JM Jason Mayfield

SERMON OUTLINE FOR PASTORS

THE POWER OF PRAYING IN TONGUES

What It Is, What It Does and Whether You Need It

> Speaking in tongues is not required for salvation, but it is for every believer. When you pray in tongues, the Holy Spirit prays through you: He intercedes for you, carries the weight of prayer your mind cannot, and builds you up.

MAIN TEXT
Acts 2:1-4

FIRST PREACHED
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SERIES
We're Openly Spirit Filled, Week 3 of 5

BY
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AT A GLANCE

THE MESSAGE

1. Disclaimer one: tongues are not required for salvation, and teaching otherwise knocks on the door of damnable heresy.
2. Disclaimer two: not having spoken in tongues does not mean you do not have the Holy Spirit, since there is an indwelling ministry received at salvation and an empowering ministry received at the baptism.
3. Disclaimer three: praying in an unknown tongue is for everyone, even though the sign gift of tongues with interpretation is not.
4. Acts 2 is best read as the first instance of tongues and interpretation, because a loud commotion of many voices could not be sorted into separate languages by the crowd below.
5. The mockers saying they are drunk shows that what was heard did not sound like ordinary foreign speech.
6. 1 Corinthians 13:1 and 14:2 point to a language that taps the supernatural realm and is spoken to God rather than to men.
7. Jesus promised power and what the disciples received was tongues, so tongues is the power.
8. What it does, first: praying in tongues connects you to the Holy Spirit's intercession, and he prays for you better than you can pray for yourself.
9. What it does, second: it bypasses the mind and moves the mental load of prayer onto the Holy Spirit.
10. What it does, third: the one who speaks in a tongue builds himself up.
11. Do you need it: not to be saved, but yes for every area of life you want to see improve, because how you pray does affect what you get.
12. The church is openly Spirit filled, not obscurely and not obnoxiously, and everything around the gifts must edify the whole body.



WATCH IT PREACHED

youtu.be/-fx2LeDcULM



READ THE ARTICLE

jasonmayfield.com/messages/the-power-of-praying-in-tongues

PREACHING NOTES

Before You Preach

This is the third message in a five-week series on being openly Spirit filled. The first weeks laid the foundation; this week is direct teaching on speaking in tongues. Say it plainly: the church has been "slow rolling Pentecost" to make sure the foundation is Jesus Christ and His finished work at the cross. Now the Band-Aid comes off.

Expect a mixed room. A message on tongues draws people who are curious, people who are skeptical and people who were hurt by excess. Lead with the three disclaimers so no one leaves thinking they are unsaved or second class, then answer three simple questions: **What is it? What does it do? Do you need it?**

This message deliberately withholds the usual altar call for the baptism in the Holy Spirit. If you preach it as part of a series, decide ahead of time where the opportunity to receive will come, and tell people.

Introduction

> ACTS 2:1-4 ESV
>
> [1] When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. [2] And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. [3] And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. [4] And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Today we are talking about the supernatural benefits of speaking in other tongues.

On this subject the church is divided. Some believe the supernatural gifts are not for today; others believe they are. Even among those who believe the gifts are for today there is a division. Charismatics do not believe that speaking in tongues is the initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals do. This church holds that doctrine, and so do I: **we believe in the baptism in the Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues as the Spirit gives utterance.**

THREE DISCLAIMERS

1. Tongues are not required for salvation. Some falsely teach that you must speak in tongues to be saved. That is not true. It knocks on the door of damnable heresy. We do not believe it and we do not teach it.

2. If you have never spoken in tongues, it does not mean you do not have the Holy Spirit. At the end of John's Gospel, Jesus "breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (John 20:22). Yet the

disciples did not speak in tongues until after Jesus ascended. If Jesus looks you in the face and says you have the Holy Spirit, you have the Holy Spirit. The moment you believed, you "were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13).

Robert Heidler, a Baptist who received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, put it this way in a book that shaped me as a young man: there is an **indwelling ministry** of the Holy Spirit, which you receive when you are saved, and an **empowering ministry** of the Holy Spirit, which you receive in the baptism.

3. It is for everyone. The sign gift of tongues with an interpretation, given for others to hear, is not necessarily for everyone. But the ability to pray in an unknown tongue that the Spirit knows is for everyone.

Illustration: the interpretation at district council. A close friend, a pastor, called me a year or two ago from our state ministers' meeting. During a service, a man began screaming a message in tongues. My friend rolled his eyes and thought, "Here we go." Then someone near him began screaming the interpretation, and he rolled his eyes again, sure the service was about to go off the rails. About twenty seconds later he realized he was the one screaming the interpretation. He went back to his hotel mortified. The point: the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit are for today.

OPENLY SPIRIT FILLED

Prepare people for what they will experience here. There is an expression of tongues that is meant to be interpreted (1 Corinthians 14). There is another expression, the one this message is about, that happens privately between a believer and the Lord. Sometimes it makes its way from the prayer closet onto your row. You will hear someone near you praying in tongues. At some point your pastor will get excited, pray in tongues a little and go back to preaching. That is who we are, and it is not about to change.

We are an openly Spirit-filled church. Have the congregation say it together.

- **We are not obscurely Spirit filled.** Some churches like ours have pushed the Holy Spirit into a Thursday night small group because the pastor does not want to touch it.
- **We are not obnoxiously Spirit filled.** Everything that happens around the gifts of the Spirit must happen for the edification of the body at large. No prophetic cartwheels down the aisles.

Three questions about tongues: **What is it? What does it do? Do you need it?**

1. What Is It?

In Acts 2 the disciples are praying in an upper room in Jerusalem, a room that may have looked out over the street, and something happens: a sound from heaven, tongues as of fire, and they begin to speak in other tongues.

