

Declaring the Wonders of God

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Date: 14 July 2024

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- [0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we study this morning. Gracious God, won't you bless your word to us this morning. That we might know it and understand it.
- We might see clearly what the Spirit says through the pages of Scripture. We pray this not just that we might grow in knowledge, but that we might grow in love.
- And in the likeness of your Son. Remind us of your Son, who is the goal of Scripture. His life, his work, his Lordship.
- Help us now, we pray, by your Spirit, for Christ's sake. Amen. So trudging along still in the book of Acts, Acts chapter 2, still at the time of Pentecost.
- We looked last week, for those of you who weren't here last week, what we did was we looked at the two, two of the three signs that accompanied the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.
- [1 : 0 5] We looked at the rushing wind that you just read about there, and we looked at the tongues of fire. Now what we're going to do this morning is we're going to look at the third sign, and that is the speaking in tongues.
- Now it is almost impossible, and maybe you thought about this when we were talking about it last week even, but it's impossible to address this topic and kind of just exclusively focus on Acts chapter 2 and what's happening in Acts chapter 2 without sort of being drawn in, at least in your minds, probably for a lot of people, drawn into the larger debate about the modern phenomenon of tongue speaking that's associated with many kind of Pentecostal and charismatic churches today.
- So maybe you're sitting here this morning, maybe you come from that kind of tradition where tongue speaking was a common thing in your worship services. Maybe it's completely alien to you, but either way you're sitting and going, well I've got a lot of questions about this thing called tongues in the Bible.
- And so here's what I'm going to try and do for you today. First, kind of two places we're going to go. Number one, we're going to start with the description in Acts, and then try and look more broadly at the New Testament, what the New Testament says about this issue of tongues and some of the issues related to it.
- That's the first kind of point. And then the second part of the sermon, we're going to come back to Pentecost and like we did last week, discuss the meaning behind the sign being associated with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.
- [2 : 2 7] Okay? So, tongues in the Bible, let's start with that. Come back, have that passage open, Acts 2. I want you to see the first four verses here. It says, When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place, and suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.
- They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. And all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

So, you see, there are three visible or audible signs that come with the pouring out of the Spirit. And it's the third sign here that's caused a whole lot of debate, perhaps a lot of confusion in Christian churches.

And I would say particularly in the last century and a bit. Now, if you had met me, Stephen, when I was a Bible college student, you would have thought, Stephen is always up for a good theological Barney.

You know what the word Barney means, right? Not that big dinosaur, but like having a little fight, a fisticuffs. Stephen is always up for a good theological fight. He's not afraid to share his opinion and get in your face around these things.

[3 : 42] That is not so much the case anymore. And you can put it down to wisdom. You can put it down to maturity. Or you can kind of put it down to cowardice and me just kind of liking to keep the peace nowadays.

But today, I am generally less inclined to want to step into theological controversies with guns blazing and say let's blow everything up and tell everybody why they're wrong. Like people are wrong and they need to know why they are wrong.

And so I come to this whole discussion on tongues really, really wanting to bring more light than heat. There are very, very well-meaning, very godly, very passionate, very thoughtful Christians on various sides of the debate around tongues.

And I think biblical virtue, Christian virtue, calls us to charity and to unity as far as we are able as Christians, even when we disagree as Christians that have serious disagreements as Christians.

So I say that, but that being said, we should though always endeavor to understand Scripture as best we can and explain modern phenomena through the lens of Scripture and not the other way around.

[4 : 52] That's really important. And then when we do come to different conclusions, I do think we need to be clear and not kind of shrink away from biblical convictions because it might make things a little bit awkward and uncomfortable.

And so with that kind of proviso in place, let's talk about tongues this morning. Now tongues really occur in two main places in the Bible, in the book of Acts chapter 2 at Pentecost that we just saw.

And then the Apostle Paul gives a more detailed commentary on tongues in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, 13 and 14. There are a couple of other occurrences in Acts chapter 10 and chapter 19, but those are kind of more passing references and don't tend to add too much more to the discussion.

There are, I think, two main questions about tongues we need to resolve, and this is kind of where the debate lies. The first question is this.

In the Bible, what exactly is tongues? What is tongues speaking? In the Bible, what exactly is tongues speaking? So that's a nature question. What is it? And then once you've kind of got some semblance of an answer to that question, then the second question is, is speaking in tongues normative for all Christians today?

