

The Wow Factor

Acts 2:1-41

There's a story told of a husband and wife both of who were doctors - one a doctor of theology and the other a doctor of medicine. When their doorbell was rung and the maid answered, the inquirer would often ask for "the doctor". The maid's interesting reply was: "Do you want the one who preaches or the one who practices?" We know the theory of Christian living but what we must do is to practice it!

The Bible in general and the book of Acts in particular was written not only to **tell** us how to live our lives as Christians but to **show** us how to do it. The Christian life is supposed to be a lived out thing, it is not just about knowledge, knowledge of scripture, knowledge of doctrine etc it is also about experience. It is about not only knowing that a God exists but having a living and dynamic relationship with Him. A relationship that is two way a relationship where He loves, cares for and supplies all our needs and where we serve Him, love Him and honour Him in all of our ways.

If we are honest we would have to admit that sometimes or even often for all of us it doesn't feel like that. It can feel like God has completely forgotten us, that He has no interest in us and that we are just going through the motions of being a Christian coming to church and stuff but not really connecting. We wonder where the joy is that people talk about and we wonder why we bother.

I think the disciples must have been feeling a bit like that on the morning of Pentecost, they had been meeting together to pray for 10 days now, Jesus had promised them that He would send His Spirit to be with them and give them power but still they waited. I would imagine that those 10 days must have felt close to an eternity. After all they didn't know what was going to happen, up to this point in history the Spirit had only been given to one or two special people at special times, the odd prophet a worthy priest even a king or two, but not on a rag tag assembly of fisherman tax collectors and general nobodies from the unpopular and unsophisticated north!

That was all about to change though, on that 10th morning something new and amazing was going to happen, the Spirit was going to be poured out. Just as an aside here, when the scriptures say poured out, they mean precisely that, the imagery is of a powerful tropical storm, not some gentle English mizzle! It is about being totally drenched, not just a little bit damp; it is about being immersed and engulfed in the Spirit like some fantastic hug rather than just a causal handshake!

When the Spirit came on that Pentecost morning He came in a very clear and obvious way. First there was the wind, an audible sign that something was coming.

I have done lots of camping in my time some of it wild camping away from campsites and shower blocks, often in woods. The wind does some strange things when you are camping like this, you can be lying in your tent and you can hear a gust of wind

some way off in the trees, but you know that it is coming your way, sure enough a few seconds later the tent will be shaking and you'll be wondering whether you put the pegs in well enough. You can hear it coming but you can't get out of the way!

This is what was going on at Pentecost the Apostles could hear the wind, they knew something was coming but they didn't know what.

After this the even more remarkable tongues of fire came, this time a visible sign to go with the previous auditory sign the flame came and divided and settled on each and every one of those in the upper room, the gestation period of the church that started on Easter Sunday was over, the labour had begun. Just as the Spirit of God brooded over the waters at the beginning of creation, so now the Spirit comes and broods over the apostles and gives birth to the church that will bear the name of Jesus down through the centuries that follow.

What happens next is the key to our understanding of the work of the Spirit. The scripture doesn't tell us that the people left the place where they were all together, but it is clear that they are now out in the open, they have been driven out into the streets by the Spirit and they begin to speak. They speak so loudly and exuberantly that they very quickly begin to draw a substantial crowd. This crowd is more than interested by what is going on they were completely amazed and bewildered. All the people of the crowd heard them speaking in their own native tongue. The Scripture in verse 6 tells us that, "When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language."

The apostles were speaking all of the different languages of those present, they weren't only speaking Greek which most, if not all, of those present would have been at least able to get by in, but were speaking the native language of those present! Wow that would be a cool way of passing you're "A" level French paper! But that is not why God gave His Spirit; He gave it to empower His people.

Many of you will know that there is a TV series called the X-Factor, I don't personally watch it but I do know that it is very popular. I understand that the judges are trying to find an act with that certain something; that little bit extra that means that they stand out from the crowd, the X Factor of the title. That is part of the role of the Spirit within the life of a believer and a believing church; He provides that X factor, that wow factor that speaks to those that we meet of something beyond ourselves, of a purpose, of a love that is not possible in human terms. The Spirit shows people Jesus, and Jesus as we know shows people the Father. If the Spirit is not alive in a church then how can that church hope or expect to show people Jesus?

