

## Changing the World (2)

Have you ever been in a situation where you feel completely overwhelmed or in way over your head? Perhaps that's how you felt last week when I dared to suggest that God desires to use the Church (that's you and me) to change the world. Changing the world is something very few people feel equipped to do. But as I said last week, it has always been God's plan to use His Church to change the world.

So for those of us who are followers of Jesus and part of the Church, that means it is God's plan to use us to change the world. I don't know about you, but I know for me personally, when I first realised God has called me to change the world I felt somewhat overwhelmed.

If you are feeling a little out of your depth right now as you ponder this calling, I have some good news for you today. God does not expect you and I to change the world through our own power or in our own strength. God's not in heaven thinking, *"Wow, look at them; they're so smart; they're so talented; they're so creative; they're so innovative; they can easily change the world."* No, God already knows that we don't have the power to change our own lives, let alone the whole world! God's plan is for us to change the world through His power working in us and through us.

So once again, we're going to go to the book of Acts. Last week we were in Acts chapter one and saw the final farewell between Jesus and His disciples. Jesus gathered His followers together and told them they were called to change the world. But the way He said they would do this is simply by going and telling the world about Jesus; by going out and telling the world about what Jesus has accomplished; how Jesus has defeated sin and death through His own life, death and resurrection.

Jesus told them to go and tell the world about Him and not to worry, because He was going to make sure they had the supernatural power they needed to fulfill their calling and to change the world. When He had told them that, He left the earth and ascended to the right hand of God the Father.

A few days later, the disciples are hanging out in a house together, waiting to see what's going to happen. Jesus had told them to wait until they received power from on high before going and telling the world about Him. That brings us to Acts chapter two.

**Acts 2:1-4** *"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 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. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues[a] as the Spirit enabled them."*

So picture this: the disciples are hanging out together, when out of nowhere, they're suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit. They are filled with the very spirit and power which Jesus had when He walked among them. They are filled with the power that Jesus promised would come in Acts chapter one. Then as evidence of this, they begin speaking in all of these other languages. Now, this is obviously a crazy, strange and bizarre story. But let me remind you what is really going on here.

In Jerusalem at this time, there's this Jewish celebration called Pentecost happening. So there are Jewish people from all over the world who have travelled to Jerusalem for this festival and this celebration. There are people from all of these distant lands who speak all of these different languages who are now gathered in one place and this was no accident. God timed all this perfectly. So when the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples, this visitation of God is accompanied by a roaring, mighty windstorm which could be heard for miles. So all these visitors to Jerusalem can't work out what's going on. What's the deal? Where's all this noise coming from? So they go to check it out and as they get close enough to hear the source of this mighty sound, all these people from all these distant lands, who speak all these different languages, are just astounded because they are actually hearing the disciples speak in their own native language.

So Peter, one of the followers of Jesus, looks out and sees what is going on. He immediately interprets this as a perfect opportunity to do exactly what Jesus told them to do in Acts chapter one. You will remember that Jesus told them go to the ends of the earth and tell people about Him. Peter looks out at the crowd that's forming and he literally sees people who have come from the ends of the earth all standing right before his face! Not only that, he realizes that somehow God is working some miracle where all these people from the ends of the earth who speak all sorts of different languages are being enabled to understand what they are saying in their own native language. So Peter seizes this amazing opportunity to do what Jesus had told His disciples to do. This is what he said:

**Acts 2:22-24; 36** *"Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him ... Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."*

So Peter and the other disciples receive the Holy Spirit as Jesus had promised and the first thing that Peter does is get up and proclaim the good news of Jesus. Let look at what happens then:

**Acts 2:41** *"Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."*

The Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples, just as Jesus promised them; then Peter gets up and proclaims the gospel, he proclaims the good news of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, just like Jesus told them to - then immediately - from this very first sermon following the birth of the Christian Church as we know it - 3,000 people come to faith in Christ. Now in those days they would have only counted the men - and so the number of people who were brought to faith that day would have been much higher. But who were these people? These people were those whom God knew would be coming from the far reaches of the known world, to gather in one place - the place where God planned from before the foundation of the world - to birth His Church.

