

Acts 2:17-21

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 July 2001

Preacher: James MacKenzie

[0 : 01] The bit that I want to focus on particularly is the part from verses 17 to 21. This is the prophecy of Joel, and we read this earlier, to put it in its context, 800 years before the Lord Jesus Christ was actually born.

Now I guess most of us are kind of familiar with the whole idea of nuclear warfare, and nuclear warheads and all that kind of stuff we've seen on the televisions, people protesting at Fas Lane and all this kind of stuff.

But back at the beginning, 1945, when they were developing the first atomic bombs, they worked for years at a place called Los Alamos in the Nevada desert.

And after really assembling all the stuff, doing all the technology, doing all the calculations, the time came for the test, and they lowered this device through a borehole in the earth's crust, down several thousands of feet, and then they would charge a safe distance, and once all the other preliminary tests had been completed, they pressed the button.

Nobody really knew what was going to happen. There were in fact some quite respectable calculations which suggested that the nuclear bomb could in fact ignite the earth's atmosphere and destroy the whole world at the time.

[1 : 35] They didn't really know what was going to happen, whether the thing was going to be a flop or not. So they pressed the button and they sat back and waited. A few seconds passed and nothing happened.

And several of the scientists who'd been working on that project saw their career in ruins. It's a failure. All that we've worked for for these years has been a failure.

And then suddenly, the earth shook, and there was a blinding flash of light, and this huge cloud of smoke, the mushroom cloud that we're so familiar with, emanated from this borehole.

They still didn't really know what this thing could actually do until the end of the Second World War, when the Enola Gay is the aircraft that took the first of these nuclear missiles to be used in war up over Hiroshima, dropped it from 33,000 feet with pinpoint accuracy, missed the target by 400 feet, and then they swung round and looked down, and there was nothing but a maelstrom of smoke and rubble, and the city had gone.

And they realised then what the power of this particular weapon actually was. And we're kind of familiar with the context now. They knew what the weapon was capable of, because of the power which it unleashed.

[3 : 03] They knew that this was something extraordinary. This was a landmark in human history, because of the power that was released by that one particular bomb.

And on the day of Pentecost, we're not left in any doubt at all about the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the reality of Christianity, because on the day of Pentecost, there was unleashed, unimaginable, spiritual power.

Nothing had been seen like it in the history of the world. And in that particular incident that we have here, we have some amazing things.

Now, I'm going to nail my covers for the mask here. I don't believe for one minute that what's said here in Acts chapter 2 only applied to the day of Pentecost. You would never for one minute say that this tremendous Gospel invitation, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, only applied to that one day.

We believe it applies to the whole of the Christian age, if you like. And I believe that there's a lot here in this particular chapter which is as relevant for you and I today as it was for these people on the day of Pentecost.

[4 : 19] And I hope to show that this evening. And there are some things in Christianity which are just so fundamentally important that we've got to revisit them over and over again.

This morning it was the issue of prayer. And you remember I used the kind of illustration at the beginning of the guy who had assembled his computer. And it wouldn't work.

And the reason it wouldn't work is because it wasn't. The power wasn't switched on. And what we were looking at really this morning was the connection to the power source, which is prayer.

What we're looking at this evening is the power source itself, which is the Holy Spirit of God. And I want to look at this particular passage 17 down to 21.

And I just want to ask four questions really. The first question is this. What is available? What is available?

[5 : 16] And then the second question I want to ask is when is it available? The third question is to whom is it available? And then how do we get it?

Four questions. Quite simple questions from this particular passage. What is available? Well, the Lord Jesus Christ, before he went back to heaven, immediately before he went back to heaven, he called his followers together and he spoke to them.

And he said to them, and it's recorded in Acts chapter 1, verses 7 and 8, he says, he said to them, it's not for you to know the times or the dates the Father has set in his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.

You will receive power. And the connection here between the coming of the Holy Spirit and power is really inescapable. And I think we need to revisit this issue over and over again.

The one thing that validates Christianity is the fact that unlike other religions which have the power to change people's opinions, because Christianity is so intimately linked to the work of the Holy Spirit that individual people's lives, it has the power to transform not just people's opinions, but transform people from the outside in completely, radically changed people.

[6 : 53] And there are people here tonight who have been radically changed from the outside in not by being convinced by some clever argument, or suddenly having some vague sort of enlightenment whilst they went out into the country and meditated for some time on the colour of the sky, and then suddenly this vague sort of mystical experience took place.

Not that kind of thing at all, but a radical transformation which only the Holy Spirit can achieve. And Jesus says quite clearly here, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.

And we need to remind ourselves of this over and over again. If you are not a Christian this evening, what you need is power.

