

Reaching the World

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Date: 25 April 2021

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you so much, Derek and Lynn, for reading. Folks, lovely to see you this morning. Hope you've been enjoying the sunshine over the last week or so. It doesn't happen often here, does it? So we've been enjoying it over the last few days.

Let me encourage you to come to Acts chapter 2 and to this thrilling part of God's Word that I hope is going to be so instructive and also just inspiring for us today as we continue to live our lives for the glory of Jesus Christ in the city which he has called us to live in.

But let me just pray as we get there. The words of Psalm 119. Your hands have made and fashioned me.

Give me understanding that I may learn your commandments. And so it's to you, Heavenly Father, our creator, the God who loves us, the God who provides for us.

Father, we pray that you, by your Spirit, would help us understand something more of the glory of your Son. And may today what we look at, Father, be inspiring for us as we just glean an insight into your worldwide purposes for the glory of your Son.

[1 : 0 9] And we pray these things in his precious name. Amen. Amen. Well, folks, with Acts chapter 2 open in front of you, let me just put a number on the screen to get us going this morning.

If you're like me, you get easily confused by the number of zeros that appear in figures. Let me put you out your misery and tell you that that number is 97.2 million.

Now, I wonder if you can think on the spot as to what that number represents. What does it represent? Well, let me tell you that according to Christian charity Operation World, that is the number of people living in China today who claim to be following Jesus Christ.

So 97.2 million people. Let's agree that that is an awful lot of people. If you're trying to put it in some kind of context in your mind, know that there are just under 70 million people living in the whole of the UK today.

So this is the number of Christians, disciples of Jesus, who are living in China today. Now, let me ask you, as you consider that number, how do you explain it?

[2 : 1 9] How do you explain it? How do you explain how, despite being an atheist nation where the government not only discourages faith but is known to close churches and jail believers, that the number of Jesus followers, disciples in China has risen roughly 10 times since 1980?

How do you explain the fact that despite real persecution, it's why we should be always praying for our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world who are counting the cost for following Jesus in such a real way.

How do you explain the fact, despite persecution, despite limitations on things like social media where communication is really easy, how do you explain the fact that China is currently on course to be home to more Christians in the world than any other country by the year 2030?

How do you explain it? How do you explain that despite all the odds, against all the things that should tell us otherwise, the church in China is growing exponentially and nothing seems to be able to stop it?

What we're looking at today in Acts chapter 2 is the Bible's number one answer to that question. And I imagine it's the question that Luke's original audience are asking themselves as they pick up the book of Acts, as they read the story of the early church, they think, how has this happened?

[3 : 46] Well, it's a great question to ask. That's the one that we're going to ask today. Here is the number one answer that the Bible gives. I'm going to throw another number on the screen. This time, I hope, a bit more manageable. It's the number 120.

Go back one, 120. Now, if you come with me to the text, verse 15 of chapter 1, this is kind of where we'll pick it up today. 120, a lot more manageable number.

That is the number of disciples in Jerusalem at this point in the Bible story. Okay. Not an impressive number. Again, if you're trying to put that in some sort of context, can we call there's kind of 40 adults in this room just now, maybe even less than that?

And that's just three times that number. So again, just get your heads around 120 people. All the world, 120 people. Now, that's not an impressive number. And more than that, this is not a very impressive group of people.

Okay. If you've ever seen the film 500, okay, this isn't Gerard Butler and 500 trained Spartan soldiers who are armed with weapons and six packs galore, ready to take on anyone who comes against them.

[4 : 53] This is 120 everyday people. You have former fishermen. You have a former tax collector.

In the text, you'll see Jesus, his mum and his brothers. 120 people. They don't have numbers on their side. And they don't have, I guess, what we would call worldly prowess on their side.

But what they do have is a mission from the risen Jesus to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. They've got a mission and they've got a promise that he will send from the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit to empower them to do the mission.

And more than that, over, above all else, they possess hearts that have been gripped by a glorious Christ.

