

Unit 4, Lesson 25: The power of the Spirit

Memory Verse: All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:4)

Out of the ten days of unity and prayer depicted in the first chapter of Acts comes the powerful acts of the followers of Jesus on the day of Pentecost. And that power came from the Holy Spirit, who arrived as Luke describes:

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 [languages] as the spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:2-4)

There can be no doubt that these primarily Jewish commoners did something supernatural that day, and that what happened was a direct result of the work of the Holy Spirit. The “other tongues” they spoke in were real languages these people didn't know but others did.

Now there 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 them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphilia, 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!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” (Acts 2:5-12)

The supernatural element of this event attracted attention, but the message the people heard in their own language had an even greater impact. Notice that the hearers described what they were hearing as “the wonders of God.” And these were not people to whom the concept of monotheism was new. These were all Jews or converts to Judaism, so they all had at least an intellectual understanding of a creator God. We don't know what these people said, but Peter's speech gives us an idea.

First Peter addresses the explanation some are giving that the people are drunk. Drinking doesn't enable you to speak a language you didn't already know, and may hamper your ability to speak a language you do know. So the claim was ridiculous on its face. Peter attributes the phenomenon to the work of the Holy Spirit as prophesied by Joel in the Old Testament.

“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.” (Acts 2:22-24)

Peter goes directly to the heart of his message, Jesus of Nazareth. Most, if not all, of his listeners already knew about Jesus, and knew about his death and the rumors of his resurrection. So Peter doesn't have to tell the long story and simply reminds the people of the parts they already know. Then Peter

quotes from Psalm 16, using Scriptures that all Jews held to be sacred and authoritative. He points out that the passage can't apply to David himself as it would seem to on a shallow reading.

“Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.” (Acts 2:29-33)

Peter again quoted from Psalms, this time Psalm 110:1. He again makes the point that what David said in the first person couldn't apply to David and thus must apply to David's descendant, Jesus. God, Peter asserted, has made this man you rejected both Lord and Christ. By saying Jesus was the Christ, Peter was telling his Jewish audience that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the deliverer they had long hoped for. He even said, “The promise is for you and your children....” (Acts 2:39)

Notice one thing Peter didn't do in his speech. He didn't spend a lot of time running them down for having killed their own Messiah. In fact he “softens” the blow by saying that they had the help of “wicked” men in this act. Peter only mentions it and then lets the Holy Spirit do the work of convicting them.

Have you noted the simplicity of the message preached that day? Peter demonstrated a knowledge of Scripture, but he didn't get into lengthy discussions about how to interpret them. He didn't lay a complicated groundwork of rules and assumptions. He didn't get into complicated theological or philosophical investigations. He had a simple message.

Jesus, the one you rejected and killed, came back to life by the power of God. He has since returned to heaven where he has sent the Holy Spirit, which enabled the miraculous phenomena you see today. The people heard the message and asked what to do. Again, Peter had a simple answer, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ....” (Acts 2:38)

In just one day the followers of Jesus baptized about three thousand people. There had not been a long evangelistic or teaching campaign ahead of this. The people heard the simple message, they believed and accepted it, and they were baptized to symbolize their entry into the group of Jesus followers. So in one day the number of believers increased many times over, from about 120 to over 3000!

With results like that it is clear that the Holy Spirit was involved. And as Jesus said earlier, they had the advantage of preaching to an audience already familiar with the Old Testament and the concepts of God and the promised Messiah. Others did the hard work, the believers reaped the benefits. (John 4:38)

Possible thought papers:

1. Read the two Psalms from which Peter quoted. How do you understand them?
2. Imagine being in that room when the Holy Spirit arrived. Write a story telling your experience.
3. In the Bible, the name represents the character. Joel said “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Insert “character” for “name.” What does Joel mean?