

Introduction

- Last week, we began the 3rd leg of our series on the person and work of the Holy Spirit.
- We looked at the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost.
- I tried to plot a middle path, somewhere between those who over-emphasise and those who under-emphasise Pentecost, somewhere between those who want to emulate Pentecost in the life of every believer and those who dismiss it as a once-off event that has no relevance for us today.
- I tried to argue that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is for all believers, that we are all baptised once, that we receive multiple subsequent in-fillings, that the fullness of the work of the Spirit is something that was planned and purposed from eternity past and has extended beyond the first 100 years until today, that tongues are an evidence of the work of the Spirit, although not a necessary evidence.
- Having said all these things, I tried to argue that the work of the Spirit is dynamic and fluid and that a stiff, dogmatic approach to these things is unhelpful and restrictive.
- I suggested that the appropriate posture is not that of a rigid skeptic but that of the 120, who waited patiently, in a spirit of unity, for the Spirit to come and do as He chose in their midst.
- As we saw, the tongues at Pentecost served the very purpose that Jesus said they would serve — to convict the world regarding sin, righteousness and judgment. In the context of John, the phrase “the world” was commonly used in reference to the Jews, and in particular, the Jewish leaders of the day.
- At Pentecost, Jewish leaders from across the ancient world heard the disciples proclaiming the wonderful works of God in their own languages.

- I closed by saying that the Spirit of God can and may place a tongue, known or unknown, into the mouth of a believer to accomplish the same purpose today.
- As we continue through [Acts 2](#), we see there is an repeat emphasis on speaking:
 - Peter raised his voice and said...heed my words ([Acts 2:14](#))
 - This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel ([Acts 2:16](#))
 - Hear these words ([Acts 2:22](#))
 - Let me speak freely to you ([Acts 2:29](#))
 - With many other words he testified and exhorted them ([Acts 2:40](#))
- We also see that there was a consistent response to the speaking:
 - They were cut to the heart ([Acts 2:37](#))
 - They gladly received his word ([Acts 2:41](#))
- By the time we arrive in [Acts 3](#), Peter and John were going up to the temple when they encountered a man who had been lame from birth, and had been begging at the temple every day for over 40 years.
- God heals the man through Peter. Since Levitical law did not permit a lame person to enter the temple, when he is healed, the very first thing this man does is to enter the temple, leaping and praising God as he went (v. 8). For the first time in his life, he entered the house of worship.
- Since people knew the man, this was noteworthy. People were filled with wonder and amazement.
- This provided Peter with a platform and occasion to preach.
- In [Acts 4](#), Peter is still busy speaking with the people when the priests, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came and arrested him and John.

- The next day, they were presented before the Sanhedrin.
- This was the highest legislative and judicial body in Israel. It consisted of 71 members from 3 groups, including *rulers* or temple officials, *elders* from chief families, and *teachers of the law*.
- Included in this body are two figures we have seen before. Firstly, we see Annas, a high priest who had been deposed by the Romans and who had interrogated Jesus on the evening of His arrest. Secondly, we see Caiaphas, who succeeded Annas and was serving as the high priest during Jesus' trial.
- This is significant:
 - When Jesus was arrested, all of His disciples deserted Him. Shortly after, two disciples followed after Him and featured in the account of Jesus' trial, although neither of them are portrayed as being particularly bold or heroic. They exhibited a posture of quiet discretion and self-preservation.
 - Those two disciples were Peter and John.
 - Now, those same disciples stood before the same Jewish tribunal with some of the same leaders who had falsely charged and condemned Jesus, and had played a role in his eventual execution.
- That brings us to our focus text for the day.

Acts 4:5–7 NKJV

⁵ And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, ⁶ as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. ⁷ And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, “By what power or by what name have you done this?”

Acts 4:8–10 NKJV

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: ⁹ If we this day are judged for a good deed *done* to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, ¹⁰ let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that

by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole.

Acts 4:11–12 NKJV

¹¹ This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ ¹² Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

- And so, our two disciples, now apostles, are set before the Sanhedrin.
- They are asked to explain by what power or by what name had they been acting.
- The question is strikingly similar to the one they had asked of Jesus:
- “By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?”
- Why is this question significant?
- Well, it is significant because Jewish law provided guidelines on how the authorities were to deal with miracle workers. According to [Deuteronomy 13](#), the performance of a miracle was not enough to prove that someone was from God. They still needed to test their teaching and gauge if they were operating within recognised authority structures. If a miracle was performed by a prophet or a sorcerer who used that miracle to entice the Israelite nation to follow after other gods, that person was to be put to death.
- By asking by what power or by what name they were performing these miracles and making these proclamations, the Sanhedrin had tried to trap Jesus and were now doing the very same thing to the disciples. If Jesus had said that He was doing these things by His own authority, He would have been in trouble. If the apostles said that they were doing these things by Jesus’ authority, they would have been in trouble.
- They knew the tactic. They understood the peril they were in.
- And yet, these apostles, who had cowered in fear at the trial of Jesus, act very differently when they themselves are placed on trial.