They have been loved by Jesus. You know, one of the men that God used in the years gone by to make a gospel impact in our city of Edinburgh was an American by the name of D.L. Moody, right?

[6 : 01] So he used to speak here, Corroboros Christian Centre in the Royal Mile. And people used to look down on D.L. Moody for his ineloquence, for his humble upbringings, for his lack of education, for the fact that he used to sell shoes for a living back in America.

And yet, despite those things, during his life, God used him to bring the gospel to an estimated 100 million people across the globe. And for Moody, the words that captured his heart were the ones that were spoken to him by a friend as they sat together somewhere, I think, down south on a park bench.

His friends simply said, Dwight, that was his name, the world has yet to see what God can do with one life that is fully consecrated to Jesus Christ.

And D.L. Moody made a pledge in his heart right then. He said, I can be that man. Now, I hope that's an encouragement for some of us here today who are feeling a bit like the 120 disciples.

Really got nothing going for me. Could God use me? What about my lack of education? What about my ineloquence? What about all the faults and failings that I have? And I hope we're encouraged by this text today to say that it's never been about us.

- [7 : 14] Here is God, through his spirit, accomplishing his purposes. And so what Luke is recording for us here is the beginning of that mission and the fulfillment of that promise.
- And these things kind of come together in verse 1 of chapter 2. On the day of Pentecost. If you've got the text there, on the day of Pentecost, verse 1. Now, Pentecost, one of the Jewish festivals, happens 50 days after Passover.
- And I guess it's kind of the equivalent to what we might call today, some churches do this, don't they? They have a harvest festival. This is what the people are doing. Celebrating God's faithfulness and giving them the harvest.
- Of course, it's... The camera angle changes, isn't it? It's not just about a physical harvest. Right here in Acts 2, here is the start of the spiritual harvest.
- It's great, isn't it? What's going on? And Luke kind of unfolds what goes on. Remember, the doctor come historian with an eye for the details trying to record for people what's happened. Right? For Theophilus.
- [8 : 16] But I imagine for the readers who are behind Theophilus looking at this, he records the details of what happens on the day of Pentecost. We're going to look at it in three quick scenes to get us through this, right? He firstly records an undeniable moment as God pours out His Holy Spirit on His disciples.
- Now again, if you've got the text there, notice Luke's plural emphasis as he records what happened in this section. Okay, how often he repeats the word them or they or just collective language which he uses to emphasize that the Spirit fell not on a certain few individuals.
- The Spirit fell. God poured out His Spirit on all of His people. So what happens when we put our faith in Jesus? The only reason we can say that we could come to be a Christian is because the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives.
- All of us have the Spirit. You see, as you read the Old Testament, you encounter the Holy Spirit falling on select individuals, anointing people to fulfill a certain task.
- But now the Spirit has fallen on all believers as God takes up residence in the lives of His people. Again, I hope that's encouraging for you this morning.
- [9 : 32] See what Luke describes verse 2. There was a sound like a mighty wind and there was a sight. Tongues like fire rested on each of the believers gathered here.
- Which I guess shouldn't surprise us in a sense because what this is all about is this is going to be about proclamation. Proclamation. Verse 4. The disciples start speaking in other languages.
- Understandably, verse 7, the people are amazed and bewildered. What did they say? I think this is quite funny if you look at the text. What did they say?
- They say, are these people not Galileans? Do you see it? Are these people not Galileans? Because apparently, people from the region of Galilee, which I guess to the north of, way to the north of Jerusalem, they're known for two distinct things.
- They're known for their distinct accent. It's why, if you remember where Peter's gathered around the courtyard and the servant girl says, I recognize your accent. Your accent betrays you. Apparently, people from Galilee have a distinct accent.
- [10 : 37] We should get that in the UK. Right? You can immediately tell within two or three sentences listening to somebody where they come from. Right? Geordies, Scousers, Cockney, Weegees.
- Okay? I remember the couple of years I spent living down south. Within two or three sentences, people had placed where I came from. We get that. These people are known for their accent and they're known for their, I guess the word is, commonness.

