

Who do we believe?

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[0 : 0 0] Dear Heavenly Father, we begin a time of prayer only too aware of our sin. And so we come to you, confessing our sin and seeking repentance.

So we ask, Father, that you would forgive us. Forgive us for those things that have displeased you. Those times when the evil one has dominated our thoughts rather than your son.

Those actions that we've undertaken that are displeasing to you. Times when we've not done what we ought to have done.

Or else we've evaded. The responsibility that comes with having your name, bearing your name. Father, in so many ways we've fallen short of your righteousness.

And what you would desire in us. So please forgive us, we pray, and give us repentant hearts. So that our whole lives would portray your son, Jesus Christ.

[1 : 2 1] In answer to such a prayer, we hear words of comfort. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

And we move now to pray for evangelism in our city. Father, we ask that over the next few weeks as Christmas looms large on the horizon, as all of us at the same time are aware of the turbulent economy in these days, we ask, Father, that folk would be forced to re-evaluate what they place their trust in.

We pray, Father, that through past experiences, maybe when they were growing up as children, many would recollect times gone by.

They would feel nostalgic this Christmas and that this feeling would somehow be used by you to draw great numbers to your church and to your word.

We ask, Father, that you would disturb complacency and that you would kindle a desire to find a true security that this world can never offer.

[2 : 4 3] Father, our prayer is that you would let many see Jesus this Christmas. And we lift now to you, Father, those we know who may be suffering, be it with pain, illness, perhaps bereavement, depression, and the inevitable aches and pains, the ailments that come with old age, perhaps a hospital appointment, or else maybe some overwhelming family crisis just now.

Father, we pray that you would draw near these folk, our loved ones, in the person of your spirit, and that you would show our loved ones, your son, Jesus, give assurance and strength to the saints, we pray.

And for those as yet unsaved, we pray that their situation would be used by you to draw them into a relationship with yourself.

As of old, Father, you're suffering for your glory, we pray. And if medical intervention is appropriate, we ask that you would heighten the skill of medics, give a speedy diagnosis and treatment, we pray, and recovery where this is possible in your purposes.

And finally, Father, as we come to your word, we pray that you'd guide our thinking and that you would apply it to our lives and send us out and make us useful for your kingdom.

[4 : 31] And we lift our prayers to you confidently because we ask in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. So you might like to turn up Acts chapter 2 and you'll find that on page 209.

Acts chapter 2. And I'll read from verse 1. When a day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.

And suddenly, there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting, and divided tongues as of fire appeared to them, and rested on each one of them.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now they were dwelling in Jerusalem, Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.

And at this sound, the multitude came together, and they were bewildered because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?

[5 : 31] And how is it that we, each of us, here in our own native language, Parthians and Medes, Illamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.

And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, What does this mean? But others, mocking, said they are filled with new wine.

So before Jesus ascended to his father, he promised his Holy Spirit, didn't he, to his apostles, and they were to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit to fall upon them.

And just listen to this, it's Acts chapter 1 and verse 8, Acts chapter 1 verse 8, it's the theme of the whole of the rest of the book of Acts. And the theme really, until the Lord returns, I guess.

So Acts chapter 1 verse 8, Well you will receive power, and the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

[7 : 19] And as we close the book of Acts, the gospel's in Rome, isn't it? The world superpower of the time. And from Rome, it spread out, and it got to Glasgow.

I suppose that's pretty much the ends of the world, isn't it? So the gospel gets to us. And so, the apostles are gathered together, and the Spirit falls upon them.

Now, by God's grace, I've seen quite a few people converted, but I've never seen tongues of fire coming down out of the sky when they're converted.

Friends, some of the events of Pentecost, they're not the normative Christian experience. They sort of authenticated the apostolic ministry, and they were sort of, they lay between the covenants, the old covenants, and the new covenant.

And also, they've got a unique place, haven't they, in God's unfolding plan of salvation. Just listen to what Sinclair Ferguson says on this matter.

[8 : 31] He says, Pentecost itself is no more repeatable than is the crucifixion, or the empty tomb, or the ascension. To assume that it was would be tantamount to producing a Pentecostal form of the medieval mass, repeating what is unrepeatable, and consequently diminishing, if not actually denying its true significance.

So, let's not all expect to be doing everything the apostles were doing. Now, back to our passage, and did you notice in our reading how people reacted to this spectacular event?

It would make a good movie, wouldn't it? It's so dramatic. Verse 6, a crowd came together in bewilderment. Verse 7, they're utterly amazed, astonished.

Verse 12, can you see verse 12? And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, what does this mean? What does this mean?

And that question sort of hanging in the air for a few seconds, something of major importance has been happening, isn't it? Something supernatural. It's a new epoch in God's unfolding plan of salvation.

