

The Spirit of Power
Acts 2:1-13

Psalm 16

2 Corinthians 4

Responsive: 1 John 2:1-11

This morning we are going to be starting chapter 2 of the book of Acts. Over the past few weeks we have been taking quite a bit about the Holy Spirit and it's role in the life of a Christian. In our passage this week we are going to be reading about the arrival of the Holy Spirit from which God had promised would come, and this is the reason that he told them in verse 8, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." This morning lets read this account of the Holy Spirit coming upon the Disciples, starting in verse 1, of chapter 2 and reading to verse 13. (read Acts 2:1-13)

There are a few different schools of thought on this account of the disciples speaking in tongues and I think it would be beneficial to touch on those this morning. The first, and foremost is our Pentecostal friends, it is in this passage that they attempt to find the support for speaking in tongues, it is here that they argue for the existence of an angelic mysterious language that they believe is the utterances of the Holy Spirit, and a special ministry of the Spirit which comes upon them. We have already in the past few weeks have talked about some of the issues with this, the biggest being that any miraculous work, by Jesus himself, or by the Holy Spirit was not merely to prove the power of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit, but rather, along with the miraculous show of sovereign power, there was always a redemptive purpose.

Much in what we see today in the way of speaking in tongues, is more or less a chaos. A mysterious, unknown tongue uttered by one who is supposedly filled with the spirit. I say supposedly, because honestly.....are we all not filled with the spirit? all of us who are Christs? Do we not have the Spirit indwelling in us? He does not need to come upon us in some miraculous show of power, for he already indwells and lives in us in miraculous power. He ministers, witnesses, convicts, and comforts, us in power. It is these things that prove his presence in our lives, not some holy dance, or shaking, or utterance of an unknown angelic language. Have you ever been comforted reflecting upon the grace, mercy and love of God? Have you ever been convicted of a thought, or an action, or words that you have said? Have you been reading the bible and have and seen something new and glorious that you have never seen before, or had some new connection in scripture revealed to you? Have you gone to God in prayer, and just pour out your heart to him, and feel a great peace and comfort in trial? These are all works of the spirit, they are not showy, they are not flashy..but they are powerful, they are glorious, and they are miraculous.

There is no need for any of these showy outward signs of the spirit, there is no sudden miraculous filling of the spirit to where you dance around and start uttering unknown words, for there is no power in that, there is no redemption in that, it is nothing more then an empty show of a meaningless, confused, chaotic expression. And as we can even see this morning by our text, even this concept of uttering some mysterious angelic language, one that is unknown to the human ears is not even biblically supported here in the very account that is used to support this notion. This brings us to another view of this passage which I think is really just a response to the Pentecostal practice of speaking in tongues.

There is a view that says, that the Holy Spirit didn't grant the disciples the ability to speak in other languages, but rather he granted those hearing to be able to hear it in each their own language. Now I think this is an interesting thought, and it would seem that this idea has come about as a way, or a form of rebuttal against the idea of what we see today for the use of speaking in tongues.

Verse 6 says, "And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speaking in his own language." So this seems to make sense, it is the idea that he disciples began to speak, and to witness and minister the gospel and each foreigner who heard them heard it in their own language. But there is a major problem with this idea that the gift of tongues given here to the disciples by the Holy Spirit is not a gift of speech, but a gift of hearing. And that problem is found in verse 4. "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to.....speak with other tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance." This was not a gift of hearing as some would argue...this was a gift of tongues given to the disciples, at this moment, as a fulfillment of what Jesus told his disciples in verse 8 of chapter 1. "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be a witness to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Also in this passage, we do not find any support for a mysterious unknown angelic language. But rather the languages that were spoken by these disciples was the language of all the peoples. Each one heard in their own native tongue. There was no need for an interpreter to explain the babblings of an individual, they all heard their own languages being spoken. As I said a few weeks ago, I don't want to limit the power and scope of the Holy Spirit's ministry, I will not stand here this morning and say that such things are impossible today, for if God wills it, if God can use it for his purpose and for the ministry of his word then such a display of tongues may indeed yet still be possible. Who am I to say that the spirit can not minister in this way, who am I to say that there is a limit to God's power, or how he so chooses to minister. BUT, I do not believe that such is truly even necessary today as it was at the time here in Acts. We live in a society where language is no longer a barrier, we have technology that allows all peoples to be reached through multiple different media types.

