

Acts 2 – Power Received

“If 'Pentecost' means anything at all to most people today, it is probably something to do with 'Pentecostalism'. And that – again, if it means anything to people at all – probably signifies a somewhat wild form of Christian religious experience and practice, outside the main stream of church life, involving a lot of noise and waving of arms, and (of course) speaking in tongues.”¹ That was not what Luke or his first readers understood by 'Pentecost', for them it was an agricultural festival held on the fiftieth day after Passover when farmers brought the first sheaf of wheat from the crop to offer it to God. But the Jews of the first century would also remember that the fiftieth day after Passover was when the Israelites came to Sinai where Moses received the Law. “Its about God giving to his redeemed people the way of life by which they must carry out his purposes.”² It was on this day when the believers “were all together in one place” that with a noise from heaven, the sound of a strong wind blowing, and tongues like fire that the Spirit came.

They were all filled with the Spirit and enabled by the Spirit they began to speak the praises of God in the languages of the many different nationalities that were gathered in the city. It was a noisy affair that soon drew a crowd, some who were amazed at hearing about God's mighty deeds in their own heart language, others who mocked them for drinking too much sweet new wine. If ever the believers had questioned how they were going to be able to communicate the gospel to all nations here was a glorious answer, a foretaste of what was to come.

Peter seizes on the comments of the scoffers to explain what was happening and Luke gives us a summary of this first sermon. We would not explain an experience of apparent drunkenness by talking of the prophecy of Joel but Peter knew that he was speaking to a people who spent their time looking into the prophecies of the Old Testament because “they saw themselves as the generation for whom it should all come true.”³ He interprets Joel's “And afterwards” to “In the last days” and proceeds to tell them that what God had promised through Joel was now being experienced. The last days have arrived.

After this introduction Peter goes on to tell the story of Jesus, how this is a fulfilment of prophecy, has been witnessed by the apostles and now needs to be responded to with repentance and belief. He said that those who repented and trusted in Christ to forgive their sins would also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The result was that 3000 people were baptised and added to the number of believers that day. Now that's a sermon that demands our attention!

In the final paragraph of this chapter we have a description of the new community of believers. Acts 2:42 is often regarded as setting down the four marks of the church. The apostles teaching, the fellowship of believers, the breaking of bread and the prayers. The four go together and cannot be separated, or one left out, without seriously damaging the church.

1 Tom Wright 2008, Acts for Everyone Part 1, SPCK

2 Tom Wright 2008, Acts for Everyone Part 1, SPCK

3 Tom Wright 2008, Acts for Everyone Part 1, SPCK

Acts

Open

- Have you ever been in a situation where you were amongst people speaking a different language to you then heard someone speaking in your own language and dialect? How did you feel or how would you feel if it happened to you?

Study

Read together Acts 2: 1-47

1. What were the three supernatural signs that accompanied the coming of the Holy Spirit? What do you think they signified? (Acts 2:1-4, see Luke 3:16-17, Exodus 19:18, John 3:8)
2. Why did a crowd quickly gather and who were the people in the crowd? What was it that “amazed and perplexed them”? Why do you think some treated it as a joke and put it down to drunkenness? (Acts 2: 5-13)
3. “What does this mean?” (verse 12), how does Peter answer this question? In what ways do you think this was particularly relevant to his audience? (Acts 2: 14-21)

Acts

4. How does Peter show that Jesus is the Lord referred to by Joel (verse 21, Joel 2:32) on whom everyone must call to be saved? What are the four key things he tells them about Jesus? (Acts 2: 22-36)

5. What was the response to Peter's message? What do you understand by his reply to their heart cry, "Brothers, what shall we do?", how does his reply draw us all into the story? (Acts 2: 37-41)

6. In Acts 2: 41 we are told that 3,000 people were baptised what were the things they did now that they belonged to a Spirit filled community? What impact did that have on the people they lived among? (Acts 2: 42-47)

7. Looking over the whole chapter what evidence can you see that they had received power when the Holy Spirit came upon them? (Acts 1:8)

Acts

Commit

- “Pious Muslims are expected to learn God's language. By contrast, Christians are much keener to get the Word out—and much less choosy about what form it should take”⁴ To what extent do you think Acts 2: 4-11 is a mandate from God for us to make sure we present the gospel in the heart language of our hearers? If so what are the things we personally can do about it?
- In Acts 2: 47 “the Lord added people *daily*...The early church's evangelism was not an occasional or sporadic activity..... No, just as their worship was daily (46a), so was their witness.”⁵ What do we need to do to recapture the enthusiasm and effectiveness of those first believers?
- “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off”. What are the signs to show that we have received the gift of the Holy Spirit and belong to a Spirit filled community?

4 John Mickelthwaite and Adrian Woolbridge, 2009, *God is Back How the Global Rise of Faith is Changing the World*, Allen Lane Penguin Books

5 John R W Stott 1990, *The Message of Acts*, IVP