

Have You Got the Power? [Acts 2.1-41]
2021-05-30 Sermon

By Major Brian Coles

[slide 1] Please open your Bible to Ac.2 as we continue our series in the book of Acts [run video, slide 2]

Let's pray. Come, Holy Spirit, for moved by thee the prophets wrote and spoke: Unlock the truth, thyself the key, Unseal the sacred book.

Some people just hate to wait. When we were stationed in Dartmouth, N.S. there was a toll bridge we had to go over to get into Halifax.

As people would drive up to the toll booth they would try to get into the shortest or fastest toll lane.

After a few months I got the knack for how to best do this. If one driver jumped into one lane ahead of me

I'd quickly maneuver my car into the next fastest lane because I can't stand to wait when driving.

Generally speaking, people hate to wait. We are impatient to the core of our being, aren't we?

It just doesn't sit well with us to have to wait. But sometimes all you can do is wait. That's how we left the followers of Jesus in Ac. 1 last week – waiting.

Jesus told them to "...not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.

For John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

And “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria and all over the world.”

This morning, the question we’re going to ask ourselves is, “Do I have that power?” Or, to put it another way, “Am I filled with the Holy Spirit?” because the power comes from him.

It has been 10 days since Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the gift his Father promised them.

About 120 of them are jammed into an upper room while the streets below are jammed with 10’s of thousands of people.

The streets are jammed with people because there’s a festival going on in Jerusalem called Pentecost, as Luke indicates in v.1.

What is Pentecost? It’s kind of like our Thanksgiving but without the football games and turkey or ham.

Pentecost means “50th,” and refers to a festival held on the 50th day after Passover.

[slide 3] Originally, it was an agricultural festival called Shavuot. It was when farmers brought the first-fruits, or first portion of grain, from their crops and offered them to God,

partly as a sign of gratitude and partly as a prayer that the rest of their crops would be safely gathered in.

But more than just an agricultural festival, Shavuot, or Pentecost, also reminded the Jewish people of their history, specifically as it relates to Passover.

We know something of that 1st Passover from movies like *The Ten Commandments*, starring Charlton Heston as Moses.

[slide 4] The Israelites were instructed by God to sacrifice a lamb and brush its blood over the doorframes of their houses so that they would be saved from the angel of death,

who killed every firstborn Egyptian child but 'passed over' their homes when seeing the blood of the lamb.

[slide 5, blank] After this, they made their exodus from Egypt, by passing through the Red Sea on dry ground and then moving into the Sinai desert.

[slide 6] Then, 50 days after that first Passover, they came to Mt. Sinai where Moses received the law from God.

[slide 7] So, Pentecost has this double meaning – it's about first fruits from the crops, which indicates the harvest has begun,

and it's about God giving his people the Law; a way of life by which they were to live for him.

[slide 8, blank] All of that is behind what Luke is telling us about Pentecost in Ac. 2 where we see a harvest of 3,000 people coming to faith in Jesus

and we see the outpouring of the Spirit which fulfills promises made by God in Ezekiel 36.27 and Jeremiah 31.33, "I will put my Spirit in you" and

"I will put my law in their minds and write it on the hearts" which is what the Spirit does when he enters our lives.

So, these 120 followers of Jesus have gathered in an upper room while there are thousands of people gathered on the stone streets below, and Luke says in v.2,

"Suddenly..." no Doppler weather radar warning, no, "I just have a feeling something is about to happen," but

[slide 9] “Suddenly a sound like the blast 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 [or languages] as the Spirit enabled them.”

[slide 10, blank] So, the promise of being baptized with the Holy Spirit in Acts 1.5 is now fulfilled here in Acts 2.4 when they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

The words ‘baptized’ and ‘filled’ are being used interchangeably by Luke.

Now Jewish tradition associated wind, fire, and speech with the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai, the same three phenomena Luke describes here for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

However, it’s this last phenomenon, speech, or speaking in other languages, which Luke concentrates on in what follows in vv.5-11.

“Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. [They had come to celebrate Shavuot or Pentecost].

⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.

⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?

⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome

¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues [or languages]!”

How many languages do you know? In our previous appointments we’ve had people who spoke Persian [or Farsi] – Sa-lam.

Others spoke German – Hah-low / a little Italian – Chow / and French – Bonjour / Chinese – knee how / Japanese - Konnichiwa / and Greek – Yassas.

But it can be difficult, sometimes, to understand others without a translator.

For example, during a conference for international X’n students, NT scholar Tom Wright was giving lectures on Luke.

