

Acts 2:1-13. Baptism with the Spirit

Introduction: Baptism with the Spirit

In Acts 1:5 Jesus told his disciples, "John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit." Acts 2 presents this baptism with the Spirit.

A certain missionary had only been in Pakistan a little while and knew almost no Urdu. He was invited to come to a Pakistani village and baptise a baby boy. When it came time for the baptism service to begin he realised he didn't know the name of the baby boy. So, using an interpreter, he asked the father, "What is his name?" At this time the parents hadn't decided what to name their son so the father said, "Jo koi", which in Urdu means, "whoever." But the missionary pastor did not know Urdu. When the missionary pastor performed the baptism service he held the baby in his arms and said, "Joe Koi, I baptise you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

In Acts 2 a baptism takes place which involves the use of not merely two, but many different languages. But on the day of Pentecost God did not baptise Joe Koi, "whoever", that is, just anybody who happened to be in range. This was a carefully planned operation with precision targeting. From verses 1-4 we learn that the Lord targeted one solitary house in Jerusalem and he zapped every single person in that house, apparently 120 believers (1:15).

Baptism with the Spirit and Power

Baptism with the Holy Spirit is first and foremost baptism with power. On May 3, 1999 a cluster of tornadoes, one reaching speeds of 420 kilometres per hour tore through the central Oklahoma wiping out neighborhoods and causing an unknown number of fatalities and destroying 400-600 homes. But there is a wind which makes tornados as threatening as baby breath by comparison. The Wind of God, the Holy Spirit. In Luke 24:48-49 Jesus told his disciples: "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." In Acts 1:8 Jesus renews this promise: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." In Acts 2:2 we read: "Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting." The mighty Wind of God, the Holy Spirit had come to clothe the believers with power; the greatest gust of fresh air ever to visit this polluted planet.

When Jesus was baptised, as described in Luke 3, God provided two accompanying signs. The first sign could be heard - the voice from heaven declaring, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." The second sign could be seen - "the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove." In Acts 2 it is the disciples of Jesus who are baptised and once again God provides two accompanying signs. The first could be heard - "Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven." The second sign could be seen - "They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them." The Spirit is the mighty Wind of God. But, significantly, the Spirit is also the Tongue of Fire which then separates so that every single disciple, filled with the Spirit, becomes the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit through whom the Spirit speaks. We must never separate the Wind from the Tongue, the Power from the Word. The Tongue of Fire separates into many tongues of fire which "come to rest on each of them" (v3). Each and every one of those Christians present in that house was baptised with the Spirit. Each and every one of them

received a brand new set of clothes. Each one was clothed with the power of God. Each one received power for a specific purpose. We read in verse 4: "*All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues*", that is, other languages, "*as the Spirit enabled them.*"

Robert Frost observed, "Half the world is composed of people who have something to say and can't, and the other half who have nothing to say and keep on saying it." Sometimes it appears as though many Christians, perhaps even most Christians belong to the first half of the world's population. We obviously have something worth saying but apparently we "can't" say it, because so often we don't say it. Acts 2 reminds us that it is the Spirit-empowered people of God who declare the wonders of God (v11), that is, what God has done in Christ.

One person has said, "Christian faith is like breath. If you hold it you die." God poured out his Spirit on all the early Christians because, as the promise of Joel 2 had indicated, "in these last times" all of God's people are prophets. The Spirit has come to fill us and empower us to be the mouthpieces of God, to declare the message which comes from God, the gospel concerning the death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, the message which calls upon all people to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ and submit to his rule.

No other organ in the body needs as many muscles as the tongue. In giving us the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus has provided us with immense power to enable our tongues to be used to tell people from all nations of the wonders God has performed in Christ.

Baptism with the Spirit and Beginnings

God does not normally empower his people to communicate his Word in the dramatic manner employed at Pentecost. But remember again that Jesus describes this as "baptism with the Spirit" and remember that "baptism" has to do with beginnings.

We have seen that the description of the Spirit's coming is likened to the descent of the Spirit on Jesus at his baptism. From Luke 4:14-15 we learn that the consequence of this for Jesus was that he returned to Galilee "*in the power of the Spirit*" and that in this power "*He taught in their synagogues.*" For Jesus baptism, including endowment with God's power, the Spirit, comes at the beginning of his public ministry - a ministry which centers in Jesus' teaching ministry. In the same way, in Acts 2 baptism with the Spirit comes at the beginning of the church's public ministry - a ministry which centers in communicating the Word of God.

We never read of Jesus speaking in tongues, of being enabled by the Spirit to speak in particular provincial dialects or in foreign languages. The other major occasion in Acts when a similar outpouring of the Spirit occurs is when the Holy Spirit is poured out upon Cornelius and the members of this household when they became Christians. In Acts 11:16 Peter tells us, "*Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.'*" Jesus had said that when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, that is, when you are baptised with the Holy Spirit, you will be witnesses beginning in Jerusalem and reaching to the ends of the earth.

In Acts 2 we see the beginning of apostolic gospel ministry to Jews in Jerusalem. Acts 10 marks the beginning of apostolic gospel ministry to the Gentiles. The way God

begins ministry to Jews and Gentiles clearly indicates his desire to see all people hear the wonders of God being spoken in their own language.

