

Section II.--Miraculous Effects

by William Arthur

The miracle of tongues was a miraculous gift of speaking in different languages, which was given to the disciples on the day of Pentecost, and was a credential for the new religion, a message from the Spirit, and a universal call to man.

Scripture: Matthew 10:20, Acts 1:8, Acts 2:4, 1 Corinthians 14:2-18

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Gifts Of Tongues"

Description

William Arthur preaches about the miraculous event of speaking in tongues on the day of Pentecost, emphasizing that the ability to speak in foreign languages was a sign from God to authenticate the message of the gospel. The miracle demonstrated the universal nature of the gospel, breaking down barriers of language and culture, and empowering all believers to actively participate in sharing the good news. The diverse spiritual gifts bestowed upon the believers, including the gift of tongues, highlighted the direct access each individual has to God without the need for intermediaries or priests. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all believers, not just the ordained ministry, underscored the importance of every believer being a witness for Christ and actively sharing the message of salvation.

Transcript

"THEY began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." It is not said, "with unknown tongues." In fact, the expression, "unknown tongues," was never used by an inspired writer. In the Epistle to the Corinthians, it is found in the English version; but the word "unknown" is in italics, showing that it is not taken from the original. Speaking unknown tongues was never heard of in the apostolic days. That miracle first occurred in London some years ago. On the day of Pentecost no man pretended to speak unknown tongues; but just as if we in London suddenly began to speak German, French, Spanish, Russian, Turkish, and other foreign languages, so it was with them. Not one tongue was spoken that day but a man was found in the streets of Jerusalem to turn around and cry: "This is my tongue, wherein I was born!" The miracle lay in the power of speaking the tongues of adjacent nations, from which individuals were in Jerusalem at that very time. This is not only miraculous, but a miracle in a very amazing form; perhaps, as to its form, the most amazing of all miracles.

Matter is a great and pregnant thing. To us its properties are not only wonderful, but exceedingly mysterious. When we see it flourishing while we fade, towering in hills, or careering in waves, or spread out in the firmament, we almost feel as if it were greater than we. Yet we are ever proving that, in spite of

appearances, matter is less than mind. Mind searches out matter, wields it, molds it, makes it the servant of its will. Mind, then, being the superior, it follows that a work wrought in mind is greater than one wrought in matter. Miracles in seas, mountains, the firmament, or the human body, display a power which rules the frame of nature and the frame of man. Yet, as the sphere of these is matter, the whole order may be called the physical miracle--works above nature, wrought upon physical agents in attestation of the revelation of God. But beyond this lies a higher miracle, of which the sphere is mind; and which, therefore, we may call the mental miracle--works above nature, wrought in attestation of the revelation of God. Of this order, two forms had been witnessed previously--inspiration, and prophecy; but now a new miracle in mind was to challenge the belief of all Jerusalem.

This miracle, as to its moral impression, differed totally from all physical miracles--even from that complex and most peculiar miracle, the raising of the dead, wherein we see a power which matter and spirit, animal life and mental illumination, equally obey. That miracle stands alone; yet the chief impression which it makes, and certainly the impression which all purely physical miracles make, is that of power. They suggest also, indeed, the idea of wisdom, else the power would not go so unerringly to its end; and of goodness, else power so irresistible would move, not to bless, but to destroy. Yet the leading impression produced is undoubtedly that of power. In such miracles we recognize chiefly "the high hand and the stretched-out arm."

In inspiration, we see the mind of man enabled to sit down among the morning mists of things, and to write a book which will stand while the world stands. In prophecy, we see the mind enabled to look through a thousand years, and describe what lies beyond so plainly that, when it is unfolded to ordinary sight, it shall at once be recognized. Both these miracles bring us, not so much into the presence of a Ruler as into the presence of a Spirit.

In beholding a sea dried, or a wilderness strewn with food, we feel ourselves near the Lord of nature and the Stay of life. So here we feel ourselves near the Fount of all mind, whose own knowledge depends neither on material phenomena nor on the lapse of time; whose mode of acting on the human mind is not by laws analogous to those whereby the latter acts on material organs, or on its kindred minds through them. As, however, we watch the miracle of tongues, a strange solemnity falls upon us: we feel as if we had left the region where mind slowly and dimly learns through sense, had crossed some invisible line into the land of spirits, and were standing before the Original Mind. What knowledge of mind so minute as that which scans every sign whereby every mind expresses its ideas? What power over mind so unsearchable as that which can fill it in an instant with new signs for all its ideas--signs never before present to it, yet answering exactly to those which others had been trained from childhood to use?