As he was talking, translators worked hard to keep up and put his words into the languages of the students listening

– Poles, Russians, Romanians, Hungarians, Czechs, Germans, French and others.

During a break time a young woman from Hungary, who had been doing her best to translate his words for the Hungarian students, came up to him almost in tears saying,

“Dr. Wright, you’re going to have to go much, much slower. You see, the average word in Hungarian is two or three times as long as its equivalent in English.

It is physically impossible to speak the Hungarian words at the same pace as the English ones.”

And so, he spent the rest of his lecture series talking very slowly, always keeping an eye on the translator’s booth.

That story is similar in some respects to this scene in Acts 2. One major difference being, on the Day of Pentecost, they didn't need translators. Everybody understood their own language.

At that time, all around the Mediterranean world, everybody's 2nd language was Greek.

Ever since the conquest of Alexander the Great, 400 years earlier, Greek had been for much of that world what English is for many people today.

People who travelled to the city of Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost from every nation under heaven,

would be able to get by speaking Greek, while probably speaking at least one other language, if not two or three.

Jews living in Palestine would know, and usually speak Aramaic, though some would know Hebrew as well.

Many people would know at least some Latin, as the Roman Empire gradually imposed itself on many of the countries originally conquered by Greece.

But on the Day of Pentecost, they didn't need to switch languages or worry about translation.

These disciples of Jesus, in that important moment, were able to speak in specific, identifiable, known languages and dialects to the people in the streets about the wonders of God, v.11,

about what God has done in and through Jesus by his death and resurrection.

[slide 11] "When they heard this sound," v.6, "a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?’”

If they were all speaking different languages, how did they know that these people were Galileans?

Galileans had difficulty pronouncing guttural sounds which gave them a distinct accent.

So, it was their accent that gave them away. It would be like the difference between Cockney English and the Queen’s English.

Think of the two main characters in the musical *My Fair Lady* – the arrogant phonetics professor, Henry Higgins, who speaks the Queen’s English, and the poor flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, who speaks with her Cockney accent.

So, the people in the streets were saying, “These guys are from Galilee. How is it that each of us hears them declaring the wonders of God in our own native tongue [or language]?!”

v.12, “Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, ‘What does this mean?’”

Because Luke goes to great lengths to emphasize the multi-cultural makeup of the crowd – people from every nation under heaven – what this means is that the good news about the kingdom of God is for *all* people.

Nothing could have demonstrated more clearly the multi-cultural nature of the kingdom of God.

While some asked, “What does this mean?” Others, Luke tells us in v.13, “made fun of them and said,

‘They’ve been drinking too much wine’” - which Peter immediately denies, v.15. “We’re not drunk. It’s only 9 o’clock in the morning!” he said.

[slide 12, blank] This isn't the last time they would be made fun of either.

Throughout Acts we find opposition, scoffing, and ridicule at what Jesus' followers say and do, mainly from the religious leaders.

When we witness for Jesus in the power of the Spirit, there will always be people who will ridicule us and make fun of us, telling us we are wasting our time and talking gibberish.

I suppose the question for us today is, "Do we have enough Spirit-filled power in witnessing for Jesus to make people say anything at all about us?"

Has anything happened which might make people think we are drunk? If not, is it because the Spirit is simply at work in other ways? Possibly.

Or is it because we have so quenched the Spirit that there is nothing happening at all? Maybe that's too convicting. Let's move on.

[slide 13] In v.14ff Peter stands up filled with the Holy Spirit, filled with a courage and a power he had never even known before – the same power promised in 1.8 –

and explains, in his first sermon, what Luke has just described in the first 13 verses.

[slide 14, blank] First sermons are often memorable experiences. I remember the 1st sermon I had to preach in seminary in front of my class.

While I can't remember what I preached, I knew I had to preach for 15 minutes without notes. It was nerve racking to say the least!

Another student attending seminary named Brent preached his first sermon on Zacchaeus. He was really nervous as he stood up and said,

“Zacchaeus was short; so am I. Zacchaeus was up a tree; so am I. Zacchaeus came down; so will I.” And he sat down.

Peter’s first sermon was more memorable than that. He starts off by quoting someone else’s work, v.16,

“This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: v.17, ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.’”

What does ‘the last days’ mean? ‘The last days’ was referring to the time when God’s promises for salvation would be made available to all people.

So according to Luke ‘the last days’ have arrived with the coming of the Messiah, Jesus, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The ‘dreams’ and ‘visions’ in v.17 seems to be umbrella terms for the verb ‘to prophesy’ which frames this part of the quote from Joel in v.17 and 18.

