

Title: Acts 2: 1-40

Theme: Series-Jesus Christ and His Church (Acts of the Apostles): The Promise Fulfilled

Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during All Age Worship Service on 17/04/2016 at 10.30am

I think it's generally true that people are always looking to improve, to change their lives for the better. That's why there are so many advertisements for diet and exercise products. There is no doubt about it, people want to be changed for the better.

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be? Is it the way you look? Something to do with your health? Something to do with your level of expertise on a certain subject? If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

God is interested in change too. He's interested in changing you and His church so there is no staleness. And as we look at what happened on Pentecost many years ago, we see that God changed many people's lives. I believe there are certain things about you that God wants to change. What are those things? And how does God plan to do that? We will find the answers as we study God's Word.

Two major changes took place in Acts 2. Change number one was what happened to the disciples. If you are familiar with the Scriptures, you know that the disciples believed in Jesus as their Savior, but they were still very confused about all kinds of different things. They still didn't fully understand Jesus' mission, why he had come to earth. They were still wondering if Jesus would be an earthly king. They were confused, and as a result, they were timid. They weren't confident about sharing the Gospel with others. How could they be, if they didn't fully understand it?

But then Pentecost came. The disciples were together, when the sound of a blowing wind came down from heaven. What seemed to be tongues of fire settled on their heads. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in foreign languages they had never learned before. A crowd gathered, people from all over the world, and that crowd listened as the disciples preached the Gospel. The Apostle Peter stood up and addressed the crowd – he gave a beautiful sermon that God the Holy Spirit inspired him to preach, a sermon that converted 3000 people in one day. (Acts 2: 41).

Do you see the changes that took place on Pentecost? No longer were the disciples confused. Now they understood the plan of salvation completely. No longer were they timid. Now, they were confident, speaking publicly. Look at Peter – two months earlier he was so afraid that he denied Jesus three times. Now he was speaking to the crowd with confidence and understanding that he had never had before.

There was another change that took place on Pentecost, and you could argue that this change was more spectacular than what happened to the disciples. After Peter preached his sermon on Pentecost, 3000 people came to faith and were baptized. The Holy Spirit was the one who converted those 3000 people that day. Now these people knew how to get to heaven. Now they knew that they were at peace with God. Now they knew that Jesus was their Saviour.

This promise that the disciples would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them (**Acts 1:8**) and that they would be clothed with power from on high (**Luke 24:49**) was a promise given to sustain the completion of world evangelization, and all the ministry that supports it. The context of both texts makes that plain. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses . . . to the end of the earth."

The task of world evangelization is not yet complete. Therefore, the promise of this extraordinary power to sustain and carry forth the work is still valid.

So, I come to our text this morning with the persuasion that we have much to gain from the Spirit's work at Pentecost, for our day of widespread deadness and powerlessness. Luke's first volume led us from the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem to the climactic events of his life in Jerusalem. Acts, (Luke's second volume) on the other hand, moves us from Pentecost in Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Luke tells this story in Acts 2 in three parts:

1. **The promise fulfilled (Acts 2:1)**
2. **From knowing to experiencing (Acts 2: 2-13)**
3. **Peter's keynote address Acts 2:14-40.**

1. The promise fulfilled (Acts 2:1)

Some people think that promises are made to be broken – not so with God. When He says a thing, His word is His bond unless we misunderstand Him. And we often do. We say God told me when all we were hearing are the thoughts of our heads or at other times, we claim promises which although are written in the bible, but they are meant for specific people in specific situations. In Acts 1, we see the preparation for the promise of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2 we witness the arrival of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1, the disciples were equipped for ministry. In Acts 2, they are empowered for ministry. In Acts 1, the disciples were held back but in Acts 2, they are sent out. The full resources to get the message to the end of the earth are given as promised in Acts 1:8.

The power promised by Jesus in Acts 1:8 and Luke 24:49 is an extraordinary power. Power can be used in at least two ways: it can be unleashed, or it can be harnessed. The energy in ten gallons of gasoline, for instance, can be released explosively by dropping a lighted match into the can. Or it can be channelled through the engine of a car in a controlled burn and used to transport a person 350 miles.

Explosions are spectacular, but controlled burns have lasting effect, staying power. The Holy Spirit works both ways. At Pentecost, he exploded on the scene; His presence was like "tongues of fire" (Acts 2:3). Thousands were affected by one burst of God's power. But He also works through the church--the institution God began to tap the Holy Spirit's power for the long haul. Through worship, fellowship, and service, Christians are provided with staying power.

The lessons of history give a strong support for this. From time to time, God has moved in extraordinary ways in the history of the Christian movement. He has poured out his Spirit in fresh, new, uncustomary, dramatic ways. These times have been called times of revival or awakening or reformation. Pentecost was the first of these great outpourings on the Christian church, and until the task of world evangelization is completed, I believe it is our duty to pray for fresh seasons of the extraordinary outpouring of God's Spirit—to awaken and empower the church and to penetrate the final frontiers of world evangelization.

