

50 Days of Wonder: He Ascended Into Heaven: 5

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everybody. My name is Aaron, if you're new to St. John's, and I want to add my welcome to David's. At the end of the service, we kind of stand around the back and people sort of file out around the sides.

But if you're new, I'd love to meet you. I'd love to just say hi. I won't ask you any weird questions or anything. I just want to say hi and welcome you to St. John's. All right, if you are new, let me give you a quick catch-up.

We are at the end of a short series that we've been doing, which covers the last bit of Luke and the beginning of Acts. And last week, David preached the first on the first...

I was going to say David preached his first Christian sermon. I was going to say David preached on the first Christian sermon that was delivered immediately following the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. That was the second half of Acts 2.

And it was a sermon preached by Peter, and it was three minutes long, and there were 3,000 converts, which is wonderful. I mean, I'm just happy if at the end of a 20-minute sermon somebody says something nice to me, you know.

[1 : 07] Perhaps I need to lift my expectations. So this week, we're looking at the incredible events that lead up to that very first sermon. Now, you've heard the passage read, and I think the structure is helpfully very clear.

There is a context, which is the Day of Pentecost, and then there are three phenomena. There is wind, fire, and supernatural speech. But first, let's have a quick look at the context that the people that are gathered together have found themselves in.

So it's the Day of Pentecost. This is a Jewish festival, and it has a dual focus, this festival. It's celebrated the 50 days after Passover, Passover, when the Hebrew people would begin to gather the harvest, to harvest the grain.

It also celebrated the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, which was reckoned to have happened 50 days after Exodus. And it's very appropriate that it has this dual focus, and the Holy Spirit comes, because what we have immediately after the Holy Spirit coming is the sermon and a great harvest of souls.

And what else does the Holy Spirit do? It writes God's law in our hearts. So the followers of Jesus are gathered on this feast day of Pentecost, and they're hanging out. And then it happens.

[2 : 22] It happens. And it begins with a wind. Well, more correctly, we see in verse 2, a sound like rushing wind. First thing to notice there is where does that sound come from?

Look in verse 2 there. It would be helpful to have your Bibles open. In verse 2, Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind. The sound came from heaven.

This is very important. Luke wants us to know that God's power is coming from outside into that room. Not just outside in the world, but outside of the world itself.

It is something happening that is coming from heaven. And why is this important? One, the folks that are in that place, they're not having some internal sort of psychological ecstatic experience. No, it's something that is happening to them. And two, it's important because the idea of God entering from the outside, coming in to address our problems, is bumps up smack against some prevailing cultural beliefs of our time.

[3 : 34] Some of the biggest cultural beliefs of our time. See, culture says this. Culture says that your problems are from the outside, coming in to you, doing damage to you, and everything you need to deal with them is on the inside.

Now, the Bible says the opposite. The Bible says your problem is internal. It's a heart of sin. And the only way that can be dealt with is through a power coming from the outside, coming in.

And of course, that puts us in a very humble position, doesn't it? It forces us to be quite humble. So, this is what's happening on the Day of Pentecost.

God, in His sovereign will, is acting. He's invading. He's entering our world with a solution to a problem that we have no answer for.

And He's acting. He's doing something amazing. Moving on. So that's where the sound came from. Now, more about the sound itself. It says it sounds like a mighty wind. Why that reference? Why even mention the sound?

[4 : 34] Because wind is a very important word in the Bible. It's the same word as spirit and breath. What does God do in Genesis 2? Let me remind you, reading from verse 7 in Genesis 2.

Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed. That's that word. Breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

And man became a living creature. That breathed word. That's the wind word. Ezekiel 37. Let me read a bit of that for you. You know this passage too.

And the hand of the Lord was upon me. And he brought me out in the spirit of the Lord. And he set me down in the middle of the valley. And it was full of bones.

And he led me around among them. And behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley. And behold, they were very dry. And he said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord, you know.

[5 : 34] And he said to me, See, this valley of dry bones, This represented the desolation that sin causes in our lives.

But God will come. And it says, And he says he will breathe. He will breathe. What? He'll breathe life into death. So what's the point of those passages? It's God breathing life.

It's God breathing life. So why the reference to wind at Pentecost? Because the coming of the Holy Spirit is about God breathing life into us. It's a recreation.

