

Sermon Series: *The Person & Work of the Holy Spirit*

The Meaning of Pentecost

Acts 2:1-13 (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.
⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.
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.”

The final two verses of this text reveal two responses to events of the day of Pentecost. Verse twelve tells us that “all were amazed and perplexed.” Everyone thought this was amazing and confusing. However, some said, “What does this mean?” while others said, “It means nothing, because they are all drunk!” The first response is the better response and is the question before us today—“What does this mean?” What is the meaning of Pentecost?

Being Filled With the Holy Spirit

Some have said that this event is the beginning of believers being filled with the Holy Spirit. Is this correct? Is the meaning of Pentecost seen in the miracle of the filling with the Holy Spirit? Being “filled with the Holy Spirit” is not what is particularly amazing here. Being filled with the Spirit was not unique to the day of Pentecost. There are examples of being filled with the Spirit in the OT.

Many people from the beginning of recorded Israelite history had been “filled with the Spirit of God.” Bezalel and Oholiab were filled with the Spirit and given the gift of skill and craftsmanship in order to make all the furniture, utensils, and garments for the priests to conduct worship in the tabernacle (Ex 28:3; 31:2ff; 35:30-35). Moses was filled with the Holy Spirit. Samson and the other judges had been filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. The prophets were often filled with the Spirit when they prophesied (Mic 3:8). John the baptist was filled with the Spirit from the womb (Lk 1:15) and this was prior to Pentecost. His mother, Elizabeth, was filled with the Spirit when Mary told her she was pregnant (Lk 1:41) and this was prior to Pentecost. Zechariah, her husband and the

father of John, was also filled with the Holy Spirit and he prophesied about John at his birth (Lk 1:67ff). All of these events took place prior to Pentecost so the filling of the Spirit cannot be the most significant miracle of Pentecost.

The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit

Others have said that the miracle of Pentecost was the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but even this is not unknown in the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit was said to have been *in* Joshua (Num 27:18), Ezekiel (Ez 2:2; 3:24), and Daniel (Dan 4:8-9, 18; 5:11). This kind of language is certainly not normal, but neither is it unique. What is the significance of Pentecost? Remember what Jesus said to His disciples,

John 16:7

It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

Those of us who have been born on this side of Pentecost are far better off than the disciples themselves were who lived and walked along side Jesus. But why? Because the Holy Spirit came for the first time at Pentecost? Was not the Holy Spirit already present in the world and already with the disciples? Of course He was. What did Jesus mean by “I will send Him to you?” Speaking about the Holy Spirit, Jesus said to His disciples,

John 14:17

You know Him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you.

The Holy Spirit Was Already Present In the World

Yes, the Holy Spirit was in the world prior to Jesus’ coming. This was the point of [last week’s sermon](#). He was present in the world prior to the coming of Jesus and had been active in the world since the beginning of creation. Last Sunday I listed 11 ways (which can be condensed into 10) in which the Holy Spirit was present in the world prior to Pentecost.

1. The Holy Spirit was present in the world giving the gift of life and sustaining life.
2. The Holy Spirit was present in the world giving the gift of Interpretation of dreams.
3. The Holy Spirit was present in the world giving the gift of artistic skill and craftsmanship.
4. The Holy Spirit was present in the world giving the gift of leadership & miraculous deliverance.
5. The Holy Spirit was present in the world giving the gift of teaching & guidance.
6. The Holy Spirit was present in the world giving the gift of courage to overcome fear.
7. The Holy Spirit was present in the world giving the gift of boldness to reveal sin.
8. The Holy Spirit was present in the world giving the gift of hope.
9. The Holy Spirit was present in the world giving the gift of prophecy (speaking God’s word in the moment and predicting Messiah).
10. The Holy Spirit was present in the world giving the gift of regeneration (new birth).

The Disciples Were Born Again Prior to Pentecost

Some have taught that the miracle of Pentecost was that this was the beginning of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. However, as we saw last week, the Holy Spirit has been regenerating unbelievers even in the under the Old Covenant. And the disciples were certainly born again prior to Pentecost.