A number of Galilean peasants issue from an upper room into the streets of Jerusalem. A strange fire is in every eye, a strange light on every countenance. Each one looks joyful and benignant, as if he felt that he was carrying the balm for the world's sores in his breast. Each has plainly a word to say, and wants listeners. Probably their steps turn toward the temple, which, during the ten days, had divided their presence with the upper room. One meets with an Arab, and addresses him; another goes up to a Roman, and in a moment they are deeply engaged; a third sees a Persian, a fourth an African from Cyrene; and, as they go along, each one attaches himself to some foreigner. He tells a strange tale strange in its substance, equally strange in its eloquence; a new and unaccountable eloquence, wonderful not for grace, expression, or sweet sound, but for power.

One hearer in Latin, another in Coptic, another in Persian, another in Greek, exclaims first at the wonder of the story, and then at the wonder of the narrator: "Art not thou a Galilean? Whence, then, hast thou this fluency of Latin?" He answers that he has received it to-day by gift from God. A smile curls on the lip of the Roman, and he turns around to a neighboring group. There an Egyptian has just been putting the same question, and received the same answer. Yonder is an excited little knot, where a Parthian declares that the tongue in which a man has told him of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, is his mother tongue. People from Jerusalem are mocking, and saying, "The men are full of new wine"; but the strangers, on speaking one to another, find that they have all been hearing precisely the same things in their "own tongues."

Those faces of different complexions, on comparing their opinions, darkle with awe. They find that in all this diversity of tongues the same tidings are repeated, and thus see the unity of matter in the variety of language: they find that the men who speak are unschooled peasants, yet are all gifted with the same unheard-of power; and thus see in the variety of speakers the unity of inspiration. The tongues are the tongues of all mankind; but the impulse is one, and the message one! From what center do all these languages issue? The same instinct which leads back the thought from speech to a mind, leads it back from this universal speech till it stands awe-struck in the presence of the Central Intellect of the Spirit which "formeth the spirit of man within him"---of the Supreme Mind, to which all mind is common ground; of the Father of thought!

It would be impossible to conceive any form of credential so well framed to certify that a doctrine was the immediate issue of the mind of God. The bare thought of such a miracle as that of tongues, had it only been a thought, would have made in itself an era in the history of man's intellect; and it may be fairly questioned whether such a thought could have originated in anything else than in the fact. The leading feature of the new religion was to be a Divine teaching upon things invisible and spiritual--on points of which the unaided powers of man could give no conclusive solution. For such a teaching, no attestation could be so apposite as one that accredited it as a message from the Spirit, which "searcheth all things." The universal call to man was worthily issued into the world by a sign which showed that it came directly from the only wise God, who gives understanding, and holds the keys of thought. The command of all languages, by one consentaneous impulse, proclaimed the new message to be the Word of God.

The great question for humanity is, Hath God spoken? Are we poor wanderers each left here to his own light, and Heaven looking down in eternal silence on all our straying and perplexity? Hath the Parent Spirit, whence these spirits of ours come, surrounded them with his infinite presence at every step of their stumbling and perilous journey, and never once, from the day of Adam to our day, signified that he saw, and heard, and felt? Has he dealt with the soul of man as with "the spirit of a beast," that could never bless him and never break his law? Are all words the words of erring man, and all lights those doubtful and deceptive lights, following which so many have miserably perished? Is all doctrine the guesses of thinkers, or the juggling of priests? Has God never, never spoken?

"God spake all these words, and said!" On the Pentecost of Israel, from out of the fire on Sinai, came "a mighty voice," which, sweeping down from the distant peak as if from a throne at hand, filled the ears of three millions of people, or more, as if they had been a little group. Ten times the Voice sounded mysteriously over all that awed and quivering host, till human nature, smitten to the core, cried out, "We die, we die!" The Voice had uttered only gentle and wholesome laws, laws binding man to God, and man to man, laying sure paths to peace and blessedness, and the Voice awoke only the response: "Let not God speak with us, lest we die." (Exodus xx. 19.)