Okay? And so the people look at these people speaking and they say, where did they learn how we speak? Because it's not, which is a great question.

Cracking question. Because it's not like they've signed up for a night class at college and learnt this. It's not like they've downloaded an app on their phone and they sit in bed every night listening to somebody speak to them.

Remember when we did that at school? French is the only language I can speak. Equity and reputie. That was it, wasn't it? Listen and say it back. These people didn't have that. Verse four is clear.

[11 : 38] The Spirit gave them this ability. And as a side, let me just deal with this here. I think that's why we need to see this as a one-off event. Unrepeatable.

And I think what we need to see is that this is what differentiates this from the tongues that we see later on in Scripture, 1 Corinthians 12. It seems there, Paul is addressing their unintelligibility.

People can't understand what's being said. Whereas here, yes, it's supernatural. And yet this seems to be all about intelligibility. People can understand what's being said immediately.

Look what Luke describes. Who is there from verse 9? Who is there at verse 9? Do you see it? People from 15 different nations.

I love that. 15 different nations. He takes the time, again, the historian, to tell you where all these people have come from. From the surrounding nations. They've come to Jerusalem for this festival.

[12 : 37] And I guess what's going to happen is they're going to hear this good news, these mighty works of God, understand, and then go back to their own countries and proclaim Jesus there. Do you see how this is happening?

The ripple effect of the gospel. And do you see God's international heart here? And I think this is where we maybe need to pause and reflect on it. God's international heart for the peoples of the world.

Have you ever wondered, stopped to think, why we are here? Why are you here? Why should the gospel have made it to Edinburgh? Why should somebody have told you about the good news of Jesus? Because this God has an international heart to reach the peoples of the world throughout the generations.

His desire to see the peoples of nations come to have life in Jesus. And you see here, it's categorical. There is no gender barrier. There's no race barrier.

There's no ethnicity barrier. There's no class barrier. There are all people coming to know Jesus. And in the Bible story, if the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, looked at at the beginning of last year, was about God's response to mankind's rebellion as he scattered the peoples of the world and confused their languages.

[13 : 54] Do you see how this is kind of like the reversal of Babel? What God is doing is through the diversity of language. They are united in the one common message.

United in this common understanding that Jesus is king. Psalm 67, we're going to look at it tonight in the prayer meeting. Let the peoples praise you, God. This is what's going on.

The peoples of the world in their distinct tongues praising God. It's a wonderful scene, isn't it? It's a wonderful scene. But here's maybe what hit me this week as I thought about it again.

I love the Bible's realism here. Again, it's just something that helps me understand that this is something that I can trust. I love the Bible's realism because maybe you're here and you're thinking to yourself, I don't know, maybe the same thing that was in your mind this week when you heard about those plans for the European Super League.

Okay? You heard about that stuff? people saying in the news, no, the idea behind this is we just want to see the best teams in Europe play together. We just want to see sports, entertainment, and that's what we want to see.

[15 : 03] And you're thinking, yeah, sure it is. Sure it is. People speaking in different languages? Yeah, sure. Sure it is. Nonsense. I don't know, maybe that's your response.

I'd say that that's a perfectly plausible response because this isn't something that happens every day, is it? But I love the Bible's realism here. Not only is that included, I think that's included because Luke realizes that people will be asking this question.

What do the people say? Verse 13. They're drunk. That's what people thought at the time. They're drunk. Right? And Luke's readers reading this many years later who might think the same thing and yet here is people in the first century who can smell a rat as well.

They can smell a rat. That's what they thought and yet Luke is helping us see that I'm guessing that many of those who mocked are in the crowd that hears the message that comes next and they're in the huge group of people that respond at the end.

So if you're thinking that today, then know you're in good company. These people thought that as well and that's why I want you to hang on in here and see what happens next. Okay? Because we move from an undeniable moment.

[16 : 14] We move to an unmissable point. Sermon with an unmissable point. Verse 14. Upstands Peter. And the very fact that Peter is the guy who speaks here, I hope that encourages you as well.

