

Tongues at Pentecost

by John R. Rice

John R. Rice emphasizes the significance of the Holy Spirit's power at Pentecost for the purpose of winning souls through the preaching of the Gospel in literal languages.

Scripture: Luke 24:46, Acts 1:8, Acts 2:1, Acts 2:41, 1 Corinthians 14:22

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Pentecost Power"

Description

John R. Rice preaches on the significance of speaking in tongues based on Acts 2, emphasizing the power of the Holy Spirit to win souls and warning against being led astray by false doctrines. The main focus of Pentecost was the enduement of power from on High to preach the Gospel and witness for Jesus, resulting in three thousand people being saved. The miraculous gift of tongues at Pentecost served the purpose of enabling people to hear the Gospel in their own languages, emphasizing the importance of soul-winning and God's intention to reach all nations.

Transcript

I read a few verses from Acts, chapter 2, as I begin a series of messages on speaking in tongues. In reading what the Bible has to say about speaking in tongues, my aim is, first of all, to get people concerned about the one main thing, that is, the power of the Holy Spirit to win souls, and to keep people from being led off into some cult and false doctrine and get a substitute instead of the real thing. I know I can help you if you will listen to what the Bible says.

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues [literally other languages], as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Juduea, and Cappadocla, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylla, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed

.... " -- Acts 2:1-12.

What Was the Meaning of Pentecost?

Power to Win Souls!

Now this is the one great essential Bible passage that deals with speaking in tongues at Pentecost. Here they spoke in tongues. What does it mean? The Scripture says, "Every man heard them speak in his own language." So we are talking about literal languages but given miraculously as a gift of God in a time of need. Here is the principal Bible passage on talking in tongues; this is the great example in the Bible, and we must keep in mind what God had in mind and learn what the Bible really says and not what some man implies about it.

Now, note the main intent. What are we talking about? The day of Pentecost when they had three thousand people saved. And what were they told to look forward to? In Luke 24:46-49, Jesus said to them that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high."

Now, what are they waiting for? They are to preach the Gospel but they are to tarry for an enduement of power from on High. Not a word is said about the languages because everybody who preaches must preach in some language, but what language it is is not essential except that people hear and understand. So the Lord didn't say anything about what language; but the great essential is they are to preach the Gospel and they are to have an enduement of power from on High.

What does Pentecost mean? It means the coming of an enduement of power, the power of the Holy Spirit on people so they can witness for Jesus.

Again, in Acts 1:8 the Lord told them, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." What are they to expect at Pentecost? The Holy Ghost is to come on them and they are to receive power to witness for Jesus at Jerusalem and then in all Judaea and in Samaria and to the uttermost part of the world. It is a time of power of God coming to win souls.

I turn to Acts, chapter 2, and verse 41, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Oh, what a wonderful thing!

When I was a fifteen-year-old boy I discovered this in the Bible. I was saved and I wanted to win souls and while I was reading this came to me -- I probably had read it before, but, oh, how it struck me -- that here we pray for revival, we are so glad when one or two or a dozen are saved, but they had three thousand people saved in one day! I thought then, and I think now, that is the next thing to Heaven, that is marvelous, that is a wonderful thing! Isn't it a foolish and silly and sinful thing for anybody to talk about Pentecost and think about Pentecost and not be interested in what God was interested in? And the one main thing He told them He intended was to get people saved, and it turned out they did have three thousand people saved. And you are not interested in that! No, I fear you are interested in the origin of the church. You are interested in talking in tongues. Or you are interested in sanctification. You ought to be ashamed. If you ever get burdened about what God is burdened about, and if you talk about what God is talking about, then you will see the point here. Tongues were an incidental convenience, a miraculous one

but an incidental convenience to the matter of preaching the Gospel and getting people saved. So the Bible plainly says here. They got three thousand people saved.

In I Corinthians 14:22, in correcting a heresy about tongues and rebuking them of heresy over at Corinth Paul said that this matter of tongues is a sign to the unbelievers. Here people came from sixteen different nationalities, whose names I read you, and here at Pentecost they heard the Gospel in their own language in which they were born. That was a sign to them of the power of God and they listened and thousands of them -- three thousand that day -- were saved.