[9 : 52] And the apostles in verse 11, they're all proclaiming, aren't they? The wonders of God. And more than that, it's a multinational communication event.

No translators needed, is there? Are you with me? Not like when my wife's watching BBC Alba. There's translators needed there.

I have to watch the subtitles. In fact, on the way here, I dropped my daughter Ruth off at my wife's mother's house, and she's just gone and bought a Gaelic speaking teddy.

And I think I'll need a translator to understand what it's saying. But not here. What's happening is the message about the wonders of God is supernaturally going global into this world.

It's entering people's ears, their minds, their hearts, and awakening them, isn't it? Listen, unhindered by language difficulties.

[10 : 55] And friends, think about this, it's a reversal of the Tower of Babel, isn't it? From Genesis chapter 11, when God introduced different languages. Just listen to this.

Therefore, its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. Acts chapter 2, here, Pentecost, everyone is hearing the wonders of God in their own language.

Do you see? So it's not in comprehension, like Genesis chapter 11, it's comprehension, isn't it? This Acts chapter 2 scene of Pentecost, it's a preview, isn't it?

Into the heavenly realms. Just listen to this. Revelation chapter 7, after this I looked and behold what? A great multitude that no one could count numbers, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

And here's a question for us lot, friends, this lunchtime, living post Pentecost, are we explaining the gospel in a language that people understand? We need to be doing that, don't we, as individuals, as churches, we need to be communicating the gospel in a way that people easily understand all things being equal.

[12 : 35] It's what happened at the Reformation, isn't it? God's word suddenly became available in your own language. Previously, it had been in Latin, it was gobbledygook to most people, and then the European printing presses were churning out Bibles in all languages, weren't they?

So Acts chapter 2, the gospel is breaking through barriers. You know, it's deeply incarnational, isn't it? Think about it, it's what Jesus was doing when he came in the flesh.

God comes to us in human form. We're image bearers, and the original comes to meet us, and dwell amongst us.

Emmanuel, communication. And from Pentecost onwards, he even comes to dwell in happiness, doesn't he?

As believers. And suddenly, everything is connecting together. Is that your experience? When I was doing Cornhill down in London, many years back, I had a friend there, Dr. Paul Dale, he was a mathematician, and one evening I was doing some homework in the library, there was just he and I there, and I thought it's time for a cup of tea.

[14 : 00] So I went to Paul to ask him if he wanted a cup of tea. I looked over his shoulder, and there was his work. Sure enough, he was marking homework. It was homework from Oxford University.

He was doing mathematics homework from the students in Oxford University. I said, whatever is that, Paul, it was like Egyptian hieroglyphics. I couldn't understand any of it, or Chinese or something.

He said, it's reman invariance. I said, would you like a cup of tea? I don't even know what that is. But just imagine if I could have taken Paul's brain out of his head, put it in my head, I'd look down suddenly, wouldn't I, at reman invariance, it would all immediately make sense, wouldn't it?

And that's what God does with us, friends, with his spirit. He comes to dwell in us. We look at our Bibles, what was previously unintelligible to us, suddenly we begin to understand.

Don't we? The dungeon flame with light, my chains fell off, my heart was free, our rose went forth and followed thee. What does this mean, they're saying? They know that there's a major event taking place, and that question's hanging in the air, and we get two explanations, friends.

[15 : 13] We get firstly the world's explanation, and then we get God's explanation. So two explanations. Let's look at the world's explanation first, and we'll see that in verse 13, just one verse there, it's quite brief, can you see it?

But others mocking said, they are filled with new wine. Isn't that ridiculous? The world's explanation, they're sort of clutching at straws, aren't they?

Or perhaps they know that they've sort of concocted this false analysis of the data, like many fabrications we hear today, isn't it? I speak to Muslims quite often, and they say, well, Jesus didn't die on the cross, you know, the Roman soldiers must have been neglecting their duty.

And here in verse 13, they say, oh, they've had a skin full. Doesn't ring true, does it? So don't get depressed, brothers and sisters, don't get depressed when you're talking to somebody and they try to ridicule you.

They did it with Jesus, they did it with the apostles, and they'll do it with you and me. Of course, some people, they've got genuine misunderstanding, haven't they?

[16 : 36] But many that we come across, well, it's just a smoke screen, some of the things that they say. You know, they try to hide away from the truth, like Adam and Eve hiding away in the garden.

And Paul says we suppress the truth, don't we, naturally. So that was the world's explanation. They've had too much wine. But that verse 12 question is still hanging in the air.

What does this mean? Verse 13 didn't answer it. And we come now, finally, to the biblical explanation, our second point. Now, notice Peter confronts the ridiculous claim of verse 13.

