

SPIRIT DRIVEN GOSPEL FOR ALL NATIONS

Acts 2: 1-41

Leo Douma

26th May 2019



We are all aware of hecklers at football matches. Some of it can become quite unpleasant. Hecklers were part of the recent election campaign. Some even threw eggs. There is an art in replying to hecklers. The politician Winston Churchill once had a woman yell at him at a political rally. 'If you were my husband, I would poison your tea'. To which Churchill replied 'Madam, if you were my wife, I would drink it!' Hecklers were also part of the huge crowd in Jerusalem as we see in our text. Turning the tables on hecklers is what we see the Apostle Peter does here. I reckon Peter must have stunned that crowd. They had been laughing and enjoying the joke of the hecklers who said the disciples were drunk.

This enormous crowd had come together, attracted by the sound of the *"violent wind from heaven"*. Then they heard the disciples speaking in other languages. That really was astonishing. The Galilean fishermen spoke a guttural Aramaic dialect that hardly anyone else could understand. It would be a bit like the speaker of Queen's English being greeted by an Aussie ocker saying 'hello': you know: 'Owryagoinmateawright'? Not only that but the disciples were also quite hopeless in speaking Greek, the common language across the Roman Empire. And yet here they were speaking various languages as clear as a bell.

Luke tells us (Acts 2:5) *"Now there were staying in Jerusalem God fearing Jews from every nation under heaven."* In other words, they were Jews who were dispersed throughout all the known world of the time. Historians tell us that something like a million people came to Jerusalem for the Pentecost feast. Luke's list (Acts 2:9-11) of the various nations is not random. It's like having a map in front of you and moving your mind's eye from east to west in three groups *"Mesopotamia (Persia)...Asia (Turkey)...Egypt to Rome"*. You see Luke is deliberately following the list of nations in Genesis 10. There with the tower of Babel we see the people dispersed because of their sin, by confusing their languages. But now Luke sees the gathering of people from all the nations.

You see that with the emphasis Luke gives to the disciples speaking in "other tongues". We are told nothing more of the "tongues of fire" which we see at the beginning.

Rather on three occasions (Acts 2:6&7 &11) Luke repeats the point that *"each heard them speaking in his own native language"*. That is the power of the Spirit: the ability to bring the message of God to all the nations. Now because of this, the crowd is *"amazed and perplexed"*. The Greek means 'to push out of their senses', or as we say now 'its mind blowing!' It means they were hit hard and stunned. That's why they asked, "What does this mean?"

Here we come back to the hecklers. (Acts 2:13) They make fun of the disciples, *"They have had too much wine!"* But Peter turns the whole thing around and says, 'We're not drunk. Give us a break. It's too early for that. No, actually, this is the sign of the last days. You see folks what you see and hear shows we're about to hit the Day of Judgment. This is it folks, we're close to the end.' That's how the message would have come across when Peter quoted from the Old Testament prophet Joel. (Acts 2:16) *"This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel. In the last days I will pour out my Spirit."*

Peter used the formula of the "pesher". That was the Hebrew term for stating the fulfillment of prophecy "This is that..." In other words, "You know that stuff Joel spoke about? Well this is it. It's here!" Now who's laughing! Look at verse 20 (quoting Joel 2:31) *"The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord..."* (Joel 3:2 adds) *"I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of judgment"*. The Old Testament prophets, like Joel, saw the end times telescoped into a single moment. You know how it is when we look at distant mountain ranges through a telescope. The ranges appear very close to each other when in fact they are far apart. They saw Christ's two comings as one 'Day of Judgement'. Christ's first coming was when he was born amongst us and died in our place. The second is when he comes to judge all the nations. The two were seen by Joel as the one great "day of the Lord".

It is not by coincidence that this great moment occurred at Pentecost. Pentecost was the Jewish 'Feast of the Harvest'. That's when the sickle was put to the grain and the harvest gathered. That reminds us of the imagery in some of Jesus' parables of the final judgment. He described it as when the wheat is harvested and threshed, and the rubbish is thrown into the fire. That is the context here in our text: the "last days... the day of the Lord." The symbolism of 'the harvest' being gathered is also powerful in the sense of a harvest of believers gathered from all the nations. We see the first sign of that when, at the end of Peter's sermon, 3000 people were converted.

Now the sign (or the indicator) of the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy is that *"In the last days I will pour out my Spirit on all people says the Lord."* In the Old Testament times the

giving of the Spirit was like a trickle or a drizzle or even an occasional shower. But at Pentecost, it was a tropical rainstorm. The heavens opened, and the water was dumped. That's the sense of the words "*poured out on all people.*" There again, in those words, is that sense of finality. That which is poured out cannot be retrieved. It is not a sparing trickle to a few. It is a dumping, an unloading for everybody. The reference to "all people" does not mean that the Spirit is given to everybody irrespective of a person's readiness. Peter says clearly at the end of his sermon that the people were to "*repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus and you will be forgiven and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*"

The words "all people" are qualified by "your sons and daughters... your young men...old men... even my servants (Hebrew-the slaves) men and women." What is being said is that the Holy Spirit was "poured out" without any distinction regarding age, gender or status. So, no longer the Old Testament emphasis on the few, especially the men in special office of prophet, priest or king. No longer a temple that kept women and children and foreigners at the outer courts with fear of death for going further inside. Now all God's people, all who believe, the women and children, the poor and slaves included, have the Spirit in all his power poured out on them. Now all believers are themselves the temple of the living God.