[6 : 06] Should we expect all Christians to be speaking in tongues? So let's look at the first question. Biblically speaking, what exactly is tongues? Acts chapter 2, face value.

If you look at that, it doesn't seem like a particularly hard question to answer. And the reason for that is we get to actually see the people's responses to the disciples who are now speaking in tongues.

So remember, this is during the festival, the harvest festival of Pentecost, and it's a big festival. So there are a lot of Jews and converts to Judaism from around the ancient world, all flooding into the city at this time, into Jerusalem.

And it appears that as the Spirit is poured out, and these disciples then start speaking in tongues, it seems like they spill out of the house in which they were speaking in tongues, where the Spirit was poured out.

And they go out into the city, and they continue speaking in tongues. And they do it in front of all these onlookers, in kind of front of all these spiritual tourists who are in town at the moment. So if you look at verse 5, it says, Now they were staying in Jerusalem, God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.

[7 : 13] Luke is particularly trying to be comprehensive here, with a bit of hyperbole there. And when they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.

Utterly amazed, they asked, Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? And then there's the long list of all the places they come from. Down the bottom there, We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues.

Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, What does this mean? So here you get all these kind of diaspora Jews, telling us what they heard from the disciples.

And what did they hear? They heard the disciples proclaiming the wonders of God, that's the content. But here's the supernatural part. In their own regional languages. Not dialects, languages.

And this perplexes them, because they go, But these guys are Galileans, who probably spoke a little bit of, well, mainly Aramaic, and maybe a little bit of Greek. So at face value, what it seems like, is it seems like the disciples were supernaturally empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak in human languages, and that's important, in human languages, they had not previously learned.

[8 : 37] You'll see, if you've got an NIV translation in the Bible there, there's a footnote next to the word tongues in verse 4, and it says that the word could equally be translated as languages. That is, the Greek word can basically mean like a literal tongue, like the thing in your mouth, or it can mean a language.

It just kind of depends on context. Now you say, well, okay, so where's the controversy here? This seems pretty straightforward. The disciples supernaturally spoke unlearned foreign languages by the power of the Spirit of God.

But if you've ever been to a charismatic or a Pentecostal church, or been part of one, or if you've ever heard somebody speak in tongues, in the kind of modern conception of tongues, you'll know that the sounds that come out of their mouth are most definitely not known human languages.

In fact, we actually have widespread empirical evidence on this. So Don Carson, one of the leading New Testament professors in the world, I think, wrote a lengthy book on the subject of tongues and prophecy in the New Testament.

And in that book he says this, he says, to my knowledge, there is universal agreement among linguists who have taped and analyzed thousands of examples of modern tongue speaking that the contemporary phenomenon is not any human language.

[9 : 59] The patterns and structures that all known human language requires are simply not there. Occasionally a recognizable word slips out, but that is statistically likely given the sheer quantity of verbalization.

If Acts 2 is the supernatural speaking of known human languages, and it seems pretty clear that that's what it is, then what is happening in modern charismatic and Pentecostal churches is not the tongues that we have here.

And so you might say, well then, so how do modern tongue speakers justify their practice, like what they're actually doing? That's where Paul comes in. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14.

Here's the Apostle Paul, and what he's doing in this passage is he's addressing the issue of spiritual gifts. Chapter 12, verse 4, he says this, he says, there are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.

There are different kinds of service with the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

[11 : 18] To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom. To another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit. To another faith by the same Spirit. To another gifts of healing by that one Spirit.

To another miraculous powers. To another prophecy. To another distinguishing between spirits. To another speaking in different kinds of tongues. And still another the interpretation of tongues.

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit. And he distributes them to each one just as he determines. So Paul says there that the speaking of tongues and the interpreting of tongues are spiritual gifts.

Given to the church for the common good. That is the building up of the church. Spirit gives the church these gifts to build the church up. And then he proceeds, what he actually does in the following chapter, in the rest of the chapter and into the next two is, he regulates this tongue speaking in public worship in the church.

He's got like, this is how you're going to use this particular gift. And the gift of prophecy. This is how you're going to use this gift in many tongues. This is how you're going to use it in public worship in this church. Because you need to know that the church in Corinth was something of a dysfunctional and chaotic church.

[12 : 26] They had people getting drunk at communion. Like I've got, we've got a lot of issues in church like any church does. But I'm pretty glad that we don't have that particular issue to deal with on a Sunday morning. But this is a dysfunctional church.

