

Our study of Christ's outpouring of the Spirit focuses on the His anointing of the church *as a praying and witnessing body of believers* in this week's notes.

Monday: Read Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4; 2:22; 2:37-39

Days of Preparation

The Day of Pentecost rightly holds pride of place in Acts as the day when the Lord came down in power to decisively energize the church for world-wide mission. But the quieter days of the Spirit's work are also used by God. The seeds of world-changing power are sown when the Gospel is prayed into the hearts of unbelievers, followed by the mighty, effectual call of the Spirit through the Word read, quoted, and preached. Indeed, it is the quiet, inward, convicting work of the Holy Spirit which we pray for first of all. Jesus promised that, when He sent the Holy Spirit, He would convict the world of "sin, righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8-11). We see this work of the Spirit as Peter urges the crowd on the Day of Pentecost to especially heed the words of Scripture (Acts 2:22). Working quietly in the deepest recesses of the crowd's heart, the Spirit of Christ produced a mighty rending of the heart in Acts 2:37.

Meditate and Pray: Ask the Lord to embolden His church (including our local body) to have full *confidence* in the Word of God and then to give us the *opportunity* to bear witness boldly to that Word – even as the church in the book of Acts prays for boldness in Acts 4, to which we turn in tomorrow's notes.

Tuesday: Read Acts 1:4 & Acts 4:23-24 & 4:29

Leaning

We must wait upon Christ and His Father to send the promised Holy Spirit, just as the first believers did in Acts 1:4. We have no option but to wait on God to take the initiative. This is also what the persecuted church does in Acts 4 - *asking God to enable them to fruitfully bear witness to Christ in this hostile world* (Acts 4:29).

In Acts 4 we have the church's response upon hearing the report of the persecution of the Apostles at the hands of the religious leaders in Jerusalem. They immediately gather in prayer and cry out to the Lord. They dare not trust their own wisdom to guide them.

Meditate and Pray: May we learn that it is the very essence of faith to express our *complete distrust of ourselves* and our reliance *only upon the Lord's wisdom* when we pray.

Faith empties the soul of its own wisdom, understanding, and fullness, that it may act in the wisdom and fullness of Christ. The only advice for preservation in trials and temptations lies in that of the wise man, Prov. 3:5: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding." This is the great work of faith; it is faith; it is to live by faith. The great cause of men falling in trials is their leaning to, or leaning upon, their own understanding and counsel.

(John Owen – *Works*, Vol. 6, pg. 146)

Weds/Thurs: Read Acts 4:23-29**In One Accord**

In Acts 4:23-29, the church gathers with Peter and John as one body to pray, in response to the report about the persecution of the Apostles at the hands of the religious leaders in Jerusalem. Here are some key components:

First, they lift their voice “**with one accord**” (Acts 4:24) meaning that they were unified by the Spirit of God in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3) and bound together with Christ as their Head by the faith which the Spirit works into every believer.

Second, they lift up their voices in **agreed words of prayer**. This does not mean that they are bound by a certain liturgy, but that the Spirit, leading them in prayer, causes them to focus in awe, gratitude and in word, on certain fundamental truths about God, to which we turn now.

Third, notice how they address God as “**Sovereign Lord**” (Acts 4:24 ESV). What they mean by this address is to appeal to God here as the Possessor of all. This word is used in Greek literature - as the title given to slave-masters and absolute potentates, emphasizing their authority and power to exercise their will completely over the works of their hands and the possessions at their disposal.

Fourth, notice how this theme of **God’s absolute sovereignty continues** as the church fills her mouth with prayer in Acts 4:27-28:

For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

Meditate and Pray: Here we have expressed the church’s bowing the knee to God’s authority in “working all things out” for the good of His people and to further His plan of redemption. Notice especially how the church in Acts 4 speak of “God’s hand” as outstretched and controlling even the wicked rulers, Herod and Pilate (verse 27)! Sing about God’s sovereign purpose, using hymn # 74 in our red Trinity hymnal:

1 God is working his purpose out
as year succeeds to year:
God is working his purpose out,
and the time is drawing near;
nearer and nearer draws the time,
the time that shall surely be,
when the earth shall be filled with the
glory of God
as the waters cover the sea.

