

Pentecost

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What day is Christmas? December 25th. When is Easter? Sometime in the spring, late March or April. We read in the book of Acts that the Holy Spirit first came to dwell with man at Pentecost. When is Pentecost? . . . Silence . . . It is interesting how we believe in the trinity and we celebrate Christmas, the coming of the Son of God to earth, but we do not celebrate or even know when Pentecost is. It would be good if we regained balance in this area and came to appreciate both the Son and the Spirit for the huge role they both play in our Christian lives. Let's take some time to become more familiar with the Spirit's coming at Pentecost.

In the book of Luke, we read of what Jesus did and what He taught, until His return to heaven. The book of Acts, Luke's second book, begins right where the book of Luke left off. Jesus had died, been raised from the dead, and had spent 40 days with His followers showing many proofs that He truly was alive. He also taught them, during this time, about the kingdom of God. Jesus instructed them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father. He told them of how the Holy Spirit would come upon them, how they would be baptized by the Spirit, and how they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

So that's what they did. After Jesus ascended back to heaven on the Mount of Olives, they took the short walk back to Jerusalem. They gathered in the upper room and waited. Acts 2:14 tells us how 120 followers of Christ gathered *"in one accord, devoting themselves to prayer"*.

Jesus had been crucified during the Passover celebration. He had been raised from the dead and had spent 40 days with His followers before His ascension. Now the disciples were waiting and praying as the Jewish celebration known as Pentecost approached.

Pentecost is the Greek name of an Old Testament festival known as the "Feast of Weeks" (Leviticus 23:15; Deuteronomy 16:9). It was a "week of weeks" or 7 weeks after Passover. Seven weeks add up to 49 days. The day after was "the Fiftieth" or Pentecost. The celebration commemorated the giving of the Law to Moses at Mt. Sinai and was also a celebration of gratitude to God for the harvest.

Each year Pentecost fell at the end of May or the beginning of June. At this time of year traveling conditions were at their best. This meant that large crowds of Jews from many different countries would make the journey for this special religious celebration. In addition, by Jewish law, every male Jew living within 30 kilometers of Jerusalem was required to attend the Pentecost celebration. On Pentecost it was also against the law to work, so because of all of these factors Jerusalem would have been very crowded, with many people in the streets, with Jews from many countries, during the Pentecost events that we find in Acts 2.

“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 disciples had been praying and waiting for ten days. Not knowing what the future held, they just stayed faithful to the last things Christ had told them: *“Don’t leave Jerusalem. Wait for the Holy Spirit. Be my witnesses.”* And on the tenth day, the Father’s promise was fulfilled.

Many times in the Old Testament we read how the Holy Spirit would come upon a person for a specific reason and then the Holy Spirit would depart from him or her once the purpose had passed. The prophet Ezekiel wrote of something different that would one day occur between the Holy Spirit and God’s people:

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

This is what we see occurring in Acts 2. As Christ had proclaimed in 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.”***

Christ had commanded *“to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me’ . . . ‘for you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit’ . . . ‘and will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you’”* (Acts 1:4-5,8).

At Pentecost, in Acts 2, we see the coming of the Holy Spirit. As important as Christ’s birth was at Christmas, so was the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Spirit came powerfully as a sound of a violent wind and what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came upon each one of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. There was no mistaking that the Spirit of God had come. We don’t know exactly how this took place, but it must have been unbelievable.

In response, the disciples seemed to flood out into the crowded streets. They began to preach and were speaking in languages that they did not even know, so that the diverse crowd of Jews could understand. Something supernatural was taking place that demanded an explanation. It could either be from God or from Satan, but the ones who were speaking in different languages were declaring the wonders of God, so surely it could not be from Satan. It must be God. They were amazed and intrigued, but others chose to be cynical. There will always be some like this, no?

Don’t be surprised. Christ has already told us that, *“The gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. But the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few”* (Matthew 7:13-14). Expect that the majority will harden their hearts against God, but focus even more prayers and more energy on those whose hearts are sensitive to and searching for the things of God. As Jesus said in John 5:19, *“we can’t do anything on our own, we can only do what we see the Father doing.”* Whether in your home or in your workplace, focus your attention on those whose hearts are more receptive. Trusting that God is already beginning to draw them to Himself.

All of this was staged by the Holy Spirit to bring about a spiritual awakening. It is not that different than how many of us came to Christ. Through various events or relationships in our lives, we came to Christ. John 6:44 tells us that, *“No one can come to me (Christ) unless the Father who sent me draws him.”* God sets the stage so that we may *“come to our senses”*, much as the prodigal son did, so that we might repent and believe and be saved.

The works of the Spirit and the speaking in tongues caused curiosity and brought attention to the Spirit’s coming. It gathered a crowd and stirred interest. Once the crowd had gathered, Peter, *“standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them”*.

