

GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

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The challenge of the unexpected and the unusual Part 2 – Joss Bray

Last time we started to look at the challenge of the unexpected and unusual in the early church in Acts.

We only got to the end of chapter 1.

There had been a lot of unusual and unexpected activity for those early Christians.

Jesus had done amazing miracles, given world changing teaching and been followed by crowds of thousands.

He talked about the kingdom of God – he talked about the dangers of sin – he talked about our eternal destiny.

He loved as no other had loved – the poor, the needy, the seekers after truth, the ill, the outcast, the hopeless.

He spoke the uncompromising truth to power – to the religious authorities that controlled and manipulated people.

He showed his followers how to live – it was very simple really – Love the Lord your God with all you've got – and love each other as much as you love yourself.

It was so simple really – in everything Jesus did and said, He was showing us what God is like and what he wants of us.

He was pointing the way to His Father – so we could become children of the same Father.

But the world is fickle – people are fickle. Have you noticed this?

One day he was flavour of the month – then he was the object of scorn and rejection and humiliation and they crucified him.

Things don't change, do they?

All that was unexpected and unusual for a start – but then Jesus was raised from the dead and was walking talking and eating for 40 days with his friends and followers.

That's not something that happens every day.

And then he was taken up into heaven right in front of them.

So, then, the 120 people – men and women - were left on their own to try and make sense of the situation.

Out of the thousands that had been attracted to Jesus – people who followed at least a bit – there were only 120 real believers – real disciples - left.

There had been many who shouted “Lord, Lord”.

There were many who sang praises.

There were many who followed whilst it was easy and trendy.

But there were few who followed to the end.

Being a Christian – being a believer in Jesus and a real follower – is not about just believing that he existed.

It is not even about inviting Jesus into your life.

Its about accepting him as your Lord and Saviour.

Peter was quite clear in his second letter chapter 2 when he tells us:

...grow in the grace **and** knowledge of our **Lord and Saviour** Jesus Christ.

Lord – means just that – he is in charge now – it’s no longer our life.

Paul says in his letter to the Galatians in chapter 2:

I have been crucified with **Christ** and I no longer live, but **Christ lives** in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, **who** loved me and gave himself for me.

This life we live – if we are really Christians – is one where its all about following Jesus – wherever he leads – and whatever he says.

And it’s about growing – both being changed and understanding more.

And what about the Saviour part of Lord and Saviour?

Why do we need to be saved – and what do we need to be saved from?

Paul tells us what it is in Romans 6:

For the **wages of sin** is death, but the gift **of** God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It’s about sin and what that leads to – its death – eternal death.

Sin is basically rebellion against God – whether its conscious or unconscious.

Its doing what he says not to.

Its not doing what he says to do.

And it's not just doing or not doing - it's about thinking wrongly – ungodly thoughts.

Sin separates us form God – its an old-fashioned word that shouldn't be old fashioned.

Because sin leads to death!

But – in an unexpected and unusual way – God reached out and provided a way out – or rather a way in - to eternal life.

Jesus is our Saviour – he saves us from death and we need saving!

And that is the foundation we live on now – Jesus is our Lord and our Saviour.

There is no other foundation that will stand for eternity.

Now – the arrival of the messiah – Jesus – the sent one – shouldn't have been so unexpected.

The Jewish scriptures were full of prophecies about Him and what would happen.

And what happened next to the believers shouldn't have been much of a surprise either.

Remember – they did the right thing when they didn't know what else to do after he ascended.

They stuck together, and they prayed together.

They looked at the scripture for clues as to what to do next.

That was chapter 1 of Acts – then everything changed.

The Holy Spirit of God came in a way that was promised but they couldn't have imagined what was going to happen.

It was the day of Pentecost – a harvest festival for the Jews celebrating the first fruits of the harvest – a time of giving thanks for God's provision and expectation of more to come.

The Greek word *Pentekoste* means fiftieth day – and it was the fiftieth day after Resurrection Sunday.

It was on this day that God chose to do something he had promised – something that would change their lives -and the world - forever.

The believers were all together in one place.

There was a sudden sound like a violent wind.

The whole house was filled with it.

Something was coming directly from heaven to the earth.

Something that seemed like tongues of fire came that separated and rested on each one of them – 120 men and women – and probably children.

Can you imagine that?

They couldn't even describe it exactly – they used phrases such as “a sound like the blowing of a violent wind”, “what seemed to be tongues of fire”

All of them were filled – when the Spirit came – he didn't just rest on the top of their heads – like some paintings of this event.

They were totally filled up with God.

They started “declaring the wonders of God” in many different languages – languages they had not learnt.

There seemed to have been at least 15 different languages – being spoken all at once.

People from all over the known world could understand them – in their own native tongues!

So, what was the response of the crowd who had gathered when they heard the noise –

Bewilderment, utter amazement, perplexity – “what does this mean?”

But also, ridicule – “they are drunk”

But they weren't – it was only nine in the morning!

In any case – people become less understandable when they are drunk – not more!

The coming of the Holy Spirit was not about being drunk.

It was not about the power of suggestion and mass hysteria.

It wasn't the result of someone working up hype among the believers.

And it wasn't for a few "special" believers.

It affected the whole place – not just part of – all of it.

How often do we underestimate the power of God to come and do things that are unexpected?

How often do we try and "make" God "show up" at a meeting?

How often have we got the message that God's amazing presence is just over there – or favouring certain people?

Have we got the impression that the more "drunk" a person seems – then the more Holy Spirit they have?

This is not biblical!

So – once again Peter stood up and spoke with the team of apostles - and explained to the gathered crowd what was happening.

He starts with – they are not drunk!

He goes on with showing what was happening was biblical and prophesied and quotes Joel 2:

"In the last days, God says,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your young men will see visions,

your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days,

and they will prophesy.

¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above

and signs on the earth below,

blood and fire and billows of smoke.

²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness

and the moon to blood

before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

²¹ And everyone who calls

on the name of the Lord will be saved."

He starts from there and then explains all about Jesus – with more scripture backup – he explains who he is, where he came from, what

happened to him and how he was Lord and Christ – the messiah – the anointed and sent one - and how people needed to be saved.

What was the result – the people were “cut to the heart” and asked what they should do.

This is what Peter said:

³⁸‘Repent and be baptised, 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. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.’

⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’ ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

That was an uncompromising message and it got a significant response.

So, when the Holy spirit comes in power - how do we know its Him?

He always points to Jesus and he gives boldness to speak about him.

He fills people up irrespective of age and “position”.

He is not limited to specific rows in meetings or places.

He is not “conjured up” by the right words, prayers or songs.

He does not bring unproductive drunkenness but productive gifts and power.

There is something else that happens when the Holy Spirit comes – he cements people together in the unity of the Spirit which can be surprising and unexpected.

Look at the end of Acts chapter 2 and see the effect he had on the early church as well as what happened at Pentecost -

They became passionate about receiving teaching, meeting together, breaking bread together.

They were full of awe for God and here were many wonders and miraculous signs.

They were all together and shared everything.

They had “glad and sincere hearts” – they were joyful and committed and praised God.

They enjoyed the favour of all the people and many were saved and added to the church every day.

How excellent is that!

So, in this most unexpected and unusual event at harvest festival time – God transformed the church and through the church, his purpose is to transform the world and bring an eternal harvest home – which is you and me and for anyone for whom Jesus is Lord.

In Part 3(!) we'll look at how the early church coped with unusual and unexpected things that were not so welcome – and what that can teach us now about our response when things don't quite go according to our plans....