

ACTS 2:14-21

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to appeal to people's interest, the church today has emphasised its many varied and different programs, methods and approaches that it uses. We have seeker sensitive services, worship that involves plenty of musical items and drama. Small study groups that involve people telling one another what they think a passage of Scripture means.

Increasingly management techniques and advertising strategies have all made significant inroads into the life of the church. Seminars abound on everything from how to have a good marriage and how to handle money etc. Now I am not suggesting that all of those that I have mentioned are wrong, some in their proper place could be very helpful.

But what has often been the case in church trends is that a flurry of activity and programs has become the priority in churches rather than the preaching of the gospel. Now of course we must reach our world with methods that are attractive and appealing to the unbeliever but we must never ever sacrifice the importance of preaching or allow it to be replaced with methods that will hinder the preaching of the gospel. The reason why we must guard the preaching of the gospel is that preaching is God's method for saving sinners and it was the priority of the very early church.

This is clearly seen here on the day of Pentecost, for the first thing that happens following the coming of the Spirit is that Peter preaches a Christ centred sermon and 3000 people are added to the church.

The whole book of Acts is largely the record of apostolic preaching and down through church history preaching has always remained central to the church's mission within the world. Look at the centrality of preaching within this book of Acts (4:2; 5:42; 8:4-5, 12 & 25).

The early church's emphasis on preaching reflected that of the Lord Jesus for at the very outset of his ministry Jesus began to preach (Matthew 4:17). Jesus was primarily a preacher (Mark 1:14; Luke 4:43). In fact Luke gives us a little summary of Jesus ministry (Luke 4:16-21), which highlights the importance of preaching.

Finally if you remember when Jesus gave his disciples the great commission they are instructed to go into the world and preach (Mark 16:15). Therefore preaching has rightly held the central place in the life of the true church throughout the ages. The reformation, which recovered the faith, was initiated and spread largely through the revival of preaching by men like Luther, Calvin and Knox.

Likewise the great awakening of the 18th century was led through preaching by men like Whitfield, John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards. The 19th Century saw great evangelists like D. L Moody and great preachers like Charles Spurgeon who were used greatly by God and they were primarily preachers.

Revivals have taken place because God has blessed the simple yet Christ centred preaching of the word of God. So what we learn from the day of Pentecost and from the history of the church is that a godly and gifted man empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel has no equal in the presentation of God's truth.

Preaching is the God ordained method for evangelism and for edification of the church. The weakness of the contemporary church is largely due to the decline in powerful biblical preaching.

Now before we launch into the sermon that Peter preached on the day of Pentecost in order to see what we can learn from it, we need to notice that Peter first of all discusses what is immediately on

people's minds, which is the phenomena of Pentecost. He starts his discussion by discrediting the claims that what is happening can be explained by drunkenness.

1. HIS DEFENCE OF PENTECOST (vs. 14-15)

Peter was the acknowledged leader and spokesperson for the Apostles which is why when you find a list of the names of the apostles Peter's name appears first (Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19 & Acts 1:13). So Peter stands up with the other 11 apostles, they are identifying with his words by standing with Peter and he raises his voice so that the large crowd could hear him and he begins to address the crowd.

The word "addressed" is the same word used in verse 4 for "began to speak" therefore teaching us that this sermon by Peter is Spirit led, or Spirit inspired. It is the result of being Spirit filled. The crowd was Jewish both those who were resident in Jerusalem and those who had travelled there for the "Feasts of Weeks" were present. Peter calls upon his hearers to listen carefully and to let him explain what is happening at Pentecost.

Peter is confident that what is going on is what was predicted in the book of Joel, this experience at Pentecost is not something that cannot be explained but something that is clear and ought to be understood by the audience who were present.

In the same way when we are seeking to answer the questions and doubts and accusations of unbelievers and of those who mock the gospel we ought never to give the impression that we have any doubt whatsoever about the gospel. Peter addresses this crowd respectfully but yet firmly. He will show them the error in their thinking.

