

It was William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, who wrote that some of the chief dangers that he saw facing the country were: Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, religion without the Holy Spirit, and politics without God.

Well, thank God that we haven't quite descended to those depths, but Booth might have been surprised that, at least in some areas of the Christian Church, many believers have come to experience a far greater measure of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives. They know, at first hand, his prompting them, guiding them, empowering them, renewing them, and giving them altogether deeper spiritual lives.

Today we remember the Holy Spirit coming to the early followers of Jesus in the infant Church. This momentous happening is recorded for us in Acts Chap 2. I want you to notice 4 highly significant things took place on that Day of Pentecost.

The first was that there was **A Disturbing of The People of God**

We learn from Chapter 1 that there were 120 believers who met together for prayer and fellowship and mutual support. We're told that this was the regular habit of the disciples, the women, and many other followers who had attached themselves to the company. V14 of chapter 1: *they all joined together constantly in prayer*. Now 120 is quite a prayer meeting, especially when the Church hasn't yet been established!

How important it is for Churches to meet regularly for prayer. John Calvin had a valid point when he remarked that Jesus giving us a Family Prayer addressed to 'Our Father' unites us together – the Lord actually expects you and me to come together for prayer!

Often, though, what happens is that a prayer meeting appeals to the faithful few and there is a danger of it becoming just an inner circle, a tightly knit bunch. Very warm, friendly and *safe!*

But for this prayer group in Jerusalem, God had other plans! God had no intention of allowing them to become cosy or comfortable or inward looking. Oh yes – prayer and worship together were important! Sharing and caring and supporting one another were vital as they became a Christian community, but the Holy Spirit was going to galvanise them into activity, to inject a divine energy into that group.

The picture we have is of vigour, a life-changing, experience. A sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. A driving wind, a *disturbing* wind...

There comes a time for all of us to stop praying and launch ourselves into activity. To leave the holy huddle and venture forth!

I've always found the best way to reach fellas is a Saturday morning breakfast. On one occasion we invited a well-known Christian speaker and, as we prayed for a good response, we felt the Holy Spirit wanted us to pray for 100 men to sit down to breakfast. But the Spirit then convicted us that we all needed to take the invitation cards and *get them into the hands of the guys we knew*. [We got 101 to breakfast!]. That's **disturbing** the people of God – that's giving us a shove. Don't we need that sometimes?

We need the Holy Spirit to disturb us, to motivate us, to get us active in Christ's service. Are we allowing him to unsettle us?

The second effect was **Advancing the Purpose of God**. God had declared in his word through the prophet Joel that his Holy Spirit would be effective in this way – v17 God says: *I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy (proclaim my message)*.

God has planned for this – what 500 years at least – before this event. He declared his purpose and now he was bringing it about.

*“What does this mean?”* asked the excited crowd of bystanders. God was working. The Day of Pentecost was an essential part of God's sovereign plan.

The time was right, the place was right, the circumstances were right, and the Lord was now ready to go forward. Have you ever thought about why it was exactly the right moment?

It was a period of *relative political stability*. The Roman Empire held sway and peaceful conditions prevailed. The Roman Road network was first class. Good straight roads meant *speedy travel for the gospel message*. Developing trade meant Europe, India and the East, and North Africa were all opened up as never before. A common Greek language was spoken by *all the educated folk and people engaged in commerce* – another aid to the gospel!

Ideal conditions! As always, God's way is perfect. It was the same at the Reformation – the rediscovery of great truths in the Bible - with the timely arrival of the printing presses. It was the same in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the great age of Overseas Missions with access to huge areas of the world via the Colonial system.

And today God is using all the advanced technology we have at our disposal to reach the unreached. What a wonderful God we have! Do you recognise the Holy Spirit at work in today's world?

Local churches are reporting surprising interest from people checking out Church Services online in the present lockdown; looking at Christian websites; enquiring about Alpha courses; raising big questions about life; about death; about prayer.

Don't we need to capitalise on what the Spirit is stirring up in people's minds? God is at work. Disturbing the people of God/Advancing the Purpose of God.

### 3) **Declaring the Wonders of God**

On that historic day there were thousands and thousands of pilgrims from all over the known world in Jerusalem. The city was packed. The nationalities listed are only a sample selection. And what did they hear? The disciples testifying to the 'mighty works of God'. When the Holy Spirit enabled them to talk, they couldn't stop themselves but tell of his marvellous deeds.

What did Jesus say about the Holy Spirit? *"He will speak about me – and you, too, will speak about me."*

Everyone heard in their own language – this was a miracle! Now some have tried to explain this away, but this is Luke writing, the factual, painstaking, historian. And why shouldn't they hear? This is God reversing the Tower of Babel. Read about it in Genesis 11. There God judged mankind for their pride and confused their languages – now here he was just as able to unscramble them again. Bringing order so that the disciples could declare the wonders of God and bring conviction to so many of the hearers.

I believe there is a place in our worship for bringing testimony of what God has done in our lives, in personal and family situations – as a means of encouragement. I'm sure there are countless stories amongst our Church family about how God – in his love – answered prayer, brought healing, dramatically changed a situation. Perhaps opened up a conversation about faith.

I'm been editing a book about a chap's spiritual journey. As a Street Pastor, he was in a city centre, when a rather brazen young woman came up to him and announced: "I've had three children, all by different men. What do you think your God would make of that?"

My friend gulped, prayed quickly, and then noticed the woman had the name *Gracie* tattooed on her neck. He asked who it was and found out it was her daughter. He then gently told her about God's love for her and her family, and what God's grace – His free gift - could mean for her. Isn't that being open to God's spirit – isn't that declaring the wonders of God?

Then, finally, **Spreading the Truth of God**. The account goes on to record how Peter stood up and preached that powerful sermon under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He explained the way of salvation through Jesus to that enormous crowd.

Notice the attack of Satan. There will always be opposition to the gospel from the enemy. “These men are drunk – they’ve been on the bottle!” We have to expect resistance that when we’re taking him on.

We didn’t read on this morning, but Peter’s sermon is full of God’s wonderful intervention into our affairs.

- V22 God did mighty miracles, wonders and signs through Jesus
- V24 God raised him up
- V30 God swore an oath to set one of David’s descendants on the throne
- V37 God made Jesus both Lord and Christ

We worship a God who has broken into history, primarily so that men and women can know and love the living God – the God who acts, who cares, who redeems.

God demonstrated his power then and does so today. He proves his saving love in transformed lives. He freely gives us his Holy Spirit to be a resource to strengthen, to deepen, to enrich our Christian lives.

And he can use you and me in our conversations with our friends. It’s the Spirit’s desire to promote Jesus – but He delights to work through us. It’s about building the kingdom – but it also brings glory to Jesus! Amen