

What Does it Mean to be Spirit Filled?

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[0 : 00] We're going to spend some time this evening looking at Acts chapter two. We began looking at that this morning, the first section. And so this evening we're mainly going to be focusing on the part from verse 14 until verse 21, where Peter is responding to what the crowds were saying, having witnessed the miracle of Pentecost.

And one of the questions that the crowd were asking was, what does this mean? What are we to make of this miraculous event? Remember the wind and the fire and particularly the other languages spoken, the disciples were miraculously given the ability to proclaim the gospel, to declare the mighty works of God in the languages of these different Jews and converts to Judaism.

And of course, representing all the peoples of the earth and showing that message that God speaks all these different languages that God wants to reach out to all these different peoples.

What does this mean? I've entitled the talk this evening, Is There Life After Pentecost? Not just life after death, but life after Pentecost. What does it mean for us as Christians that this event happened?

And the first thing that Peter does in this section here is that he has to answer what seems to be a particularly serious accusation, which is that at nine o'clock in the morning on this Pentecost Sunday, the disciples had all had a lot to drink and the Galileans were becoming quite rowdy and making a lot of noise.

[1 : 39] And of course, Peter says, well, obviously this is not the case. And what he does to explain the events of Pentecost is to go back into the Old Testament and particularly to go back to the prophet Joel.

Joel is one of the minor prophets. And Peter found in this particular prophecy, no doubt he knew that text well, a prediction of the events of Pentecost.

And so he uses this Old Testament passage in this Old Testament prophecy to explain what happened. And I think it'd be useful just before we dive into this particular thing, just to think about the book of Joel, maybe that's a book that you know well, or maybe not so well.

And just to think about why it is that Peter went here to look to think about Pentecost. Now, if I say Joel, what's the immediate image that comes into your mind? Is there something that comes into your mind straight away?

You can whisper it through your mask. I won't be breaking the advice to say that. It's your immediate image that is associated with the book of Joel. No?

[2 : 45] Locusts. Okay? So the book of Joel is sort of famous for this very graphic description of a locust plague.

Now locust plague is actually, it's a natural phenomenon. It's something that happens around the world, which is a huge quantity. And I wouldn't be able to put a number on it of locusts concentrating in a particular place and they literally eat up everything that's there.

They completely destroy the harvest and everything that had happened. And this is something that had happened in, presumably in the southern kingdom, in the kingdom where there was the temple, where there was the ruler who could trace his descendancy through David.

And in that kingdom, they'd experienced this locust plague. And it's described in graphic detail in this prophecy. And for Joel, this is a kind of picture of God's judgment.

So God has allowed at least this particular event to happen. And he sees that as being God's judgment on the people. And what he does is he says that in the light of this judgment, in the light of experiencing this hardship and these difficulties, and you could only imagine what it meant in those times to not have a harvest, God's people need to humble themselves and pray so that the right response experiencing this hardship, this natural phenomenon that would have had really serious consequences is to humble themselves and to call on the Lord.

[4 : 15] And we'll come back to that phrase later on. There's a call upon the Lord. So you can imagine maybe prayer meetings, people particularly seriously praying for God's mercy.

And Joel says that God will answer that prayer. So that prayer for mercy, that prayer for God's answer, for blessing to follow judgment, that prayer will be answered before a future day of the Lord.

And again, we'll come back to that expression later. So here are some of the things that are said in the prophecy of Joel, just to give us some idea of what that whole book is about and why Peter particularly went here to explain the events of Pentecost.

So God, for example, says, behold, I'm sending you grain, wine and oil and you will be satisfied. So it's describing a new harvest. It's describing blessing following this judgment of the Locust Plague.

It says, he has given the early rain for your vindication. He has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain as before. It's unusual for us to think about that in this country, but rain in the Bible is always blessing.

[5 : 25] Okay, so for us living as we do in the north here, close to the sea, sometimes we feel that we'd like to pray against rain. In the Bible, almost always, people are praying for rain.

Rain is blessing. There's a story, possibly apocryphal, where a visiting pastor from Africa came behind the pulpit in Charlotte Chapel and one Sunday sort of said, Lord, we just thank you for all this rain.