And so Paul's coming on saying, guys, God gives us these gifts, but here's how we need to think about using them in public worship. Now, as you read through 12, 13, 14, there are way too many references to tongues there for us over those three chapters to look at all of them this morning.

But several theologians have looked at these passages and they've said, hey, hang on. These tongues seem to be a little bit different from the tongues in Acts chapter two.

For example, in chapter 14, verse two, Paul says, anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people, but to God. Indeed, no one understands them. They utter mysteries by the spirit.

In verse 14, he mentions praying in tongues. He says, if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. And so you look at these verses and one or two others in that section and you think, this, this could sound like something else, something different to what is happening in Acts chapter two.

[13 : 40] As a, several theologians suggest that perhaps there's a second type of tongue speaking in one Corinthians that is related in that it comes from the spirit, but it's different to the tongue speaking in chapter two of Acts.

This, the second type of tongue seems to be a little bit more kind of, for lack of a better word, revelatory. Then in Acts two, because throughout one Corinthians 12, 13 and 14, Paul connects the speaking in tongues and the interpreting of that tongues with prophecy.

So like having revelations from the Lord through these ecstatic experiences, utterances. And then you might say, well this then, maybe this is what accounts for what we see in charismatic and Pentecostal churches there.

Some sort of non human spiritual language that has a revelatory function. So the question comes in, well, are there two, are there two types of tongues?

And I want to say to you, I think this is a hard question to answer definitively. And there are scholars who I respect very, very much who come down in different places from each other on this particular issue.

[14 : 49] So very, very tentatively, here's how I in my own kind of thinking go through sorting this out. Number one, there are a lot of references to tongues in one Corinthians, but while there are a lot of references there, the references are actually, if you look at them, very vague when it comes to articulating what exactly tongues is.

The nature of the tongues, the vast majority of the references have to do with regulating the practice. This is how you use it, not this is what it is. Now that's important because a key rule in interpreting the Bible is to use parts of scripture that are more clear to interpret parts that are less clear.

So even our Westminster Confession of Faith, our confessional standards, this is what the reformers built their Bible interpretation on. They said this, chapter one, paragraph nine, the infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself.

And therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture, it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly. That is basic Protestant interpretation of Bible.

That's how, how we interpret the Bible. Move from what is more clear to what is less clear. Now using that rule, it seems to me that Acts 2 is far clearer about the exact nature of tongues than 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14 is.

[16 : 12] That's the first thing I want you to consider. Number two, nowhere in 1 Corinthians does Paul try to differentiate what he's speaking about in relation to Acts chapter 2, which you think he would do if he was speaking about two different things.

Just to kind of clear up any confusion anybody might have. He assumes that his Corinthian readers know exactly what he's talking about when he speaks about tongues. That's why he's only regulated.

He's not explaining this is what it is. He's just regulating it. And the only precedent we have, and presumably they had, was Acts chapter 2. Speaking of tongues there.

So if Paul doesn't differentiate, the question is, should we? Number three, there's a little exercise you can do. This is something for you to go home and do on a rainy day today, after you've eaten all of the food that you can eat.

But a little exercise you can do, and I personally did this exercise multiple times, just kind of really check myself in preparation for this sermon. It's not something I came up with. A friend of mine pointed this out to me several years ago.

[17 : 21] But there's a little exercise you can do to test out this hypothesis. If you go and you read 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14, but every place where you see the word tongues, take it out and substitute it with the phrase foreign languages.

You'll find that for the most part, the text reads fairly smoothly. And it makes a lot of sense, the situation. Paul is regulating the speaking of foreign languages in that church.

Spiritually empowered ability to speak foreign languages, but foreign known human languages. There are one or two places, like those verses I just mentioned, where it's a little bit more awkward. But even in those places, I think there's a pretty easy, rational and contextual reason for why it still fits there.

So that's the third thing. Fourth thing. In 1 Corinthians 14, verse 21, when the Apostle Paul references the Old Testament, as he so often does, in this discussion on tongues, he goes back and he points to Isaiah 28.

And he quotes from Isaiah 28, verses 11 to 12. And there in Isaiah, if you go back and you read the original quotation in Isaiah, it's clearly foreign human languages that are in view.

[18 : 40] Not angelic languages, not non-human spiritual languages. The passage back in Isaiah is a reference to the judgment that God meets out on the nation of Israel by the invading Assyrian army who are speaking foreign languages.

