

07a ACTS

And to continue our worship, we want to take a moment at the outset of our study of the Word of God to go to the Lord in prayer, acknowledge the ministry of God's Holy Spirit. For most of us, this should be habitual by now. We know that it's going to be difficult for us to glean anything that makes a difference in our thinking or that is transforming to our souls unless we allow God's Holy Spirit to do His work.

So let's take a moment and go to the Lord in prayer. Father, we thank you for the opportunity to spend time in fellowship and worship in the study of your Word, in appreciation for what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us and the life that He has given to us, the calling that has been assigned to us, the opportunities that have been made available to us, so that sustained by your grace, we can have lives here in time and in circumstance that have meaning and purpose, have lasting value, have significance that goes beyond the grave and into the eternal future. We pray that our study this morning will be fruitful, that it will provide that which the Holy Spirit needs to lead us into all truth, to conform us to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to prepare us for our assignments in His kingdom and in yours.

We pray for those who are not with us this morning, that you'll be with them, grant them traveling mercies and safe return, and that wherever they are, the implanted Word that is resident in their souls will be available to sustain and nourish them and give them comfort, strength, and encouragement until they can return and share their spiritual gifts with us. We pray now that you will be with our leadership in the United States. We pray for our president who is under attack from various quarters and whose heart for you is evident in so many different ways.

We pray that you will comfort, encourage, and strengthen him for the task that he has both in foreign and domestic policy. We pray for our congressional leadership, our judicial leadership, that those who are sensitive to your will and your purpose and your spirit will prevail in guiding the future and the direction of our nation. And we ask once again that you will be with us as we fellowship together.

We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. For our scripture reading this morning, turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 14.

1 Corinthians 14. I am pitching you a change-up this morning. In our Friday night study in Acts, we got almost exactly halfway through our study of the Doctrine of Tongues, and I want to complete that because it also, surprisingly enough, encompasses the role of women in the church.

And those who were listening closely at the end of our first class on Friday night heard me say that when we come back, we are going to address ourselves to that sometimes touchy subject, and then I never did. It was not a lack of courage, it was simply a lack of

time. So once again, to prove that we will just take anything that comes up in the scriptures in the course of our verse-by-verse study, we are going to continue this morning our study of Acts.

We are in Acts chapter 2, and we have reached the day of Pentecost. There has been the appearance of this flaming fire, which divides itself and settles as tongues of fire, or the appearance of tongues of fire, on the heads of each of those who were assembled. I think they are assembled in the upper room context that we have seen at the close of the Gospels.

And this creates quite a stir. There is a sound of a mighty rushing wind. A crowd gathers.

This was not something done quietly within the bounds of the closed doors. The people in Jerusalem hear this, and a large crowd assembles. Peter stands up and begins to sermonize and to explain what it is that is happening.

As he does so, he is going to allude to Joel 2.23-24, which is the prophecy that the Spirit will come on the people of God. Your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions, and this and the other. Well, it says that the thing that drew this crowd to which Peter is preaching is the phenomenon of hearing other languages.

They began to speak in other tongues. And this is our subject. As I mentioned Friday, we have never really addressed this in great detail.

I want to do so now and kind of put it to bed once and for all, because it is quite a popular practice in many segments of Christianity. And lest you think that it has gotten tired and has kind of fallen out of fashion, it has done nothing but accelerate. If you want to research this any further, look up things like the Toronto Blessing or Holy Laughter or any of the other offshoots and further developments in the area of charisma and speaking in tongues that have been taking place just in the last few years.

The other thing that is happening, and the reason it's important for us to understand, is that the churches, the denominations, the groups within Christianity who believe that this is a legitimate manifestation of the Spirit in our day, have gone mainstream. People used to say, well, those are the holy rollers, those are the wild-eyed, hand-waving crowd. And we sort of marginalized them and said, well, you've got a fringe in every group, and that's our fringe.

So let them flap in the churches and let's just go on. But the flapping has taken much more concrete form because the Assemblies of God, the charismatic wing or branch or stray feather, whatever you want to call it, is now writing theologies, systematic theologies, is publishing study Bibles, is all over the media. And many, many people are beginning to come up who assume that this is an accepted and normal part of modern Christian function, which it manifestly is not.

So I say all of that to say it's important for us to have a handle on this, to know what the Scripture says. Should the occasion arise to speak the truth to someone in love, if they ask us a reason for the hope that is in us, and the reason we are confident that God's Spirit ministers to us and manifests God's Word to us, without these extraordinary activities, we don't want to just say, well, I don't really know where the passage is. That's just, I mean, my church teaches that and I believe it.

That's what my pastor says. That's what, I just don't think that's right. That's not helpful if someone is seeking an answer.

