

Pentecost

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening. Please turn back to Acts chapter 2. We're going to look throughout this chapter, not every verse, not every part of it, but Pentecost, what happened at Pentecost is our theme.

Now, let's say that you as a Christian may not always find being a Christian easy. I think that's fair to say, isn't it? The Christian life is one that isn't necessarily straightforward, believing knowing God, going on knowing God, all of the different aspects of what it means to be a Christian. In fact, you may say there are many things, but here are two that are particularly difficult.

Simply knowing and believing in Jesus. Now, that's fundamental to what it means to be a Christian, isn't it? But it's hard knowing and trusting in Jesus and going on knowing and trusting in Jesus.

Because for a start, sometimes we doubt. Even as believers, sometimes we think, well, I don't understand everything or I don't know how to understand this or that aspect of Christianity.

And also we get dry. It's just a fact, isn't it? Sometimes we feel cold within ourselves towards Jesus.

So it's hard. Another aspect I would suggest that is difficult about being a Christian is testifying to Jesus. Doesn't it follow that if you find it hard to know and trust in Jesus in your heart, maybe because you feel dry or because you yourself have doubts, then it's going to be hard to go and tell other people about Jesus and testify about him if you yourself are struggling.

[1 : 48] So these, there are many, but these are two things I think can be hard about being a Christian. Now, here's the thing. I think sometimes we think well, I'm a Christian because God called me.

You know, this is part of what we've been learning about in Ephesians. That because of the election of God, because of the fact that he calls us by his spirit, then he has begun this work in us. And we think to ourselves, well, this is hard, but God, you called me. You called me to this life of following you.

Why is it so hard? And how are you going to help me? How are you going to help me trust in you and go on trusting you? And how are you going to help me tell other people about Jesus? These are some things that you may have found hard. You may find hard now and you may well find hard in the future. Pentecost is hugely helpful in these regards.

Understanding what happens at Pentecost and how it impacts who we are now in this day and age is really, really helpful. So we're just going to look through this chapter, pull out some of the things that happen and see how it applies to us.

Enter the scene. Okay, let's just think for a minute, first of all, about the scene here. Acts chapter 2 begins with this, when the day of Pentecost arrived. Now, first of all, we have to go back to the start of chapter 1 because Jesus, the great hope of the disciples, these people who had experienced this life with Jesus, who had seen him at first hand, who had been able to really trust in him because he was right there in front of them, helping them, teaching them, being patient with them. He'd ascended, he'd gone back and they experienced at first hand that sense of loss. The person of Jesus had returned, had ascended to heaven. But you see at the start of Acts chapter 1 Jesus had told them to wait for something.

[3 : 48] So in verse 3 we read, He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs. Appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God, He'd been preparing them for the life that they were to go on to have, a life of being his witnesses. But then He says this in verse 4, while staying with them, He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which He said, you heard from me, for John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit, not many days from now. So these few, the disciples and the kind of small extended community of believers at this time, very small, were waiting, a great sense of anticipation because their hope, Jesus, had said, there is something else that is to happen

and you must wait. Don't go dispersing off to your places and your towns and where you come from, wait, because I'm going to send the Holy Spirit. And so when we get to Pentecost, this is that great thing that they were anticipating.

This is that great thing that isn't random, that isn't just a kind of one off show of what God can do, but it is within the purpose and the plan of God in His timeline and what He's going to do for His people, that He's going to have such huge effect right up until now and on into the future until Jesus comes again.

He will send His Holy Spirit to be with His people, His vulnerable people, His people who miss Him, Jesus Christ physically, He will send His spirit. And so the waiting disciples, suddenly as we get this great scene in Acts chapter 2, experience the coming of the Spirit.

What do they experience? Three things. Let me read from verse 2. Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind and it filled the entire house where they were sitting and divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. They read these three distinct evidences if you like of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

These three things aren't in and of themselves the thing that we are to focus on. They are the evidences of the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit with His people. They hear they see and in their speaking they see evidence of the Holy Spirit.