The bible is translated into different languages and is widely available both in print, and online. Yes, I know there are yet isolated pockets of tribal people throughout the world who have yet to be reached, and there are missionaries, and groups who have that calling..to seek out, and go forth to minister to these people. But they do not go, showing signs and miracles, they do not go speaking in some mysterious angelic tongue. No, they go, they study, they learn the languages, they work to interpret the scripture, they live among these people to reach them for the sake of the gospel. And the Holy Spirit moves within that, he works within the learning of the language, within the translation of the bible into those languages, he prepares the soil of the heart in those people to hear the word of God and to believe. It's not flashy, its not showy, but it is none less miraculous.

The work of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the gospel is a work of redemption, a work of salvation, and we see it in our own witness and in our own ministry, and we have all seen it in our own lives. If one comes to God, if one turns from their life of sin and rebellion from God and lays it down before him in repentance and belief, that is the work of God, through the Holy Spirit in the heart and mind of that individual. And that work, is a miraculous work, the new birth itself is a miracle, for it is only a work of God himself who in a mysterious way causes the eyes and ears of the individual to see the kingdom of God, and to hear the gospel and believe. It is a miracle that one who hates God, would turn to love the very thing hates. This is not a mere decision, this is not a mere changing of ones mind...the new birth is nothing more then the miraculous work of a loving and gracious God in the heart of a person, changing them, enabling them, to hear and see his word.

Throughout the ministry of Jesus recorded in the gospels, we see multiple accounts where he had healed the blind, deaf, and lame. Making them able to see, making them able to hear and walk again. This hasn't stopped, God still yet heals the blind, he still yet heals the deaf, and he still yet heals the lame every. Single. day. His word has gone out into this world, the ministry of the Gospel is happening throughout the world this morning as we speak, there are people who are hearing it for the first time....sure, they may have heard the gospel before, but they were deaf and unable to hear, they were blind and unable to see...but God through the Holy Spirit in the new birth gives them new eyes to see, and new ears to hear his precious word.

Everyone who turns to God, and repents and believes is nothing short of a miracle, having their eyes and ears opened in a way not much different than the accounts we see in scripture of the blind man being able to see, or a deaf man being able to hear. For mankind is under a curse of blindness, and deafness from birth. Mankind in his natural state is blind to the things of God, and deaf to the word of God. Lost in their own sinful desires, lost in despair and hopelessness, a slave to sin, unable to free themselves for they have no desire to, as scripture says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Our heart desires to be wicked, our heart desires to be deceitful, our hearts are selfish, arrogant and full of pride. This is the natural state of man, we do not desire God for God is the opposite of what we want. As Psalm 14 says, "The fool has said in his heart, there is no God, They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one."

We are lost, we are blind, we are deaf to the word of God. Seeking our own ambition, pursuing our own desire, and it is not until God, through the ministry and power of his word, through the Holy Spirit that comes upon us and changes our desire, who gives us new ambitions, that we can believe upon him, for indeed without the miraculous work of the new birth of God, we can not even see, nor hear him. We have a great example of that here in our passage this morning, Look at the response of those here in the book of Acts upon hearing the gospel spoken in their own tongue, verse 11. "We hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God. So they were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, whatever could this mean?" And look at this next verse.....and Others mocked saying, "they are full of new wine."