Having said that, we're in our Scripture reading, 1 Corinthians chapter 14, following chapter 12 and 13, where Paul has introduced the idea of spiritual gifts, and he says, you know, before I even go any further, I want to talk about the essentials of the Christian life, and he spends all of chapter 13 on love. And that's what took our time in the second session, Friday night, is trying to set that same context and establish that same emphasis. You can always go argue points.

This is the thing you see in seminary. Someone will say, well, I think the, in fact, the next issue that's coming up in our Exodus study is the length of the sojourn in Egypt, because we are about to hit Exodus 12, 40, that says, lo and behold, the children of Israel were in bondage in Egypt 430 years. Well, that would be fine until you go listen to Stephen preach in Acts chapter 7, or you hear Paul talking in Galatians, and Paul, for example, says that from the giving of the promise to Abraham until the Exodus was 430 years.

And there is an issue there. Well, you can slice and dice, and I, when I was considering moving forward in Exodus this morning, I thought, well now, how technical do we want to get? How far do we want to delve into this question? How long was the sojourn? What is the answer to the so what question there? When I leave and go forth into my Sunday afternoon and my week, how does that 215 year discrepancy affect my walk with the Lord and my strength to extinguish evil and overcome sin and produce divine good? What do you think? That's my dramatic pause for emphasis. What do you think? It's easy for us to get tangled up in technicalities and not have that food, that strength that we need for application.

And this is the question I wrestle with study by study, week by week, is there are lots of fun things that are fascinating to me, textual problems to resolve, things of this nature. But here's the point. When you come to something like this, Paul says, before you get into all of the technicalities, they're important and we're going to answer that question.

We will answer the 430 year question. We're going to answer the question about tongues and about the role of women in the church. But he says, don't lose sight of the main idea.

The guiding emphasis is faith, hope and love. You find it throughout the scriptures. What

is the first and foremost commandment of the Old Testament? What sums up all of the law and the prophets according to the Lord Jesus Christ? Love.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, all thy soul, all thy strength, and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Jesus said all the law and the prophets are summed up in those two statements. So he says, when you're trying to figure out how far you can walk on Sabbath, just remember, the main idea is, are you expressing love for God? Are you expressing love for your fellow believer? And in a larger context, your fellow man, but specifically the people of God, your neighbor.

In Israel, your neighbor is your fellow Israelite. He doesn't say, go love the Baal-worshipping, Kimosh-feeding, sacrificing your child of Molech Canaanite. The way you love him is by lopping off his head in as painless a fashion as possible and sending him to his judgment.

But it is specifically the bond of love, the spirit of unity, the bond of peace. You have love all through the New Testament, just as it is through the Old. So, long introduction to our scripture reading this morning in 1 Corinthians 14, because the chapter begins, pursue love.

This is the great command that conditions everything we're going to find out about tongues and about women in the church and all of this sort of thing. The word pursue here is dioko, D-I-O-K-O, and the lexicon says it means to move rapidly and decisively toward an objective. Marines, Army guys, we love this kind of language.

Move rapidly and decisively toward an objective. That's the context here. All of chapter 13, love suffers long, all the rest of that.

He says now that you know what love is and what it's like, move swiftly and decisively toward that objective. Pursue it, go after it, tackle it, get a hold of it. Hasten, run, press on.

This word was actually used for harassing someone. You keep after them, you keep nagging, you keep bugging, you keep trying to grab a hold of something. It was actually used for persecute.

You know how in persecution they just never let you alone to keep after you? Well, it has this idea of getting a hold. We want to do this with love. We don't harass people with our love, but the attitude of pursuit of I will not accept failure.

I will not accept it eluding me. I will not accept failure at all. I will pursue it.

I will find it. And then it also says desire pneumatika. Pneumatika.

Pneumatika, if you were going to pull it over into Koine English. It says be zealous. This is

zealute.

This is where we get our word zeal and zealous is from this Greek word. Zealute Pneumatica. These are things of the Spirit, that which the Spirit bestows, the things that operate out of our spirit, things in the spiritual realm.

And this specifically has the idea of spiritual gifting, spiritual functions, spiritual operations and activities. So pursue love and be zealous for the manifestation of it. What is the purpose of a spiritual gift? What is the purpose of a spiritual gift? In all of them but evangelism, it is to edify the body of Christ.

It is to build one another up. It is a gift God has given each of us. You have a spiritual gift.

Every time you are around another believer, whether it's spouse, family, church fellowship, believers in the larger context of life, you have the potential for your presence to be a blessing, your talents, your gifting to be a blessing. So he says pursue love and not just I'm sitting here loving you. You can't tell by looking at me, but I love you.

I love you all. I mean, that's one of the most overused words in the English language. Love.

