

POWER TO WITNESS

Text: Acts 1:8, Acts 2:1-41

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When Liz and I were in Israel we were able to go to the 'Wailing Wall' in Jerusalem. It is the remaining western wall of the perimeter Herod built around the temple, the temple that Jesus knew. Our tour guide told the story that in 1978 when President Carter said he would pray for the 'Peace Plan' he developed, the Prime Minister of Israel Mr Begin said he would pray also, and that it was 'just a local call for him'. I remember remarking that it's a local call for all of us. Proximity to the old temple is no longer a sign of proximity to God as it was in the Old Testament. Since Pentecost it is all very different. As my daughter, as a four year old put it so aptly, Pentecost '... means that Jesus is now living under my skin.' That is the wonder of Pentecost. The Almighty now lives in his people. The holy presence of God, the 'Holy of Holies' is now in the heart of each one of his people. Now that is very amazing stuff. The question is: What is the significance of this? Well, we are going to explore this by using Acts 1:8 as our text to interpret the Pentecost event. *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

The first thing we notice here is who received the gift of the Spirit. Our text says *"...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you..."* Who is the 'you' in our text? Well it refers to the followers of Jesus. They are the ones who were instructed by Jesus to wait in Jerusalem. We note in Acts 1:15 that there was a group of about 120 believers. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came like a 'violent wind' and 'tongues of fire'. These tongues of fire rested on each of the persons who received the Spirit. So it was easy to see who received the Spirit. And Acts 2:4 says that *"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit..."* So you see it was not just some of those who were there that received the Spirit. They all received the Spirit. So they were all filled and all received power.

Now who were these people, these 120 in that room? Were they spiritual giants? Heroes of the faith? Theological experts? No they were just ordinary people. Actually

they were a very odd collection. There was a bunch of fishermen. There was an ex-tax collector, and an ex-prostitute as well as the mother of Jesus. And then over a hundred more that we don't know anything about. Not even what they did later. This is certainly not a list of the 'who's who' of the society of the day. I am not sure we might today regard them as the 'cream' of the church. May be some or many were, but we simply have no clue. And yet this unlikely lot are the followers of Jesus and they all received the gift of the Almighty God coming to live in them. They may seem an unlikely lot, but that in itself so clearly makes the point that the Pentecost blessing is for all the people of God. It is for women and men, the young and old, the rich and poor, the educated and uneducated; in other words everybody. That is what the prophet Joel got so excited about in his prophecy. As Peter said in his sermon in Acts 2:17-18: *"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your older men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women I will pour out my Spirit in those days and they will prophesy."* That is the wonder of Pentecost. In the Old Testament the Spirit was given in a trickle or an occasional shower. But now the Spirit is poured out, even on the kids and the slaves in the house. No matter who 'you' are, the gift of having God living in you can be yours. Listen to Peter as he spoke to the very people who had wanted Jesus crucified (Acts 2:38) *"Peter replied 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" It is as simple as that. If we trust in Jesus as our saviour and Lord we have the Spirit within. Therefore all of us who believe in Jesus have the same privileges. Each of us has God dwelling in us and we have his power. Remember the text: "...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you."* So there are no differences amongst Christians as if some Christians are better or holier than others. There is no need to go searching for a so-called 'second blessing' or some greater spiritual experience. All Christians have the Spirit and power of God. It doesn't depend on who you are or what you do. It depends solely on the grace of God.

Now, seeing that every believer has the gift and the power of the Spirit what is the purpose for us having this? Note the next part of our text: *"...to be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."* So we receive the gift and the power of the Spirit to be witnesses for Jesus. This point is brought home to us when we remember that Pentecost was the Jewish feast to celebrate the

gathering of the harvest. It was like saying 'The crops are ready. Let's get out there and bring it in!' With the Pentecost celebration described here in Acts 2 the New Testament church is born. It has the mandate to gather the harvest. Its calling is to gather in God's people, starting at home (that is in Jerusalem) and then spreading out into the whole world. Note the ever expanding circle: *"...Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."* Without the power of the Spirit this couldn't be done. That's why Jesus said in Luke 24:49: *"Wait, stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high..."*

And now, on the day of Pentecost we see the power in action. Note Acts 2:4 *"All were filled with the Spirit...and ...began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."* Why the ability to speak in other 'tongues'; or as the word can mean other 'languages'. Notice Acts 2:5, 6 *"Now there were staying in Jerusalem God fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound a crowd came together in bewilderment because each one heard them speaking in his own language."* See the power displayed here? Very ordinary people, Galilean fishermen and other simple folk, suddenly they were speaking all kinds of languages. They were very dramatically given the ability, the 'power', to be Christ's 'witnesses' to 'the ends of the earth'. For example, look at Peter. About a month and a half earlier he was too scared to admit he was a follower of Jesus. Remember how he used colourful language to deny he knew Jesus. Now look at him. He is boldly standing up and preaching a dynamic sermon to the same crowd that wanted Jesus crucified. And not only Peter, who was always quick to speak, the other disciples too; they received understanding and courage. They were the ones who had run off scared when Jesus was taken in the Garden of Gethsemane. They were the ones who had been hiding for weeks. Now look at them, boldly witnessing about Jesus and his death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit gave them power, power to witness. And look at what happened. The Spirit worked in the hearts of those same people who had wanted Jesus crucified and a miracle of grace occurred: 3000 of them were converted. Those who had wanted to be rid of Jesus now received him as their saviour and Lord. There you see the power of the Spirit at work in their lives as the disciples witnessed to them.

