

The Spirit has come

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[0 : 0 0] So let's get straight into it. Chapter 2, verse 1. Jillian just read it, but I'll repeat it. When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 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 like 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 again, notice that the disciples were together physically in the one place. They were in the house, could have been the same upper room, I don't know, when the Spirit comes.

It was also the day of Pentecost, which coincides with the Jewish festival of weeks. That comes 50 days, 5-0, after the first day of the Passover.

Now in Jewish law, 50 signifies freedom. Hence the year of Jubilee, 50 years, where debts are cancelled, slaves are set free. But you might wonder, where does this 50 come from?

[1 : 0 6] If you do your maths, that's 7 times 7 plus 1. 7 being the number of days to complete a week, and a week being the number of days of creation.

And so 49 signifies the overwhelming completeness or fullness, sort of complete on complete, if you like, with the 50th year being the start of something new.

And so the coming of the Spirit then signals the dawn of something new. A new kingdom, a restored Israel, even a new creation. Let's focus first on what was seen when the Spirit came.

There were tongues of fire that separated and rested on each of them. This is the baptism of fire that Jesus spoke about. The Spirit's presence, therefore, is symbolically visible.

God is with them, both collectively, but also individually. But there was also audible evidence of the Spirit's presence. They could hear the manifestation of the Spirit.

[2 : 1 3] First, in the violent wind that comes from heaven to fill the house they were in. Now in Hebrew, the word breath or wind is the same word, ruah, that is used to refer to the Spirit.

And that could explain why God chose to use a violent wind. Now clearly, though, the wind and the fire are purely symbolic, because the Spirit isn't physical. And so, you know, one can be filled with the Spirit without needing to feel the wind or see a flame over your heads.

At Pentecost, this was a representation that the Spirit had been poured out. Now second, though, what was also heard were the tongues spoken by those filled with the Spirit.

Now it's clear that these tongues were spoken languages. They weren't meaningless babble. And you only need to look at verse 5 to see that. Now they were staying in Jerusalem, God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.

When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Now being the Festival of Weeks, what would have happened was the Jews would have gathered from across the empire, Roman Empire, back to Jerusalem for this festival.

[3 : 33] But in addition to Greek or Latin, which was the empire's common language, or Aramaic, which was the local language of the Jews, these Jews from the Diaspora would also have spoken other languages native to where they had come from.

But it would have amazed them to hear the disciples speak them, because these men and women were likely never to have stepped foot out of Judea and Galilee.

So we read, continuing, 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 and Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues.

Obviously, this is a supernatural occurrence. In fact, we actually are told what they were speaking of. The disciples, it says they were declaring the wonders of God.

And when you consider just how far the people had come from, you know, as far away as Mesopotamia in the east and in Rome in the west, Libya down in the south, you would see then that what God was trying to show was that these disciples were beginning to do just what Jesus had promised.

[5 : 05] That is, be witnesses to the ends of the earth, except the ends of the earth at this point had come to Jerusalem. So, while the gift of tongues was a supernatural event signifying the presence or outpouring of the Spirit, it was actually given to serve a purpose in God's plan.

This is not just for show, but was given to equip them to fulfill Christ's commission to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth.

In fact, the gift of tongues, I think, supercharged this process of witnessing because it took away the need for people to learn a new language and have the apostles' teaching translated from one language to another before the gospel could be proclaimed.

All of this, because of tongues, just happened in one instantaneous moment. Now, that's not to say that that's the only way of doing it because now the gospel, as we preach the gospel, we do have people learning, you know, doing Bible translation, don't we?

Missionaries like the deans, you know, learn a new language, undergo language training when they go to Timor-Leste so that they can preach the gospel in the tongues of those people there.

[6 : 24] But right at the start here, God has sort of given that, you know, commission, an initial boost, if you like, initial momentum by giving the gift of tongues so that this process could be fast-tracked.

Now, let me pause here to just draw attention to the other reading in the Old Testament because I think there are parallels and contrasts between this outpouring, historic outpouring of the Spirit here in Acts 2 compared with the Genesis 11 account of the Tower of Babel.

Now, if you recall in the Tower of Babel, God came down to humanity, same as how the Spirit has come down now on the new Israel. Back then, there was also a focus on language and tongues as there is here.

But in the Tower of Babel, they started with one common language. And then God judged them because of their rebellion. Remember that they wanted to ascend to God with that tower by their own efforts, and they wanted to make a name for themselves in arrogance and pride.

And so God judged them by confusing their languages. Here, in Acts 2, God is now reversing the curse of Babel with His Spirit.