Peter's got the big picture in his thinking, hasn't he? He knows his Bible. Do we know ours? So here it is.

He's God's explanation from the Bible. Peter stands up in verse 14. And we get this explanation. It takes us from verse 14 to verse 41.

[17 : 42] But we'll just be doing the first half of that this lunch time up to verse 21. We'll do the next section next week, God willing. So verse 12, what does this mean?

And verse 14, Peter begins his explanation. 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 men are not drunk as you suppose, since it's only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel.

And in the last days, says Joel, it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams.

And the first thing to notice, friends, is that these events on Pentecost, they were written about in the Old Testament part of the Bible. Joel spoke about the outpouring of God's spirit and also closely connected to that, the end of the world.

[19 : 01] Joel had written about these days more than 500 years previously. And the Jews, they would have read his prophecy from childhood.

And Peter is saying today is the day that Joel wrote about. He's saying these events, they were etched into history by God long ago.

It's an event wholly orchestrated by God. God is in total control. And we, well, we can't even get a 48-hour weather forecast right, can we?

And look at the financial crisis as well. People were so short-sighted, weren't they? We just can't see. Not so with God.

It's good news that, isn't it? When we look at our lives and our situations, God is in total control. His plans and purposes majestically unfolding.

[20 : 06] Everything falling into place. Events falling into line with prophecy. The cock crows. Jesus' words are fulfilled.

Peter weeps. Total control. And Peter, Peter is asking the Jews here, he's asking this question, can you see that God is in total control.

He's saying you're standing here witnessing a dramatic fulfilment of prophecy in the now. But more than that, Peter's saying, look where things are heading.

Today's events, they're part of the first instalment of the events of the last days. It's where everything is heading. And just as surely as the first instalment has now arrived, so will the second.

Verse 19, look, can you see? And I will show wonders in the heavens above, and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and vapour of smoke.

[21 : 15] The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

and perhaps some of that was fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross. On Good Friday, the sun withdrew its light. Didn't it, friends?

The rest, well, it's part of the last days as we await the return of Christ. Christianity is big, isn't it? I often speak to people outside and they just have got no comprehension.

Christianity has sort of been on the inside. It's having an eternal perspective. It's been properly orientated as a human being.

Many people, they think, well, Christianity is all about religion. I've talked to some people, they say, I'm not religious, you know. They think I'm trying to make them religious.

[22 : 19] religious. You know, they think it's sort of all about odd things. Your neighbour might think that. Your colleague at work. A relation.

They just don't understand. They think Christianity is weird religious stuff. Stain glass windows, chanting, doing strange things I can never understand, gravestones, strange clothing.

Now, I know we've got some of that. We've got some beautiful stained glass windows up there, but they're not the centre, are they, of Christianity. Christianity is about nothing less than a relationship with the creator of the universe, which will take you into eternity, into a whole new creation.

If you're a Christian, it's lunchtime, you can walk out onto Buchanan Street, knowing where you'll be in 300 years' time. The world, it hasn't a clue, has it?

So, just as surely as the day of Pentecost has now arrived, says Peter, so will the end of the world, says Joel. Are you ready for the end of the world?

[23 : 34] We're in the last days. We're living, friends, aren't we, between Pentecost and God's second coming, and we ought to be ready. The day of the Lord will come, like a thief in the night, 2 Peter chapter 3, verse 10.

And so verse 21 is good news to us this lunchtime. Look down there, verse 21. Can you see? And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Have you done that? Have you called on the name of the Lord? Have you asked him to forgive your sin and help you to lead a new life? Peter's applying Joel's prophecy.

He's bringing it through time and he's applying it to minds and hearts. And friends, as we open our Bibles, that's what God is doing with us, isn't it?

Through his word, through his spirit, he's drawing near to us. And suddenly, it all becomes personal, doesn't it? Friends.

[24 : 49] So here it is, the day of Pentecost and two explanations. The world's explanation, I suggest to you, was ridiculous and then we got Peter's explanation.

And he used the Bible, didn't he, to explain what was going on. That's where his authority lay. And he used it to tell us what's in store for us and where our lives are heading.

Shall we pray? And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

We thank you, Father, for those authoritative words. We thank you that you do save us through your Son, Jesus Christ, if only we would call upon you.

And we thank you, Father, that having done that, we then are properly orientated in these last days. We know where things are heading.

[26 : 13] We know where we'll be for all of eternity. So we thank you for this good news that is ours in Christ.

And we pray, Father, that some of this would rub off on others. In this confused old world of ours, people would look to us and they would see we have a different perspective on things, that we have a different orientation, that we know where we're going.

Father, use us, we pray, to radiate this wonderful gospel message into our lost world. And we lift this prayer to you in Christ's name.

Amen. Amen.