Thus, in the old time, a whole nation could be appealed to, that all words were not uncertain, nor all questions open: "Ye came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness. And the Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice. And he declared unto you his covenant which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone."

As in the Pentecost of Israel, so in the Pentecost of Christianity, the Lord once more speaks "out of the midst of the fire." Now, however, the accompanying tokens are not physical, but mental: employing many human minds and human tongues as his instruments, yet manifesting the unity of that impulse whereby they are all moved, he makes not merely the people of one nation, but the representatives of all nations, feel that God hath spoken. Yes, tell it wherever there are ears to hear, tell it to the ends of the earth: God hath spoken; man has not been forgotten; guesses are not all our light; there is a gospel, a "speech of God"; questions affecting salvation are settled, and our way to holy living and happy dying traced by the Hand which rules both worlds.

With regard to the gift of tongues, some serious questions have been raised, especially by the learned. One is as to whether the miracle was really in the speaker, and not in the hearer; so that although all that was spoken was in one language, the ordinary language of the disciples, yet the hearers of different nations each heard in his own tongue. For this opinion, as for all opinions, it is possible to cite some considerable names. But had it been as here supposed, the symbol of the miracle would not have been cloven tongues, but manifold ears. The double declaration of the narrative perfectly corresponds with the symbol. As regards the speakers, it says that they "spake with other tongues"; as regards the hearers, that they "heard every man in his own tongue."

When St. Paul finds fault with the use of the gift of tongues in Corinth, he does not blame the hearers for lacking an ear that would interpret their own tongues into foreign ones, but blames the speakers for speaking "with the tongue words not easy to be understood" by the unlearned; and the only reason he ever assigns why the auditors could not understand is, that they were unlearned; clearly showing that a foreign language was employed, which education might have enabled them to understand, but for the understanding of which miraculous power does not seem ever to have been given. If the supposition of the miracle in hearing, instead of in speech, has been resorted to with a view to simplify the miracle, it defeats its own object; for, to sustain that supposition, the miraculous influence must have been exerted on a number of persons as much greater than in the other case, as the hearers were more numerous than the speakers. At the same time, the nature of the miraculous operation would be in every respect equally extraordinary.

Another question is as to whether the speakers understood what they said in the foreign languages. The doubt as to this is not raised upon the narrative of the Pentecost, but on certain expressions used by St. Paul in writing to the Corinthians. There he says, "Let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret"; and again, "If one speak in an unknown tongue, let one interpret." Hence it would appear that some could speak with tongues, who could not render into their language that which they had spoken. This, however, is not clear; for he also says: "Greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the Church may receive edification." Here he supposes that the person who possesses the gift of tongues does also possess the power of interpreting into the common language that which he has uttered in a miraculous way.

But even granting that some were unable to interpret, so as to edify the Church, that which they had themselves spoken, it would appear that this did not at all arise from their not understanding what they had said, but from their being destitute of the gift of prophecy, whereby only they could edify believers. As to any doubt whether the person speaking really understood his own utterances, it is completely removed by the text, I Corinthians xiv. 14-19: "For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified. I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all; yet in the Church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." Here, publicly praising "with the understanding" is taken to be, so praising that a common man may understand; and publicly preaching "with the understanding" is taken to be, so to speak as "to teach others also." To praise and to preach in public without these, is to act without understanding. The words, "he understandeth not what thou sayest," though "thou verily givest thanks well," settle the whole matter. They take it for granted--as, indeed, the apostle does all through --that the speaker clearly understands himself; but the fault is, that he uses speech which was never given for the sake of intercourse with God, but for that of intercourse with man, in a way that defeats its own object. Speech is man's revelation of his own spirit to his fellow-man; and when nothing is revealed, it becomes a mockery. Feelings and thoughts are the language which God listens to: man hearkens in the air, God in the soul within. To speak to him, we need no sounds: sounds are for human ears, and useful only when the ear can recognize the meaning. The fact that some who could not prophesy, could yet speak with tongues, is apparent in several parts of Scripture, and is a singular proof at once of the generality and the diversity of gifts. The lower gift, that of tongues, was more generally diffused than the higher, that of prophecy.