He's just been loved by Jesus. Forgiven. Restored. Heart inflamed. By Jesus. Again, it's Peter. Right?

This guy who only a short while ago collapsed like a house of cards when somebody asked him if he were with Jesus. collapsed when a servant girl interrogated him and yet here he is filled with the Holy Spirit unashamedly and boldly exploiting what has happened to an enormous crowd of people.

I take it there's no explanation for that other than the power of the Holy Spirit and the life of somebody who was willing to be used. If you want to distill its contents because of time, his sermon's got two big points and I'm aware of the irony it's in a three point sermon, okay, but stay with me.

Here's two big points of his sermon. He's talking about, he's saying to the crowd, listen, a new page has turned. A new page has turned, right? This isn't a random event. You see how he brings in the prophet Joel.

[17 : 26] This is something that Joel spoke about. You look at Joel, Joel in his day, he's looking forward to the two big things that God is going to do in the future. Right? These two kind of markers.

The first one, that God is going to do something incredible in the eyes of the world. He's going to do it and pour out his spirit on his people as a result of it and the word's going to go forth. And in so doing, after this moment, the new page is turned.

This is going to usher in the period of gospel proclamation. So that, verse 21, everyone and anyone who hears and calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

And that's the page that's turned because of this event. You know, our little girl Chloe, we've been going through the Narnia series. She's just devouring the Narnia books, right? And I absolutely love them.

I think I'm enjoying them more than her personally, right? We're reading these Narnia books. Lewis is just such a brilliant way of weaving biblical truths into his stories, but more than that, helping us understand why all of our best stories are caught up in the bigger Bible one.

[18 : 32] That's what I love about C.S. Lewis, just his insight into things. I love as well how Lewis first became a Christian. I once said to him by his friend J.R. Tolkien, who was a Christian, said to Lewis, he said, have you ever wondered why you love stories so much?

The reason you love stories so much is because you're in one. You're in one. Love that. You're in one. Friends, this is the story we are in, right?

You need to understand our lives, not random. We're in this story, God's story, and this is the part of the story that we are in. participating in what God is doing and taking this news of his risen son to the peoples of the world.

This is the part of the story that you and I are in. And the other thing that Joel is talking about, the other event, verse 20, is the great and glorious day of the Lord. Right?

The return of the king when Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead according to how they have responded to him. Eternal life, eternal death.

[19 : 38] That is the next thing that has to happen in the Bible story. And so we now find ourselves, do you understand this, living between these two bookends, the pouring out of the Spirit and the return of Christ.

This is where we are in the story. And God is going to accomplish his purposes. And because of that, verse 22, I assume Peter says because the page has turned, because these bookends are now in place, you've got to listen to what I say.

Right? What's he saying? Second point, the two-point sermon, the king is crowned. You see verse 25, you killed him, says Peter. You killed him. Right? It doesn't beat around the bush.

It doesn't hold the punches. You killed him. Now if you hang on a second there and think about it, not everyone listening to that would have killed Jesus or played any part in it.

Right? So I'm trying to get into the text this week thinking how did, how would they have responded to that? You killed Jesus. No we didn't. Well in a greater sense, maybe in one sense they didn't. But in a sense they did, friends.

[20 : 43] And we all did. It was our sin that put him there. You killed him. You killed him. You know I remember as a teenager going to the cinema to watch Mel Gibson's film The Passion of the Christ.

I know you ever saw that when you were young. I'm sure you can get it on Netflix or something today. The Passion of the Christ, one of the only films I can ever remember where at the end of it nobody moved for 10 minutes.

It was incredible. Never experienced anything like that before. But a little known fact about that film, Mel Gibson, the director, Mel Gibson's only in it at one point in the whole film. And it's his hand that's on the hammer that nails, the nails into Jesus' hands.

Right? His hand. And it's his way of saying in the film, I take some responsibility for what happened to Jesus. You killed the Son of God. Friends, we killed the Son of God.

Our sin put him there. But here's what else Peter wants them to know. Even that act of murder was all part of God's plan. All part of God's plan.

