

The Spirit and Mission
Acts 2:1-21
Stafford Carson

Let's read from the Scriptures again as we find them in Acts 2.

2 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. **2** And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested^[a] on each one of them. **4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. **6** And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. **7** And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? **8** And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? **9** Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, **11** both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." **12** And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" **13** But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. **15** For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.^[b] **16** But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

17 "And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;

18 even on my male servants and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

19 And I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;

20 the sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

21 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Amen. May God bless to us this the reading of his word.

As you know, the patron saint of Ireland is Saint Patrick, an outstanding missionary and evangelist whose life and career many of us find utterly fascinating. His rich Trinitarianism, his zeal for missions, and his complete, complete commitment to the authority of the Bible draw us to him. He was committed to mission and evangelism for all the right reasons, the glory of God, His love for the lost, his concern for their salvation. And He was fully obedient to the scriptural mandate to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

In the early fifth century, Ireland was the ends of the earth. The Irish was believed inhabited the last piece of land at the world's furthest extremity. Beyond Ireland, there was nothing but the vast expanse of the Atlantic Ocean - The Western Sea, as Saint Patrick called it. And in Patrick's mind, he had been given the incredible privilege of preaching Christ to literally the last nation to be reached and evangelized. And that added to his sense of wonder at God's grace that he, an unlearned man, should be chosen to take the gospel to the final people on Earth who needed to hear that. In his confession, he describes his commitment to the people of Ireland. God dealt with him in love and mercy He said. God had worked in this life, transformed his character, so that he was happy to labor for the salvation of the Irish. And in describing that commitment, he uses a very interesting phrase -- I am bound by the spirit -- He says-- a phrase drawn directly from Acts 2:22, where the Apostle Paul tells the efficient elders that he is bound or constrained by the spirit to go to Jerusalem, despite the probability that he will experience much suffering when he went there. Paul is committed to what he perceives as God's will, no matter the cost and the clear implication in Patrick's use of that phrase is that he shares that same attitude, that same commitment, a man whose desire for the nations to hear the gospel was deep and profound. Patrick was prepared under the guidance and compulsion of the Spirit to live out his days in Ireland so that the Irish might come to know the Triune God as he had done.

It's that same Holy Spirit who has inspired and constrained and bound God's people in the task of mission from the very beginning. When we think of mission and evangelism, we might worry, how will it all be possible? We know that mission is something important and central for the church, but how are we going to get it done? What resources are available to us? Are we equipped for the task? And the short answer is that God has given us the Holy Spirit to equip and to empower us for mission. Luke is very aware of this, that of the four evangelists, he is the one who lays the heaviest emphasis on the work of the spirit. Luke, as you know, has two volumes in our New Testament as gospel, and then the Acts of the Apostles really a two-volume unity and the Acts of the Apostles picks up for a left off at the end of his gospel. And in his gospel, he emphasizes the rule of the spirit in the life and the Ministry of Christ. When the Angel announced to Mary that she would conceive and have a son Mary asked, how will this be since I am a virgin? And the angel replied, The Holy Spirit will come upon you. The part of the most high will overshadow you. Jesus was saved by the part of the spirit, and when he entered his public ministry. Luke tells us that he was full of the Holy Spirit, led by the Spirit -- at his baptism, the Spirit descended upon him like a dove. And having told us about the Ministry of

the Spirit and the life of Jesus in his first volume, Luke now turns to the Ministry of the Spirit in the life of God's people in his second volume, one of the key verses Acts 2 verse 33, Exalted to the right hand of God. He Jesus has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you and I see in here. The gift of the Spirit. It was the final act of the Saving Ministry of Jesus Christ before his second coming.