[7 : 47] Not by returning the world back to a common language, one single language all over again, but actually allowing for His Word then to be heard in many languages and still understood by all.

God is therefore taking what is a curse and transforming it, redeeming it into a thing of beauty. So we're not headed back with this Pentecost event, back to Babel, but actually forward to a vision as portrayed in Revelation, where peoples of every language and tongue gather around the throne of God in worship.

That's where we're going. Now, in a globalized world in which we live in now, we've come to appreciate, don't we, the beauty of language. So we like to travel, you know, and take delight in going to France and saying, Bonjour, and then going to Japan saying, Arigato, you know, even though that's all we know how to say, nothing else.

Or if you're watching My Kitchen Rules at the moment, you know, all the contestants' hearts melt, don't they, when they hear Manu talking in his French accent, you know. They love it, right?

So we love language now, don't we? We, you know. But, even though we can't speak it, we love it. But what is happening, therefore, is that what was a curse, God has now actually redeemed, hasn't he, in Acts 2.

[9 : 20] Because we have a vision here, actually, a snippet, a glimpse, of heaven as portrayed in Revelation. God's spirit is now poured out, and it breaks the language barriers, all for the sake of the gospel going out and being proclaimed so that God can draw people from every nation into his kingdom.

Where the Tower of Babel resulted in the people being scattered, the Day of Pentecost allows for people divided by language to again be united in the kingdom of God.

Where in Babel, or Babel, humanity wanted to make a name for itself, here at Pentecost, God's people are given the task of making a name for the Lord Jesus, proclaiming his name.

That's what's been happening in the reversal that takes place here at Acts 2. Now, as usual, of course, the responses of the people are mixed as we see here in verse 12.

So on the one hand, we have people amazed and perplexed because they didn't understand. So they ask one another, what does this mean? And this is fair enough because signs by themselves don't explain anything, do they?

[10 : 37] Rather, as we see later, they have to be explained. At the same time, there were others who, when something doesn't make sense, simply revert to mocking.

So on the next slide, in verse 13, rather than assess their views, they made fun of them and said, they have had too much wine. Now, that's the case with most of life, isn't it?

It doesn't matter what the issue is, there will always be a variety of reactions and responses, no matter what the issue. Just name the issue, footy club, plate of food, piece of art.

Some people will like it, some people will hate it, there will always be a variety of views. And that's no different, really, with the good news of Jesus. When we share the gospel, some people will challenge us, some people will ignore us, it will be resisted by others, but some will listen and some might even believe.

What matters, then, is not so much the variety of reactions, but whether what we say is true or not. And for us, as Christians, Jesus has given us the task of explaining what is true, hasn't he?

[11 : 52] Which is now what Peter does by standing up among them. He responds to their reaction with a powerful sermon, connecting what has just happened to the fulfillment of scriptures.

So in verse 14, if you look there, on the slide as well, Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice, and addressed the crowd. Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you.

Listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning. No. 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.

I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

[13 : 00] And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Now, we will look at the entire sermon this Sunday, but rather, we'll do that next week. But I thought it important to read until verse 21, because what Peter says here in the first part of the sermon directly relates to what has just happened.

He's quoting Joel to show them that this is a fulfillment to God's promises in Scripture. Now, in fact, actually, if we went all the way back to verse 1 of chapter 2, Luke is conscious of this because when he writes about the day of Pentecost's coming, the word he uses there has the meaning of coming in fullness or coming in fulfillment.

So Luke very much sees this as a fulfillment of Scripture as well. Now, further, as Peter is speaking to fellow Jews, what he does is direct them back to the prophets and appeals to their belief in Scripture's authority.

But I want you to notice something that's quite interesting. Do you notice that Joel's prophecy has no mention of tongues? Does it? Incidentally, nor of a violent wind.

Only one mention of fire. So my question to you is, what's the connection then between Pentecost and the prophecy in Joel? How is it that Joel's, Peter is able to take that prophecy in Joel and say that this is a fulfillment in Acts of that prophecy?

[14 : 29] So have a look. Anyone? Shout it out. Raise your hands if you want. Any ideas? No? No?

All right. Wouldn't leave the awkward pause too much longer. It's in verses 17 and 18.

Can you see it? It's the fact that the sign of the Spirit being poured out is connected to the prophesying by sons and daughters.

That is, the speaking in tongues is actually an act of prophecy. And remember that Mary and the women were there too, so sons and daughters, both were doing them.

And also the fact that everyone was prophesying, all 120. So not just the 12 or the anointed prophets, but all of God's people are prophesying.