Power to overcome sin, power to deal with those things which make your life a mess in God's sight. power to live the way that God wants you to live.

A way that honours him in this world. A way that enables you to overcome obstacles, a way that enables you to go on, fight the Lord's fight, extend his kingdom, and you need the power.

[8 : 13] And Jesus says here, there is power available. It's the power of the Holy Spirit. Now there are some amazing things said about the Holy Spirit and the power of the Spirit in the New Testament.

I just want to mention three things. The Holy Spirit, first of all, Jesus said this very plainly to his disciples the very night before he went to the cross.

He said to them, when the Holy Spirit comes, he will lead you into all truth. He won't speak of himself primarily.

He will take things that relate to me and reveal them to you. So the first aspect of the Holy Spirit's work, the power of the Spirit in us, is revealing to us the truth about Jesus Christ.

And that is an amazing work. I can think of my own experience of when I didn't actually believe that God existed, that there was any confession of God. In fact, I managed to convince myself that God must have once existed because the universe was too complex to be explained just by chance.

[9 : 25] This is the way I reasoned even as a non-Christian. But God must now be dead because to my mind I didn't see any evidence of his working in the world. What an idiot really.

It's quite embarrassing to admit it. But little by little, as I studied the Bible, I heard God speaking to me and convincing me, revealing to me the truth about Jesus Christ.

That Jesus Christ is who he says he is. He is the one who has come down from heaven to earth to deal with the problem of our sin. Have you been convinced that Jesus is who he says he is?

The Holy Spirit's first work is to convince us of the truth about Jesus Christ. And Jesus said that when he comes he will lead us into all truth.

And that's the first aspect of his power at work in our lives. The second aspect that I just want to mention is this. If you're a Christian, there is a completely different level of Christian experience available to you.

[10:35] You can live on the bottom story of the spiritual skyscraper. and just get by, struggle along.

What else you can live on the top story? And know what the New Testament calls the fruit of the Spirit being born in your life.

What is the fruit of the Spirit? The fruit of the Spirit is being like Jesus Christ. You look at Galatians chapter 5 sometime, maybe you've read it many times, just look at what it says there.

and compare the contents of the fruit of the Spirit with the life of Jesus Christ. Love, joy, peace.

Do you see these things in Jesus? I certainly do. Patience, gentleness, self-control, all these other things.

[11:32] Do you see them in the life of Jesus Christ? Christ. And the Holy Spirit, if we just allow him to work in our lives, will produce that fruit. And that is power to transform us into the image of Jesus Christ.

And what about the third area? The Holy Spirit equips us for service in the body of Christ. I've said this to you before, and I do believe it passionately, that each one of us, if we're Christians tonight, has at least one gift that we can bring to the service of Jesus Christ.

He equips his church for service. And I'm saying this because it's just so important that we remind ourselves over and over again we can get so negative, so defeated, we can look at the difficulties in our own congregation perhaps, or look at the recent history of our denomination and think, oh, this is awful.

In some ways it is. But, let's never lose sight of the power that's available to us as individuals to live Christian lives which are pleasing to God, which look more and more like the life of Jesus Christ for every passing day, and to utilize our gifts in the service of Jesus Christ and his kingdom.

Jesus said to his disciples, when the Holy Spirit comes you will receive power. If you're a Christian you have the Holy Spirit and therefore the power that's available to them is also available to us.

[13:06] Same Spirit. Isn't that exciting? Isn't that exciting thing to be a Christian? It's really a marvelous, it's a wonderful thing. The Christian church is a marvelous institution that is connected dynamically to the power source of the universe.

I mean, this is, you know, some of you have maybe seen the Phantom Menace, I love the Phantom Menace, I've seen it a few times, but you know, there's that amazing kind of bit towards the end where there's this huge space station thing orbiting the planet and almost amazingly, you know, Luke Skywalker, young Luke manages to sort of fly his plane right in, fire a missile right into the nuclear reactor thing that powers this death ship and the whole thing blows up.

Isn't that amazing? You know, what power there is in the Christian church. The Christian church is connected to the spiritual nuclear reactor, if you like, at the heart of the universe.

God, our Heavenly Father and His Holy Spirit. And Jesus says here that the power is available. So what's available? There's power. Do you feel in need of power tonight?

He's struggling against problems, habits that you can't seem to break free from, difficulties in relationships that you'd really like to deal with and you just don't seem to know what to do about them, which way to turn.