So you see it is the Spirit that draws the crowd; the incredulous and confused crowd, the crowd knows that the people speaking are from Galilee, this means only one thing in their eyes, that they are poorly educated and have a funny accent. Apparently Galilean's were known to swallow syllables as they spoke and that is what made their dialect distinct, that is how Peter was recognised on the night that

he denied the Lord three times. So the crowd were really confused how could these uneducated illiterate northerners be speaking in all the known languages of the world?

The power of God when it is made manifest always seems to have two reactions amongst those who see it, either total amazement that such things should be seen and done or total scepticism as from those who accused the Apostle's of being drunk!

We still see this today even amongst believers within the church. When the Holy Spirit releases its power in a meeting for healing or prophecy or whatever, there will always be some who will seek to deny the sovereignty of God by trying to come up with some rationalistic argument for what has been witnessed. Group hallucination or the person wasn't actually ill or some other weak and spurious argument. The fact of the matter is that God all through scripture did this sort of thing, so why should He not do it now; after all we say that He is the same yesterday, today and forever!

What happens next is probably the biggest miracle of the whole scene; to the onlookers it would not have appeared so but to us with all of our prior knowledge that fact that the cowardly Peter gets up and addresses this huge crowd is amazing and indeed miraculous. This is the same Peter who couldn't even admit to a servant girl that he knew Jesus, now He stands in Jerusalem, the city that killed his Lord and proclaims fearlessly the name of Jesus, a miracle indeed.

The obvious question then is, how does this happen, how does the coward become the emboldened evangelist, how does the one who skulked in the shadows become the one who stands at the centre and points to Jesus? The answer is obvious and the answer is the power of The Holy Spirit. Jesus promised them power and power is what they received; power to speak other languages and power to speak of Jesus.

The Spirit, as we have already mentioned, drew the crowd by an amazing and miraculous act, now the Spirit through Peter speaks to the crowd of Jesus, challenging them about their own lives, their own attitudes and testifies to the spirit of the hearers that they need forgiveness. That is why the crowd at the end of Peter's sermon respond in the following way, "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter's reply is simple and direct he says to them, "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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

The people realised that they needed saving, when the scripture talks of salvation and being saved it does so as a sovereign act of God. It is the Lord who saves.

Imagine you have gone skiing and you are going down the hill, when suddenly you realise that you are on the wrong run, a run that is too difficult for you one that will

certainly end in disaster. You stop, turn round and go back up and find the right run. However imagine you are completely off piste, the hill is too steep for you to stop and there is a sheer drop straight ahead. What do you do? The answer is, you can't do anything; you need someone to save you. You need someone who can somehow stop your decent and lead you back onto the right path.

That is how it is with sin, we can't deal with it, we commit plenty of it but we can't deal with it. Romans 6:23 tells us, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." That is what those 3000 realised on that Pentecost morning, they realised that they, good Jews that they were, needed saving, they needed Jesus.

That is the power of the Spirit at work in people's lives, the power to draw people to Himself and convict them of their own sin. If the church is to be truly the church, then as I have said before it must be an outward looking, and a lost seeking church, but there is a problem, we can't do it by ourselves. We can perhaps come up with all sorts of good ideas, we can probably make great plans and strategies but they will all come to nothing. The only way that a church grows, the only way that a church is fully church is when it is a Spirit empowered church.

The Spirit gave birth to the church on that Pentecost morning, He empowered those present on that first morning to speak in other tongues and to proclaim the love of Jesus to a waiting and watching world and 3000 people were added to the number that day. That is what the Spirit of God can do; He can and does completely change the situation, He turns cowards into fearless proclaimers, He turns uneducated men and women into linguists, we will see more of the Acts of The Spirit as we proceed through the book of Acts.

The question for today though is, what about us? Do we desire to see the church of Jesus in this place grow, do we want to see, God at work amongst us, not only transforming us His people that already know Him into the image of Jesus, but calling more and more people of all shapes, sizes, backgrounds and sins to join us? That is what we are called to do, to meet with and minister to the lost and the needy, the down-trodden and the broken hearted, but the only way we can do that is through the power of the Spirit working in us and through us.

If you have never received the Spirit in a way other than to receive salvation then I would encourage you to come forward for prayer during the last hymn. He is a gift for all through all time the scripture has told us. Also if you have never met Jesus but the Spirit has been talking to you and showing you your need of a saviour then you can come forward and receive prayer. The Lord is a loving and gracious God, He delights to shower His people with gifts, not to spoil them but to empower them for works of service so that His name will be glorified and His kingdom come.