Assyrian, whatever they spoke in Assyria, back in 568 or 722 BC. So known human languages, not spiritual languages.

So with those kind of four considerations in place, and there are more, but we don't have time for them. If you ask me, Stephen, what do you think tongues are in the Bible? I would very tentatively say that I think that the tongues in Acts chapter 2 and in 1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14 are basically the same thing.

We have people being supernaturally empowered by the Spirit of God to speak in known human languages that they had not previously learned. Now I want to say my view is not without some tricky, sticky parts and problems.

None of the views are. And there are some very good scholars who would differ with me. In fact, I would say Stephen of 10 plus years ago actually might have differed with 2024 Stephen.

[19 : 53] But as things currently stand, I just, having come to the subject again, having studied a lot in the past, coming to it again, I just can't see enough evidence in Scripture for a second type of tongues that is not a human language, but rather a kind of spiritual or angelic language breaking all the known rules of human linguistics.

Now maybe I've upset you by saying that. I'm sorry. But that means I am somewhat skeptical of modern tongue speaking, the phenomenon that you find in Pentecostal and charismatic churches today.

I have a hard time explaining it biblically. I also have some concerns about the practice of tongues that I've seen take place in different contexts, but I didn't want to talk about that too much because I actually wanted to say, let's just talk about the text itself.

And so I do wonder, I wonder if it really is from the Lord and from the Spirit. Now friends, listen very, very carefully about this part. This is not to doubt the sincerity of the people who claim to speak and pray in tongues.

I do not doubt the sincerity. I do not doubt that they sincerely believe that they are being spiritually helped by praying in tongues, that it's a kind of, it's a positive edifying experience.

[21 : 07] I certainly don't doubt their salvation or that they are brothers and sisters in Christ and neither should you. I am absolutely, absolutely sure that there are Christians who speak in tongues or claim to speak in tongues who completely shame me in their personal obedience, in their private devotion, in their passion for evangelism and the things of God.

This kind of theological disagreement, it actually, it brings me no joy or delight. There's no kind of smugness on my part like I've got it right and you've got it wrong. These are brothers and sisters who are very, very sincere. But I have to say that I think sincerity is not enough.

I'll give you one example that charismatic and non-charismatic Protestants would all agree with to kind of make this point. There are many Roman Catholics who very, very sincerely believe that praying to Mary is of huge personal benefit and value to them.

And so they sincerely, sincerely pray to Mary and they would say they find that experience very edifying, that it kind of draws them closer to God, that it's an uplifting spiritual experience. But as Protestants, whether you're a charismatic Protestant or a non-charismatic Protestant, we would say, we would all say together that no matter how sincere they might be and as real as that experience might feel, biblically speaking, there is no such thing as praying to Mary.

Mary is not listening to the prayers of Christians. Christian prayer in the Bible is made exclusively to the triune God. Nobody else.

[22 : 46] Sincerity is not enough. Powerful experience even is not enough. We need biblical warrant. And so because of all of these reasons, I have significant reservations about the modern practice of speaking in tongues because I think tongues in the Bible is known human languages.

Now second question. Whatever you think tongues is, the question is, is speaking in tongues normative for all Christians today?

And to this, I have a much shorter answer. The answer is no, it's not normative. But I'll still say three things to help you with this. Number one, it's not normative, I think, for Christians to speak in tongues today because Pentecost is a very unique event within the unfolding history of the redemption of the Bible.

It's not an event that is supposed to happen over and over again with the same kind of signs accompanying it. And we'll discuss this a lot more in later sermons when we look at the content of Peter's sermon that he preaches where he explains what's happening at Pentecost.

But if the event itself is not normative, and I think it's clear that it's not normative, then it hardly follows that accompanying signs should be normative for all Christians. Nobody is claiming that every Christian should have little licks of flame above their heads every Sunday when they come together or when they come to faith.

[24 : 08] So we need to think about that. That's the first thing. Second thing, if it's not normative for all Christians, sorry, it's not normative for Pentecost to happen all the time, it's also not normative for all the Christians to speak in tongues even in the book of Acts itself.

So there are only three mentions of tongues speaking in Acts, but there are lots of accounts of people coming to faith and receiving the Spirit, being baptized in the Spirit, where there is then zero mention of them speaking in tongues.