The miracle indicated not only the origin of the new doctrine, but also its sphere. It was a message from the Father of men to all men. National diversities, instead of being a barrier before which it stood still, were opportunities to display its universal adaptation. Each various tongue was made an additional witness that it had come for "every people under heaven." Our Lord's last words, "the uttermost part of the earth," had here a strange and multiplying echo. A force was set in motion, which claimed all humanity as its field; a voice was lifted up, which called upon every nation to join its audience.

Again, this manifestation met and answered all doubts which might have arisen as to the power of our Lord to gift his servants with language and utterance needful for their coming contest with the whole world. He had told them that, when brought before rulers and kings for his name's sake, it would be given to them what they should say: "For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." (Matthew x. 20.) He had evidently referred to such Divine aid in speech when he told them that they should receive power after that the Holy Ghost was come upon them, and that they should be his witnesses, even "to the uttermost part of the earth." Moses had feared to plead before Pharaoh, from a dread that utterance equal to the gravity of the mission could not be given to him. Jeremiah had feared on a similar ground.

Nothing is more natural than that one who feels himself charged with a sublime truth, on the proper delivery of which infinite interests depend, should distrust his ability to frame suitable language. It is very probable that such thoughts had troubled the disciples in the contemplation of the great work which lay before them. If so, what an answer did they receive in the miracle of tongues! He who enabled their lips to

pour forth the testimony in words they had never spoken, and never heard, could surely give them every measure of propriety, of clearness, of copiousness, of power, whereof human speech was capable. All questions as to how copious diction could be imparted to the unready, and force to the feeble; how the slow could be made impressive, and the tame eloquent, were here answered. The old promise, "I will be with thy mouth," received an unlooked-for commentary. The effects which the Spirit of the Lord could produce upon the human tongue were shown to be illimitable by any natural impediment. The ground of confidence as to their success in preaching was conspicuously changed from talent, learning, office, or credentials, to the working of the Holy Ghost. Their power ceased to be a question of natural ability, and became one of Divine gift. The measure of the former might be greater or less, without materially affecting the fruit of their work; but this would exactly correspond with the degree of the latter.

Andrew had heard the Baptist preach, had seen how his words had plowed up the rude feelings of the soldier, and at the same time commanded the subtle conscience of the scribe. He had heard the Lord himself, when every word struck the ear as a wonder. Probably he had always thought it impossible that such swordedged sentences should ever come from his lips, or from those of "his own brother Simon." He might conceive that he should be able to repeat the substance of the lessons which the Lord had taught them, and that, when he stood before counselors and magistrates, he should be enabled to assign a reason for his hope. Perhaps he would think it possible that, when filled with that new Comforter, who had been so often promised to them, he could address a multitude with feeling. But as to words like fire, melting and burning the spirits of men; words like hammers, breaking in pieces the hearts of stone; words that should rush on the congregation with a force too overwhelming to be called eloquence, should win a conquest too rapid and too complete to be called persuasion, should make the speaker not only a prodigy, but a power, his hearers not only an orator's audience, but a Master's disciples, --as to such words as these, how was it possible that they should ever proceed from him, or Simon? So might he naturally reason; but when he finds himself fluently telling a man from the shores of Cyrene the whole story of the birth, and death, and resurrection, and ascension, in a tongue which he had never heard before; when the African assures him that it was the tongue of his native town--then, had you asked him, "Is it now impossible that you or Simon should speak with a voice mightier than the voice of a prophet, or that the least of your company should be greater than the thunder-tongued Baptist?" he had answered, "With God nothing is impossible."

"And it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." The tongue of fire rested upon each disciple, and all spoke with a superhuman utterance. Not the Twelve only, the Lord's chosen apostles; not the Seventy only, his commissioned evangelists; but also the ordinary believers, and even the women. The baptism of the Spirit fell upon all, and spiritual gifts were imparted to all--not equally; for the expression, "as the Spirit gave them utterance," seems to indicate a diversity of gifts, which accords with other passages in the New Testament. It is not probable that each one could speak every language; for St. Paul says of himself, that he "spake with tongues more than they all," clearly implying a limit in that gift, and a different limit in different persons. And it is certain that all had not the gift of "prophesying" suited to address such congregations as that soon about to meet, or even publicly to teach in ordinary assemblies. As in his later operations, so now, the blessed Spirit would doubtless show "diversities of operations," giving to "one the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge, to another prophecy," etc. But the cloven tongues sat upon each of them, and, by the joint effect of spiritual life imparted and of spiritual gifts bestowed, all were instantly set upon spiritual services; all led to become active witnesses for Christ and for his cross.

