

How Does the Spirit Speak?

Acts 2:14-41

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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. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh”

- Acts 2:14-17, ESV

We remember Pentecost as the day when the Holy Spirit came upon the church, but for centuries prior it was one of three God-appointed pilgrim feasts in Israel. During these feasts - Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles - the population of Jerusalem swelled with visitors, Jews from other lands on pilgrimage. When the Holy Spirit came upon the gathered disciples on Pentecost, the noise and light attracted quite a crowd. The crowd that gathered to investigate the noise was bewildered to hear the disciples speaking their own native languages - perhaps as many as 15-16 different languages.

God had gathered this crowd and bewildered them with the sign of tongues for a reason: He wanted them to hear Peter's sermon about Jesus. God always has a central goal: exalting Christ and drawing people to Him.

In Peter's sermon, we get a glimpse into how the Holy Spirit empowers people to speak. In other words, we get an answer to key questions: How does the Spirit speak? What language does He use? What is His vocabulary and the focus of His speech? What we see most clearly in Peter's message is the that Holy Spirit speaks the language of Scripture and focuses His message on Jesus Christ.

We have only about 530 words of Peter's sermon recorded in Acts 2. Presumably, he spoke for longer than just a couple of minutes, but of the 530 words we have recorded for us here, almost 230 of them are the words of Scripture. Almost half of Peter's message is taken up with direct quotes from the Bible.

In addition to being thoroughly biblical, Peter's sermon is also thoroughly Christ-centered. Peter quotes from the prophet Joel and from Psalms 16 & 110, written by David. Though these Scriptures were written 700 - 1,000 years before Jesus was born, Peter makes it very clear that these Scriptures are about Christ and the early church. He even goes so far as to proclaim that David could not have been writing Psalm 16 about himself, since he died and was buried, and his body did see decay.

Based on Peter's example, we can safely conclude that Spirit-filled preaching is not marked by a particular emotion but by two chief characteristics: It is thoroughly biblical and Christ-centered. Biblical Christ-centered preaching should not be boring, nor should it be without urgency and a plea for the people to respond. Yet emotion and pleading cannot drive and shape the message; that must be the role of the Scriptures and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Heavenly Father, Your church needs a revival of biblical, Christ-centered preaching. Your people need to be guided by Your word to glorify Your Son. Give us faithful preachers. Make the pulpits of Your churches resound with the power of Your Holy Spirit, speaking through Your word and magnifying Your Son. In Jesus' name, Amen.