Jesus said to the disciples that the **Holy Spirit dwells with them** and that **they knew Him** (Jn 14:17). This means that the Holy Spirit had already regenerated the disciples. They were already “born again.” There can be no doubt that the Holy Spirit was at work in the individual lives of the disciples enabling them to work miracles and to understand the truth of Jesus’ identity. How else could the disciples have cast out demons and healed the sick of their diseases (Mk 6:7-13; Lk 9:1-10) but by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit? How else could Peter have understood that Jesus was the “Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16), but by the illuminating work of God’s Holy Spirit? In Jesus’ high priestly prayer, He prayed to the Father,

They Did Believe

John 17:8

For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

We know that the things of the Spirit and the things of God are foolishness to the natural man because those who are dead in sin cannot understand and embrace the significance of spiritual truth (Rom 8:7; 1 Cor 2:14). Yet the disciples *did* believe, so how else could this have happened except through the regenerating and illuminating power of the Holy Spirit? Jesus often chided the disciples, “O you of little faith...”¹ but they did *have* faith, even if it was little.

Their Names Were Written In Heaven

Furthermore, Jesus told the disciples when they returned from casting out demons not to rejoice that the demons were subject to them but to rejoice because “their names were written in heaven” (Lk 10:20). Then again in John 15:3 He said, “*Already you are clean because of the word I have spoken to you.*” Their names were “written in heaven” and they were “clean” because of the word. Clearly the disciples were already born again prior to Pentecost.

Jesus Words Pointed to a New Work of the Spirit

When Jesus said to the disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:15; 15:26; 16:7) and that the Holy Spirit would be *in* them (Jn 14:17), He was not denying that the Holy Spirit was already present and active in the world or in their lives. Some have stumbled over this saying and seen it as a contradiction. It is not a contradiction and there is no need to stumble over this. Remember Jesus said this on His last night with the disciples. He was saying these words to comfort His disciples and telling them that He would send them THE Comforter—His Holy Spirit.

At the Last Supper, Jesus said, “*This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood*” (Lk 22:20). Jesus was pointing to the fact that what was about to take place in the coming days, i.e. His suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, would effect forever a dramatic change in the way in which God would relate to His children. This does not mean that God had not previously related to them in other ways before for certainly He had. It simply means that

¹ Mt 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20.

the Lord God was about to do a new thing in the world and it would happen through His only Son Jesus Christ! Oh what bright words Jesus was speaking to these humble men!

Jesus was promising His disciples that He would send His Holy Spirit to them to be *with* them and *in* them in ways in which He was not at that moment with them and in them. Something incredibly new and amazing and wonderful was about to happen in relation to His Holy Spirit. Jesus was giving them a staggering promise that would be fulfilled within two months and would bring about epically glorious results. His promise would be fulfilled at the day of Pentecost. And this is where our text begins today.

What Is Pentecost?

The Day of Pentecost was the second of the three pilgrim festivals (preceded by Passover and followed by the Feast of Tabernacles [or Booths] four months later) in which Jews were required to travel to Jerusalem to present themselves before God and worship at the Temple.

The word Pentecost (πεντηκοστή *pentēkostē*) means “fiftieth.” It was to be celebrated on the fiftieth day (Lev 23:15-16) after Passover. After Passover seven sabbaths were to be counted and then Pentecost was to be commemorated on that next day, day fifty, which of course would have been a Sunday.

It was also called the “Feast of Harvest” (Ex 23:16) as it was celebrated at the beginning of the grain harvest. Another name for it is “The Feast of Weeks” due the seven weeks counted from Passover. Jews still celebrate this occasion today and refer to this feast as the “Feast of Weeks,” or *Shavuot* (in Hebrew). It is also referred to as the “Day of First Fruits” (Num 28:26-31) because of the first harvest of grain.

The festival was primarily a harvest festival and celebrated the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest. Traditionally, grain harvest extended from Passover, when the first grain was cut (Dt 16:9) around mid-April, to Pentecost, which marked its conclusion in mid-June.²

On the day after Passover, the people began to celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread, which lasted a full seven days. On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread the priest would wave a sheaf of newly harvested grain before the Lord in thanksgiving for the harvest He had graciously provided.

By the first Century A.D. Pentecost also had the added significance of being celebrated as the anniversary of the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai. This is deduced from the facts found in the books of Exodus and Numbers.

They left Egypt on the 15th of the first month (Num. 33:3) [which was the day after Passover], and arrived at Sinai the first [day] of the third month (Ex. 19:1, note “the same day”), which would be the forty-sixth day. The next day [the 47th] Moses went up into the mount, and three days later the law was delivered (Ex. 19:11)!³

² Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale reference library (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 1007.

³ Arthur W. Pink, *The Holy Spirit*, electronic ed. (Escondido, CA: Ephesians Four Group, 2002).