And so that suggests then when Luke records these instances of speaking in tongues, he's doing them for special purposes, making specific points, showing us key movements in the story of the development of the early church, not normative practices for us to be mandating.

And then number three, Paul in 1 Corinthians assumes that not all people speak in tongues. So listen to Paul. This is 1 Corinthians 12, 27 to 31.

He says, Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church, first of all, apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.

[25 : 19] Then he says, Are all apostles? Question mark. Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all, do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing?

Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? And the answer he is naturally expecting from those questions, and this is actually really emphatic, you can see it more clearly in the original Greek, but the answer he is expecting is no.

Not all are apostles, that's clear. Not all are prophets, not all are teachers, not all work miracles, not all have the gifts of healing, and not all speak in tongues. So Paul is clear, not all people speak in tongues.

So on the basis of scripture, we have to say, I think, that speaking in tongues, whatever it is, is not normative for all Christians. And so churches like traditional Pentecostal churches, and this is not true across all the kind of Pentecostal charismatic spread, but particularly historic Pentecostal churches, churches like traditional Pentecostal churches which mandate that all believers be baptized in the Spirit as a second distinct experience post-conversion, and that they evidence that being baptized in the Spirit by speaking in tongues, I think those churches are putting extra biblical requirements on people.

Saying you've got to have something that the Bible doesn't say you have to have. And I think that can be very, very detrimental to people's faith and mess up their sense of assurance in all sorts of ways. We'll speak about that a little bit more next week.

[26 : 52] When I was a youth pastor in Durban, the kind of first ministry job when I had to look after wild teenagers like Graham Heslop, I was part of numerous inter-church youth rallies, and our church was the only church of like about 10 to 12 churches in that area, in that suburb, that took kind of like a more conservative approach to speaking in tongues, as in we didn't speak in tongues in our church, which made me feel completely out at those meetings, like totally out, like I was like complete out, I didn't fit in, and lacking spiritually.

I'm looking around, I'm lacking something here. I'd go to these worship events and we'd have this worship band and we'd sing all these songs and everyone would just break out in tongues around me, but not me.

And so I'd go home and very sincerely and with a lot of angst pray and plead that the Lord would cause me to speak in tongues. I begged for the Spirit of God to kind of be poured out on me in a special way and that I would speak in tongues.

Nothing ever happened. I never spoke in tongues, I actually just ended up feeling dejected and unspiritual. And so it was an enormous relief for me to later on discover that the Scriptures do not see tongue speaking as normative for all Christians.

It's like a huge weight was lifted off of me. There wasn't something wrong with me because I'm not doing this. There's a lot more that we can say about tongues and I'm trying to maybe think of a way in which we could do more of a Q&A; around the Spirit as we get to the end of chapter 2 because there's a lot of questions around the Spirit.

[28 : 35] But I want us to move on to our second point. What is the meaning or the significance of tongues speaking as a sign that accompanies the pouring out of the Spirit? So here's the second point. When you look at tongues in our passage, not only do we get to see that it's known human languages back in Acts chapter 2 but we actually get told about the content of the speech.

So if you look down at verse 7 it says, utterly amazed they asked, aren't all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? And there's this whole group the Parthians, the Medes, the Elamites, the people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Cyrene, well Libyanese, Cyrene, Cretans and Arabs.

And then it says, we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues. So the disciples are all supernaturally speaking out languages that they've never learned before and what are they declaring?

They're declaring the wonders of God, the great things that God has done. It's God's fame that they're lifting up before this crowd.

God's spirit has been poured out in what he is doing now. He's turning the attention of the people away from themselves onto him. Now if you are very, very familiar with the earlier parts of the Bible, there should be something in this Pentecost account that brings to mind another much, much, much older story.

[30 : 05] Let me read to you from Genesis 11. Now the whole world had one tongue and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

They said to each other, come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly. They used brick instead of stone and tar for mortar and then they said, come, let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves.

Otherwise, we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth. But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The Lord said, if as one people speaking the same tongue they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.

Come, let us go down and confuse their tongues so they will not understand each other. So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth and they stopped building the city.

That is why it was called Babel because the Lord confused the tongues of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth. It's the Tower of Babel.

[31 : 20] A time in the very, very early kind of primordial history of humanity where instead of marveling at the wonders of our creator God, we humanity said, hey, we got a good idea.