Likewise when we are asked to defend the gospel or to present it we should do so respectfully and firmly but without apology. We should calmly explain what the gospel is and what it means for those who are listening to us. We should never be ashamed or embarrassed or confused about the gospel. There are many things in the bible that we may be confused over but the gospel should not be one of them.

I want you also to notice the difference that the power of the Holy Spirit makes. Peter was the man who was afraid of a servant girl to the extent that he denied his Lord. But now he stands with the 11 apostles and clearly rebukes the accusation that the people have drunk too much and goes on to give a robust defence and explanation of the gospel message.

The Holy Spirit can take the most timid and shy person and use them to explain the gospel to others and to defend that gospel. The Holy Spirit gives us strength that we never imagined that we had; He enables us to do something that we never thought we were capable of. He takes our personality and enhances it for the better so that we all can be witnesses of the truth.

That is not the same as saying that we can all be preachers for that is not true, God does not give us all the same gifts but by the power of the Holy Spirit we can all be witnesses who proclaim the truth. We will do it of course in keeping with our personality but we can and will do it when the Spirit empowers us.

Peter denies the accusation that the apostles were drunk and he does so by claiming that such an accusation is absurd for it is only 9 in the morning. You simply don't see people drunk that early in the morning, even alcoholics aren't drunk that early in the morning.

In fact within the Jewish culture people didn't eat their first meal of the day until after nine o'clock so to think of them drinking wine before then is ridiculous. That reasoning seems to be so universal that it is a sufficient explanation to rebuke the charges of drunkenness.

2. THE EXPLANATION (vs. 16-21)

What transpired on the day of Pentecost was not a drunken abnormality but as Peter will demonstrate it was connected to what was spoken through the prophet Joel in the Old Testament (Joel 2:28-32). The term the "last days" (v 17) is Luke's interpretation on Joel for that term was a common Old Testament term (Isaiah 2:2) referring to the coming of Jesus.

Since Jesus birth we have been living in the last days and when you see that term appearing in the New Testament, it is talking about our age, the New Testament age. This is the final age before the Lord Jesus returns to our world in power. During this "last day" period a period that lasts from Jesus first coming until his Second Coming we are told that during this period God would pour out his Spirit on all people. All people must not be taken literally here as it clearly refers to all people who will repent and believe (v 38).

All who will call on the name of the Lord (v 21) and in particular all people who were present at this "Feast of Weeks" and were awaiting the coming of the Spirit. You see there is something new happening here. In the Old Testament the Spirit came upon certain people in power to enable them to fulfil a God given task.

The Spirit came upon Prophets and Kings and Priests, but now with the coming of the Holy Spirit in power on the Day of Pentecost, everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved (v 21). They will receive the Holy Spirit in a way that most of the Old Testament saints didn't receive Him. O they received the Holy Spirit but in a more limited way, certainly not with the same power.

The fact that the Spirit will be poured out on all people also indicates to us that Joel's prophecy is much more comprehensive than the people in Joel's day would have realised. The Holy Spirit worked among the people of God that is the nation of Israel within the Old Testament. To belong to God's people then people had to become Jews but now with the coming of the Spirit, Gentiles who believe will also receive the same Spirit. This is a thought that no Old Testament saint could really have imagined. Remember Jesus commission was that the church was to start in Jerusalem but they were to work outwards to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Why? Because the Spirit had come and the gospel is for all people not just for the Jews. The Holy Spirit is available for all people from every background, and language and all anyone has to do is to call upon the name of the Lord in order to be saved and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This universality of the Holy Spirit is further highlighted by the fact that sons and daughters, young and old, men and women will receive him. The youngest child who turns to Jesus Christ for salvation and the oldest person who does so receive the same Spirit and have the same power at work within them.

That is why we should never under estimate children who are saved and why we should never write off the elderly for they both have the Spirit's power at work within them, just like every other believer.

The idea of prophecy and visions here is that when the Spirit comes it will be obvious. In the Old Testament when Joel wrote these words prophecy was not only foretelling but also forth-telling. Of course God would enable prophets to foretell but their primarily role was telling forth the wonder of the grace and mercy of God. Visions and dreams were one way in which God communicated to his people of the Old Testament.

So in Old Testament language and understanding Joel is saying that when this Spirit is poured out on all people then they will have communication with God and will tell forth his wonders.

Of course for us in our New Testament age we no longer have prophets and we no longer need dreams and visions because we have God's word, but the result of us having the Spirit will be the same. If we have the Holy Spirit within us and you cannot be a Christian without Him, then God will communicate with us through His word the bible and we will as a consequence tell forth the goodness and grace of God to others.

So the evidence whether someone has the Holy Spirit is clear. Do you know the Lord speaking to you by his Spirit as you read and study his word or as you hear his word preached? You should if you have the Holy Spirit within you. Coming to church you see is a spiritual exercise for when we come to church we rely upon the work of the Spirit to speak to us through His word.

As we read his word daily do we ask for the help of the Spirit, do we seek his guidance and aid so that we can understand his word better and in a deeper way?

Likewise when we have the Spirit we will tell forth God's grace, we will not be able to stop ourselves talking about the Lord. When we are together as Christians, do we find conversation about the Lord easy, or does our work, health and family dominate our conversation. Spirit filled people are people who speak about Christ and they will do this not only in the presence of believers but in the presence of unbelievers as well.

Now perhaps today you know that the Lord does not speak to you through his word as once He did or perhaps you know that speaking about the Lord either to Christians or unbelievers is not as natural as once it was. What can you do about it? May I suggest to you that you ask the Lord to search your heart? You ought to deal with the pride that is resident there for one reason why we do not hear the Lord's voice through His word or speak freely of him is that we are not filled with the Holy Spirit. We are not allowing him to rule our lives and to guide us.

We are trying to rule our own lives; we can be so proud, therefore we must submit ourselves to the Lordship of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Only then will we begin to know God speaking to us as once he did and then we will be able to speak freely and naturally about our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This communication with God and this telling forth his greatness will be the church's task from Pentecost to the end of the world or until the "glorious day of the Lord" as it is called by Joel (v 20). The language used in verses 19-20 is what is known as apocalyptic language, it is language used of the Second Coming of the Lord.

It is language that you will find in apocalyptic books like Revelation (8:7-10; 9:15, 14:20 16:3) and Jesus uses this sort of language in Matthew 24:29-30 when talking about his own Second Coming. For the New Testament writers never detached Christ's coming, the Spirit's coming from the Second Coming of Christ. They were all part of God's plan of salvation. Each event was part of God's overall plan for the redemption of His people.

So what Luke is doing here is saying that what is happening at Pentecost is part of God's overall plan and therefore believers filled with the Holy Spirit will listen to God through His word and by His Spirit and they will proclaim Christ to our world. That is the task of the church of Jesus Christ until His return as Judge.

Therefore what we should be doing as Christians is reading His word and listening to His word being proclaimed and seeking the help of the Holy Spirit as we do so. We should be proclaiming Christ and speaking of him to others, declaring the wonders and greatness of the grace of Almighty God. This is the task of the church today and every day until Christ comes again.

As we do this we know that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved (v 21). So through the church age as God communicates with the church through His word and by His Spirit

and as the church proclaims Christ, men and women and boys and girls will call upon the name of the Lord and will as a consequence be saved.

Let us take heart from this passage let us listen to God as he speaks to us by His Spirit and let us proclaim His wonders and trust God that he will enable people to call upon Him so that they will be saved. That is what happened on the Day of Pentecost when 3000 people were saved.

Let us pray that the Spirit may work in powerful ways through the lives of God's people so that many may be added to our church.