That's fifty days from Passover. Pentecost (i.e. *Shavuot*) is still celebrated as the anniversary of the giving of the law among contemporary Jews. It is a significant celebration and serves as an annual renewal of the Mosaic covenant. Jews view this celebration as a renewal of wedding vows between God and Israel. "On this day," one Jewish website notes, "God swore eternal devotion to us, and we in turn pledged everlasting loyalty to Him."⁴ This year the Jewish celebration will fall on Tuesday, June 7, 2011. We Christians will celebrate Pentecost on the fiftieth day following Easter (i.e. Passover) which, this year, will be Sunday, June 12.

Now lets reread verse one.

Acts 2:1 (ESV)

1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.

The first question is, who is the 'they' who were gathered? The first chapter of Acts tells us the answer. The 'they' refers to the Eleven, who then become the Twelve again after choosing Matthias to replace Judas, Jesus' mother, Mary, and His brothers⁵ and sisters, and some other women, all together about 120 persons (Acts 1:15).

1) Pentecost Was a Fulfillment of God's Promise

The second question is, why were they "all together in one place?" What were they doing all together? Answering that question directs us to our first point in understanding the meaning of Pentecost. ***Pentecost was a fulfillment of God's promise.***

Luke tells us that after Jesus' resurrection, He was with them, teaching them for 40 days (Acts 1:3). During that time He told them to wait in Jerusalem and not to leave.

Luke 24:49

And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.

Acts 1:4-5

4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me;

5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Jesus tells His disciples and the whole 120 believers that He is sending the promise of the Father. The "promise of the Father" will "clothe them with power from on high" and will be a "baptism with the Holy Spirit." The coming of the Holy Spirit will be the fulfillment of the "promise of the Father." Peter clarifies this in Acts 2:33. Paul further explains this to the Ephesians Christians (1:13) and to all the churches in Galatia (3:14).

We see this promise of an outpouring of God's Holy Spirit in many, many places throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. Moses yearned for it.

⁴ Source http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/609663/jewish/What-is-Shavuot.htm accessed 8 April 2011.

⁵ See Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3; Jn 2:12; 7:3, 5, 10.

Numbers 11:29

But Moses said to him, Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!

Solomon spoke of it.

Proverbs 1:23

*If you turn at my reproof,
behold, I will pour out my spirit to you;
I will make my words known to you.*

Isaiah foresaw it.

Isaiah 44:3⁶

*For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground;
I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring,
and my blessing on your descendants.*

Joel foretold it.

Joel 2:28

*And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.*

Ezekiel wrote of it.

Ezekiel 39:29

And I will not hide my face anymore from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD.

All of these verses point to the fact that what happened at Pentecost was a fulfillment of God's promises. **Pentecost means that God the Father keeps His promises.**

Pentecost Also Means Jesus Keeps His Promise

Jesus' final words before ascending into heaven were,

Acts 1:8-9

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

⁶ See also Is 32:15.

Pentecost also means that through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is enabled to keep His promise as well. When Jesus commissioned the disciples to go into all the nations and make disciples, He promised that He would personally be with them, always, even to the end of the age (Mt 28:19-20). How could Jesus keep that promise when He bodily ascended into heaven and is now seated at the right hand of God the Father?⁷

He can always be with us? Because His Spirit has been poured out in our hearts! He never leaves us because His Spirit dwells within us. When we put our faith in Jesus and trust in Him to save us from our sins and keep us safe from the wrath of God, then we are adopted into God's family by Him giving us His Holy Spirit.

Gal 4:6 (ESV)

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father!

Romans 8:9 (ESV)

9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

Jesus can keep His promise to be with us always, even to the end of our lives because the Holy Spirit we receive when we put faith in Jesus is the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7). God's Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus are the same Spirit. When the very Spirit of the Most High God dwells within us and He is the same Spirit as the Spirit of Christ, we can never be separated from Him!!!

One of the glorious truths of the meaning of Pentecost is because we live this side of cross, Christ has purchased for us the gift of having His Holy Spirit dwell within us to the end of our lives! He is not far from us, He dwells within us. This is a great mystery, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27).

Never Separated From Him

We never have to worry about being separated⁸ from Him. We do not have to fear, as David did, the Lord will take His Spirit from us (Psalm 51:11). David witnessed the Holy Spirit being taken from Saul and he feared because of His sin that God would take away His Spirit from Him. God removed the Holy Spirit from Samson (Jud 16:20). In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit would come upon certain people for certain tasks, but He would not always abide. However, Jesus changed that! Today, since Jesus has achieved perfect righteousness and has atoned for sin, Jesus had poured out His Holy Spirit in a permanent way.