[15 : 38] And when I say prophecy, I take it in the broader sense, not about the telling of the future, but actually prophecy in the sense of being God's messenger, being witnesses to the truth.

And so can you see where Peter's emphasis is? It's not in the miraculous ability to speak a tongue other than yours, but rather the aims that are achieved by it.

And that is to prophesy. So the gift of tongues, you see, wasn't just a manifestation of the Spirit, but actually a critical means of gospel proclamation.

And what is the message that's being proclaimed? Well, that's the rest of the sermon, which we'll see next week. But now, for now, we will just consider what is being said up to here. And first, the first message or the first point is that the great and glorious day of the Lord is coming.

Verse 20. And with that comes first of all judgment on all wickedness. And if you read the prophecy of Joel, that's the main message in Joel anyway. All the portents of wonders in heaven and the signs on earth are really signs of God's impending judgment.

[16 : 50] The sun turning to darkness and the moon to blood, same thing. This glorious day is therefore not one of celebration in the first instance, but rather an appeal to take refuge from God's judgment.

How? Verse 21. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. So this is a call to faith, imploring everyone to place their trust and dependence on the Lord.

You see, now that the Spirit has come, Peter is alerting them to what Joel has said. Verse 17. That the last days are upon us. The fact of the sons and daughters prophesying is evidence of that.

And these last days will precede the day of the Lord, the great and glorious day of the Lord. And before that day comes, everyone is urged to call upon the name of the Lord for salvation.

And so, the tables have really been turned, haven't they? Because here they were, these people laughing and making fun of the disciples and now the spotlight is really being turned by Peter back on them.

[17 : 56] These Jews would have been aware of the prophecy and Peter is now directing it at them. How will they now respond? Well, we'll find that out next week when Peter finishes his sermon.

But for now, we too need to realize that we are in the last days as well. And the offer in Joel's prophecy still stands. God's great and glorious day is coming and the offer of salvation is still on the table.

Everyone is able to call on the name of the Lord. And so, if you haven't done that as yet, then would you like to do that? Let me urge you to do that.

And if you need to find out more, please come and talk to me afterwards about it. But here's the good news. Everyone who does will be saved. There's no discrimination here.

It's not just for the men and not the women or if you're a certain race or a certain age that you qualify. No, anyone can. And everyone who does will be saved.

[18 : 58] That's the great news. That's the good news. And you've already done so, then as Jesus' disciple, you too have been blessed with the Spirit. There may not be any tongues above your head.

And I'm pretty sure there isn't looking right now. No one's got any tongues. Good. You may not be able to speak a foreign language other than the one that you've learned. But you have the Spirit if you are a disciple of Jesus.

And while the Bible speaks of many other blessings that come with the Spirit, here in Acts 1 and 2, the focus of the Spirit is on prophecy and the task given to the church to proclaim the good news of Jesus, both as a church but also as each of us individually.

all of us therefore, as I said already last week, have a part to play to help people find their way to salvation by urging them to call on the name of the Lord.

We all have that Spirit. We all have the Spirit to empower us to be His witnesses. And so please don't doubt that. You may not be called the way Peter is or did to stand up and speak like he did.

[20 : 12] You may not be speaking a foreign language or things like that but as sons and daughters of the living God, we have the Spirit to help us to prophesy, to speak God's word on His behalf.

Now of course, God also enables us to be trained and taught to do it better. And so just to flag by way of preparation, come November in the lead up to Christmas, we're really planning some short courses and training to help you do that.

So it's on a Wednesday night, same night as the Trinity young adults. So prepare to come along so that you might be equipped to talk to your friends, to talk to your family, to talk to strangers even about this great news of Jesus.

But at the end of the day, even though we may be trained, let's remember that actually it's God's Spirit poured out in us that makes us witnesses of the Lord Jesus.

It's not something we need to do with our own strength alone. But every time we tell somebody else about Jesus, we're actually being moved to do so by God's Spirit.

[21 : 19] We may not feel anything stirring in us as we do it or see any miracles of tongues and things like that, but it's nevertheless a supernatural and spiritual work that God is doing.

So be encouraged by that. Don't be disheartened. You know, people can make fun of us, but no, God is still using us somehow to bring His message to others and to draw them to call on His name to be saved.

So more of that we'll see in the rest of Peter's sermon next week. So this is really part one, but let me pray and ask God to help us. Father, thank you for the gift of the Spirit and the power He gives us to be witnesses to your Son.

Open our eyes to see the work you're doing in our midst. Help us to rise up to this calling and challenge. And for those of us today who have not yet turned to you through your Son, Jesus, please give them the faith and humility to do so, so that all of us might call on your name for salvation.

salvation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.