It's what happens when you become a Christian. The Holy Spirit enters you and begins to recreate you in his image. And this is key because it's easy to think about the Holy Spirit as this bonus thing that you get when you become a Christian.

No, it's this thing that kind of helps you do stuff maybe. No, it's the Spirit is life. It's the life of God in us.

[6 : 53] Without it, without the Holy Spirit, we're lost. We're vacuous. We're dead. And that's why this passage describes it as wind. And so first they heard the sound like a mighty wind.

Next, verse 3, And divided tongues of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. So the first phenomena is wind. The second, tongues of fire.

Okay, fire, fire. You know references to fire in the Bible, don't you? The good ones. Actually, and the tough ones as well. Why does it say fire?

Why does it describe it as fire? Because fire is a symbol of God's presence in the Bible. So Moses and the burning bush. The pillar of fire in the desert. The giving of the law in Exodus 19.

It says, Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. Fire. So fire is a symbol of God's presence.

[7 : 54] But why is fire such a good symbol of God's presence? Not because it's a heartwarming thing. It's because fire, as we know, purifies. Fire is light.

It reveals. It exposes. So the fire picture at Pentecost is saying this. It's saying the life-giving power of God is coming, which is positive. It's life-giving.

It's great. But it is a holy presence. It's a purifying presence. And where there is sin, it will expose it. And where there is compromise, it will reveal it.

Holy Spirit has not come to make you feel good about stuff, to make you feel warm, to make you feel fuzzy. Holy Spirit's come to make you holy.

Folks, where is your treasure? Where is your treasure? What are your idols? Sometimes the Holy Spirit has come to expose those things. If sometimes, perhaps you know this experience, you feel a bit of spiritual heat in a particular area of your life.

[9 : 00] It could be as we take up the offering. It could be how you treat a particular person at your work. It could be a relationship with a loved one that's a bit estranged.

Perhaps it's when you're on the internet. If you feel spiritual heat in an area, folks, that is the Holy Spirit working. You should pay attention to that.

You should pray into that. So moving on, we have wind, we have fire. And I was doing a Bible study at work, and I said, we have wind, we have fire. And somebody said, all you need is earth, and you've got a soul band.

You know, I thought I was safe doing a 1970s cultural reference. Oh, come on. Come on. So, wind, fire, we have speaking in tongues.

That's the third phenomenon, speaking in tongues. And the passage spends the most time speaking about that. Let me read the relevant verses here, just a couple of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in each other's tongues as a spirit gave them utterance.

[10:10] Now they were dwelling in Jerusalem, Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound, the multitude came together, and they were bewildered because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.

So the spirit fell, and the followers of Jesus started walking around, telling each other about the mighty works of God. That's verse 11. So if one of these Galileans walked up to an Egyptian, they would speak Egyptian to them.

And if they walked up from somebody from Pamphylia, they'd miraculously speak Pamphylese. I was trying really hard just to say that and move on, thinking, he's got a collar, he must know what he's talking about.

The Pamphylia, it smells like a small dog, doesn't it? A little Pamphylia. Anyway, I made that word up. All right, so you have a look at verse 7.

One of the things that was really particularly amazing about this was that they were Galileans who were doing this, and Galileans were very recognizable by their accent.

[11:20] They couldn't say some letters, and they had this very harsh accent, and they were regarded as uncouth and uncultured. They were the ancient equivalent of the modern-day Australian, basically.

And now, I did not... Wait a minute. Listen to me. I did not write that. That is... I read that in several scholarly journals.

This is not... I'm just quoting. I'm just quoting. I'm getting back at David Short, because this is my sermon.

See what's written in pen on the bottom there? It says, Consult David's Sermon. He wrote this 10 minutes before I walked out on the stage this morning. He snuck it in there to throw me off.

So, here's the question. Here's the question. Back to this. Why did the pouring out of the Holy Spirit present itself in this way? Why did it do that? Why was the Holy Spirit gets poured down, and what happened?

[12:21] People started speaking in other tongues. Why? Why is that? Why wasn't it something else? Like, people glowing or levitating or something there. You know, something like, Wow, that's amazing. Well, this incredible manifestation here, it points back to a curse, and it points forward to the purposes of God.

So, the curse. You see that list of nations there, starting at verse 9? From Luke's horizon, Luke the writer of Acts, from his horizon, that was the known world.

