

The Legacy of Pentecost: The Significance of Speaking in Tongues

Intro: •Note Dad's statement: No Pentecostal movement without the connection between baptism in the Spirit and tongues.

•Why was/is tongues so important?

It is an important symbol. First, it validates and symbolizes the way we read Acts. Acts is a model: "Their experience is our experience."

Second, it also validates and symbolizes our understanding of baptism in the Holy Spirit. It reminds us of who we are: we are a community of prophets, called and empowered to bear bold witness for Jesus.

So, tongues serves as an important symbol (a sacrament) of Pentecost life and practice.

•The emphasis on tongues that has marked the Pentecostal movement flows from the Bible, and especially Luke-Acts. ("People of the book")

So, let look at what Luke has to say about speaking in tongues.

1. Acts 2:4 and Luke's Narrative

In Acts Luke describes the initial coming of the Spirit on four occasions: Acts 2:4; 8:17; 10:46; and 19:6.

•Note: the Evangelical argument (based on early Pentecostal arguments)...Acts 2, 8, 9, 10, & 19. (3 out of 5...)

But Acts 9 does not even describe Paul's experience. Only 4 accounts in Luke's narrative.

•3 of the 4 accounts explicitly link tongues to this event. Acts 8 does not explicitly describe tongues, but in the context of Acts even a very inept reader will get the point.

•Let's focus on the three key texts: similar lang. used in Acts 2, 10, & 19.

-This is not always clear due to differing translations: e.g. Chinese and English.

•Ill: He He Ben: shuo fang yan, shuo qi bie guo de hua.

•The different translations are a result of the different phenomena described in these accounts: Acts 2: xenolalia; Acts 10 and 19, glossolalia.

•But notice: in spite of the differences in these events, Luke uses the same language to describe them all: speaking in tongues.

This suggests that Luke is intentionally making this linkage. The pattern is important to him. Luke *desired* to make the connection: he *desired* to establish Acts 2 as a model.

Acts 2 (the xenolalia account) helps the reader understand the significance of tongues: it is a symbol of the prophetic calling and anointing of its recipient.

So, Luke's narrative is constructed – carefully, intentionally – to highlight the repetition of “tongues.” Notice that tongues is a “**sign**” of the Spirit's coming in each episode and, more specifically, it is a **sign of prophetic inspiration**:

Acts 2 – sign that Joel's prophecy is being fulfilled

Acts 10 – sign that they have received the Spirit “just as we have.” (note implications for Luke's readers and us!)

Acts 19 – sign that Paul's question has been answered: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

•Conclusion: a natural reading of Luke-Acts suggests that Luke offers a clear answer to the question, how will we know that we have received the Pentecostal promise (Acts 1:8)...or the fulfillment of Moses' wish....Joel's prophecy?

• Some may say, “yes, this all sounds reasonable...but is this really enough to support the claim that Luke expected every believer, when baptized in the Spirit, to speak in tongues?” Some might say o.k., normal but not normative.

I believe that a passage in Luke's gospel helps clarify this matter.

2. Luke 11:11-13

Another important text is found in Luke 11:13. The context for this verse is Jesus' teaching on prayer. (and sending of the 70 in Luke 10).

Read Luke 11:9-13, (esp. Luke 11:13/cf. Mt. 7:11) “...If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

Note: the parallel passage in Matthew's gospel contains slightly different phrasing: “how much more will your Father in heaven give *good gifts* to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:9-11).

Luke here tells us how we should apply this saying of Jesus (the “good gifts”) in our lives... He provides us with a Spirit-inspired, authoritative commentary on this saying of Jesus.

-Three important implications follow:

1. Luke helps *his readers* understand how to apply this saying of Jesus in their lives.

-These words are not simply directed to the apostles, they are directed to Luke's church and ours...all who read the Bible.

-This promise, that the Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask, only begins to be realized at Pentecost.

2. This exhortation is clearly addressed to Christians!

-The context indicates that the promise is made to disciples (Luke 11:1).

-Luke-Acts was written primarily for Christians, for Luke's church.

Since it is addressed to Christians, the promise cannot refer to the gift of salvation (regeneration).

-This judgment is confirmed by the repetitive character of the exhortations to pray in Luke 11:9: Note the repetitive or continuous action implicit in the verbs in 11:9: αἰτεῖτε (ask), ζητεῖτε (seek), κρούετε (knock).