[6 : 40] Let's look at them just for a couple of minutes. We get this incredible sense of this powerful sound that captured them and that captured the surrounding people, a crowd gathered after this event happened.

This sound that happens we get in verse 2. Suddenly they came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, not a wind, like a mighty rushing wind is evidence as I've said of the power and the presence of God, the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit coming amongst them. We get different references in the Bible. You know when God presences himself with His people when He makes himself known sometimes we get very dramatic representations of the sense of God being there. Let me read from Exodus chapter 19.

In Exodus chapter 19 just before the God comes and speaks to the Israelites through Moses and gives the Ten Commandments to them. We read these words in verse 16. On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast so that all the people in the camp trembled. A real vivid sense of the sound and the drama of the presence of the coming down of God to evidence himself to his people and to declare to them, to give them His law, His commandments. You can read on and read a kind of continued sense of the presence, the coming presence and the drama.

In the sound there is a symbol of the power of God coming. The mighty sound of the power of God. But also when we think about this sound like a wind there is a sense of it being like the breath, like the breath of God. The Holy Spirit breathed out upon His people. In Job, here's a verse from Job chapter 33. In Job we read, the spirit of God has made me, a reference there to the creative life giving work of the Holy Spirit. The spirit of God has made me and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

[9 : 04] There aren't many references in the Old Testament as developed as there are in the New Testament but that's a really clear verse there. And of course we think about the life giving power of the spirit. If you go right back to the very start of the Bible in the book of Genesis, the spirit of God was hovering over the waters. We get that mention of the presence and the creative power of God's spirit right at the beginning of creation. But it's true, as we've seen in that little verse there in Job, it's true also of Christian conversion isn't it? How has God worked in you, Christian by His Holy Spirit? You didn't just decide one day to be a Christian by your own power but you recognised and you testified to the work of God in your heart.

God's Holy Spirit at work in you. In John's Gospel it speaks about those being born of water and of the spirit. So we recognise at a fundamental level that as believers we testify to the work of God in us and the work of His Holy Spirit. So there is that sense of the power and of the presence of God in this symbol, in this picture, this evidence of this mighty wind. But also there's another verse in John where Jesus is speaking to His disciples before this day of Pentecost and it's linked to this whole idea of the breath but it's very significant, it'll be very significant in terms of the effect of Pentecost, the purpose of Pentecost. Jesus is speaking to His disciples and then He does this.

In John chapter 20 it says, when He had said this, He breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit. You see Jesus, that verse in many ways prefigures what happens here in Pentecost with the, if you like, the breathing out, the pouring out of God's Holy Spirit, the beginning of this great work of God being with, empowering, equipping His people to go out. Jesus is about to send out His disciples and He says to them, He breathes on them and says receive the Holy Spirit. So there is that sense and this is going to be important, we're going to come back to this, that as He prepares them for their ministry, for the mission that He has for them He sends them out not on their own, not on their own, receive the Holy Spirit.

We'll come back to that. So we focus really upon the sound, this incredible sense of the power, this great noise, but obviously we also get these references to the sight, supernatural, amazing sight of these flames as of fire coming down and light, a lighting above all the different believers. Again often when we read of the presence of God in the Bible fire is a symbol of His power, but also we speak about the Holy Spirit of God and fire is often a reference to the purifying the holiness of God, the Holy Spirit comes amongst them. Think also of the reference in Isaiah, when Isaiah sees this great, incredible, powerful, awesome vision of God, he falls down on his face because he's aware of his sinfulness, he's aware that he can't stand before this incredible God and yet even at that point you remember the picture of how the live coal is brought and it touches his lips and he is told that his sin is atoned for. There is a holiness of God, but even in this great picture at the heart of the Old Testament there is this testimony to the work of God in bringing salvation bringing forgiveness. So these tongues of fire come down and descend upon the believers and of course then we read about the way they speak this supernatural miracle that occurs and that takes up in many ways a lot of the chapter, a lot of the chapter is about what happens when they are supernaturally enabled to speak in different tongues and we don't have time to go into all that happens and I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this but again what is the purpose of this? What so often happens when we read through the miracles in the New Testament is we're tempted to sometimes focus just on the miracles as spectacles in and of themselves. But the miracles that Jesus did in the gospels, the miracles that are done at different times throughout the Bible are evidences of the power and the presence of God and they're intended to point those who see the miracles to the one who enables them to the one who performs them to the one who has authority over the elements or whatever it is that is being worked miraculously so that people can say behold the true God and this miracle that happens here with these people who haven't learned all these different languages but they're enabled by the Holy Spirit to speak in many different languages so that all the different people who are gathered in the crowd from across if you like the known world at that time are able to hear them speaking about their

God and understand them are pointed to the God about whom they speak. They don't just say oh wow that's incredible these guys can all of a sudden speak different languages because of course what this whole episode results in is 3000 people being added to the church the testimony is testimony to the power and presence of God and it leads people to say we saw towards the end of the chapter verse 37 now when they heard this because of course Peter goes on to explain to the people what's happening he quotes back from different passages in the Old Testament to say well please understand what's happening here this is the fulfillment of God's promises. Peter explains to them and then when they heard this they were cut to the heart said to Peter what should we do what should we do when faced with this great evidence of the presence and the power of God and Peter says repent and be baptized repent and be baptized having spoken having preached about the one in whom they are to put their hope with saviour Jesus he says repent and be baptized and so this miracle this great display of the presence and the power of God is testimony to God himself and leads people to him it's not just spectacle it leads people to him it is for people to put their trust in him so this great event that happened this historical event that happened roughly 2000 years ago sometimes leaves us saying well wow wasn't that an incredible time wouldn't that have been an amazing place to be wouldn't that have been an amazing sight to behold a thing to experience if only things were like that for me now because I doubt and I fear and I drift and I don't always feel like testifying things feel very distant to me nowadays so it's really important then for us to go on and think about how this incredible event is relevant for us the second thing I want to think about is the timing or if you like the order of what happens here not God has done but let's just ask ourselves the question well how does this fit in terms of time and history think about a skilled workman maybe a mechanic a skilled mechanic building a classic old car or a watchmaker somebody putting together some complex piece of machinery what's really important for that

person is to know the order of things where things fit so that the machine works really well now what I'm not suggesting is that God was trying to follow some complex instructions and if he got a little piece wrong then he would have made a mistake because this is his plan this is his history he is putting this together but what we should do is understand how this fits how this piece if you like fits in his purposes in his history as he put together and worked out his salvation history we spent this morning we spent the last few weeks and indeed we spent many weeks in church focusing on Christ the death of Christ the resurrection of Christ and the ascension of Christ but what's important to see here about this day of Pentecost and this giving of the Spirit is this comes as a result of all of those things so because

[18:52] the time had come where Jesus died and was raised and ascended glorified to heaven because that time had come now was the time for God to pour out his Holy Spirit now was the time where Jesus had said to his disciples when I go I will give you my Spirit now is the time for him to do that this was the appropriate time if you like this was where that peace in God's great plan of salvation came into fruition so as I said the disciples who had gathered here weren't to see this as just some random happening that's why Peter wanted to preach and to say to them well look remember these old Testament prophecies understand that this is the fulfillment of what is happening Jesus as we look to that verse in John chapter 20 as he sent them out on their mission he enabled them he sent them out with a purpose but he had enabled them he promised them the Holy Spirit

Jesus himself though was enabled all the way through his ministry by the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in the form if you like of a dove Jesus at every point in his ministry was upheld and taken forward until that great moment on the cross by the Holy Spirit and now as God's fledgling early church gathers in all its fragility in all its unknowing of the future in all its sense of the real sense of what is God doing and how is he going to take us forward now is the point where God is to pour out his Holy Spirit on his church so that they may go forward into this new era this era which we still live in today the era of the gospel the era of good news the day of salvation the time when all the ends of the earth are to hear the news of the gospel and to believe and that is a great call that he enables by the working of his spirit which he began at Pentecost as Christ returns to heaven then glorified work completed able to sit at the right hand of the Father have him finished the work that was given to him to do then we get to verse 30 in our chapter and we read these words being there for a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ but he was not abandoned to Hades nor did his flesh seek corruption this Jesus God raised up of that we're all witnesses being there for exalted at the right hand of God having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit as it was poured out this the you yourselves are seeing and hearing see as Christ returns to heaven in glory now is the time for the Holy Spirit to be poured out John's gospel speaks a lot about the work of the Holy Spirit very helpfully to us let me just back this up there's another verse in John's gospel that I want to read in John chapter 16 remember Jesus is preparing his disciples all their fear what's it going to be like when Jesus goes how are we going to deal with this what's it going to mean for us when Jesus goes John chapter 16 verse 7 Jesus says nevertheless I tell you the truth it's to your advantage that I go away for if I do not go away the helper will not come to you the helper is the Holy Spirit so I will send him to you and when he comes he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment one more verse in John chapter 7 John chapter 7 verse 39 verse 38 whoever believes in me Jesus says as the scripture has said out of his heart will flow rivers of living water now this he said about the Spirit whom those who believed in him were to receive for as yet the Spirit had not been given because Jesus was not yet glorified see even in there in the gospel of John there is that teaching of the order of things of the way that God was to work that while Christ was with them his work was to teach them about himself to point them to himself as the Messiah who would be able to forgive their sins because he was going to the cross and having finished that work he is able to pour out the Holy Spirit to equip his church and to be with them for all that they must do it's sometimes the case I think that we feel as believers I just wish that Jesus was right here with me now it would be so much easier if he was just here with me now and I could just ask him the question that I have then I could give him my complaint I could ask him how on earth I'm supposed to witness he could help me with my problems he could help me because I feel far away from him and I understand that that's a very real thing to feel and we look forward to that day

when he will return as he has promised but if we feel a sense of disappointment at his absence in some ways we haven't understood the potential of the promise for us and of the significance of Pentecost because what God did was that Jesus the Saviour ascended and was glorified but he gave his spirit to every believer who believes and repents so that every believer here in this room and every believer in this city and in this world every person walking this earth who is a believer in Jesus Christ is indwelt by God himself the spirit of God indwells a believer and so though we feel the physical absence of Jesus if you like don't underestimate what you have been given by God don't underestimate who you have been given who you have been indwelt by you have the power and the presence of God the Holy Spirit of God we read that in verse 38 again we mentioned this but Peter confirms to them when they ask what should we do

[25 : 56] Peter says repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit so let's just understand what it is that God has done for us you know think about consider the desire and the reality of God dwelling with us think about way back into the garden of Eden that great fellowship that was experienced by Adam and Eve before the fall the sense of God being with them wouldn't that be wonderful that untainted relationship with and walk with God tabernacle is an important word isn't it tabernacle the dwelling the sense of dwelling goes we go on as we go through the Old Testament to read about the actual tabernacle the tent the Israelite people constructed as a place where God would come down and be with them that was the dwelling place of God to be with them of course that went on and we read of the temple the more secure permanent dwelling place of God with his people the hope that we have we read of in Revelation 21 when we read of what God will do in renewing the heavens and the earth and it speaks of how God promises that at that point the dwelling of God will be with his people that's our great hope isn't it but we have to remember you know we have to remember right now when we think about relationship with

God the desire to have God with us helping us testifying to us of his love for us a verse like 1 Corinthians 6 do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you I think sometimes we need to be assured of that we need to be reminded of that because our Christianity is not something that we've just decided to read about in a book it's not something that we work up by ourselves by our own desires it's not something that we act out of our own strength of our own righteousness of our own goodness it's something that God is at work within us to enable his desire is for us his desires for you to have you as his child to know you so that you would know his love you would know his fellowship and that you that we as a community would know that sense of the presence of God with us as we seek to work out what it means to be a community of God and so we have the Holy Spirit given to us individually and as we come together we know the presence of God and so Saint Columba what is Saint Columba Saint Columba isn't a group of people who like each other it is that we hope but it's more than that Saint Columba isn't a church that is just trying to work out how to be the best church in Scotland Saint Columba isn't a group of people who think they're better than other people or better than other churches because they're doing things differently or anything like that Saint Columba is a group of ordinary people who are called to know and to go on knowing the power of God at work amongst them to take them from darkness to light and to see the work of God amongst them by his Holy Spirit every day the supernatural indwelling of the spirit with you for you so that you may know God but the final thing I want to see we've seen the experience here what happened at Pentecost and I think we've seen a little bit about the timing of what God does here and the purpose but I want to return again to the question

I started off with because I still think we might sometimes say well in theory that's fine but I still find that I have these questions how tangibly practically how then do I know Jesus I still find I'm distant and I still find it hard to testify to what Jesus has done for me I'm going to go back to John's Gospel and just read a few verses just to help us see this because it's really important to get a sense of the work of the Holy Spirit now for you amongst this community of believers what is the work of the Holy Spirit? Jesus again Jesus speaks to his disciples quite a lot in preparation to help them understand what the spirit will do for them so that first question that I asked right at the start how can I know Jesus how can I go on knowing Jesus I don't just mean intellectually I mean believing in him and trusting in him tomorrow morning when you have to go to work or whatever you face this week a couple of verses John chapter 15 and in verse 26 Jesus says the helper comes whom I will send to

you from the Father the spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father he will bear witness about me so let's be clear that the Holy Spirit his work is to testify to you about Jesus in many ways people would say different commentators would say that the work of the Holy Spirit is quite self-effacing it's not to make us even think about the Holy Spirit necessarily that much but as the Spirit works in you he is enabling you to look at Jesus to think about Jesus to understand the work of Jesus in dying for you in being raised again in being ascended in ascending and in being glorified the one who is now your mediator who sits at the right hand and who intercedes for you who prays for you who remembers you before the throne the Holy Spirit's work is to testify to that to you another verse John chapter 16 verse 12

Jesus says these amazing words to his disciples I still have many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now when the Spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all truth for he will not speak on his own authority whatever he hears he will speak and he will declare to you the things that are to come he will glorify me for he will take what is mine and declare it to you there is such an awesome sense of God's interaction the Trinity the Father Son and Holy Spirit the perfect knowledge of God within that union Father Son and Holy Spirit and yet the desire to take what is the truth of the gospel and make it known to us again that is the work of the Holy Spirit he will take and make known to you now of course that those verses in particular had great relevance for the disciples if you think about it these were the men who were going to go on and be those who would receive and write down the New Testament so that great body of truth that we have now received was that they were going to receive and pass on to us but that of course itself that is in many ways the foundation of how we go on knowing Jesus not just in some mystical voice coming to us every so often but in the foundation of the Holy Spirit inspired word of God that we have for our building up every day as we take it in a very ordinary way we take these scriptures that were written down for us that testify to Jesus and as we take them and read them we don't do that on our own because the Holy Spirit at work in us enables us gives us understanding teaches us leads us into all truth so we come we read the scriptures on our own we come together to read the scriptures and to hear them explained but know as well look the spirit the spirit's desire is to enable us as we read to see Christ and so that's why we are so encouraged to go on reading and to go on coming back to the word and not to give up on if you like our quiet times the foundational things that we talk about the means of grace prayer and the Holy Scriptures coming near to God through his word spirit enabling us to know Christ to know Jesus