That was it. That was everything. He was saying, The representatives of the whole world are here. And it's a list that corresponds with another list in the Old Testament, in Genesis 10.

And what had happened is, God had judged the world in the flood. You know this story. He judged the world in the flood. He started again with Noah's sons. They spread themselves out, and it kind of names all the places they went. That's a big list.

And then the next big thing to happen in the Bible, is Babel, Genesis 11, which we had read out this morning. So, humanity tries to build a tower to heaven. They don't want to be spread out.

[13:27] They want to build a tower to heaven, and God stops them. It's interesting, isn't it? As a side note, they're trying to use technology to bring unity, because it says in the passage, they don't want to be dispersed.

They're using technology to unite them. It doesn't work. It doesn't work. I was listening to CBC this morning, and there was a professor of peace studies talking about all the tentacles of conflict in the world at the moment.

And he was describing them on and on and on. He started listing stuff that doesn't make it to the popular media right now. And the announcer, just as a finish, said, and he was talking about, she

was saying, how do you solve these problems?

And he was talking about how complex and ingrained they are. And she, the last thing, you know, one of the last things I heard before I came in here, she goes, it sounds impossible. It just sounds impossible. We should just throw up our hands and go home.

You know, folks, it is impossible. Unity is impossible without God coming from the outside, coming into our lives. So, back to Babel.

[14:38] They use technology for unity. And what happens? God will frustrate any attempt outside his purposes for unity. And so, how does he frustrate that?

He confuses their languages and they're dispersed. They are scattered. Now, think about Pentecost. What's happening here? God is reversing that.

Miraculously, people can understand each other. And instead of scattering, people from all over the known world are gathered together again. God, at Pentecost, is reversing the curse of Babel.

He's remaking a people. It's beautiful. It's wonderful. Folks, whatever else was going on that day, whatever else you think about the Holy Spirit, whatever else you think about tongues, the gift of tongues, on that day, all those that were present, representing the whole world, heard the gospel. God deliberately and miraculously made sure that no culture was given precedence over any other culture. And in reversing the curse of Babel, God was pointing them to the way the Holy Spirit would create one church.

[15:57] But that's not all. As I said, the speaking in other languages is pointing back to a curse, but it's pointing forward to God's purposes. Have a look at verse 11. What was it that the Galileans were miraculously saying to everyone?

Well, they were telling them about the mighty works of God. And in our context, they were telling them about Jesus. But the amazing things that God had done through Jesus. I mean, this says something, I think, profound and correcting for me, I think, and for many of us probably, about the work of the Holy Spirit.

As a young Christian, I had this idea the Holy Spirit was a power that I had that kind of made me like a wizard and I could call upon it to do supernatural things.

Like it was, you know, like the Holy Spirit is this, you know, empowers me to do my will, basically. You know, as well as doing purifying, sanctifying work in your heart, the Holy Spirit is there.

And this is the thing I want to remind you that the passage spends the most time on is to empower the church to be engaged in the mission of Christ to spread the good news to the ends of the earth.

[17:11] Whatever else you think about the Holy Spirit, whatever else you think about tongues, this is primary here. The Holy Spirit's ministry is to see Jesus preached, to see him glorified.

Dr. Packer helpfully describes the Holy Spirit's work as a floodlight ministry. So it's like a floodlight. A floodlight shines on something else. Attention away from itself shines on something else.

So like a floodlight, the Holy Spirit shines a light on what it's directed at. So the Holy Spirit's message is never, look at me, listen to me, come to me, get to know me.

No, it's always, look at him, see his glory, go to him, and have life. Get to know him and taste his gift of joy and peace.

Let me summarize now. Back to the question someone in the crowd asked in verse 12. They asked, what does this all mean? A great question. Finishing up here, it means that God's desire is for a reunited and redeemed humanity around the person of Jesus Christ.

[18:22] And that community, that redeemed people, through the Holy Spirit, should be engaged in the work of preaching the gospel to every nation. Now do you notice in the passage, and I could have spent a lot of time on this, but I want it to be the last thing I say.

Do you notice that the word filled is used a lot there? That's a picture of abundance. Folks, you are filled with the Holy Spirit for this purpose. And do you also notice that the Holy Spirit comes in tongues of fire on each person?

It's each of our jobs, folks. Amen.