2. From knowing to experiencing (Acts 2: 2-13)

This is what happened, it seems, to the disciples in Acts 2 when they saw tongues of fire and heard the violent wind. It filled them with an overwhelming sense of the presence of God. Until that moment we can imagine them praying (**Acts 1:14**) and reciting to each other the 23rd Psalm and saying, "Though I walk through the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me," and rejoicing that God was with them—he was right there in that very room. How did they know it? The Bible told them so. Just the way we know so many wonderful things: "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Then suddenly **something happens that utterly transforms their knowledge of God's presence into the experience of God's presence.** They see what appears to be tongues of fire on each other's heads and they hear a loud wind. And they are filled not merely with a deductive certainty of God's present reality based on Psalm 23, but with an experiential certainty based on the extraordinary outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The fire begins to burn in their hearts (Luke 24:32) and the sound of the wind surrounds them and envelops them with the tokens of God's power. And they are simply overwhelmed with the greatness of God. And it begins to spill out in praise.

The reason I say they are overflowing with worship and praise is because of **verse 11**: "We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." Luke calls this the fullness of the Holy Spirit in **verse 4**: "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." **Being filled with the Holy Spirit here is being overwhelmed with the greatness of God. The literal translation of verse 11 is that they were speaking "the greatness of God."** Since the Spirit was giving them utterance, and since the utterance was of God's greatness, **I take the fullness of the Spirit to mean that the Spirit's experience of the greatness of God becomes our experience of the greatness of God.**

The speaking in tongues in Acts (different from the tongues in 1 Corinthians) has a very definite roll to play. It is directly connected to the presence of people from all the nations who need to understand the great things the disciples were saying. It was a token that God means for all peoples to understand his greatness and that he is willing to do miracles to make his glory known among the nations.

Amazement and Perplexity

That leaves just one last observation from the text. And it turns out to be a caution to us. **In verse 12** the demonstration of God's power in the miracle of tongues causes amazement and perplexity among everyone. "And all were amazed and perplexed." But the perplexity gave way to two very different responses. Some seriously asked, "What does this mean?" Others (in verse 13) mocked and leaped to a naturalistic explanation: "They are filled with new wine." This is the caution: whenever revival comes—whenever the Holy Spirit is poured out in extraordinary power—this division happens in the Christian community. Some genuinely inquire as to what this is, and test all things, and hold fast to what is good. Others stand outside and mock and write off the enthusiasm as merely human, "They are filled with new wine."

3. Peter's keynote address Acts 2:14-40.

So, Peter stepped in, filled with the Spirit. He gave a powerful sermon which led to the conversion of 3000 people. It is the first Christian sermon ever preached. And thus, it sets for us a pattern of preaching, that carries down even for our own preaching today.

His first point is that what has been witnessed on this wonderful Pentecost day is the fulfilment of the prophet Joel's words. God is pouring out his spirit on all flesh! Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Acts 2:21). This may be the theme of the entire episode.

Verses 22-36 give us a sermon about Jesus. Imagine! Pentecost Day, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the sermon is about Jesus. Note verse 23 - we dare not miss this reality about Pentecost. Israel can then know (cf. Acts 2:36) that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ, Yahweh and Messiah. It is Jesus who mediates the Holy Spirit; who is able to perform healing miracles through his community; to whom prayers are to be addressed; who is the appointed judge of the world; and who is inseparable from and subordinate to God. It is Jesus who promised the Spirit of God which has done all the preparation. And this is a fantastic sermon.

The results, **verse 37**, “When they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Verses 37-40 are the invitation to salvation. The call to repentance is the universal call to all people to turn from their own ways and to turn to God in Jesus Christ. God offers the Holy Spirit, new life, and forgiveness of sins to all who will receive.

This power is what we want; but the question is, are we ready for it? Are we fit to be used, willing to be used, to be used anywhere, to be apparently unused, to be nothing, that Christ may be all? The possession of power is a great responsibility; perhaps the self-will and self-esteem of some of us would make the possession of such power a very deadly thing. Andrew Murray says, "**We want to get possession of the power, and use it; God wants the power to get possession of us, and use us.** If we give ourselves to the power to rule in us, the power will give itself to us to rule through us." We are waiting here this morning to be filled with power. Perhaps we had better wait first to be emptied.

Do you want to be more confident? Do you want to be more at peace with God and yourself? Do you want to be less confused about the Bible? Do you want to understand it better? Do you want to be able to share your faith more naturally, more confidently? Do you want to be able to live the way God tells you to live in the Bible? Do you want to change your soul for the better?

This is what the Holy Spirit does. He did that in a miraculous, unusual way on that first Pentecost. Today, he does it as you spend time hearing the Word, as you see a baptism, as you take the Lord's Supper – that's how the Holy Spirit changes people, changes you, turning you more and more into the Christian that God has made you to be.

Let us pray.