Luke seems to be telling us that the disciples’ Spirit-inspired speech in other languages represents the promised last days prophetic gift we read about here in vs.17-18.

That being the case, as I stated earlier, the last days have arrived. Jesus inaugurated the last days and the final proof of this was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Note that ‘the last days’ is plural, and is distinct from ‘the last day’, singular.

There remains another ‘day’ – not necessarily a period of 24 hours, but a moment in time, a coming time –

which the prophets referred to as ‘the day of the Lord, which Peter, still quoting Joel, mentions in v.20.

That’s the day when Jesus returns to fully establish his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

We, then, are living in a time between the ‘last days’ and the ‘the last day’ or ‘the day of the LORD’, the moment when Jesus’ returns, as already promised in Acts 1.11. His return is our sure and certain hope.

In light of this hope, we shouldn’t be surprised that among the signs of this all coming true there would be signs in heaven and earth.

Vs.19-20, “I will show wonders in the heaven 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.”

What does that mean? The Jewish people, who were used to the language of biblical prophecy, knew only too well

that these were regular ways of referring to what we would call ‘earth-shattering’ events; things that would shake the very foundations of society.

These signs are referring to times of great instability and uncertainty in the world before Jesus returns – before that great and glorious day of the Lord.

But Peter assures us in v.21 that “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

What does it mean to be saved? The word Luke uses for saved, σωζω, [sode'-zo] means to know God’s saving power,

the power revealed in Jesus, now, in the present, while awaiting God's final great act of salvation in the future.

It is about God rescuing us from the penalty of sin, which is death, rescuing us from the power of sin in ever increasing measure, as Christ is formed in us and we grow to be more and more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions, and eventually rescuing us from the very presence of sin.

This ultimate rescue or salvation will take place when Jesus returns, as was promised in 1.11.

And when Jesus does return, we receive our new bodies, our resurrection bodies which Paul writes about 1 Cor. 15 and other places; bodies fit for life in the new heaven and new earth, Rev. 21.

So, Peter encourages his hearers in v.21 to 'call on the name of Jesus, the resurrected LORD'

that they might know his 'salvation', his rescue, as a present reality as well as a future hope. That's Peter's opening salvo in his first ever sermon.

Friends, we need wait no longer. The same Spirit who came and filled and empowered Peter and the others to witness for Jesus is available to us, to fill us, and empower us to witness for Jesus.

[slide 15] A few winter's ago, when we were living in Ontario, we had a bad ice storm. Tree branches fell, hydro lines were down, and people were without power for several days. I thought it would be a good time to buy a chainsaw.

The 1st day I cut down 3 damaged trees with that chain saw. The 2nd day just 2 trees. By the 3rd day, I was so tired of cutting, I could only cut down about half a tree.

Just then, my neighbour walked across the street, and said, "Give me that thing." He took the chain saw from me, flipped a switch, pulled the

cord, and it was amazing! I mean, you should have seen the difference that made!

[slide 16, blank] I made up that story about the chain saw, but my point is, there are a lot of us who try to live the Christian life like that; in our own strength.

But Jesus is saying, “Flip the switch! Flip the switch and you will receive power!”

The question we need to ask ourselves this morning is: [slide 17] “Have I got the power? Am I filled with the Holy Spirit?”

As you read through Acts, you’ll discover that there are at least 5 different occasions when Peter and the others are filled with the Spirit.

That’s because being filled with the Holy Spirit is not a one-time event, as Paul reminds us in Eph. 5.18 when he says, “Be filled with the Spirit.”

The Greek verb he uses for “be filled” - πληροῦσθε - from the root word “play-ro'-o” - is a present tense imperative which indicates a continuous action.

So what Paul is saying is, “Continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit” or “keep on being filled with the Spirit.”

“Am I filled with the Spirit?” That’s the question we can ask ourselves, “Am I filled with the Spirit? Do I need a fresh filling today?”

Song: Come, Holy Spirit CH 382 [CS only] P Spirit Of The Living God 312 / 834 P

Pray with me. Lord Jesus, like the gas tank of a car needs to continually be filled up with gas to run, I need you to fill me up again; I’m ready for you to fill up my life with your Holy Spirit.

Clean out any gunk in my life that may hinder the flow of your Spirit's power through my life

such as acts of immorality, hatred or bitterness toward someone, gossiping about someone, or having selfish ambitions, and fill me with the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

This I ask in the name of my Saviour, my King - Jesus. Amen.