The fire did not fall on the Twelve to be by them communicated to the Seventy, and by them again to the ordinary flock. It came as directly on the head of the disciple whose name we never heard, as on that of the beloved and honored John. It did not confound John the Apostle in the promiscuous mass, or place his office at the disposal of the multitude; but confirmed it, and fitted him by new gifts to adorn and make full proof of his ministry. But it did not, on the other hand, leave the ordinary believers as mere spectators to see the spiritual work of the Lord committed wholly to the selected ministry; their part being passively to receive spiritual influences and illumination from those who had direct access to Him with whom is the supply of the Spirit.

This original blessing meets beforehand the error, which was likely to spring up, from looking on the true religion in the light in which all false ones are ever regarded--as a mystery to be confined to an initiated few, on whose offices the multitude must depend for acceptance with the invisible Power. Here was a religion that did single out and lift up some above their fellows, investing them with a high and solemn ministry; but from their ministry it swept away all seeming priesthood.

The usual idea of priesthood is that of a power standing between man and God, through which alone we may draw near and find mercy at his hands. But so far from any such characteristic belonging to the ministry of the gospel, it is distinguished as being an office, the special labor of which is to point each man direct to God, and to assure him that between him and the throne of grace there is no power, visible or invisible, and no mediator but One to whom alike apostle, evangelist, and the humblest penitent must look. True, all were not apostles, all were not evangelists, all were not prophets; but, in the only sense in which any were priests, all were priests. The one altar of the Cross, the one sacrifice of the Lamb, the one High Priest within the veil, were alone to be named in any light of peacemaking with God. To all, the privilege of offering up the sacrifices of praise and of prayer, of living bodies and of worldly goods, was equally open. No man was made a depository or storehouse wherein spiritual favors should be laid up for the use of those who might purchase or implore them at his hands. He was most honored who could most successfully turn the trust of men away from all other advocates, and fix it upon the Son of God alone.

"They all began to speak." This shows that the testimony of Christ was not borne by the ministry alone; that this chief work of the Church was not confined to official hands. The multitude of believers were not mere adherents, but living, speaking, burning agents in the great movements for the universal diffusion of God's message. Many feel as if religion, on the part of the ministry, was to be a matter of bold and public testimony; but on that of ordinary Christians, a heart secret between themselves and God. Let such sit down in sight of that first Christian scene; let them behold every countenance lighted up with the common joy, and hear every tongue speak under the common impulse, and then ask Bartimeus, or Mary, if the private disciple has not just as much cause to be a witness that Jesus lives, and that Jesus saves, as either James or John. Let them ask if it is like their religion that one lonely minister shall, on the Lord's day, bear witness before a thousand Christians, who decorously hear his testimony as worthy of acceptance by all, and then go away, and never repeat the strain in any human ear.

Looking at the universal movement of that pentecostal day, who could think that the new religion was ever to come down to this? that speaking of its joys, its hopes, its pardon, its mercy for the wide world, was to be considered a professional work, for set solemnities alone, and not to be a daily joy and heart's-ease to evergrowing multitudes of happy, simple men? Cheerless is the work of that Christian minister who, at set times, raises his testimony in the ears of a people, all of whom make a practice of hiding it in their hearts! Blessed in his office is he who knows that, while he in his own sphere proclaims the glad tidings, hundreds around him are ready, each one in his sphere, to make them their boast and their song! Spiritual office and

spiritual gifts vary greatly in degree, honor, and authority, and he who has the less ought to reverence him who has the greater, remembering who it is that dispenses them; but the greater should never attempt to extinguish the less, and to reduce the exercise of spiritual gifts within the limits of the public and ordained ministry. To do so, is to depart from primitive Christianity.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/william-arthur/section-ii-miraculous-effects/>

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