3. Luke's usage elsewhere indicates that he viewed the gift of the Holy Spirit in 11:13 as a prophetic enabling.

-On two occasions in Luke-Acts the Spirit is given to those praying;¹ in both the Spirit is portrayed as the source of prophetic activity.

•Luke's account of Jesus' baptism indicates that Jesus received the Spirit after his baptism while praying (Luke 3:21). This gift of the Spirit, portrayed principally as the source of prophetic power (Luke 4:18-19), equipped Jesus for his messianic task.

•Later, in Acts 4:31 the disciples, after having prayed, "were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." Again the Spirit given in response to prayer is the impetus for prophetic activity.]

¹ Acts 8:15, 17 represents the only instance in Luke-Acts, apart from the two texts discussed above, where reception of the Spirit is explicitly associated with prayer. However here the Spirit is bestowed on the Samaritans in response to the prayer of Peter and John. While the situation in Acts 8:15, 17 is not a true parallel to Luke 11:13, in Acts 8:15, 17 the Spirit is also portrayed in prophetic terms. Prayer is implicitly associated with the reception of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 1:14; 2:4). Here also the gift of the Spirit is presented as a prophetic endowment. So also Acts 9:17, though here the actual reception of the Spirit is not described.

What sort of prophetic activity did Luke anticipate would accompany this bestowal of the Spirit? Certainly a reading of Luke's narrative would suggest a wide range of possibilities: joyful praise, glossolalia, visions, bold witness in the face of persecution, to name a few. However, several aspects of Luke's narrative tell us that Luke felt this gift of the Spirit would include and be marked by speaking in tongues.

1. In Luke-Acts, the gift of the Spirit typically includes or results in speaking in tongues. Furthermore, Luke highlights that speaking in tongues is the sign of the Spirit's coming.

2. In view of the emphasis in this passage on asking (vs. 9) and the Father's willingness to respond (vs. 13), it would seem natural for Luke readers to ask a question that again is often asked by contemporary Christians, how will we know when we have received this gift?

•Here we hear echoes of Paul's question in Acts 19:6.

Of course, Luke has provided a clear answer. The arrival of prophetic power has a visible, external sign: glossolalia.

-I would add that this sign must have been tremendously encouraging for Luke's church. It signified their connection with the apostolic church and confirmed their identity as end-time prophets.

-I find it interesting that so many believers from traditional churches today react negatively to the notion of glossolalia as a visible sign. They often ask, should we really emphasize a visible sign like tongues? Yet these same Christians celebrate the Lord's supper and baptize new believers. These too are signs.

Signs are valuable when they point to something significant. Luke and his church clearly understood this.

3. The question should be asked, why would Luke need to encourage his readers not to be afraid of receiving a bad or harmful gift (note the snake and scorpion of vs. 11-12)? Why would he need to encourage his church to pursue this gift of the Spirit?

-If the gift is quiet, internal, why the concern?

-However, if the gift includes glossolalia, then the concerns make sense. Luke encourages his readers to not fear. The Father gives good gifts. We need not fret or fear.

•In short, Luke applies this saying of Jesus (Luke 11:13) to his readers, his church. He encourages them to pray for a prophetic anointing, an experience similar to those modeled by Jesus (Luke 3:21-22; 10:21) and the early church (Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6).

-The reader would naturally expect glossolalia to be a part of this experience.

-The larger context of Luke-Acts supports this perspective.

-Also the message of this text – don't be afraid – supports this perspective. This text, then, tell us that, according to Luke, tongues is a good and every believer should pray for it...every believer can receive it.

Conclusion

-I would like to summarize Luke's perspective:

- Luke presents the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit as a fulfillment of Moses' wish (Num 11:29) and Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-32). Thus, it is a prophetic anointing marked by Spirit-inspired speech.
- According to Luke, tongues is a special type of prophetic speech that serves as a sign.
- Luke encourages every believer to pray for this prophetic gift marked by tongues.

Luke encourages us to remember who we are: We are God's end-time prophets. We are called and anointed to bear witness for Jesus. Speaking in tongues symbolizes this truth. It reminds us of our connection to the apostolic church, our prophetic calling and our need of divine enabling.

Remember, God's only gives good gifts. Let's pray and ask the Lord to stretch out his hand upon us, to shake this room, and use us for His glory!

- Nanjing Story – Elderly teacher...tongues and persecution.