But what's the idea? In the body of Christ, that love is to express itself in some tangible way, some effective way. What do we mean when we say effective? As an effect, cause and effect. Your love ought to be the cause of something that produces an effect.

This is what Paul says. That's just the first half a dozen words in our scripture reading. Pursue love, desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.

The best thing you can do to express your love, whether it is for God or whether it is for your fellow believer, is to speak the Word of God. Prophecy means speak the truth. The truth of the Word of God.

He says you all are really wowed by this speaking of foreign language gift that God has given as a sign. You can stand up and speak Parthian. You can praise God in Parthian.

Well, big deal. You're praising God in Parthian. That's good when it serves God's purpose, but if you start saying, whoa, you know, I've got that Parthian speaking gift.

I can whip that Parthian out anytime I want. I just kind of raise my eyes to the rafters and Parthian comes out. I don't know what it means, but those Parthians get a blessing from it.

So this is my speaking in tongues gift. And Paul says, you all need to settle down and think about the context. Think about love.

Think about the effective manifestations of love that God has given in terms of these giftings. And all of you can prophesy. All of you can speak the truth in love.

The one speaking in a language does not speak to men, but to God, for no one understands. And in the spirit, he speaks mysteries. Now this sounds like a gobbledygook.

Like, well, he's praying in some special heaven language. This is what a lot of people think tongues is. Let me give you a clue here.

Many times, like down in verse 5 here, Paul says, I wish you all spoke with tongues. Why is that in the plural? Why is tongues found so often in the plural? Because, here's the thing. Let's just think about this logically now.

And I know I'm just interrupting and basically decimating my scripture reading here, but I can't get through it without preaching, so I'm going to. Think about the expression tongues, speaking in tongues. It's plural.

Now, let's just take three languages. You've got English, you've got Spanish, and you've got French. Let's say that those are the only three languages in the world.

English, Spanish, and French. Everybody speaks one of them. I lift my chin and start saying unintelligible syllables.

I'm speaking in tongues. Somebody else stands up and starts speaking in unintelligible gibberish. How can you tell the difference between their gibberish and my gibberish? Are there different forms of gibberish? Can you put a plural on gibberish? Gibberish, if it's not a recognizable language, how can you say, well, now that's a different gibberish than this guy's gibberish over here.

How do you know? Maybe he's just using different vocabulary. This is what I'm saying. If there was a heavenly tongue, if there was a spirit language, there would just be one, and you would speak that.

And if there was more than one, how are you going to tell the difference? The whole definition of it is that nobody understands it. So, if I have one fellow over here saying Colabasanda, Colabasanda over and over like Robert Tilton does, and if you have another person over here saying Yabbada, Yabbada, Yabbada, well, how do I know that that's two different unknown languages? Anything we don't understand is just one unknown language. So, when you say they are speaking in tongues plural, what are you saying? You are able to distinguish various kinds of gibberish, and you know that they are two separate and distinct heavenly languages? You can't do it.

The reason the Word of God treats this as a plural in so many cases, sometimes Paul says you're speaking a tongue, other times speaking in tongues, is because they are

distinguishable as separate languages. If they are distinguishable, that means somebody understands it. Somebody says, wait a minute, that's Spanish.

Oh, this fellow is speaking French. Tongues. Languages.

He who speaks any language does not speak to men but to God. What this is saying is the man himself does not understand. He's not talking to God.

How can he talk to God if he doesn't understand what he's saying? He is talking unto, as unto. Whatever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord. He is speaking unto God.

He is performing a function on God's behalf. No one understands him in the spirit he is speaking mysteries. These are church-age doctrines.

It says he does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands. Now typically, there would be at least one person there who does understand. This is going to be the one who interprets.

How did this happen? You think about the milieu in which this is taking place. You have a melting pot. You have slaves that have been taken from all over the Roman Empire and have been brought by their Roman masters, have been brought by their prosperous merchant masters to every city in the Empire, including Jerusalem.

So when you have an assembly of believers, you might have someone who grew up in Egypt but was taken slave. You might have someone who grew up in Asia Minor, someone who grew up in any one of those 16 places that Peter mentions and has been brought as a slave or is a traveling merchant or whatever. There's a cosmopolitan group there.

They're all speaking Greek. Many of them are speaking Aramaic. But all of a sudden, they're hearing the language of their homeland.

And they say, how did this Galilean fisherman come to speak my language from thousands of miles away? In the spirit, by means of the spirit, he is speaking church-age truth. But no one understands it. Someone has to interpret.

And that's what Paul is going to go on and talk about, is that if someone is going to stand up and speak in a language, and maybe this thing just kind of goes off and he starts speaking Swahili, unless there is someone there who knows Swahili, who recognizes the language, whether or not...