- Peter in particular makes a radical transformation from denial to boldness. How is this possible?
 - Only a little over 6 weeks had passed since Jesus had been crucified.
 - While the resurrection and the commissioning and the resurrection of Jesus will certainly have had confidence-building effect, Peter had not enjoyed the luxury of an extended period of time to recover his courage or rebuild his confidence.
 - Modern science tells us that even though the resurrection might have caused a shift in Peter's intellectual convictions, those convictions alone would not override or recondition his nervous system, which, following his recent trauma, would have been highly stressed, hyper-vigilant and reactive, inclined to continue to motivate Peter to act in self-preserving ways.
 - You cannot tell someone who has lived through a trauma, and who has responded to that trauma in a particular way to just think and act differently. Humans just don't work that way.
 - So how does Peter make this striking transformation?
- [Acts 2:8](#) gives us the answer.
- "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them..."
- Luke makes a direct connection between the Holy Spirit and his emboldened speech. It was the Helper Who overrode his physiology and served as the catalyst, enabling him to face his accusers.
- In his response, Peter does not provide a defensive plea to preserve his own life. He systematically turns the trial on its head in such a way that after the fact, Luke says that the Sanhedrin marvelled.
- Peter does this in 3 steps.

1. Explanation and exoneration

- This judicial body convenes with the intention of laying a criminal charge against Peter and John.
- They ask a question, which, if answered in a particular way, will allow for them to lay this charge.
- Peter responds in a way that not only undermines the charge, but reframes it so that they are exonerated of all blame.
- He says,
- “If we are being judged for a *good deed shown towards a helpless man*, let it be known that it is by the name of Jesus that he stands before you well.”
- Peter begins by showing that the trial itself was a non starter, since they were trying to prosecute them not for an act of treason but for an act of mercy.
- By labelling the miracle as a good deed, Peter strips the council of all their authority.
- Jewish law not only permitted but actively encouraged acts of mercy and healing. Acts of mercy were considered one of the pillars of religious life in Israel. By helping someone in need, you were acting in the most noble way.
- Once Peter had said this, he had laid the foundation so that the roles could be reversed.
- He moves from being the defendant to being the prosecutor.

2. Accusation and reverse prosecution

- Peter looks at these 70-something men, who were in a position of power over him, who quite literally held his life in their hands, and he levels an unvarnished accusation against them.
- “It is by the name of Jesus that this man stands before you well — and should there be any confusion, I am talking about Jesus of Nazareth, whom you know very well, because you crucified Him, but God raised Him from the dead.”

- Friends, Peter is not just stringing words together. He is making a systematic, coherent argument.
- The fact that this man was made well by Jesus confirms that He is in a position to do so. He was raised from the dead, an act that can only be performed by God, which itself calls into question the legitimacy of their judgment and sentencing of Him to death in the first place.
- In other words, Peter is saying, what happened here is proof that you were wrong about Jesus.
- Having said that, Peter goes on to elaborate, explaining precisely who Jesus is.
- He quotes [Psalm 118](#), saying that “Jesus is the stone rejected by those who were appointed as builders; however, He has become the chief cornerstone.”
- What does this mean?
- In ancient construction, the cornerstone was the most important stone in the building. It was the foundation upon which everything was built. It was used as a standard to ensure that everything else was straight and level.
- In this analogy, these leaders of Israel are the builders. It was their job to ensure and safeguard the integrity of the building. The building is of course a nod to the temple, the house of God, which itself represented the entirety of the Jewish faith.
- Just as a builder inspects and approves or rejects a cornerstone, these men were tasked with the responsibility of making the right judgment concerning Jesus. They had rejected Jesus because He did not match their expectations.
- Peter says, “He is not only resurrected, and alive and well, and healing people, He has also become the chief cornerstone of a new building that God is constructing for His people, a temple not made with hands, but a temple comprised of believers — Jews and Gentiles — living stones who are indwelt by the very Spirit of God.”
- Having said this, Peter can go on to make a distinction between the Jewish legal system and this new reality that had been inaugurated by this Cornerstone called Christ.

3. Proclamation of the gospel

- By this stage, Peter has not just laid a foundation. He has built up a head of steam.
- And emboldened by the Spirit of God, he goes on to make the most courageous and provocative statement that any human being has ever brought before the Sanhedrin.
- “There is no salvation in any other! There is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved!”
- In saying this, Peter declares that the Jewish legal system is no more. Salvation can no longer be secured by obeying the law. It has been superseded by a new solution, and that solution is faith in Jesus Christ.
- Friends, if Peter had not already laid the foundation, and presented his argument in the systematic and coherent way that he had done, the Sanhedrin at this point would have risen up as one man, cried blasphemy, and will have dragged them out of the city for stoning.
- They probably still had that inclination.
- But Luke says they saw the boldness of Peter and John, could tell they were uneducated and untrained, and marvelled not just at what they had just heard but at the fact that the lame man stood before them healed, as a testimony of the truth of their message.

Conclusion

- Friends, last week, we touched upon the thorny issues of spirit baptism and tongues.
- For me, it is an utter tragedy that this has become a topic of contention among believers.
- Jesus said — not Gordon Fee, not Donald Gee, not Anthony Thiselton, not Craig Keener, not Don Carson, not Max Turner, not Richard Gaffin, not John MacArthur, not any scholars who have written on the relevance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit today — Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the Son of God, the cornerstone, the ultimate authority and head of the church, said this:

Luke 12:11–12 NKJV

¹¹ “Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. ¹² For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

- **And He said this:**

John 16:7-8 NKJV

⁷ “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. ⁸ And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”

- Friends, in [Acts 2](#), the Spirit gave the believers foreign tongues, and the utterance thereof convicted the Jewish leaders of the day concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.
- In [Acts 4](#), the Spirit gave Peter a known tongue, and the utterance thereof convicted the Jewish leaders of the day concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.
- We get tangled up in controversies — this is baptism, this is infilling, this is a tongue, this is not a tongue, this is relevant today, this is not — and we miss the point.
- And the point is that the Spirit gives us not only the boldness but also the words to say — whether they are known or unknown — so that the gospel concerning Jesus Christ may be proclaimed with power and effectiveness.
- May we be a church that is open to Him leading and empowering us to do so.