Note the main intent of what happened at Pentecost was to get people saved. That leads me to say there is a sinful dishonesty to approach this Bible in any other way except in thinking about what God is thinking about and wanting what God wants and getting the main point that God makes the main point. The main point here is they were waiting. What for? For power. They tarried in that Upper Room and prayed ten days. What for? For an endowment of power. What are they going to do with it? They are going to preach the Gospel. And the Day of Pentecost came; they were endued with power, they did preach the Gospel to everybody there in various languages, and they had three thousand people saved. It is wicked to pick out a few little things and make some cult of your own and something on which you can brag: "Oh, we've got it and other folks haven't." And you think you are better than the soul winners. You think you are better than the mightiest men of God who carry on His work and get multitudes saved, because you jabber in a tongue that doesn't mean anything to anybody. You call that what they had at Pentecost! That is wicked and dishonest. An honest approach here must see that what happened was that God, in lovingkindness, gave them the power to talk to people in their own language and they were converted; and that was a wonderful thing.

Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., used to say, "If it doesn't have any sense to it, God isn't in it." God does things for a sensible reason, and for a very clear reason here -- He wanted them to win souls and He used sensible things.

The Tongues at Pentecost Were Literal Languages

Now, what happened here at Pentecost? First, there were literal languages. They were astonished because every man heard in his own tongue in which he was born. They heard the wonderful works of God. Because it was spoken in their own language they heard the Gospel, and so it was literal languages. It was not some so-called "heavenly language," it was not some so-called "unknown tongue." Now it is true that to people of another language a certain language may be unknown, but it was not in any sense a language unknown to men everywhere. No. They were regular languages, regularly spoken by other people and given here in order that people might preach the Gospel and witness with power. I say they were regular languages. So this idea that talking in tongues is some ecstatic falling into a kind of a trance and you feeling light as a feather and hearing angels wings flapping, and you saying something, you don't know what, is false. Nothing like that is taught in the Bible. That is the invention of men, and it is not the Bible doctrine of the power of the Holy Spirit or of the Bible gift of tongues.

I will preach to you later about the gifts of the Spirit, and this is one of the gifts but the least of the gifts of the Spirit. But they had at Pentecost the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Notice another thing. God had a reason here. Here these people heard the Gospel.

Lord, why did You let somebody talk in the Latin language of those people from Rome? So they could hear the Gospel. Why did You have some people talk in the language of the people from the island of Crete? So they could get converted. Why did You have some talk in Arabic? Because some people were there from Arabia and Mesopotamia who needed the Gospel. Therefore they were talking in "tongues" so people could get saved.

God had a purpose and the whole purpose of Christ's coming into the world, and the preaching of the Gospel, and churches, and people called to preach, and missionaries, is to get the Gospel out to sinners and to keep people out of Hell. And that was the aim God had here. So He had plainly said, and now God had a reason to let them talk in the language so these people could be saved. Jews out of every nation under Heaven there that day heard the Gospel.

Incidental Miracles at Pentecost Not

Promised, Not Repeated

Notice also that at Pentecost there are several incidental miracles. I say incidental because they were not the main thing.

First, there was a cyclonic wind. There came a great rushing, mighty wind from Heaven. That is not natural. It could be a wind that was natural, but this one was not. This one was from God, and it was miraculous, but it was incidental. It was not promised ahead of time. It had no special meaning except to attract attention, we suppose. It was a miracle, but it was an incidental miracle.

Then there were tongues like as of fire and visible that sat on the people. Again that was not promised. Again the Lord didn't tell the people to wait for that. Again there is no special significance except that it attracted attention to the power of God on these people. God didn't command it for us. He didn't promise it to anybody else, just as He didn't promise the matter of tongues to anybody else and didn't command anybody else to talk in tongues. But here were some incidental miracles.

A man asked me, "Brother Rice, have you been filled with the Holy Ghost?"

I said, "Yes, thank God, if you mean an enduement of power from on High such as Jesus promised; if you mean the blessed Spirit of God came on me and helps me to win souls (as yesterday I saw seven or eight come to Christ) -- if you mean that, thank God, yes."

"No, I mean did you get it just like at Pentecost?"

I said, "Yes, if you mean the main thing, I did."

"Oh," he said, "but did you talk in tongues like they did there?"

I said, "No, there wasn't any need for me to talk in different kinds of languages. I have been able to talk to people in the English language. Where I go they understand English."

"Oh," he said, "then you didn't have it like it happened at Pentecost. I think you ought to have it just like it happened at Pentecost."