[21 : 47] His purposes will not be thwarted. Would it look like defeat? No, God got his greatest victory on the cross. Death could not hold him.

And I think the idea is that the fact that Jesus is sinless, death had no hold on him. Right? Death, because of our sin, pays us wages. This is what we deserve.

We deserve death. But Jesus, sinless, death had no hold on him. It wasn't paying him anything. And so that's why, friends, his victory is our victory in him. And I think that's why he brings in Psalm 16 at this point.

To show them that even David saw this coming. Even David was looking forward to this day. David, I guess, the fan's favorite of the people in the crowd. Right? Poster boy. We love David.

Even David called Jesus Lord. Psalm 16. Love it. Peter knows his scriptures. And even David knew that the only way that he would see life after death is because his life was caught up with God's anointed king.

[22 : 49] And this Jesus, verse 36, is now at the right hand of God. God raised him. God vindicated his servant. And this is the message that the world needs to respond to.

Some of you might be old enough, I don't know, to remember US TV anchorman Walter Cronkite. Right? The only reason I know of him is because he was a US anchorman that kind of signed off every night after he'd read the evening news with his catchphrase.

Right? And his catchphrase was and that's the way it is. Right? And that's the way it is. I think that's exactly what Peter is saying here.

Right? This is no blog piece. This is no TV debate. This is no podcast. This is no opinion piece in The Guardian. This is news.

And I think that's why at this point he says you can know this for, or do you see the word? Certain. This is news. And that's the way it is.

[23 : 55] And having heard the sermon with the unmissable point comes verse 37, an unbelievable response. And it's unbelievable, I guess, in two directions. We need to see this. Firstly, it's unbelievable from heaven.

From heaven. Do you see the response that the people make? They are cut to the heart. Now I love that phrase. They're cut to the heart. The Holy Spirit is impacting people like a surgeon with a scalpel going right into the heart.

These people feel the conviction. Conviction that this is true. What this man is saying, the man that we thought was drunk, is true. And they ask, what should we do?

That's the question. And the answer should be, there is nothing you can do. There is nothing. You had your chance. You killed the Son of God. There's nothing you can do. And yet, do you see, that's not the response.

They killed the second person of the Godhead. We killed the second person of the Godhead. And yet, God offers them the third. The gift of the Holy Spirit.

[25 : 01] How good is this God, friends? Just take a moment and think about that. How merciful is this God? How patient is this God? How compassionate is this God?

You know the words of Charles Wesley in one of his famous hymns, My God is reconciled. His pardoning voice I hear. He owns me as his child. I can no longer fear.

With confidence I now draw near. And Father, Abba, Father, cry. How good is this God? It's unbelievable from heaven. And it's unbelievable on earth to see verse 41.

3,000 people respond in repentance and faith. They publicly nailed him to the cross. And yet, now as they get baptized, repent, they publicly nail their colors to the mast that they follow this king.

One unbelievable day, the day of Pentecost. Friends, let me just ask you really quickly an application and I know our time has almost gone. Two questions as we respond to this. Trying to think about how do we respond to what's going on here.

[26 : 07] I think this should call us to pray. Call us to pray in action. Here's two things I just want to, questions I want you to think about as you go home today. In terms of your prayer and witnessing. Friends, are we praying for places?

Are we praying for places? As we see God's international heart here, the heart of our Father for the places and peoples of the world, let me ask us, do we share that same concern?

That his glory would go forth. You know, we have got a brilliant opportunity to do that tonight. We're going to gather on Zoom, okay, six o'clock. You'll just find the link in the newsletter.

We're going to pray for countries in the world. We've been kind of focusing on different continents. Tonight, we're going to focus on Europe. Different people, different members of this church from different countries are going to come and just bring us ways that we can pray for the advance of the gospel in their country.

So please come in tonight. Love you to be part of that. Just a movement of prayer to pray for the places in the world. Maybe something we used to do with our girls when they were really young, when we had family Bible times, just bought a really old map and we laid it right on the ground and just went through different countries of the world.