Ephesians 1:13-14 (ESV)

*13 In him [Jesus] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,
14 who is the guarantee of our⁹ inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

The person to whom God graciously gives His Spirit (by faith in Jesus) need never fear that the Lord will take back His Spirit. Jesus truly will keep His word. If His Spirit is within you, He will **never** leave you nor forsake you.

⁷ Mt 26:64; Mk 14:62; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 8:1; 12:2.

⁸ See Romans 8:35-39; cf. Rom 5:5.

⁹ See also 2 Cor 1:22.

This is the first meaning of Pentecost. God fulfilled His promises and through the out pouring of the Holy Spirit, Jesus fulfills His promises.

2) Pentecost Was the First-fruits of a Great Harvest

Pentecost was the “Feast of Harvest,” where the first-fruits of the harvest were brought before the Lord and the people offered praise and thanks to Him. After Jesus ascended into heaven, only about 120 people gather in Jerusalem to await His promised Holy Spirit. Even though they were small in number, they obeyed Him and they waited.

However, 10 days later, when the day of Pentecost arrived, and the Holy Spirit came upon them, and Peter preached and 3,000 people put their faith in Jesus and were born again. What an amazing harvest of souls! From that point on, there were people being added to the Lord every day (Acts 2:47).

The Holy Spirit was poured out upon those who walked with Jesus so that they could be empowered to preach the gospel with boldness and conviction. People were there from 15 different countries and they all heard them speaking “the mighty works of God” in their own language. They heard message of the gospel and through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they believed! **A global harvest had begun!** May the Lord God Almighty be pleased to use us to continue and hasten what He began on that day!

This is the miracle of Pentecost! The gospel had leaped over the wall of Jerusalem. What had previously been confined primarily to ethnic Israel was now spilling over into other nations. And this was only the beginning of a global movement of God’s Holy Spirit.

3) Pentecost Was the Inauguration of the New Covenant

The third point in the meaning of Pentecost is that it was the inauguration of a New Covenant. Jesus said, *“This is the new covenant which is poured out in My blood.”* Let’s compare the covenant at Mt. Sinai with the new covenant at Mt. Zion.

The Mosaic covenant was given at Mt. Sinai 50 days following their freedom from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. The New Covenant was given on Mt. Zion 50 days following humanity’s freedom from the bondage of slavery to sin.

The Israelites physical freedom was purchased at the cost of the firstborn sons of every Egyptian. Spiritual freedom was purchased at the cost of the firstborn Son of God Himself.

Fifty days after the passover lamb was slaughtered in Egypt God spoke His law out of the fire to Israel. Fifty days after the passover lamb, whose name is Jesus, was slaughtered in Jerusalem, God spoke one gospel message through tongues of fire to people who spoke 15 different languages.

After the Exodus, God made promises to Israel that day which took the form of a wedding ceremony. The wedding present was the gift of the law. At Pentecost, in a new covenant ceremony, God fulfilled those original promises to Israel and the bride of Christ, people from every tribe and tongue and nation, was formed into one beautiful body. The wedding present was the gift of the Holy Spirit! There has never been given any greater gift! (Lk 11:13).

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came as He had never come before. Something then transpired which inaugurated a new era for the world, a new power for righteousness, a new basis for fellowship.¹⁰

What is the meaning of Pentecost? The meaning is that God is God who keeps His word and never breaks His promises. He began on that day a great harvest of souls! He is an amazing God who for incredibly deep and wonderfully fearful reasons has decided to take a people, an unworthy people, and lavish them with grace through the giving of His only Son, so that they could become a people for His own treasured possession. His love is so deep that He chooses to put His own Spirit, the Holy Spirit of His Son, within the soul of man so that we would be His people and He will be our God and in the intimacy of that joyful communion, dwell forever.

Rev 21:3

Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God.

Is there any sweeter verse in the Bible? “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man!” Oh people, who is this wonderful God whom we worship!? Let us worship Him in Spirit and in truth. May we love Him with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength.

Blessed be the name of Jesus who poured the Holy Spirit of God upon us and dwelled among us and who now dwells among us through the powerful presence of His personal Spirit!!

¹⁰ Arthur W. Pink, *The Holy Spirit*, electronic ed. (Escondido, CA: Ephesians Four Group, 2002).