[35 : 04] J.I. Packer uses a helpful illustration I think in talking about the work of the Holy Spirit he said the one time he was going to his church where he was a minister and as he turned the corner and it must have been night time and he saw the church the church was lit up it was floodlit but his point was that he couldn't see the floodlights on the ground you often don't see the floodlights because they're hidden their work is all to illuminate the building the building was illuminated the floodlights were hidden the Holy Spirit's work is to illuminate Jesus your Lord and your Saviour to help you see him clearly and to be assured of his work for you in an ongoing way assuring you of his love for you and the effectiveness of what he did for you every day in an ongoing way so how does God help me know Jesus he gives you the Holy Spirit to lead you into all truth and to take you back time and time again to the gospel we are so tempted to say there must be more than the gospel I maybe can save myself it's all about me it's about the way I work it's about me pleasing God it's about my reputation amongst other people but we're to be reminded on a daily basis of the gospel and of the foundation of what Jesus did the second question that we started with well how can I possibly testify to Jesus well I think the first answer has much to do with this you know we said that often we struggle to know Jesus because we grow dry but as the Spirit works in us testifying to Jesus as our hearts are warmed by him to Jesus and to this great gospel then we have a clearer sense within us of what it means to us then the reality of the gospel if he like comes home then we go about our daily business and we go to work tomorrow and you go and see your friends on Tuesday evening or whatever you're going to do again this week with a clearer picture of who Jesus Christ is of a deeper understanding of what it means to you that he died for you because this awareness of the work of the gospel is a living thing within you and not an academic dry distant thing that you heard a while ago and have maybe forgotten about so the Spirit's testimony enlivens our appreciation of his love for us but one final verse in John I think because it is difficult to witness and in many ways it is a fearful task that we've been given but listen to this

Jesus explains in John 16 verse 8 he says this about the Holy Spirit when he comes he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment now remember that much of the calling of a Christian is to remember what we are called to do and what God has committed to do if you like so we may be called to speak we may be called to testify to bear witness to what Christ has done for us but we can't, you can't convict your work colleague you're not able to quicken the heart of the person who lives across from you you need to be reminded of the fact that that's the Holy Spirit's work as he is at work in you to prepare you to receive the gospel to remember the gospel on a daily basis he must be at work in your neighbour, he must be at work in your colleague and that is his work and that is what he is speaking about here he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment and the degree of peace and understanding about the work to which you've been called to because you can't save all of the people that you love and you pray for but you're not called to you're called to testify and then you're called to pray that God by his spirit at work in your neighbour and your friend would do his work and there we rest there we rest because that is God's work and we leave that with him so knowing if you like knowing what we are called to and knowing the work that God has committed and promised to do is so important for us because it helps us in many ways it helps us with our witnessing it helps us with so many different aspects of our Christian lives and it also gives us a confidence if it's the case that the Holy Spirit is at work in people's hearts doing this work of bringing conviction then we can go out confidently and it's not appropriate for us to say well such and such a person will never listen to what I'm saying because the Holy Spirit is at work the work amongst these 3000 who believed on this day of Pentecost is the same work that is happening now many different communities throughout the world and our job is to remember that and to believe to actually believe in the reality of the Holy Spirit within us and at work in the communities in which we live let's pray

Lord we just asked tonight that you would help us to be encouraged by this evidence of your great power and of your presence with your people we just asked that you would teach us Lord and encourage us we pray for your Holy Spirit Lord we thank you that we have the Holy Spirit if we are those who are believers tonight forgive us when we demean that truth or when we forget about it forgive us when we grieve the Holy Spirit when we stop listening when we don't give the Spirit in some ways the opportunity to testify to us about Christ when we close our Bibles when we shut our ears when we stop praying when we don't believe that you are the powerful God who is able and willing to be at work so we just pray that you would give us this assurance Lord give us the joy of the Holy Spirit give us a sense of your power and of your peace and we pray that you would send us out that you would embolden us and prepare us for this great work of witnessing to which we've been called and we ask that you would go with us because we need you to in Jesus Amen.