[14:43] Well, Jesus says there is power available. Power of my Spirit. Life transforming power. Energizing power. So that's what's available power.

second question. When is it available? Well, verse 17 says, in the last days, God says I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Now this term, the last days, is an interesting term. It's really used in two different ways in the New Testament. Testament. It's used to mean the period of time immediately before the coming again of Jesus Christ.

There's no doubt at all that is more said in the New Testament about the second coming of Jesus Christ than about his first coming. The New Testament leaves us in no doubt whatsoever that Jesus Christ is coming again in great power and glory when every eye will see him.

not in obscurity like at the first coming in Bethlehem, how he was born as a baby and a few people saw him and he was laid in a manger and then he went and grew up in Nazareth.

[16:00] Thirty years of complete obscurity in Nazareth. We don't know what Jesus was doing during these thirty years. It was all very obscure until he burst onto this scene of time with his public ministry.

But even then his public ministry was confined to Israel. But the second coming of Jesus Christ, we're told quite unambiguously is going to be completely different.

When every eye shall see him, when he comes in power and glory and splendor and majesty. And the term the last days is sometimes used to mean the period immediately before the second coming of Jesus Christ.

But in the New Testament, perhaps the more common use is to describe the period between the first coming of Jesus Christ and the second.

In other words, the last days is often, and John uses it particularly this way, the last days is taken to mean the period of history in which you and I now live.

[17:05] The time between the first and the second coming of Jesus Christ. The last days. In other words, we ask the question, when is this power available?

The answer is now. Because we now live in the last days. The time between the first and the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Now, if I could just explain this passage a wee bit, verses 17 to 21, people get a wee bit confused about what's being said here. Remember what I said earlier on.

The prophet Joel is prophesying 800 years before Jesus was actually born in Bethlehem. So he's a way back in history.

And Joel is looking forward into the future. And what he sees is the coming of Jesus Christ in the future.

[18:04] In the future to him. But, from Joel's perspective, where he was in history, the first and the second coming of Jesus Christ looked like one event to him.

It was 800 years before the first coming. A long time ago, 800 B.C. And he's looking forward and he sees Jesus Christ and as far as he's concerned, he sees one event.

And so what he does is condenses the truth about the first and the second coming of Jesus Christ into one statement here. If I could perhaps illustrate this in some way, you probably don't know what I'm talking about, but I'll try and illustrate it for you.

I was travelling along a road in Hungary quite recently and looking out the window, I saw what I thought was a very peculiar looking church. Because at one end of the church, there was a really funny kind of mushroom shaped sort of spire thing like the towers on the Sultan's Palace and Aladdin, you know, these kind of things shaped like this.

This was at one end of the church. And I also saw at the other end a steeple look much more like our traditional Scottish Febeaterian steeple. And I thought, dearie me, what strange churches we have over here in Hungary.

[19:24] And then when I got a bit nearer, I realised in fact, there were two churches back to back with a little lane in between them. And the spire belonged to one church and the sort of Aladdin thing to another church.

And that is a bit like what it was for Joel. Joel is looking forward into history and he sees the first and the second coming as one event, when in fact historically there are two.

But they look to him like one, just like that church with the two funny spires. So what he says here in verses 17 and 18, 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, even of my servants, both men and women, I will pour out of my spirit in those days and they will prophesy. This refers to what's happening at this particular time, the Holy Spirit is being poured out. But the next bit I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below and so on, refers to the second coming of Jesus, yet to come, the future.

And where are we? Well, we're right in the middle of it all. So that's a very long way around answering the question I asked at the beginning, which is, when is this power available?

[20:44] God says, in the last days, and you and I live in the last days. In other words, the power of God's Holy Spirit to transform us, to energize our witness, is available to us now, today.

Isn't that wonderful? To realize that the power of God's Spirit is available. It's not just something that was available way back there in the first century, or something that was available perhaps to Joel, or some great prophets who lived thousands of years ago.

You and I have the Holy Spirit living in us, and we have the potential for realizing that same power as was evident in the apostles.

So, what have we got so far? What's available power? When is it available? It's available now. Tonight's here, if you just call upon the people that are mentioned to whom is it available, to whom is it available?

Well, at the end of this passage at verse 21, what we read is that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

[22 : 03] In other words, the power, the life-transforming power of God's Spirit is available to anyone. And in order to just clarify this, if you just look at some of the people that are mentioned here, in the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

In other words, Jews and Gentiles, people of all different races, I will pour out my Spirit irrespective of racial or ethnic origins, I will pour out my Spirit.

And I found it quite extraordinary really to watch some of the recent events on the television in Bradford and Oldham, Rochdale and other places round about there, no, not Rochdale, Burnley, and to see it's quite amazing.