Let's build something that will be a testimony to us, to our own glory, to how great and wonderful we are. A tower that celebrates me.

And it's a story that you should see the ludicrous nature of what they're doing because it's a story that comes in a long line of stories in the early parts of Genesis that tell us that the sin of the garden, that original tragic mistake just keeps on repeating itself and rearing its ugly head.

Stories like Cain killing his brother, like Lamech making a song about murder, like the wickedness of humanity that results in the flood, like Noah even after the flood when we get a new fresh start getting drunk and cursing his grandchildren, you have all of these stories basically telling you the same thing.

Instead of worshipping our loving creator God like we were designed to do, we just keep on putting ourselves first. We just can't help it. Instead of celebrating the wonder of God, we just keep on searching for wonders in ourselves and in created things.

[32 : 39] and it has all sorts of terrible, terrible consequences like death. Isn't that what we're still doing today? With all this kind of language that we have in our culture today of finding ourselves or looking deep down inside of ourselves to find our true identity, aren't we still basically just playing the same game?

Trying to carve out a name for ourselves? Aren't we still just building towers that will come to ruin? We keep reaching up, reaching, reaching, reaching up to establish ourselves to get some sense of the divine.

We just keep building and building and building and building. We build our careers, we build our fortunes, we build our status, we build our reputation in a desperate hope that if we can kind of build this tower high enough, then somehow we are going to be fulfilled.

Somehow we're going to be satisfied and content and find acceptance and meaning and purpose and joy in this life. It's just Babel over and over and over again and it gets us nowhere.

I mean think about this, this is unified humanity back then. We are so not unified right now but that is unified humanity back then in their commitment to make a name for themselves.

[33 : 55] Unified in building their own glory, they all speak the same tongue and so they build and they build and they build and they build but the text is actually quite humorous if you read it. Because after all of their building up into the sky, the Bible says, the Lord came down to see the city and the tower.

He had to come down, he's like, there's some noise going on down there, let me go all that way down there to see exactly what's going on. These people are drunk on their own self-importance and they're trying to build a stairway to heaven, they don't get anywhere near it.

God has to come down and in what most actual commentators think is something of a mercy, he comes down and he has this mercy to limit our combined, unified sin and idolatry.

He confuses their tongues and he scatters them through the earth. It's a pretty bleak picture of humanity attempting to declare its own praises and wonder.

It's the bleak picture of our lot in life as long as we are alienated from our loving creator. But something happens at Pentecost.

[35 : 18] At Pentecost there's a reversal. There's a turning around of Babel. The British theologian Andrew Wilson puts it this way, he says, the gift of the spirit at Pentecost is often associated with Babel and with good reason.

People are not scattering, they're all coming together in Jerusalem. God comes down and works a miracle of language. People then scatter throughout the world and the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham begins.

At Babel the scattering was an act of judgment in response to disobedience bringing incomprehension and fracture. At Pentecost it's an act of blessing in response to obedience bringing new understanding and unity.

You see as God pours out his spirit accompanied by the speaking of tongues it's a clear sign I think that he's reversing Babel.

He's turning it around. The spirit empowered witness to the gospel that is now breaking out through these disciples in Acts 2 is going to scatter and that's what the rest of the book is about.

[36 : 25] It's going to scatter out into all sorts of lands in all sorts of tongues and it's going to envelop all of us who spend our lives chasing after our own glory and instead it's going to turn us into one new unified people who declare the wonders of God.

See friends do you want a name for yourself? Is that what you want this morning? You want a name for yourself? Stop building idolatrous towers. Jesus by the power of his spirit wants to give you a name.

He wants to give you an eternal name. In fact he wants you to have an eternal name so badly that he actually momentarily lost his name for your sake. The king of kings the lord of lords humbled himself to death on a cross.

What happened there? there the people spat on him they mocked him they crucified him they treated him like the lowest of low like a person without any reputation like a person without a name.

The only thing that was on his tongue were words of agony my God my God why have you forsaken me? and in that death in that losing of his name he secures a name for you.

[37 : 44] He gives you a name. In that death he ensures that your name will be written in the Lamb's book of life if you will repent of your sin and trust in him.

That's the glory of Pentecost. The spirit of God is being poured out to give you a new name that will then loosen up your tongue not in a drunken way like some of those people confuse them for but in a way where your tongue is now loosened to declare to sing out the wonder of God and the amazing saving work that he's done.

Let's pray together.