So brothers and sisters, this is how you and I can change the world. All Peter did that day was tell people about Jesus. God did all the rest! God decided when the Holy Spirit would come - on what day, at what hour and God decided who would witness this amazing birth of the Church and where they would come from and then return to and spread the good news across the world. Can you see that all Peter did was tell people about Jesus - He just did it under the inspiration and empowerment of the Holy Spirit and he changed the world with one short sermon!

We need to be reminded today what our responsibility is within this partnership we have with Jesus. This is how we change the world – by doing what Jesus asked us to do. Proclaiming Jesus - that's our responsibility. The Holy Spirit is responsible for everything else – before, during and after us telling people about Jesus and that's all we can do! We can't convict a person of their sin. We can't convince somebody to put their faith and their hope in Jesus. That is a supernatural task which is way beyond our pay-grade! We don't have the power in us to do that. That's the job of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that very clearly:

**John 16:8** *“When the Holy Spirit comes, He will convict the world of sin...”*

If you're a Christian then you have personally experienced this miracle in your own life. You have experienced this transformation when you came to faith in Christ. It doesn't matter if you came to faith in Christ when you were young, or when you are older, if you put your faith and your hope and trust in Jesus, you experienced this spiritual awakening. Your spirit was regenerated by the Holy Spirit and that is not something that any of us can do for ourselves or for those to whom we minister. It is the supernatural work of the Spirit of God.

It's our job to tell people about Jesus, that's what you and I are responsible for. It's God's job, through the Holy Spirit, to stir someone's heart so that they respond to the gospel. It's really important we know what Peter did that day and what God did. 3,000 people didn't come to Christ because Peter was an awesome preacher. Not at all. It was a pretty mediocre sermon in actual fact, but it was the truth and when the Holy Spirit anoints the truth and empowers the one speaking that truth – the world is changed!

Remember this is the same Peter who only weeks before this was denying that he even knew Jesus. This is that same guy! This is Peter, who was not a Bible scholar, he was a fisherman. What's interesting is that in that day, when a rabbi would choose the disciples that were going to follow him, he would go down to the synagogues and to the Jewish schools, and select by hand, the best of the best of the best. The Rabbi would find the students who were the most well-spoken; the students who had more of the Old Testament memorized than the others; the students who had the best grades. Then the Rabbi would say, *“Come, follow me.”*

Now think back to the early days of the ministry of Jesus. How did Jesus choose His disciples? What is Peter doing when Jesus finds him? He is fishing. And who is Peter fishing with? His family. Peter is working in the family business, which means that all the other rabbis when Peter was younger, looked at Peter and said, *“Peter, you don't have what it takes. You're not good enough to be one of my disciples, You better go learn to do whatever your dad does to make a living because that's all you'll ever be.”* Peter was the leftovers - the reject. He was the last one picked for the team in terms of the Rabbi code. But Jesus calls this reject to follow Him. Jesus looks for something different in His disciples. Jesus went to the ones the Rabbis had passed over and said, *“I'm going to use you to change the world. Come, follow me.”*

So in Jesus name listen to me, don't ever believe the lie that that you're not smart enough; that you're not good enough; that you're not talented enough, you're not knowledgeable enough for God to use you to change the world. 3,000 people didn't come to faith in Jesus at on the day of Pentecost because Peter was awesome. 3,000 people came to faith in Jesus simply because Peter was faithful and obedient in proclaiming Jesus and then the Holy Spirit showed up and the world was changed. If you're a follower of Jesus, you have this same Holy Spirit that the disciples received in Acts chapter two. This same Holy Spirit lives in you and empowers you to proclaim the message of Jesus.

**Acts 2:17** *“And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh ...”*

Peter is quoting the Old Testament prophet Joel when he tells everyone that God's plan is to now empower all of His people with the Holy Spirit - the young and the old, male and female - all of God's people will be empowered by the Holy Spirit. So again, don't miss this. This is so important if you are a follower of Jesus, if you have put your faith and your hope and your trust in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus - you have the Holy Spirit living within you. And the Holy Spirit will empower you to proclaim the message of Jesus in a way that is effective – just like He did that day in Peter. The Holy Spirit can empower you to change the world.