[27 : 18] They found the countries on the map. We, as a family, worked out how we could pray, right? Geography and theology kind of come in together. How can you creatively do this? Are we concerned for the places of the world, the peoples of the world?

But also are we concerned for the places of our everyday lives? Okay, there was a British missionary once by the name of Norman Grubb and every day when he used to get up, he just prayed a simple prayer as he got out of bed in the morning.

He prayed, Good morning, Lord. What are you up to today? Can I be part of it? Thank you. Amen. What are you up to today, Lord?

Can I be part of it? Friends, I love that sense of expectation. Love that sense of expectation. Do we share it? Do we understand that our Father has put people in our lives today, that we are not here by accident?

His purpose is that he's accomplishing, so there's no chance encounter as we go about our daily lives. Who are you meeting in your lives? Think about it. On the school run, in the office, on the commute, at the barber's, in the supermarket, who's on your street?

[28 : 24] Are we praying for places expectantly? Are we going about our days expecting that God by his spirit, and we have no idea how he is at work, yet we know that he is? Is that even on our radar?

Are we praying for places? And secondly, are we praying for faces? Are we praying for faces? You know, I had a mate at university, he used to carry about in his wallet, you know, the little see-through bit where your driving license goes?

He had in there the name of three friends. Every time he opened his wallet, just reminded, shoot it up, shot up rather, a prayer for three individuals. I'm going to pray for these three friends.

Pray for these three friends again. Friends, who are we praying for? Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing that as a church family we just committed to praying for one friend this week? Everyone, if everybody does it in the church family, okay, I don't know what's that, 150 friends we're praying for.

Imagine that. Lord, would you, and take the language from the text, by your spirit, cut them to the heart. Cut them to the heart. Help me witness, help me speak, but by your spirit, would you cut them to the heart?

[29 : 29] Friends, are we praying for places? Are we praying for faces? You know, we started with a number. Let me just finish with another number. 98.

98. Do you know what that number is? We're gradually working our way down, I know. Do you know what that number is? That is not a number, well it's a number, it's a percentage. Okay? It's the percentage of people in Scotland who do not know Jesus.

Now I hope that that breaks our heart, that that is as high as that. Given the spiritual heritage of our country, that 2% of people in this country claim Jesus is Lord. Friends, are we burdened by that?

Are we praying for people in our country? Now let me just encourage us, the Lord is at work. Some of the greatest, the greatest stories that I've heard over this period of lockdown, in amazing ways the Lord at work in people's lives, people becoming Christians, in unexpected ways.

Prayer meeting on Friday night of 400 different people in Edinburgh and Fife and the Lothians praying for people in our city, in our country to come to know Jesus. The Lord is at work, Aslan is on the move.

[30 : 37] But do we, are we burdened by that number? 98% of people in our country do not know Jesus. So how do you explain it? How do you explain it? How do you explain those 97.2 million people in China?

How do you explain what the Lord is doing? Answer, the Father whose heart beats for the peoples of the world. Answer, a Son, Jesus Christ who has loved us, who is risen and is glorious.

Answer, the Spirit who is sent into the hearts of believers to enable them to relationally revel in the Godhead and empower them to declare his praises. Let's pray together.

And maybe just in the silence now, friends, let's just take this opportunity, maybe just as a way of response, let's think of that one friend, the person in our lives, and let's just maybe 10 seconds, let's just pray for that individual just now as we respond to this.

Amen. 2 Corinthians chapter 5. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others.

[31 : 51] Heavenly Father, thank you so much for your gospel. Father, thank you so much for the way that you have loved us in your Son, Jesus. And Father, we pray that as we respond to this, your Spirit poured out on your people for us to revel in you and declare your praises to the world.

Father, help us to do that this week. I pray for those watching this today who maybe don't know you, maybe those in this room. Father, I pray that you would bring a sense of conviction about who Jesus is. Father, thank you so much for your wonderful love for us.

Father, where would we be if you were not this kind of God? And we just commit ourselves to you, Father, in Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen.