

Holy Spirit 2

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Acts 2²⁹⁻⁴⁸ / Luke 16¹⁹⁻³¹

I made the point last week that the miracle of tongues in Acts was a very very small part of the life of the Church at that point. They had been living and meeting together for 40 days, waiting for what God would do amongst them and this incident lasting perhaps at the outside a half and hour though I suspect it was more like 15-20 minutes changed much in that it drew in a large crowd of Jews from many nations. Notice 2 things however.

Notice that firstly they were not yet converted. That has to wait till Peter had preached the Gospel to them. One of the principles of conversion which even Jesus makes plain is that while miracles may wake us up to the fact that there is more to life than what we can see they don't actually convert anyone. Remember the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus – the beggar who lived on the street outside the rich man's house. Once both had died and the Rich Man realises his fate he makes this request to Abraham... **“²⁷He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house—²⁸for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ “**

In other words, send someone from the dead to warn them because they'll take notice of that. But Abraham answers him like this... 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' So Abraham suggests that there is enough warning in the Word of God. Again the Rich Man replies... ³⁰He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' So the assumption here is that if only something miraculous happens belief will come. If only God would turn up in person, or at least his Power – we would all believe. But this is what Abraham says to that... ³¹He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Miracles won't do it. Why? Because it's always possible to explain away a miracle. By definition a miracle is mysterious – its power and its origin are **not obvious** from what happens. Notice that one of the first things Jesus' detractors say to Him when He begins to work in power is that these are not the work of God but of the Devil! The miraculous in and of itself does not convert us because it doesn't demand anything of us. 10 lepers were healed. Only one was converted. Jesus healed and restored perhaps 100's of people throughout Galilee and Judea in his 3 year ministry and yet the verdict of the crowd in Jerusalem – the crowd that had welcomed him as a conquering King only days before was – death!

In John 2 we see this same dynamic at work...

¹⁸The Jews then responded to him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?”

¹⁹Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”

Perhaps hundreds of people were touched by Jesus during His ministry – no one stood with Him at His trial. As Handel so beautifully reminds us – He was **despised and rejected!**

And yet, the miracle of tongues did set the scene for an even greater miracle – the miracle of the Word of God preached through Peter. Without that miracle no one would’ve been there to hear Peter. But the crowd gathers, amazed at what they hear and they have their hearts opened to whatever else may occur. So Peter preaches and he explains who is behind this miracle and why this is so important.

This leads us to at least three things we can say about the missional task ahead of us.

The first is that, following the pattern of the events in Acts 2 where the Spirit’s action precedes the preaching of the Gospel - a recognition of the spiritual basis of the Gospel is vital if we want to effectively address the spiritual malaise of the age. What we believe about Jesus isn’t just a moral picture – a set of ‘how to live’ rules. It is so much more than this. It is life – life in all its fullness; it is wholeness – wholeness of personhood and of community; it is love. There is a wholeness about the Gospel that goes beyond ethics even if it is completely and

unquestionably ethical. The work of the Spirit symbolises and embodies this wholeness by occasionally going completely beyond human understanding and ability and doing something that is without explanation apart from there being a loving and sustaining God behind the existence of all things. We cannot do mission without appealing to this extra dimension and, as the early church found out, especially in cultures which are familiar with and, indeed, believing of the supernatural, this is simply not optional. Moving in this realm is a sign to such people that we are genuine and share a certain worldview with them which is non-negotiable.

But it's also vital in a much more cynical and unbelieving culture such as our own because it serves to awaken people to possibilities that the culture has deemed 'out of bounds' for reasonable people. Our culture exudes this kind of approach to faith and often the only thing that will wake people up is a brush with the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.

C S Lewis once said this of his own culture...

“If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.”

Where are we with the Spirit today? Have we been open to the working of the Spirit in our lives? Are we awake to how the Spirit wants to work with us? We cannot assume that the Spirit will just barge into our lives. We have some work to do to open the doors of our hearts to God in this matter.

[8]The second missional principles that arises from this passage is that the spiritual must be accompanied by something that touches the mind and the heart as well. We are not simply spiritual creatures. We exist as thinking people and as embodied people. The Gospel story through the Bible and throughout history has at its heart a spiritual people touching the wider community with love through service and by repeating and explaining the story of Christ through preaching. As Paul says so clearly in Romans 10...

¹⁴How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (Roms 10)

In many ways our first duty is to address the needs of our physical existence for in that way you effectively open the heart

to the Gospel and, of course, we see in the miracles of Jesus that this was the Spirit's focus in miracles more often than not.

A final lesson comes in the penultimate verse from our passage this morning and it is this, the Spirit's moving should drive our decisions about membership and responsibility...

⁴¹So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added...

Was it wise to move immediately to baptise these very young believers? I mean after all they'd only just made a confession of faith – a faith they had only heard about once. Wasn't the young church jumping the gun a bit here? Shouldn't they have waited to see if there was any fruit of the faith in these people?

The fact is that throughout Acts and, indeed, in most of the NT the practice is to initiate people into the faith as soon as they are willing. So the lesson here is... don't wait for people to 'grow up' before you initiate them into the way of life of the kingdom. The right time to bring people into God's Kingdom is when they're willing.

Frankly I think we've often made it too hard for people to enter to very heart of the community of Christ and to begin contributing to that community from the beginning. There is almost no one here except perhaps very young children who cannot be a contributor to the work of the kingdom and, indeed,

Jesus even said, ‘Suffer not the **little children** to come to Me for **such is the Kingdom of God.**’ We’ve built this community around an extremely vigorous children’s programme and we continue to reach out to children with the Gospel. We also welcome children taking part in the services and indeed in almost anything we do. We do this not just because it’s effective but because behind this lies a principle of conversion which is simply this – **partakers are possessors. [Repeat]** In other words, **living the life helps people own the life and make it their own.** We place such emphasis on mental assent these days when in fact most people don’t commit because they believe but believe because they’re committed. Most people truly begin to believe when they discover how satisfying and complete living with Jesus is so our major job in this church should be helping people become partakers in our missional work wherever that may be.

Remember Chesterton’s quote from last time...

“A dead thing can go with the stream, but only a living thing can go against it.”

What is the evidence of life? Is it belief? Is it thought? No! It is that we can do something – we can swim against the tide. To believe is one thing – to act on that belief is, in fact the evidence that we truly do believe. In Christ’s Name choose life today – choose Jesus!