"Well," I asked, "all right, did you get the power of the Holy Ghost just like at Pentecost?"

"Yes, Sir, I did."

"All right, was there a cyclonic wind that filled all the house and everybody heard it in town?"

And he said, "No."

Then I said, "You didn't have it like it happened at Pentecost. Were there visible tongues like fire that appeared to the people and they sat on them and they saw them -- tongues like fire?"

And he said, "Well, no, I guess not."

I said, "Don't ever go around bragging that you got the incidental part just like at Pentecost, for you didn't. You didn't get any one of those three miracles that happened at Pentecost. Did you talk in the language of somebody present who couldn't understand you in English? Did you get power to talk to him in his own language in which he was born?"

"No."

You see, there is no use pretending. If you are talking about the incidental by-products that happened here, then you didn't get that, and God didn't tell us we should have that.

In Acts 4:31 here the same people were filled with the Holy Spirit and the Scripture says that "when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and spake the word of God with boldness." There the place was shaken; there it was an earthquake. Again it was a miracle, but it was incidental and it is not commanded for us and it didn't always happen when people were filled with the Holy Spirit. Nobody need pretend that you can manufacture something or that God will fit all the little details just to please some fancy of yours. The plain, simple truth is there was a reason for these things then and if God ever has a reason for it, He will do it again. But He didn't promise it and it is not commanded and we are not to seek that and it probably won't ever happen just like that again!

There Is No Command in the Bible to Seek to "Speak in Tongues"

Well, notice another thing. There is not a single command in the Bible to talk in tongues.

You say, "But over in I Corinthians 14 Paul said, 'I would that ye all spake with tongues.' " Yes, "I would you all could talk in several languages like I do." He did not talk there about a miracle, he didn't talk about the gift of tongues. What Paul rebuked there was not a gift of tongues; he was rebuking ordinary languages used in services where people did not understand them.

No, there is not a single command in the Bible to talk in tongues. Not only that, but there is not even a promise in the Bible that certain people will talk in tongues. There is not even a hint in the Bible anywhere that if you are filled with the Holy Spirit, the initial evidence is speaking in tongues. In the first place, you don't need any evidence. If you are filled with the Spirit of God to win souls, and win souls, that is its own evidence. Why should I need some evidence of the power of God when I see a multitude of people saved?

No, the Bible doesn't talk about the "initial evidence." That is a man-made doctrine. That is a philosophy of a cult, made up by some, to claim themselves a little better than others, and that is not Bible doctrine. There is not one command in the Bible to speak in tongues or to seek to talk in tongues. That is not what God is talking about. The command is that we should have the fullness of the Spirit to witness for Jesus.

And that is what I want.

Now, it is true that tongues is a miraculous gift, a gift of the Spirit, and I will go into that more in detail later. But I want you to think about this: it is a miracle and miracles are rather rare. On this matter of talking in tongues, here is the one case in the Bible where they spoke with tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance -- at Pentecost. They "began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."

Now, we have two other cases where people spoke in their languages. One is Acts, chapter 10. Cornelius and his household talked in other languages. And we have the case in Acts 19 where some people in Ephesus talked in various languages, but the Bible doesn't say, "...as the Spirit gave utterance," and it doesn't say it is a miracle, and neither does it say it was a gift of tongues. So I have no right to suppose it, and to add it in. But if these three cases in the Bible were all the miraculous gift, that still is not very many. There are many, many times that people are filled with the Holy Ghost, but if there were only three cases when they talked in tongues, at least it still shows what I am saying: miracles are not an everyday occurrence.

You say, "Don't you think God can work miracles today?" Yes He can, and I believe He does; but I don't think anybody goes around having a miracle before breakfast. It is not just a plaything of someone who wants to put on a show to prove he is better than someone else. The Lord didn't tell anybody to go ahead and let some snake bite him so he could get miraculously healed. I have seen some amazing, miraculous healings, but I say they only happen occasionally.

When Jesus went back, in Luke, chapter 4, to Galilee in Nazareth, where He was brought up, Jesus expressed their thought: "Whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country." But Jesus reminded them that "many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias ... But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow." And He reminded them: "And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian" (Luke 4:25-27).

So there are not many miracles. Miracles are special, unusual, infrequent. So there are not many cases of talking in tongues. This was a miracle and there was only a special occasion for it at Pentecost.

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