

## **Lenten Series, The resurrection of Jesus**

### **Acts 2**

I'm going to tell you a story about my holiday in France last year, and despite that set up, I'm going to ask you to feel sorry for me.

See, my friend and I had hired a car and were navigating around a tiny French town. Unfortunately, our car was not tiny to match.

It was huge, basically a big offensive 4 wheel drive of a thing.

And so this particular day, as we were trying to navigate our way out of a tiny car park in this tiny French town in our massive car, we were driving up out onto a bigger road. But as we were driving up this narrow little road, other cars were driving towards us. We assumed we were going the wrong way in a one way road, so we started to reverse, and then realised that, with the cars now rushing past us, and the smallness of the car park (and have I mentioned the hugeness of our car), there wasn't really enough room for us to turn the car around, and go the other way out of the car park.

But we tried that anyway, because that seemed like our only option.

And as it turned out, that was the wrong move, because we got stuck. Like, badly, badly stuck. Like one wheel lodged behind a curb. Like, the nose of the car now perilously close to an overhang, and a broken fence in the process. Like, the only thing we could do after being jeered at by some passersby, was to call the local police, and then watch anxiously as they VERY dangerously brute forced the way out. It turns out that little road wasn't a one way road, after all, by the way.

Have you ever gotten stuck? You know there's somewhere you're supposed to be, and it's not where you are, and yet you just can't get there. You just can't get out.

Whether it's with an idea, or a relationship or just, you, in life – being stuck feels awful. It is awful.

Churches can feel stuck too.

What does God want us to do, when we feel stuck?

Today we're looking at what happens to make God's people unstuck, and what it can mean for us. In particular, what Jesus' resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit does to unstick us.

We're looking at Acts chapter 2, and because it's a long chapter, in some ways this is more of an overview – we won't be able to go verse by verse.

We'll look at this in three parts:

- 1. Verses 1-13 The event**
- 2. Verses 14-36 The explanation**
- 3. Verse 37-41 The effect**

#### **1. The event, verses 1-13**

Let's start at verse 2:

<sup>2</sup> Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated

and came to rest on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues<sup>Ⓜ</sup> as the Spirit enabled them.'

John Stott theorises that the: 'Wind might have symbolised power (cf Luke 24:49), fire might have symbolised purity (like Isaiah 6:6-7) and speech the universality of the Christian church.'

We don't know exactly, but what we do know is the impact it had:

<sup>5</sup> Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. <sup>7</sup> Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup> Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?"

Suddenly, people from 'every nation under heaven' (as Luke puts it in verse 5) could hear a message about God in their own language.

Nowadays you can type anything into google translate and it will translate it for you, but back then, one of the greatest barriers to the news of God's salvation going out to all the world was a simple one: language.

That barrier has suddenly been overcome.

This is a reversal of the tower of Babel – that time where, in judgment of humanity's prideful attempt to stay put, and make a name for themselves, God scrambled our common language, making it impossible for us to understand each other.

This is a crucial step towards the fulfilment of God's salvation plan – to take the news about Jesus 'to the ends of the earth' as Jesus had said in Acts 1:8.

Of course, this is how we make sense of it.

The people who were witnessing it happen at the time asked each other a pretty sensible question:

<sup>12</sup> Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

## **Part 2. Verses 14-36 The explanation**

We won't be able to cover every detail in Peter's response (and I'm sorry for that, because there's a lot of important stuff in there), so instead we'll draw out three key themes:

1. Inspiration – the Spirit has been poured out on all people
2. Salvation – has been offered to all people
3. Exaltation – only one person to whom all people owe faith and obedience: Jesus.

That first one: inspiration:

Peter's explanation for how it is that the apostles were able to speak all of these different languages is that it is a fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy in Joel 2, in which God promised to pour out his 'Spirit on all people' 'in the last days.'

The last days were understood by the Jews as the days in which God would finally and definitively work to both judge and save.

Peter is saying: we are in those days, God is currently judging and saving, and the Spirit is here to prove it, and enable it.

The Holy Spirit will enable people to see and speak the truth about God.

Secondly, salvation. Verse 21: And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Peter connects this promise with Jesus. In fact, everything Peter says in verses 22 to verse 32 is like adding argument to argument, evidence upon evidence to establish this one truth: Jesus is the Lord whose name should be called on.

He was a man, yes, but he was accredited by God by the miracles, wonders and signs that God did through him (verse 22).

In fact, you know this, you saw them. (verse 22).

Even his downfall and death was part of God's plan – which you yourselves are implicated in.

But, he's been raised from the dead – death could not keep a hold on him (verse 24).

David's testimony can now be seen to have been about Jesus – he is the Lord that David saw before him (verse 25).

Jesus is the one who was resurrected, who was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, as David prophesied.

In fact, we have witnessed it – verse 32: 'God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it'

You can imagine Peter gesturing to the 11 other men around him at this point. And them nodding: 'We all saw it!'

The point is that Jesus is the source of the salvation promised by God because he is the Lord.