It's important for us to note that truth. Pentecost is a once for all event. Part of the once for all accomplishment of our salvation. I say that because many Christians get themselves all mixed up about the Ministry of the Holy Spirit when they begin to think of the events on the Day of Pentecost, and they begin to think that those events need to be repeated and replicated in the life of the church today. They make the mistake of thinking that every individual Christian must have their own personal Pentecost when that is just not what the Bible teaches, that just as the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus were part of the once for all accomplishment of our salvation, never needed to be repeated. So the gift of the spirit at Pentecost is part of that same sequence and complex of the events -- in this one great action in the history of redemption. Jesus poured out his spirit power upon the church. He gave to his church the power, the equipment needed to fulfill its mission in the world. And because Christ has received the Spirit from the Father, he's able to pour out the Spirit upon his church so that the church can fulfill its calling – all authority in heaven and earth that's been given to me. Go, therefore, and teach all nations. And the task of mission is undertaken in the power of the Holy Spirit.

There's so much I could say about this passage. Let me make just three very short points about it –

By the Spirit the judgment of babel is reversed. On the morning of Pentecost, the disciples began to speak other tongues so that visitors in Jerusalem heard the praises of God in their own language. All of them were filled with the Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the spirit enabled them and the crowd gathered. They are very naturally amazed. Even though they came from many different nations spoke many different languages, they all heard them declaring the wonders of God in their own language and notice in verses 8 to 11 Luke gives us a table of nations. He carefully describes the range of people groups who were present in Jerusalem and heard all this and in verse 12, amazed and perplexed. They all ask, what does this mean? Part of what it means is that here we have a reversal of the people in Genesis 10. We have an extensive table of nations that existed after the flood and that resulted from the families of Noah's sons -- Shem, Ham and Japheth.

And Genesis 11 commences by telling us that the whole world had one language and a common speech. But when they reached the plain of Shinar, they decided they would build a city and a tower that would reach to the heavens. They said, We'll make a name for ourselves. But God came down and confused their language so that they stopped understanding what each other was saying. And the place was called Babel because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. Babel means confused. You can see how the name Babylon is a derivative of that. How we get our word babbling to describe confused and indecipherable language and the

reason why God changed the world in this way was because this was an organized human attempt to be independent of God.

The point of this great building project was to establish a city and a religion that was man centered rather than God centered. A tower was planned that would reach the heavens. By their own efforts, they would reach God. They would make their own way to heaven. They wanted to make a name for themselves. And God said, It's not going to happen. I'm going to bring all this to an end. And as a result of their confused language, the human race scattered over the face of the whole earth. But with the coming of the Holy Spirit, God is serving notice that the effects of Babel are being reversed. The judgment of Babel is being lifted – now people from different backgrounds, different ethnicities begin to understand one another again. It's an amazing and wonderful phenomenon. They hear the disciples declaring the praises of the Lord in a language that they can understand that the word of reconciliation is recognizable. And people who were previously separated because of their language are now united and brought together again, all because of Christ and the gift of the Spirit. Nothing could demonstrate it more clearly than this multiracial, multinational, multilingual nature of the Kingdom of Christ.

At Babel, the nations were confused and scattered. At Pentecost, the language barrier was supernaturally overcome. It was a sign that the scattered nations would now be gathered together in Christ. They prefigured the great day when the redeemed community will be drawn from every nation, every tribe, every people, every language, at Babel, the people of Earth and their pride tried to ascend to heaven in Jerusalem at Pentecost. Heaven humbly descended to earth. The sin and judgment of Babel was reversed. The spirit was given so that the scattered nations might be one again in Christ. As Paul says, and Ephesians one, God has made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which is set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on Earth. That means that we can go out and the task of mission and evangelism in the part of the Spirit, knowing that it's God's will and God's purpose to gather many people into one body. This is His plan and goal to reconcile in himself all things, whether on Earth or in Heaven. And he's given us the Holy Spirit so that this may happen.

Second thing is this By the Spirit, the commands of God's law can be fulfilled, that the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost carries echoes of another great Old Testament event the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. And the connection is explicitly drawn by the New Testament itself. In Hebrews 12, the writer says that the revelation of God to Moses at Sinai was accompanied by fire and wind and the divine tongue. And here in Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost, the spirit is given and there are signs of wind and fire and divine tongues. Moses had ascended the mountain, and when he descended, he had in his possession the Ten Commandments, the Law of God. Christ, too had recently ascended. And at Pentecost he comes dying not with the law written on tablets of clay or stone, but with the gift of his own spirit in order to write the law on the fleshy hearts of believers by his spirit, he would enable his people to fulfill the laws commands.