Now that 'power to witness' that we see here at work in Acts, is the power that is there for all Christians. We can say that because, as we have already seen, all Christians have the gift of the Spirit. And the Spirit's all consuming passion is to have Jesus known and

glorified *"...to the ends of the earth."* He will not stop till Jesus is known every where and is Lord of all. And the Spirit will do that through us. The Spirit will not stop until the disciples of Jesus have carried the message of Jesus to all the different peoples of the world. That's our calling, our key task in this life; to be Christ's 'witnesses'. That's our calling because each of us who confesses Jesus as Lord should know Jesus. After all, as my daughter said 'Jesus lives under our skin'. Note that we are not being asked to be theological experts but 'witnesses', giving a witness of our own experience of Jesus in our lives. The church is the body of Christ. We represent Jesus on this earth. We are his hands and voice. We are to complete Jesus' work on this earth. We are to bring about the kingdom of God and we do that by witnessing about Jesus. When the disciples asked Jesus in Acts 1:6 *"...are you going at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"* he did not rebuke them. He did not correct their theology of the restoration of the 'kingdom' but their assumption they could work out the timing. 'But', he says in verse 8, *"But you will receive power ...to be my witnesses"*. Restoration is coming, don't worry about when. But you just get on with being involved in bringing it about. Do we want a world with all the sin and suffering gone? Do we want an end to domestic violence and abused kids? Do you want an end to wars and disasters, to sickness and misery and death? Then we need to talk about Jesus. We need to witness about how Jesus has affected our lives and tell others as often as we are given the opportunity. We can do more than just intend being 'a hope in the hills'. We actually bring hope to individuals, and for the whole creation, by witnessing about Jesus.

So we as individual Christians or as a church cannot say 'that's not our job'. For Jesus very clearly gave the mandate *"...be my witnesses..."* No one can say 'but I don't have the ability to do this'. For Jesus said *"...you will receive power..."* So every one of us who believes in Jesus has the mandate and the power to witness for Jesus. But please note something here. While we all have the same power, that power is expressed differently in each of us, depending on how the Spirit has gifted us. [POWER POINT PICTURES x2] For example, when it comes to light globes you can have a 25 watt globe, or a 200 watt globe, or even a 2000 watt globe. There is a huge difference in their performance. But it is the same basic electric power supply that powers all of them. Some people are called by God to be great preachers and powerful evangelists. We could call them the 200 or 2000 watt performers, the big upfront witnesses. Others are called to concentrate on the quiet witness by their lifestyle and speech at home or at work, at school or wherever. We could call them 25 watt performers. But whatever

part of the task we are called to, each Christian has the same power, the same Holy Spirit working in our heart so that we can be Christ's witness to the world.

Now what is the message of the Spirit? What exactly are we to tell, as we witness. Well, what did those visitors hear in Jerusalem that Pentecost morning? Acts 2:11 "*...we heard them declaring the wonders of God...*" Peter's sermon makes it clear the 'wonder of God' is Jesus. The 'wonders of God' are centred in his amazing love as he gave his only son. Jesus is the one who brings forgiveness and peace and life. He is the 'water of life' who brings refreshment to the spiritually thirsty and dry. At Pentecost, with the outpouring of the Spirit, the people got the message. They were filled with the fullness of God. They were so overwhelmed with the length and breadth and height and depth of the love of Christ that they couldn't help themselves but speak about the 'wonders, the greatness of God'. Their minds were so full of a fresh, new, breathtaking vision of God and his astonishing acts of grace through Jesus that their mouths overflowed with praise. Here we see the 'power' of the Spirit. When we realise the wonder of what God has done and it fills our hearts with joy, we will share the gospel with boldness, with courage, with deep conviction, witnessing from the joy of our own hearts. When we grasp how broken we are and yet how much God loves us, that wonder provokes and inspires us to tell others about what Jesus has done in our own lives.

Jesus is the one who brings meaning to life and the hope that our world so desperately needs. And the Spirit's task is to make Jesus known. Many of us know that so well. That's why we call our selves 'Hope in the Hills'. But there are thousands in our community who don't know Jesus. There are many, many people, even in our own families who need the healing touch of Christ's grace. Never has there been such a spiritual thirst in our land, such a search for purpose and meaning. Well, you know Jesus. You have his Spirit and his power. Let these people hear what they need to hear. Understand it. The church does not exist for itself, having a good worship with our band, and good fellowship in our groups. We do not have the Spirit just for our own enjoyment, to make us feel good. The church exists for Christ's sake, to be his witnesses. So pick up on the passion of the Spirit. Let's start at home and move out into our communities and into the entire world and let everyone know 'the wonders of God'.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

These questions can be followed up personally, with a Christian friend, in your small groups, or in discussion after the service. Reflection is important because too often we hear a good sermon and soon forget it without actually growing spiritually or changing in attitude or what we do. The reflection questions are meant to be challenging, because our spiritual growth and the salvation of others is so important.

- Who received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? Was it a select few or broader than that? What does that imply for our church?

- What was the purpose for the disciples and others receiving the Holy Spirit? What are the implications for our congregation today?

- What is the message of the Spirit? How will you share that message? Do you know your gifting- are you are a 200 watt; 100 watt or 25 watt globe etc?