Bradford is more experience probably than any other city, maybe with the exception of London, in trying to promote racial harmony. And yet, after 25 years, 30 years, 40 years, the whole thing is just completely unravelling.

And one of the things it says to us really is that in many ways you can't impose racial harmony. It's got to be something that comes from within the people themselves.

[23 : 31] They've got to want to live with each other and accept each other as equals. I think the only place that really happens is in the Christian church.

The Christian church is an amazing thing. I was just thinking quite recently of a church you used to be a member of, and we were quite a small church, only 30 odd members, and yet there was quite a diversity of people there.

there were Scots and English used to sit down side by side, I think some doing Welsh and Irish too. We all used to sit down together at the Lord's table.

There were people from professional backgrounds, doctors, there were police, dustmen, retired miners, bus drivers, and yet all one in Christ Jesus.

The amazing thing about the Christian gospel and the power of the spirit is that by transforming us inwardly, we all recognise what we actually are, which is united in Jesus Christ.

[24 : 41] I get really sad when there are divisions in the Christian church along ethnic lines, along lines of social class, although social class is a kind of not politically correct concept, although we all know it still exists.

That's not the way the church is supposed to be. Jesus said, in the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit on all people. So, irrespective of ethnic origins, racial origins, anything that you are sons and your daughters will prophesy, irrespective of gender.

it's available to people of all kinds of racial and ethnic backgrounds, it's available to people, both men and women, male and female, and then he says also, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams, it's available to the young and the old, there is no sexism, no ageism, no racism here, and I am absolutely convinced that the only thing that really abolishes these isms, which divide society, is the Christian gospel, and the Holy Spirit transforming people's lives.

And that seems to be what we're told here. I will pour out my spirit on all people, your sons and daughters will prophesy, young men will see visions, old men dream dreams, even of my servants, with men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy, the Holy Spirit is available to anyone, absolutely anyone, irrespective of your background, your age, your sex, it doesn't matter.

Because the concluding verse here, verse 21, says, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. So what's available power? When is it available now?

[26 : 34] To whom is it available? Anyone. How do we get it? Well, there's the answer. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Now what does this mean?

What does this actually mean? Well, the first thing you have to recognize is that if you're not a Christian, there is something which constitutes a barrier between you and God.

And that's your sin. That's what the Bible calls sin. And that's why Peter at the very end of his sermon goes on in verse 37. People were really traumatized by this.

They were cut to the heart and they said, what shall we do? And Peter said, repent and be baptized. Everyone if you're in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

That's the first thing. And that's the first manifestation of God's power that you need to experience if you're not a Christian tonight. It is God's power in forgiving you all of your sins.

[27 : 37] And he will do that if you just call upon him. Turn and ask him to do that. And then Peter said, repent, be baptized everyone if you're in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In other words, if we call upon God, either as non-Christians or Christians, if you're a non-Christian, if you don't know the Lord Jesus tonight, then ask him to forgive you.

and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit who will come and live in you and by his power as we allow him to work in our lives, transform us.

He will equip us for service and he will energize our witness and enable us to live lives pleasing to him. And those of us who are Christians, there's an amazing verse in Ephesians 5, it's Ephesians 5, 18, I think, where Paul gives us a command which really is to go on being filled with the Holy Spirit. Now the idea of filling with the Spirit is something that causes a lot of controversy and I don't want to get into controversy about that, but there's no doubt at all that Paul commands us here.

[28 : 59] He says, go on being filled with the Holy Spirit. We have a need to be filled. on a regular basis by God's Holy Spirit. This is what happened in the book of Acts.

Persecution began. What happened? The apostles gathered together, they prayed, they asked God to give them boldness, and then we read that they were filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke God's word.

But boldness. Go on being filled with the Holy Spirit. We need, on a daily basis, to ask God to fill us, to energize us, to empower us, so that we can live victoriously for Him.

That's what we want. We don't want to live defeated Christian lives. We're just staggering along as best we can. We want to live victorious lives, don't we? We want to conquer.

We want to push back the boundaries of the kingdom of Satan. We want to see other people coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ through our witness, don't we? Well, the power is available to anyone who calls.

[30 : 10] Absolutely anyone. And the only way you're excluded from this is if you won't call. Because what God says, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

And we know that anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will also be filled by His Spirit if we just ask Him. Remember, those of you who were here this morning, where we left them.

There is a connection with what we were talking about this morning. The necessity of prayer. Of really, earnestly, sincerely laying hold of God in prayer.

Jesus said there, if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?

We ask. That's the challenge. So may God help us to do what His Word commands tonight. May He have all the praise and the glory.

[31 : 14] Let's just bow our heads in prayer for a moment. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.