This raises an old debate. Did they speak real human languages, or something like what we know today in classical Pentecostal experience, a language the speaker does not understand? The answer is in the rest of the passage.

> **ACTS 2:6-13 ESV**
>
> [6] And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. [7] And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? [8] And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? [9] Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, [10] Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, [11] both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." [12] And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" [13] But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

A LOUD COMMOTION

Pentecost was one of the busiest feasts on the Jewish calendar. Think New Year's Eve in Times Square, or Mardi Gras. If a small prayer group in a cafe above Mardi Gras started praying, the parade would not stop. But something in that room was loud enough that the crowd stopped and gathered.

Some say the disciples must have spoken one by one, each in a different language. But who would stand in the street listening to five languages waiting for their own?

Demonstration: "I Love Lucy." Ask everyone, on the count of three, to shout out their favorite TV show. It is a jumbled mess. Then ask everyone, on the count of three, to shout "I Love Lucy." Everyone understands the second one.

If a room full of people were all speaking different real languages at once, the crowd below would hear only noise. Yet each person heard his own language, and knew what was being said: "the mighty works of God" (Acts 2:11). **The people on the ground were interpreting what they heard.** Pentecost is not only the first instance of tongues. It is the first instance of tongues and interpretation.

There were also two groups in the crowd. One heard praise to God in their own language. The other said, "They are filled with new wine" (Acts 2:13). If you hear someone speaking a foreign language, your first thought is not that they are drunk. You recognize it as a language. What the mockers heard sounded like nothing they knew, which is much like what modern Pentecostal tongues sound like.

THE TONGUES OF MEN AND OF ANGELS

Paul supports this. Right between chapters 12 and 14, his teaching on spiritual gifts, he writes, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1). There is a language that reaches into the supernatural realm.

> **1 CORINTHIANS 14:2 ESV**
>
> [2] For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit.

If they were speaking a real human language, they would be speaking to men, men whose language they did not know. Paul says the one who speaks in a tongue speaks to God and utters mysteries in the Spirit.

Whether it is a heavenly language or a human one, what matters most is what happens when you do it.

TONGUES IS THE POWER

Jesus promised, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). Jesus said they would receive power. What did they get? They got tongues. That tells us there is a supernatural connection between praying in the Holy Spirit and the power that equips you for life and service.

Simply said: tongues is the power.

2. What Does It Do?

IT CONNECTS YOU TO THE HOLY SPIRIT'S INTERCESSION

When you pray in tongues, you are not the one praying. The Holy Spirit prays through you.

> **ROMANS 8:26** ESV
>
> [26] Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

To be honest about the text, it is hard to prove linguistically that "groanings too deep for words" means speaking in tongues. But it is also hard to spend much time in a Spirit-filled church and not hear the resemblance.

There are things going on in your life you do not know how to pray for. **The Holy Spirit is praying for you better than you are able to pray for yourself.**

IT BYPASSES THE MIND

> **1 CORINTHIANS 14:14** ESV
>
> [14] For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful.

Illustration: the purchase request form. Think about preparing a proposal or a report at work. It is a mental load: you have to think through everything. Imagine coming to the Lord every day with a purchase request form that has to be filled out perfectly, trying to think of every situation that needs your attention so you can pray it through. When you pray in tongues, the heavy mental load comes off of you and goes onto the Holy Spirit. He carries the weight of how you need to pray.

IT BUILDS YOU UP

> **1 CORINTHIANS 14:4** ESV
>
> [4] The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church.

Some things need to happen in the church. Some things need to happen in your prayer closet. When you pray in the Holy Spirit and He intercedes for you, it builds you up. How exactly? We may not be able to explain it, but having more of the Holy Spirit working in your life is not going to leave you weaker. The present, active ministry of the Holy Spirit builds up your person.

3. Do You Need It?

Yes. Do you have to have it? No. Can you go to heaven without it? Yes. But will your life be better with it? Yes. Is life harder without it? Yes. Will you have more peace, more strength and more wisdom? Will you make better decisions? Will things faze you less? Yes.

If there is any area of your life you want to see improve, you need the ability to pray in other tongues.

ON ONE HAND: GOD IS MERCIFUL

Paul says to pray with both: "I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also" (1 Corinthians 14:15). So keep praying in English. God is not unmerciful, counting it against you when you pray imperfectly. There is no department in heaven checking your prayer reports. The grace of God is at work when we do not know how to pray as we ought.

ON THE OTHER HAND: HOW YOU PRAY MATTERS

> **MARK 11:23-24** ESV
>
> [23] Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.
> [24] Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

The way you pray and what you bring before the Lord do matter. They play into the results you get. The Holy Spirit can pray perfectly toward everything you need, and into areas you are not even aware of. You can pray for your children to know the Lord. When you pray in the Holy Spirit, He can pinpoint the influence in their life that is getting in the way.

Conclusion

Normally a message like this ends with an altar call for the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the laying on of hands. Today it does not. There will be an opportunity to receive during this series.

Until then, sit with this message, especially if you have struggled to receive or have felt disqualified. **It is for you. You need it. You can have it.**

Many people who have heard this teaching have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit later, at home, simply thinking about the message. A surprising number have received it while doing the dishes at the kitchen sink.

Next steps (as preached on January 25, 2026): Next week is Vision Sunday; come and see where the church is going, led with transparency and with faith. On February 8, the series pauses for one week for a message on marriage, because the Holy Spirit prompted it. If you are married, want to be married, used to be married or are not married, be there.

Close in prayer.



ABOUT

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