But that's what it means in the Bible. And this is described here is the blessing that God will pour out after this Locust Plague.

And then there's a phrase here, and I think this is a phrase that we can hold onto as a promise that God gives in general, and particularly he gave at this time. And it says this, I will restore to you the years the Locusts have consumed.

Can you hear what's being said there? I will restore to you the years the Locusts have consumed. So if you think of the Locust Plague and how many years of work that would have destroyed.

[6 : 32] So for example, someone might have a farm and might have a field of crops that they'd been cultivating for many, many years, and the Locusts would have destroyed not just that particular harvest, but years of work.

And there could have been other things as well. If we take this in a wider sense, we can think about how in our lives we can experience judgment and God's punishment and God's allowing particular things to happen in our lives.

And we could feel that we've lost all these years because of our sin and because of God's judgment. And God gives this promise, I will restore to you the years the Locusts have consumed.

So as we turn to God, that God blesses us. And there's some way in which he even makes up for those years that we've lost before receiving his blessing. So that's some of the background of this book of Joel.

And I think you've got some idea now of why Peter went here to explain what happened on the day of Pentecost. So let's just look here now at these verses, particularly now, verses 17 to 21.

[7 : 37] Now these verses are more or less exactly what it says in Joel. So Peter is simply quoting an Old Testament prophet here and there. He might just emphasize something and repeat something, but effectively it's the same thing as Joel said all those years ago.

And the first thing I want to particularly focus on, we can see in verse 17. And it says this, in the last days it shall be God declares that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh.

I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams.

Even on my male servants and female servants in those days, I will pour out my spirit and they shall prophesy. Now what is it that Peter wants to get across to those who are listening?

And the people who are listening, remember these aren't yet Christians. These are people who have experienced what's happened at Pentecost and want to know what it's all about. Well, what's about is that of that group of 120 people praying, how many people in that group receive the Holy Spirit?

[8 : 52] All of them. So what he's emphasizing is that God says, and this is his promise, I will pour out my spirit on all flesh.

So we could imagine, for example, that God at this moment could have poured out his Holy Spirit on the 11 surviving apostles. But he does more than that. We could imagine that God would have chosen all of the men who are present, so this would have been the disciples and the brothers of Jesus and other disciples who weren't apostles.

They would have all received the Holy Spirit. All of the men. But God does more than that. Look at it says, your sons and your daughters.

We could imagine that God would have chosen the senior, mature, the authoritative people in that group, the older generation that they surely people would listen to.

But it says that it's not just the old men who will dream dreams, and that could be translated the elders. So those the office bearers possibly even. But it says your young and your old and the expressions about visions and dreams are presumably simply another way of talking about prophesying.

[10 : 07] And it's not just the well off that when we might call the professionals, the wealthy, but it's also the servants. Of course, we're all God servants, but possibly the explanation, the word here in verse 18 might be describing someone's economic situation that they're not lords.

They're not free people, but they're under authority, their servants of someone else. All these different categories of people, all of them together and individually receive the Holy Spirit.

And that's the first thing that Peter wants to get across. That's what Pentecost means. The Holy Spirit is now for each individual for all of these different categories of people for all for all flesh.

The blessing of the Holy Spirit. If you remember on the day of Pentecost, when the fire came down, and that was a unique event that as far as I know has not been repeated in the history of the church, but the fire descended and rested on each of the people individually, each of the 120 who were present.

I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and they will prophesy and they will prophesy. So Peter is describing this speech from the 120 present as being prophecy.

[11 : 22] Now we can't cover all the prophecy involves and I'm only going to focus on one particular aspect. But what Peter is saying is that this is going to happen by all of the 120.

The list of places and languages is greater than 11. So it certainly wasn't only the apostles who were speaking and they will prophesy. All of the people who received the Holy Spirit were in that sense able to proclaim God's word and for people to hear and understand.

As we go on in the book of Acts, we see that's exactly what happens. For example, in chapter four, there's a prayer meeting in Jerusalem in this same group of people which is obviously much bigger now.

