filled with God's spirit. That's very clear from the whole of the Bible. The Bible makes that quite clear that we're not to get drunk on wine but we're to be filled with the spirit.

[ 23 : 02 ] It's a regular filling of the spirit. That means not some special magic inside us but that assurance that we are walking God's way. We're doing what God requires of us.

We're clearing out our various sins from our life. We're working hard to be godly and we're looking for opportunities to talk about him. But to go through the same baptism of the spirit as the first disciples had, no.

Now why is that? Why do we say no? Because what we're reading today is historic narrative, historical narrative. Acts is what happened then.

It's not necessarily what must happen today. This is a really helpful understanding for me of how to read text years ago.

And I read recently a note to pastors stop using the Acts 2 passage as a normative prescription for every church today. This is not normative.

[ 24 : 09 ] This is just what happened historically then. The principles we take out are more normative. And the letters will help us with that. You see the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem had a one-off experience to set them up for mission with Jerusalem as their base.

God was saying to them I'm giving you my spirit as the new people of God to make my name known to all the world. So yes the principle holds we need the Holy Spirit for mission but the specific practice of wind fire and tongues no.

They show God's power as in the Old Testament and here in Acts they authenticate Jesus followers to kick them into action. The Acts 2 event here is to show the gospel is for the world the mission is universal.

The message is the same it's for everybody. The means is the same make Christ known by speaking the good news in the power of the Holy Spirit.

So Acts 2 shows clearly to me that the centerpiece is the good news of Jesus Christ. He fulfills the prophecies. It's on his name that we call on people to call out to God.

[ 25 : 33 ] Look how the Joel quote ends at verse 21. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. So our task, your task and mine if you're a follower of Jesus is to see that we have this good news clearly in our hearts, in our minds, on our lips, just like Peter had.

And it's this good news that transcends cultures and must be taken to everyone. And to do this we must be filled with God's Holy Spirit that is full of truth and full of love for lost people.

These are the last days as Joel tells us. They started here at Pentecost. The clock is against us. The world is rotting all around us. Even my Times newspaper tells me that.

And men, women, boys and girls are heading for a lost eternity. My two brothers are heading for a lost eternity. You know people who you try to talk to about Jesus and there is a death.

Brothers and sisters, we have the words of eternal life. We must go and tell. But we do not go alone.

[ 26 : 57 ] God has poured out his spirit. He's enabled us and he's convicted those who do not yet know about Christ. Our task, go and find them.

Tell them the greatest news ever. That God sent his son on a rescue mission of which they can and should be a part. How engaged am I in God's mission enterprise?

Are you engaged? If not, start straight away. Become a believer. Get on board. Pentecost was the beginning of worldwide mission.

We are to continue that work. Let's pray together. Father God in heaven, we thank you for your timetable.

Help us to see the flow of biblical history and understand our present place in that we pray. Please equip your people with your Holy Spirit to make Christ known all over the world.

[ 28 : 07 ] If we've never experienced that inner assurance that we belong to you, that our lives are in your hands to use us as you want, grant us that knowledge right now we pray right away in Jesus name.

Amen.