I don't care if you think you're too old to make a difference. If you are a follower of Jesus, you have the Holy Spirit, you have everything you need to be empowered to make a difference and change the world. I think one of the most disgraceful messages floating around our culture today is that once you get past a certain age, you don't really have anything of value to offer society anymore. But according to God's word, it doesn't matter if you're 105 years old; home-bound and reading or watching this sermon online - if you still have breath in your lungs - God still has a plan for you to change the world. If you're still here, God is not finished with you yet. Or to put it more bluntly and hopefully in a statement you won't forget:

**If you're not dead – you're not done!**

If you're a follower of Jesus, you have this same Holy Spirit dwelling inside of you, to empower you to accomplish the mission of Christ. We can retire from our careers but we never retire from the Great Commission. We never retire from the mission of Christ. We never graduate from proclaiming the message and the good news of Jesus. So just check your pulse for me right now .... seriously ... check your pulse now. If you can feel a pulse, God still expects you to change the world, in partnership with His Spirit. If you're not dead – you're not done!

You have the same Holy Spirit that empowered these disciples in Acts chapter two and the Holy Spirit will empower you to fulfill your responsibility in telling people about Jesus. Again, what happens with that proclamation is out of your control, that's beyond your pay grade, that's all in God's hands. You are called to tell people about Jesus and then you trust the Holy Spirit to bear fruit from your efforts, in His time and in His way.

Now this simple truth has incredible implications for us in our local congregation. It's no secret that the vast majority of congregations across our nation have declined in number and with that has come a decline in faith and expectation that they can make a difference in the world. This then turns our focus inward and we start worrying about our programs, our preaching, our worship, our ability to relate to the young people who are no longer in Church. Satan captures our whole thought process and very cleverly shifts our attention away from our calling as we start worrying about what is God's responsibility. We can't convert people. We can't convince them of their need for God. We can't heal them of their physical and mental illnesses. We can't bring them to life spiritually and allow them to see God. All of that is God's job.

Our job is simple. We just need to remember the two greatest things God has given us to do. We call them *The Great Commandment* and *The Great Commission*. In *The Great Commandment* we are called to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and love our neighbour as ourselves.

Then in *The Great Commission* we are called to tell people about Jesus wherever we go! We are not called to build the Church. We are not called to be custodians of some ancient doctrine. We are not called to be the moral policemen and policewomen of society. **We are called to love God, love others and tell them about Jesus.** God's job is to bring the fruit from our obedience and service and expand His Kingdom.

As a pastor, preacher and teacher of God's people, I am reminded here again in Acts chapter two that I cannot turn my Church around and reverse the decline so many Churches have seen in the last twenty years. I hope and pray that's not a shock to my congregation – or any congregation which is expecting their pastor to turn their Church around. I hope and pray that nobody expects any pastor or leader to come in with some new, fresh, innovative, creative ideas and preach some sermons and wave a wand and turn the congregation around - because no pastor can do that. We don't have the power within ourselves to do that – no matter how many years we spent in college or how extensive our experience may be. The only way any Church will be turned around; the only thing that will restore our hope and give us confidence for a better tomorrow is when we do what we are called to do and trust God to do what He has promised to do. Let me say this again:

**When we do what we are called to do and trust God to do what He has promised to do – we will be amazed at what can happen!**

Jesus told His disciples that it was their job to tell the world about Him. But Jesus also told them that without the Holy Spirit, nothing they do will bear any fruit or achieve anything good. So He told them to wait until they received power from on high. As soon as the Holy Spirit came upon them, they did exactly what Jesus asked them to do. They told everyone about Jesus. The Holy Spirit anointed the Word of God and thousands of people came to faith the very first time the good news was shared.

How simple can it be? Why do we think it is so hard to change the world when God has already told us that He will do all the heavy lifting? We simply need to tell our story, which is ultimately Jesus' story. We just need to tell everyone about Jesus and trust God to draw them to Himself as Jesus builds His Church.

Let those who have ears to hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to us today. Amen.