And they pray and it says this, and when they prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

And then possibly even more amazing in chapter eight, there's an event where the church experiences a major persecution and it says this, they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles.

[12 : 34] Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word and they will prophesy. And this is saying something which is very important that while there's a place obviously for the ministry of the word and for those who are apostles and those who are ministers and those who are evangelists, actually the most effective way in which the Christian faith is communicated is by, if you like, small individuals.

This has been described as mission from below. And that's true if we were to take a straw pole of all the people present. I'm sure that many of us, most of us, became Christians through the witness of a simple individual who wasn't a minister, who wasn't a pastor, who wasn't standing behind a pulpit.

That is how we became Christians. And if we think about the missionary history of the Christian church, the same thing is true that while there have been great missionaries and there have been great works that have been done, the most effective way in which the gospel has spread has been through traders and travelers and sailors and prisoners.

These are the sort of people who find themselves in close contact with non-Christians and in a situation where they can share the gospel and that can be received.

For example, the church in Ethiopia, which obviously still exists, traces its beginning to two brothers who got lost on their ship and there was a shipwreck and these two brothers ended up on land in Ethiopia and it was through that event that they were able to share the gospel and Ethiopia was able to become Christian.

[14 : 14] The church in Bulgaria, which also still exists, traces its origin to a, I believe it was a monk who was a prisoner in Bulgaria and he prayed for the ruler who was called Boris and the ruler of Bulgaria became a Christian.

And that story is repeated again and again and again that it's precisely what's promised here at Pentecost that the gift of the Holy Spirit is given to all these different categories of people together and individually and they will prophesy.

They will speak God's word in a language that people understand and that is the way in which the gospel will spread. And so just as we come to the end of this first point, I'd like to think, well for you to think and for myself to think about what this means in our circumstances, what it means that each of us has received the Holy Spirit and that we're called in our particular context to declare God's word to those people who are around us.

That it's not just 11 people on that Pentecost Sunday who were preaching, but it was 120 and we can just think of the hundreds of millions of Christians who are now able to proclaim the gospel across the world in all sorts of different settings.

So the first thing that we see from this prophecy that Peter's referring to is this promise, I will pour out my spirit on all flesh.

[15 : 36] Here's a second thing and we see this second thing particularly in verses 19 and 20, verses 19 and 20 in this Book of Acts chapter 2.

It says this, I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and vapor of smoke, the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

Now what's that got to do with the day of Pentecost? It looks very like the sort of things that Jesus said about the end of the world. When Jesus was speaking about his return in glory, Jesus describes events that we will recognize when they happen, but we cannot predict what they'd look like now.

But those events precede his second coming. Jesus refers to them in other places as the birth pains, the birth pains that precede the second coming of Jesus.

And the reason that Peter refers to that here is that the gift of the Spirit is the sign that we, since Pentecost as Christians have been living in this final period of world history, the last days, this is the time that we're living in.

[16 : 53] Because the Holy Spirit has been given, that's the sign. And I think we need to think about as Christians, what does it mean if we say that we're living in the last days? How does that affect how we live as Christians?

Maybe it feels a little bit like science fiction. It's just difficult to get your head around it. And maybe we feel we should just not think about it too much and just get on with the everyday business of living as Christians.

But actually, it's right and helpful for us to focus and to have a clear sense of expectation. I guess the obvious analogy would be someone preparing to get married.

Now, there are things that they would do that they would, before getting married, that they might do anyway. But there's always that expectation of a really important event, a joyful event in the future.

And actually, that helps that person to concentrate all that they do in the light of this future event. And that for us is the second coming of Jesus, which is described here as the great and magnificent day.

[17 : 59] The great is the big day, the huge day. And magnificent is the day of epiphany, the day of revelation. That is what we're living in the light of.

That is what we're looking forward to. I think it would be true to say, actually, that's the biggest issue that we face as Christians. All the different other issues are subsumed under this fact that we as Christians are expecting this day, which is also described as a wedding day, the day when Jesus comes back.

So we shouldn't live life unduly comfortable just with the way things are now, living as if there wasn't that day in the future, sort of falling asleep, spiritually, if you like.