The thing to understand is that with the Spirit we all have full access to the grace and gifts of God. Because, you see, the Spirit himself is the key that opens the door to all the treasures of Christ. The Spirit unites us to Jesus. Think of a baby in its mother. They are two distinct lives joined by the umbilical cord. The life and the resources of the mother are passed on to her child via the umbilical cord. In many ways what the mother experiences, so does her baby. What mother eats and drinks also affects baby. Similarly, the Spirit unites us with Jesus. All that Jesus has done also affects us. As Jesus died on the cross, so we have died with him and been forgiven. As Jesus rose again, we too have risen with him and live eternal life. As Jesus ascended to heaven, we have received the Spirit. All that Christ is and has, is ours by the Spirit that unites us to him. By the Spirit we have a great variety of gifts for use in the church and kingdom. So, you see, when we have the Spirit, we have everything. He is the fulfillment of all God's promises. He is the one who forms us into a new people, the people of God. Now God's people are not limited to Israel. God's people are from all the nations, whoever is moved by the Spirit of God.

Now that treasure, that power of the Spirit and the spiritual gifts he gives us, is a call to ministry for all of us who believe. It makes no difference whether we are male or female, old or young. As Joel's prophecy goes on - "*Your sons and daughters will*

prophesy your young men will see visions; your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women I will pour out my Spirit and they will prophesy." Luther and Calvin point out that having 'visions' and 'dreaming dreams' are the same as 'prophesying'. Hebrew poetry is often repeating the same thought in different words. In the Old Testament the visions and dreams were God's normal way of revealing his Word to the prophets. For example, in Numbers 12:6 we are told that Moses was special because God spoke to him "face to face". But the normal way was, as it says, "When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams." So, all who have the Spirit are to prophesy. What does that mean? Does it mean we will predict the future? No, prophecy in the Bible is always about making clear to people what God says. The Old Testament prophets basically preached about God's saving acts and his requirements for life which they based on the books of Moses. They challenged Israel to love God in response to his grace by obeying the covenant requirements. If Israel did not obey, then the curses, already written in Deuteronomy 27 & 28 would apply. At the heart of what the prophets did was to say what God told them. In other words, they simply taught what the scriptures said.

Now, what is special about the "last days", that is, the New Testament times, is that prophecy is now an activity in which all believers are to participate. As Peter preached (verses 23-36) Christ has brought reconciliation by his death and resurrection. He has ascended to pour out his gift of the Spirit. And all the scriptures have been written. Jesus himself was God's last Word. Jesus is God's final revelation. Now God can dwell in his people because we are declared perfect in Christ through faith. And all God has to say is in the Bible. So, all of us who believe, have the Spirit. We know God personally. And we have his clear message. In fact, we have the message more clearly than did any of the Old Testament prophets. Many of them will have excelled us in their faith, like Moses and Abraham. But their knowledge of Jesus was nowhere near as clear as we see it. We know very well how God is going to bring the Kingdom and restore the creation. The Spirit makes it very clear to us through the Bible.

So, for us to prophesy is simply to do what Peter did. We share the truth in the Bible. And we witness about Jesus in our own lives. When we look at Peter's sermon that's it in a nutshell. When Peter spoke to the crowd, what did he talk about? Jesus, pure and simple. He spoke of what happened to Jesus, especially his death and resurrection. Because that is the way we are forgiven. He mentioned the Old Testament passages as they spoke about Jesus. He told them of the gospel promises of forgiveness and eternal life. And he challenged them to repent and believe. That is still the task today. That's our calling as prophets. Talk about Jesus. Live in a way that reveals Jesus. Read the Bible. Share our witness and challenge others to believe. That's what Jesus said in

Acts 1 *"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."*

Now do you see the implication of this? It is not just a minister who is called to preach or a missionary that goes overseas to witness. If you believe in Jesus, you have the gift of the Spirit and you been empowered to witness. You are all called to ministry. No excuses. You cannot say, 'I am too young. I am too old. I am just a woman. I am just a simple bloke'. God says, *"I will pour out my Spirit on all [my] people"*. That means every one of us must stand up and be counted and committed. We don't have the luxury to have options about this. The situation is too serious. Remember the context of Joel's prophecy. We are in the "last days". Christ is coming again to judge the world. That's why we are all empowered by the Spirit and called by him to prophesy about Jesus. We don't have the time to just focus on ourselves and what material wealth we can accumulate. We have a message to proclaim. And people will be saved or lost depending how they respond to you when you witness about Jesus. Yes, there will be the hecklers, those who poke fun at our beliefs. But who will have the last laugh when Jesus returns in glory? If people do not believe our witness, they will not be saved. If they do believe our witness, they will be saved. That is the enormously important calling you have. As Peter said, *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"*. Pentecost is about gathering in the harvest. The gospel is for all nations, for people from every tribe and language. So, let's get out there and gather.