2 From utmost east to utmost west,
where human feet have trod,
by the mouth of many messengers
goes forth the voice of God:
"Give ear to me, you continents,
ye isles, give ear to me,"
that the earth may be filled with the
glory of God
as the waters cover the sea.

3 March we forth in the strength of God,
with the banner of Christ unfurled,
that the light of the glorious gospel of truth
may shine throughout the world:
fight we the fight with sorrow and sin
to set their captives free,
that the earth may be filled with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea.

4 All we can do is nothing worth
unless God blesses the deed;
vainly we hope for the harvest-tide
till God gives life to the seed;
yet nearer and nearer draws the time,
the time that shall surely be,
when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea.

Fri/Sat/Sun: Read Acts 4:23-29 & 2 Timothy 2:1-7

Prepared for Suffering

There are many biblical references that give structure to this, the longest recorded prayer in the book of Acts, and (as Professor Howard Marshall points out in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of The Old Testament*) one of the rare examples giving the actual wording when the church prays to God.

For example, there is an appeal to the “Sovereign Lord” – a title given to God in Jeremiah 4:10 and Daniel 9:8. The group gathered for prayer also appeals to the One “who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them” – words taken almost verbatim from Psalm 146:6.

But most important for the conclusion of this week’s notes is to note the use of Psalm 2, quoted in Acts 4:25-26:

.... who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,
“Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed.

This is not just window dressing, or an add-on to make the prayer sound official. (Some people, sadly, have a more “religious” voice which they use in prayer and not in normal conversation – and may take pleasure in quoting Scriptures to impress others about their facility in prayer).

But Psalm 2 here is deeply rooted in what the persecuted church needed, as they sought to understand ongoing hostility towards Christ – even when Peter’s opponents admit that they can’t deny the wonderful miracle which healed the lame man (Acts 4:16). How could they be so implacably hateful towards Christ, when by His name healings, comfort and eternal life are the blessings offered? Who could oppose such good things?

Well, that is where Psalm 2 comes in. By the inspiration of the Spirit, David declares *that even the hatred and suffering Christ (and by implication, His body the church) endures* is predicted in Scripture. Costly suffering for Christ is both promised to the church and rendered bearable for her by the knowledge that Christ suffered the same things and is with His church when she bears the world’s attacks for the sake of His name.

What an insight! What a help to the church in counting the cost of continued bold witness to Christ! Only the same Lord Jesus who inspired Psalm 2 could give His suffering church comfort in the face of the threats and hatred of Acts 4.

To illustrate, consider 2 Timothy 2:1-7. In that passage, Paul urges Timothy to carefully “count the cost” of serving His Savior.

Paul would not involve Timothy unwittingly in the difficulties and dangers in which he found himself. He rather bids him first of all to count the whole cost. And then he points him (to Christ) as a source of strength which will supply all his needs.
B.B. Warfield, *The Risen Christ*

But how beautifully Paul expresses his confidence that Christ will enable Timothy to endure as a “good soldier, athlete and farmer” (2 Tim. 2:3-6). How will Christ stand by Timothy? He will give Timothy discernment to apply the Word of the Gospel (and the promise of suffering for all who seek to follow Christ according to that Gospel) to his current, difficult situation in Ephesus.

Timothy wept when the Apostle Paul departed Ephesus (2 Tim. 1:4). Timothy would feel the pressure of knowing that, “all in Asia had forsaken Paul” (2 Tim. 1:15). Would he also as a young, timid pastor abandon the Apostle - especially when it seemed like “The whole fabric which the apostle had built up at such cost of labor and pain was about to fall about his ears” (Warfield).

No, Paul believed the Lord would open Timothy’s understanding and his heart to accept the pain and labor of spreading the seed of the Gospel and running the race set before him – even though Timothy would have to defend that Gospel like a good soldier!

Paul was confident that God would keep his son in the faith true to Christ, because the Lord Himself would be the True Interpreter of the very lines he is writing. (H.C.G. Moule, *Commentary on 2 Timothy*)

That is what the Lord Jesus Christ does for His church in every age – He ensures that He Himself applies His Word to our hearts and life-situations. Just knowing that Scripture predicts how hard living for Christ would be, coupled with the straight-forward Scripture which men like Paul wrote so transparently, is enough to ground us in our hard trials and against the threats of this world! Amen!