And there's stuff to get on with. We can't, by our own actions, hasten the day of Jesus' return. But we can be doing the things that we need to be doing because we know it's happening.

A few weeks ago on a Sunday morning, we were looking at a passage from Jeremiah chapter 29, which is from the Old Testament. And it's describing how a group of God's people found themselves in exile.

[19 : 07] They found themselves in another part of the world. And that was God's plan. That was what God had allowed in their history, that they were living in Babylon. They were living far away from their homeland.

And it's interesting to hear the advice that's given to those people, which we could apply to ourselves as Christians, because in a sense we're living in this exile, waiting some time in the future for this return to our homeland when Jesus returns.

And this is the advice that's given in Jeremiah chapter 29. Build houses and live in them. Plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters.

Take wives to your sons and give your daughters in marriage. That they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf for its welfare.

You will find your welfare. And those are words to us as Christians, because we're in this exile. We know there's that moment when we'll return and we will be in the presence of God when Jesus returns.

[20 : 14] But now we've got to focus on getting on with life as it is to live and do what God calls us to do. In a completely different context, there was a time when the apostle Paul thought that possibly he might be executed.

He was in prison in Rome for the first time. And in the letter to the Philippians, he discusses his thoughts about whether it's better for him as a Christian to die sooner or to stay alive on earth.

And this is what the apostle Paul says. Now I realize the apostle Paul is quite a high standard for us to be reaching for. So this is what the apostle Paul says to us. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.

That means fruitful labor for me. In other words, as God extends our life as the time of Jesus' return hasn't yet happened, it means that we've got things to do.

It means that we're to live in the light of his coming and understand what that job is that we need to do. So God says this second thing here, I will show wonders in the heavens above, that the gift of the Holy Spirit tells us that you and I are living in the final times, in the times before the return of Jesus Christ.

[21 : 27] We don't know whether that's going to be very soon or whether that could be a long way off, but we're living in the anticipation of Jesus' return. And I'd like to quote someone who wrote a long time ago, someone called Augustine.

He wrote at the end of the fourth century, the start of the fifth century. And he's got a great quote which I think captures what it means for us as Christians to wait for the second coming of Christ.

So these are the words of Augustine. He who loves the coming of the Lord is not he who affirms that it's far off.

Nor is it he who says it's near, but rather he who whether it be far off or near awaits it with sincere faith, steadfast hope and fervent love.

I really like that quote because it just focuses on what it means to wait for Jesus to come back. It doesn't mean that we know it's going to be five minutes from now or that we're speculating it'll be thousands of years from now, but we're actually actively waiting.

[22 : 27] We're doing what we should be doing to wait. Awaits it with sincere faith, steadfast hope and fervent love. So that's the second thing I want you to focus on.

What Peter focuses on here is what's the meaning of the gift of the Holy Spirit. And the second thing that it means is that we live in this last time and we as Christians need to learn to live with that deadline or that event, that wedding date in the calendar in the future and live in that expectation and what that involves.

There's a third thing as well and that's in verse 21. So verse 21 talks about a third thing which the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost means for the people who are listening and means for us as Christians.

So verse 21 says this, and it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Let's just spend a few minutes just thinking about what Peter's saying when he says that. Now in its original context when Joel said it, it's saying that if you heed this summons to pray to God having experienced the judgment of the locus plague, if you pray to God, God will answer that prayer and you will escape any future judgment that may come.

[23 : 50] God will save you in that sense. That was the original meaning. And Peter's applying that to us as Christians. And when it says calls on the name of the Lord, it's actually describing that first time that someone prays to receive the salvation that God gives in Jesus Christ.

You can use any words to say it, but that calling out to God is a prayer that God has promised to answer. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Everyone. And we want just to think about what everyone means and how far as a church, how far we've got with everyone. Well, it obviously means not just Jews, not just Jews, but also non-Jews, Gentiles, not just Hebrew speakers.