You see the story, if they will. Testament is a story of people struggling to trust and obey God. And the whole message of the Old Testament can be summarized in those two words trust and obey. But they find it so hard to do that. Why was that? Because their hearts were hard in spite of the Lord's gracious provision for them. They repeatedly hardened their hearts and the prophets called on them to repent and to respond to the Lord's grace and to obey his commands. But they stubbornly refused. And through his prophets, God announced he was going to do a new thing. The time is coming, declares the Lord when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel, I will put my law in their minds. I will write it on their hearts. I'll be their God and they'll be my people. And through Christ and the gift of the Spirit, God begins to work in a new way of changing and transforming the hearts of his people.

Paul brings it all together very succinctly and Romans 8. There's now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus, the law of the spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death for what the law was powerless to do, in that it was weakened by the sinful nature God did by sending his own son in order that the righteous requirements of the law will be fully met, and us who do not live according to the sinful nature, but according to the spirit.

Friends, the spirit has been given so that our cold, stony hearts may be changed to pliable hearts of flesh by the part of the spirit sinners with hard and rebellious hearts may be transformed into obedient servants who live according to God's will.

What a great incentive for mission and evangelism that your crusty old neighbor, who never has a good word to say about anyone, can be changed by the gospel -- that your young friend who seems to think only of her own pleasures and of having a good time, that she can be reoriented -- that you're busy workaholic colleagues can have a new sense of direction and a completely altered purpose in life. And all those changes can come about because of the power of the Holy Spirit to perform heart transplants. The Spirit has come so that the words spoken may be shared and may be effective in the lives of those who hear it. The first disciples were empowered by this spirit. They were able to declare boldly the good news about Jesus. And on this very day of Pentecost, Peter's preaching resulted in the conversion of 3000 people and the rest of the Book of Acts records how the Gospel just spread and spread and spread. Was it because Peter and the others were able to change hearts? Not at all. It was because the Spirit of God was at work. The law given on Sinai by itself was unable to bring about a hard change. But the new Moses ascended Mount Zion, and from his audience with God in his holy presence, he received the Spirit, which He then poured out on his people.

One last thought. By this Spirit, all of God's people can be prophets. This is the most obvious connection between the Day of Pentecost and the Old Testament in explaining to the people what was happening on the day of Pentecost Peter quotes from Joel the Prophet. In the last days, God says, I will put my spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your

young men will see visions. Your old man will dream dreams, and the prophets of the Old Testament looked forward eagerly to the last days. The day of the Lord when God's power would be released. And Peter says that in the gift of this spirit, those last days have arrived. You shouldn't make the mistake of thinking that these men are drunk or intoxicated. It's only 9:00 in the morning. This is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. And the key feature of what Joel foresaw was this unrestrained distribution of the Spirit. Christ has poured out his spirit and all people without any geographical or ethnic limitations. The old arrangements under the old Covenant are now rendered obsolete under the New Covenant the gift of prophecy is given to all, not restricted to just a few people. Now, in the New Covenant, the boundaries have been broken. All distinctions have been nullified. Both sons and daughters prophesy - young men of visions old men dream dreams. Back in the Book of Numbers, Moses said, I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His spirit on them. And now, on the day of Pentecost, that wish and that longing becomes reality. The experience of knowing God, which was restricted in the Old Testament, is now a blessing to be enjoyed by all God's people.

I think in the contemporary church we often miss the point of this passage by trying to apply it to specific issues like whether women may preach or whether prophecy is a continuing gift in the church. That's not the central concern here. The point is that all God's people have received this messianic anointing, as Jeremiah prophesied -- No longer will a man teaches never or a man has brothers saying No the Lord, because they will all know me from the least to the greatest. No longer will they need an anointed human mediator to teach us to know the Lord. Now all who receive the Spirit of Jesus share that prophetic anointing -- in Christ All people can have an immediate knowledge of God. And that means folks, that those of us who trust in Jesus have received the Holy Spirit to empower us in our witness and evangelism. You don't need to hold special office in the church. You don't have to be ordained. You don't need some special recognition by the church. Whatever your sex or whatever your status. If you are a Christian. God has given you his Holy Spirit. You know the Lord, and you can speak of Him to others because God is with you. His Spirit is in you. He will strengthen you and bless you.