The natural mind explaining away the miraculous work of God. We see this even more so today with what has not become a religion of science. Now I am not saying that science is bad, or even really at odds with Christianity as some would say. But the problem is when people turn to science as an absolute truth, for true science is nothing more than an attempt to understand what God has created, and the mysteries of what God has done. Yet man, in his arrogance believes that he has made a new discovery, or gathered greater understanding and it is man who puts science at odds with God, for they have elevated science itself to be a form of God, believing that there is no miraculous, only that which we haven't yet discovered. But I am here, to tell you today....the Holy Spirit ministers to each and every one of us in a miraculous way, in a way unknowable by science, in a way unknowable by natural man, it is supernatural because it is given by the God who not only created nature, but who himself supersedes the very nature he created.

The new birth is nothing short of a miracle, and it truly is a new birth, for the change that comes upon the one who repents and believes is so stark, so different that they become a new person. Now desiring the things of God, now seeking to do that which is pleasing to God instead of pleasing to themselves. They now love what they hated, and hate what they loved.

This new birth is a life changing, event. Vic would always explain it as being a Damascus road experience, one day Paul was persecuting Christians, then in a moment when faced with Jesus, in that instant he became a new man. I used to argue with him that it didn't always have to be such an experience, but now I understand a bit more as to what he was getting at and agree with him. The reality is, unless there is a change in desire, unless there is conviction of sin, unless there is prayer and repentance, then your confession of belief is meaningless. For if you don't have these things, then you don't have the Holy Spirit working in you to will and to, He is not ministering to you, for his ministry is just that, it is to convict us of our sins, to bring us to repentance, to bring us to desire God more, to bring us to love him more. This is why Jesus said, "You shall know them by their fruits, for a good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree bear good fruit." If there is no conviction of sin, if there is no repentance, then there is no spirit. No spirit, no new birth, no new birth, no faith.

There must be a change of heart, a change of mind and a change of desire, or there is no real new birth. It is instead man's own decision to reform, to attempt to be holy by his own power and man is incapable of such for our very core desires to fulfill our own selfish desire, so even our own attempt to reform, to better ourselves without God is just our own selfish desire working in us. We must have the ministry of the Spirit, that is why I said a few weeks ago that if you struggle with doubting your faith...don't attempt to dismiss it, but rather wrestle with it for in doing so there can be only two outcomes. Either the Spirit will minister assurance and comfort, or it will prove out that the Spirit is ministering to you that you yet need to repent and believe.

As I was thinking on this account here in Acts, of the Spirit coming upon them and the disciples speaking in these different languages and all those around being able to hear and to understand them. What sort of crazy experience that must have been, but yet, the reality is that is the experience of each and every one of us who are in Christ. For the new birth is not unlike this miraculous event recorded here. For the spirit comes upon us, and enables us to hear that which we could not hear before, just like all those who were there when the disciples began speaking in the languages of all of those around them. When the gospel was shared to us without the working of the spirit it might as well be a foreign language, for we are unable to see, we are unable to hear and understand. Our selfish desire for sin keeps us from hearing, and keeps us from seeing. But when the holy spirit comes upon us, and works in us so that we may hear, so that we may see, it changes our lives. Our selfish desires must die, and be replaced with a desire for God...and it is only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts that this will happen. Until the spirit, the gospel is nothing more than a foreign language to us, for it sounds like foolishness to us just as the disciples speaking in tongues did to some, for they said, "They are full of new wine."

Our new birth experience is like this account in Acts, we were unable to understand, unable to believe, unable to see the gospel. As I said earlier, we were deaf, we were blind, we were lame...and God had to come and make us whole again, it is nothing short of a miracle, it is the work of God alone through the Holy Spirit so that we may hear the gospel and believe. And just like the miracles performed in Christ's ministry here on earth, so to it is with us. It is He who has made our deaf ears able to hear his word, it is He who has made our blind eyes able to see his wonders and his love, and it is he who has made our lame legs able to walk with him in righteousness. It is not of ourselves, as scripture says...it is a gift of God. For without God, we are nothing more than the blind groping around in darkness, and the lame pretending to run the race. But God in his great mercy and love, has given us his Spirit so that we may be healed, so that we may no longer be blind and lost in the darkness of our sins. It is he who has healed our lameness making us able to walk upright in righteousness, and it is he who has made us able to see the glorious kingdom of God.