We could add in not just speakers of languages traditionally associated with Christianity, not just the chosen few, not just those from religious families, not just those who were brought up as Christians, not just those from traditionally Christian nations, but also not just those who fit, not just those who look like all the other people who are already in church.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And this is a thought that the Apostle Paul repeats in Romans chapter 10. Jesus is what Paul says, and then he comes to this same verse.

[25 : 17] He says this, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.

But everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Through a set of circumstances recently, I've got to know an Algerian who lives in Edinburgh.

He used to work as a doctor, he now does another business, and we've started a debate. It turns out he's a quite convinced devout Muslim, and I'm a Christian. And in this debate, it's working out really well.

He wants me to read particular surah from the Quran, and I read them, and I give my thoughts on that. I have found, I've asked advice, a good translation of the Bible into Arabic, and I say, would you like to read this particular verse or chapter?

[26 : 16] And we've been having this great discussion. Now my Algerian friend would probably be in the category of the people that you'd think, well, really, that's not the sort of person who becomes a Christian.

He's from the wrong country. He's already part of a different religion, and he's not particularly focused on changing that religion. He's really convinced that Islam is true.

But then we come to this verse. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Now we don't know how things are going to turn out, but there's no reason biblically why my Algerian friend couldn't in time come to believe in the Lord Jesus as his savior.

We've even discussed the word Lord, and whether the Quran could use this word to refer to Jesus. No, that's only a word that you could refer to God.

So let's just think about in our own circumstances how far we've got with everyone. Who else is it that hasn't yet had an opportunity to call on the name of the Lord?

[27 : 17] If you like, who's missing? As we look around church, does this look like the society that we live in? Are there people and categories of people? Are there races?

Are there languages that are simply unrepresented in church? But they're represented in society. This verse says, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

In our Russian church, which we were part of for 15 years, the missing demographic was men aged 55 and older. They were absent from church. And there are particular reasons why that particular demographic was not represented.

I think in this country, as I've applied to different places to serve as pastor, very often in the churches in the United Kingdom, just at this moment in time, there's a gap. See if you can guess where it's going to be.

There's a gap in the church from about the age 12 until about the age of 30. And increasingly, there are very few and sometimes no members at all in that huge age range.

[28 : 20] But everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And I think that's a challenge for us just to say, well, who's missing? And to pray, to pray that this promise of God will be fulfilled in the lives of people, to know that God's call goes out to everyone.

And there's no biblical reason why these groups should be missing. We can't second guess God's election, but we can preach the gospel and believe that God can call people to faith.

So anyway, that's what we've looked at in this chapter here. These events happened. There were witnesses who saw them. They asked the question, what does it mean? And Peter gave his answer.

He goes on, of course, to preach the gospel. But here he gives the answer about Pentecost. What is the meaning of Pentecost for those people and for us as Christians?

And there are at least three things that we can say. The first thing is that the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all flesh, on each individual person. And as Christians, we've received the Holy Spirit and part of that experience is also to see how we as individual Christians can proclaim God's mighty works to those around us in a language and in a way they can understand.

[29 : 37] The second thing is to realize that the gift of the Holy Spirit means that you and I, and I need to emphasize since Pentecost, not since yesterday, but since Pentecost have been living in this final time.

And we should learn as Christians, what does it mean to live in the final time, the end time, the last days? And then thirdly, this promise which is to us, to each of the people in this room this evening, but it's a promise to the world, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Amen. Let's pray together. Father God, we give you thanks for the Lord Jesus Christ and we thank you that He is the Lord of all people without distinction.

In some languages, His name is already associated with the title of Lord or Herra or Tenir or Gasporge or any number of different other ways of talking about Him.

But there are other languages where that's barely pronounced, where it seems wrong to us, associate Jesus with the name Lord. And we pray for all the different people for whom that is just something they can't contemplate.

[30 : 55] And we thank you Lord that you haven't finished the work that still the church is on the earth, the Holy Spirit has been poured out. And we pray for the work of bringing in all the different nations. We thank you for the promise that you give to each person, that as we call out to you through the Lord Jesus Christ that we can experience salvation, we can experience the blessing of the Holy Spirit and life eternal and forgiveness of our sins.

And we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.