He first discounts the belief of some in the crowd that the disciples are drunk. Peter argues that drunkenness is not possible because it is only 9:00 AM. Some might say that this is a weak argument, because there are alcoholics that drink that early in the morning, but those in the Jewish culture did not. The time before 9:00 AM was for morning devotions. They did not eat or drink before 9:00 AM, especially on a Sabbath or on a Jewish holiday like Pentecost. This practice would have been so known as the cultural norm, that as soon as Peter brought attention to this, the cynics would have submitted to Peter’s reasoning.

Now this was a spur of the moment, spontaneous sermon to an international crowd. His hearers, who were in the city for Pentecost, had a good understanding of the Old Testament. Because of this, Peter started from Old Testament prophecies pointing out that day's events as fulfillment of scripture about the Holy Spirit. It was the fulfillment of the scriptures which they already claimed to believe. We see in this unprepared sermon how well Jesus must have prepared His disciples. Peter knew both the truth and the spirit of the scriptures. Yes, he had memorized the scriptures, but Peter could also clearly bring together the larger truths of scripture and the gospel and present them in a way that pointed his listeners clearly from the Old Testament to Christ.

Peter first pointed them to the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹ And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; ²⁰ the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. ²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

²² Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— ²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”

These descriptions are likely a combination of the Old Testament symbolism, events surrounding Christ's death, and future events in the last days.

Christ's crucifixion was planned by the Father. Some would disagree, but if Jesus' death is nothing more than mob violence and a combination of many individual's choices and freewill that just happened to coincide in the right way on the same day, then how could it be possible that we are saved *“with the precious blood of Jesus Christ who was chosen before the creation of the world”*? (1 Peter 1:18-21).

Our sovereign God set an intricate plan in place that is evidenced from Genesis, through Moses, through the Passover lamb, the sacrificial system, the writings of King David, the prophets, and the many details that were set in place so that in the *“fullness of time God sent His son”* to be the Savior of the World (Galatians 4:4).

(800 BC) Isaiah 53:3 says, *“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”*

(1040 BC) Psalm 22:7-8 says, *“All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: ‘He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.’”*

Psalm 22:17-18 says, "I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."

Our salvation through Christ's crucifixion and resurrection was not reliant on the fickleness of man or the probability of chance. "It was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God."

We follow a God who has intentionally set a plan in place to redeem us to Himself. It is this God who holds us in the palm of His hand, even down to the daily details of our lives. We are not alone. We should not worry like those who have no God. We have been drawn near by the Sovereign God of all creation.

Continuing in Peter's sermon in Acts 2:

"²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. ²⁵ For David says concerning him,

'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; ²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. ²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. ²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'

²⁹ Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, ³¹ he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. ³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses (Acts 1:8). ³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing (John 16:7 'I will send Him to you'). ³⁴ For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, ³ until I make your enemies your footstool.'

³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' ³⁸ And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to

himself.’⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this crooked generation.’⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”

Can you imagine what it must have been like that night when all the disciples got together again? The testimonies. The tears of joy. The renewed sense of awe in their Savior. God had moved in their hearts to pray. They had obeyed and God had worked in unbelievable ways. In the same city that had screamed at the top of their lungs “Crucify Him!” there now stood 3,000 believers in Jesus Christ.

This was in keeping with the words of (500 BC) Zechariah 12:10: ***“¹⁰ And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.”***

This was the same Peter who was often impulsive, who was bad tempered, who talked too much, who had cut off the servant’s ear when Jesus was arrested, who had denied Christ, and yet here he was preaching to the masses, and 3,000 people believed in Jesus Christ. That is truly the testimony of the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. The God who gives us second chances and gives us the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish what we could never do on our own.

Out of all the people that God could have reached out to first with the power of the Gospel and the presence of the Holy Spirit, He chose those who crucified His Son. Isn’t that remarkable that God gave “good” to those who had given Him “evil”? That He chose to grant life to those who had brought death? That He decided to grant faith to those who had hardened their hearts to unbelief? May it strengthen our confidence that if we will repent and believe, He will forgive and draw us in to His embrace.

It is interesting to note that the conviction of sin and repentance did not come immediately after the violent wind, the tongues of fire or even the speaking in tongues. It came after Peter preached of Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:14 highlights the role of preaching Christ in these words, ***“¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?”***

The truth of God accompanied by the Spirit of God (John 16:8) brought repentance. Peter preached the truth and through it the Spirit convicted the Jews of their sin.

These new believers did not just claim the name of Christ, the confirmation of their salvation is seen in the fruit of their repentance and the transformation of their lives, in Acts 2:42-47.

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were

together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

The Holy Spirit had come to dwell in the hearts of those who believed, and now the Gospel of Jesus Christ showed its fruit in their love for God and their commitment to each other. The Gospel so changed them that it resulted in love, generosity and a sense of family between the believers. Together God used their testimony to bring even more people to Himself.

May this be true in our lives and in our church. May the Spirit of God move in our midst for His glory and the salvation of many in our world.