Joel is describing this period known as the last days. And during that time, the gospel is preached throughout the world. The spirit is present to enable all God's people to speak and preach the Gospel so that, as Joel predicts here, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. And we're encouraged to go out into the world because the Spirit has been given in abundance. Pentecost, as you know, was the 50th day after Passover. It was the feast of first Fruits celebrating the offering of the harvest. And there is a significance in the large and ethnically diverse group of people who are converted to Christ on that day. They are the first fruits. They are the first installment of the Gospel and the new epoch, a new era of the Spirit. They are the beginning of much greater and more numerous company that will come to Christ from among all the nations, because the Spirit has been poured out lavishly on the church. So Pentecost is portrayed by Luke as an event of rich significance.

Mission is God's plan for us in these last days. And to accomplish this purpose, God has given us His Holy Spirit. You and I can go now in the part of the Spirit. We are bound. We are constrained by the Spirit. We are commissioned. We're obligated to be as witnesses to the ends of the earth. And because it is the spirit who inspires us, the harvest is guaranteed.

I'm so delighted to report that in the regions where Westminster Seminary is active in global ministry, there's evidence of the harvest being gathered in. In China the church movement is advancing and expanding. So many new fellowships are being created, huge demand for well qualified and trained pastors and teachers. And our team is active and busy in meeting that need. We need additional resources. But the commitment and zeal of our Christian brothers and sisters is exemplary. And in fierce of much opposition and danger they're fearful in their work of evangelism and Christian witness.

There's a whole new reformation taking place in Latin America. A huge appetite for robust, reformed theological education. We opened applications for our certificate program in Spanish, and in February, within two weeks, we had 150 applications.

We're planning to host cohorts of students in Dominican Republic and in Colombia this summer, and we already have significant theological educators in Peru and Mexico asking us to make their institution a hub for Westminster programs.

For two years now, we have offered Christian training to pastors and teachers and leaders in the Arabian Gulf region. It's a very difficult and a challenging environment for these people as the gospel is opposed by the authorities.

We're working hard to develop an online certificate and degree program in Arabic in order to meet their needs. Just a month ago, I was in Cairo. We were invited to teach a group of 50 Arabic speaking Sudanese Christians who are refugees in Egypt, escaping from the war and their own country. Joyful, enthusiastic Christian believers who are hungry for Christian truth and teaching.

So in all our language initiatives in Mandarin, in Korean and Spanish and Arabic, we need the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit to enable and energize us. We need the powerful presence of the Spirit to sustain and fortify the students. We are seeking to train and help -- these opportunities before us. Are the ongoing blessings of the Spirit who came in such remarkable power at Pentecost and as a result, God is working in these language groups today, people from diverse backgrounds diversified. Yesterday's hearing The Mighty works of God and their own language. The barriers and the obstacles are being removed. The Gospel is advancing so that in many regions and people groups across the world are now hearing the praises of God in their own language.

And like the Apostle, and like the whole stream of missionaries from Patrick and the early church we are bound and we are constrained by this spirit to move forward with the great news of Christ crucified, risen and ascended, and that great missionary enterprise inaugurated at

Pentecost will one day reach a great fulfillment. John describes it in Revelation seven. After this, he says, I looked and behold a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages standing before the throne and before the lamb clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands and crying out with a loud voice Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne.

Let's pray. We give you a silence and praise all Lord, for the gift of the Holy Spirit. We thank you, Lord, that you have empowered your church and you have inspired us so that we might share the gospel with others. We recall the work of great evangelists across the ages who have shared your word and seen lives transformed and changed by the part of God. And so it's our prayer, Lord, that you would continue to pour out your spirit upon us so that the work of the Gospel may advance and that many may come to bow before Jesus Christ, our great God and Savior, in whose name we pray.

Amen.