And finally, exaltation: verse 33 to 36 – Having been raised to life, Jesus now reigns at the right hand of God.

Verse 36 – 'Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.'

That is, in its simplest terms: Jesus is the one who saves – that is what the Messiah does. And he is the one we should serve – that is what you do with a Lord – with the one who has true authority, to whom we owe our allegiance and obedience.

Notice, none of these things could be true of Jesus if he was not resurrected. If he was still dead, he would be someone whose death we mourned, but he could not be someone who had any claim over us.

Okay, so that's Peter's explanation. What is the effect?

### **Part 3. Verse 37-41 The effect**

<sup>37</sup> When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

<sup>38</sup> Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

The effect is repentance and faith. Verse 41 tells us that about 3,000 people became followers of Jesus in that day.

I would love to spend more time on that, but as we finish up our sermon today, and our series leading up to Easter, I want to give some time to exploring what today's passage means for us.

We sometimes forget because we're a bit used to hearing messages about how we are to share God's good news, that we ourselves are also living embodiments of the ongoing fulfilment of this mission. The only reason we have something to share is because it was first shared with us. Someone came to us! The message was spoken to us in a language we could understand. It might have been during a lunch break, or during an RE lesson at school, or perhaps from a parent when you were a child, or it might have been, as it was for me, in a tutorial room in a residential College in Melbourne, but regardless of when or where or how it happened, it was as miraculous and spirit-filled a moment as it was on that day in Pentecost. Have you thought about that?

That you, yourself, whoever you are and whatever you have done with your life, you can say this confidently – I am part of God's salvation plans. I am part of how He fulfils his mission in the world. I am part of the 'ends of the earth.'

I don't know how many people are sitting beside you as you listen to this today. Perhaps what you feel when you look around is the frustration and difficulty of being in a relatively small church, perhaps one that is without a regular minister.

I don't want to deny any of those difficulties but I do want to point out that what is happening today is nonetheless a miraculous and historical, and important event, the culmination of thousands of years of God's powerful ministry – from Pentecost in Jerusalem, to your pew, or your chair!

The gospel has gone from Jerusalem some 2,000 years ago to Narromine, Rylstone, Forbes, Gilgandra, Grenfell, to Anglicare Village Castle Hill, Sawtell, and to Kenmore-Brookfield. At the end of time – or perhaps before - I hope that we will get an opportunity to hear about all the many places the gospel also went out from those places, and whose lives it changed.

We are recipients of what was intended here in Acts 2, what was activated in Acts 2.

But of course there's also a flipside, which is perhaps more challenging.

We are also part of its ongoing fulfilment. Jesus is the Lord and Messiah, he is resurrected and reigning from on high right now. And that means anyone who is living their life apart from him, anyone who does not recognise this and accept it, is missing their life's deepest purpose, and their future's greatest hope.

We are being called to be part of the going out of that message.

Christians can get stuck in their own thing. Churches can become places where people feel safe together (let's hope at a minimum they are!) but not places where those same people are challenged to bring the gospel to the nations.

We can start looking at the Christian faith primarily through the lens of comfortability, stability, and sameness. We look to our own communities, rather than to the ends of the earth, in other words.

Acts 2 challenges us and says: you have a calling. The mission has not changed – the gospel needs to go to the ends of the earth.

But it's important to see that Acts 2 doesn't just give us a calling – it also shows us where our capacity comes from.

This is not something that can be professionalised – it is not just for the paid people, or the really good evangelists.

We need to re-read the words of Joel 2/Peter: and ask ourselves: am I a son or a daughter? Or an old man? Or a young one? A man or a woman?

Then the spirit has been poured out on me too and I can speak of the wonders of God too! I'm not saying it's easy. Not at all. But hard and impossible are two different things and it's important not to get them confused. I pray that as the Holy Spirit is at work in you, that He will enable you to speak of the wonders of God, where you are.

Of course, I've been speaking so far as though you are all people who have put your trust in Jesus – to whom Jesus truly is Lord and Messiah.

However that's a dangerous assumption.

You might instead be one, like the crowd, who recognises that you have not yet repented, you haven't yet put your trust in Jesus.

The invitation that Peter gives his audience is for you too. Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved – you can call on his name today – you can put your trust in him, today.

I was once in this position. I heard the song that said 'call out among the scoffers' and I thought – oh, I think this is me. I am scoffing at Jesus and everyone who follows him. I heard 'it was my sin that held him there' and I thought – oh, that is talking about me.

Now, of course, it was a longer and more complicated story than just that, in the end, but it was a defining moment for me that said: I must make a decision – will I remain a scoffer or will I turn to Jesus to be saved?

If you hear this today this call and this question is for you too.

I'll pray for us in a moment, but just as we finish I want to thank you for having spent the time with me and with Mike, in the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, as we have explored the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection.

I hope and pray that this time has richly blessed and encouraged you, and prepared you for the wonder and celebration that is coming for us at Easter.