Baptism with the Spirit and Language Ministries

The missionary I spoke of earlier, who baptised Joe Koi, could only speak English. When he conducted the baptism service his words had to be translated into Urdu so that the people might understand. When the first Christians were baptised with the Holy Spirit the significance of this event was communicated into the languages of all those present in Jerusalem. The Tongue of Fire, the Holy Spirit, enabled those early disciples to speak the wide variety of particular languages and dialects spoken by all the pilgrims to Jerusalem who had come, we are told in verse 5, "from every nation under heaven."

Some would argue that the most significantly used Christian of the 20th century was William Cameron Townsend. One of the foundational experiences which moved him to found Wycliffe Bible Translators was an occasion when he offered a Spanish Bible to an indigenous Guatemalan Indian who didn't know Spanish. He asked Townsend, "If your God is so smart, why can't he speak our language." Acts 2 reveals God does indeed speak the language of every people group on the face of the earth and Acts 2 also indicates that God wants the gospel message to be heard and understood by every person on the face of the globe in their own heart language. A few years ago Wycliffe Bible Translators identified and classified 6701 languages in the world and noted that only 1120 of these had either a Bible in their language or an adequate New Testament. There is no translation of the Bible or New Testament for 83% of all the world's language groups.

There is a popular party game for a large group of people. Each person is told that he or she is a horse, or a monkey, or a lion, or an owl, or a frog, etc. Then you tell everyone to join up with all the other horses, or all the other monkeys and so on. However, the only way a person can indicate to others what group he or she belongs to is by making the animal noise concerned. Soon the hall is filled with neighing and cheeping and roaring, and hoot-hooing and nee-deeping. The crowd which assembled on the day of Pentecost were "utterly amazed" (v7) because each member of that crowd of many thousands heard Galilean men (v7) speaking not in gibberish or weird animal-like noises, but in his or her "own native language" (v8). There were Jews there from modern-day Iran (that is, Parthia) who could speak Aramaic but their first language was Parthian, and to their amazement they heard some Galilean speaking their language. There were Jews in Jerusalem from Iraq (Mesopotamia) and Turkey (Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia) and Palestine (Judea) and North Africa (Egypt, Libya, Cyrene) and Arabia (Arabs) and Italy (Rome) and Greece (Crete). They too heard their heart languages being spoken by Galileans, perhaps with thick Galilean accents, people who, like Jesus, had never traveled outside of Palestine.

God still wants everybody on the face of the globe to hear the gospel in their own heart language. As much as it may be desirable for new Australians to learn English for many English can never be their first language. This is why it is imperative, even in Australia, for there to be ethno-specific ministries, e.g., Arabic-speakers ministering to Arabic-speakers in Arabic and Cantonese-speakers ministering to Cantonese-speakers in Cantonese. However, we will never be able to reach all the peoples who have come to Sydney if we wait for sufficient Christian workers to arise who speak

these languages and can spearhead such ministries. That's why English as a Second Language Programs and Home Tutoring in English programs and Easy English Services are crucial ministries.

Baptism with the Spirit and Harvest Time

May and June in Pakistan are the time of wheat harvest. The sky over Sahiwal, the agricultural town where we lived, is yellow with wheat dust during this season. Tractors were commonly used for harvesting the crop and air was mechanically blown through the wheat which forced the separation of the kernel of grain from the light husk and the heavier straw. In biblical times a winnowing fork was used to toss the wheat into the air. The chaff of the wheat included the dry husk blown away by the wind and the heavier straw which would fall near the edge of the threshing floor. When John spoke of Jesus baptising with the Spirit and fire he said Jesus would have the winnowing fork in his hand; that he would gather the wheat into his barn and burn the chaff, that is the heavier straw, with unquenchable fire. Harvesting involves two forces - wind and fire. What is the Holy Spirit associated with in verse 2? With wind and fire! When does this first baptism with the Holy Spirit occur? On "the day of Pentecost", the most popular of Israel's three harvest festivals. What a superb time for the time of gospel harvesting to begin! Pentecost is also called "the Feast of Weeks" or the "Feast of the Firstfruits." The firstfruits gathered on the day of Pentecost was no less than 3000 people.

Harvest time is not over yet. Proverbs 10:5 tells us, "He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son." When it is harvest time it is all hands on deck. Why are so many Christians sleeping when they should be busy gathering in the crop?

If God's purpose is that all people, including those who live at "the ends of the earth" hear and acknowledge Jesus as Lord it seems rather stupid and short-sighted if we don't take seriously the opportunity the Lord has presented to us on our very doorstep. It makes no sense to say, "Let someone else reach out to them." Let's be committed to ministering to people across cultures and do the best we can, with the Lord's help, to overcome the practical difficulties which stand in our way.

It was while Jesus was praying that the Holy Spirit descended on him and empowered him for his gospel ministry. Similarly, Acts 1 presents the early disciples gathering together constantly for prayer (1:14). In Luke's theology the power of the Holy Spirit for effective gospel ministry presupposes a profound commitment to prayer.

Jews from all parts of the Roman Empire were represented in Jerusalem. However, Peter explains the wonder of Pentecost pertains to all people, not merely to the Jews (as per Joel 2) but to Gentiles as well. Acts 1:8 has already indicated that it is on our Lord's heart to see that the witness to his resurrection and lordship is taken beyond Jerusalem, to Judea, to traditional enemies like the Samaritans and to the ends of the earth. If we are in tune with God then we must be passionately and intensely concerned about the matter of getting the gospel to all peoples on the face of the globe. When we hear of an unreached people group, peoples who have no viable church among them and who perhaps do not even have the Bible or any portion of the Bible in their own language then we will at least pray and do whatever else we can do to reach those people.