

Pentecost: Power Promised & Received

June 9, 2019

Acts 2:1-13

Reading: Leviticus 23:15-21 and Acts 2:1-13

Today is celebrated as Pentecost Sunday. I have chosen our passage out of Acts chapter 2 for this reason – open your Bible to Acts chapter 2. As we examine Pentecost of nearly 2000 years ago we need to understand Pentecost of the Old Testament, its relationship to the Passover celebration of Israel being freed from slavery in Egypt (this year Passover was celebrated on April 19th), also the promises of Jesus as he walked and taught before his crucifixion, death and resurrection, and finally what Pentecost means for us today.

Power Promised

We begin with the power promised by Jesus that was and is extraordinary! As Jesus prepared to ascend to heaven, he told his disciples, “**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.**” (Acts 1:8) Jesus promised the disciples the power of God and it will be this power that will carry the Gospel of Jesus “**to the end of the earth**”. After Jesus’ resurrection he appeared to the disciples and “**opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,** ⁴⁶ **and said to them, ... ‘I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.’**” (Luke 24:45-49) Jesus instructs the disciples to stay in Jerusalem for their protection until they are filled with “**the promise of my Father**” the power of Holy Spirit or as Jesus says here, “**until you are clothed with power from on high.**” This power Jesus is speaking of is part of and also beyond the power of new spiritual birth when one believes in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. I think this is clear from the words Jesus uses; “**the**

Holy Spirit has come upon you” and “clothed with power” and it is also clear from the effects of this extraordinary “power” described in Acts chapter 2. Also this experience of the Holy Spirit’s power at Pentecost comes after the disciples were saved or born again for we read when the 72 returned to Jesus from their missionary journey, Jesus tells them He gave his power for their mission and there is a power to come “but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” (Luke 10:20) They are saved, they believe and there is power, spiritual power to come.

Power Received

Jesus’ promised that the disciples would receive power when “the Holy Spirit has come upon you” and “clothed with power” this was a promise given to sustain them for the mission of world evangelism and all the ministry to support Jesus’ mission for the church and his followers. The disciples, the church and believers through the generations “are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.” (2 Corinthians 5:20) “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) We, my beloved, are not released from Jesus’ command to be his ambassadors to the lost world because evangelism had not yet been completed – our mission is not finished.

History teaches us that the power of God is still needed; changing not only believers from the spiritually death to those living by the power of God to overcome the evil of the world, but the Holy Spirit still manifests extraordinary power as he did at Pentecost. The church has expanded and people have come to Christ throughout history, but there have also been times of extraordinary outpouring of the Spirit’s power. Jonathan Edwards, pastored with what many would have labeled “limited success” then suddenly (*you will see this word suddenly used several times today*) then suddenly he became the leader of what has

become known as the Great Awakening 289 years ago. Edwards said this, “From the fall of man to our day, the work of redemption in its effect has mainly been carried on by remarkable (*or extraordinary*) communications of the Spirit of God. Though there *is* a more constant influence of God’s Spirit always in some degree attending his ordinances, yet the way in which the greatest things have been done towards carrying on this work, always have been by remarkable effusions (*outpourings*), at special seasons of mercy. (*A History of Redemption*, Works, vol. 1, p. 539) In other words, from time to time, God has moved in extraordinary ways in the history of Christ’s Church and the Christian movement. He has poured out his Spirit in fresh, new and dramatic ways. God’s power through the Holy Spirit came suddenly and the effects were Pentecostal and the Great Awakening was birthed. These times have been called times of revival or awakening or reformation.

Pentecost was the first of these great outpourings on Christ’s Church and until the task of world evangelization is completed, I believe it is our duty to pray for fresh seasons of the extraordinary outpourings of God’s Spirit; to awaken and empower the church and to penetrate the final frontiers of world evangelization. With this understanding we come to our text this morning – not from a distant historical event or unrepeatable event, but an event of promise. Much of the church has gone to sleep and no longer has God’s power and there is much to learn from Pentecost, much to take hold of and much to affect the way followers of Jesus Christ live their lives.

Pentecost

Let me begin in verse 1 of Acts 2, “When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.” Let me focus first on the word Pentecost. Why did

Jesus choose Pentecost as the day when he poured out the Spirit on the disciples? Two reasons come to my mind and the two are really related and could be combined.

First, on this Jewish holiday there would be a lot of pilgrims in Jerusalem from across the known world. Pentecost was one of three Jewish feasts that called for a Jew to return to Jerusalem. It got its name, Pentecost, meaning fiftieth from the fact that it took place 50 days after the Passover. Passover this year was April 19th and today is 51 days later. Second, it was a feast of harvest as it is called in Exodus chapter 23 and Deuteronomy 16. This added symbolism as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in extraordinary power of God resulted in a great harvest of souls and was a witness to the world since there were not only Jewish pilgrims who had returned to Jerusalem but Jerusalem was also where several trade routes came together and there were people from all the known nations there. It was extraordinary outpouring of God's power that resulted in over 3000 people giving their lives to Jesus.

Having spent part of my life as a missionary it saddens me the term "Pentecostal Power" has for many people come to be associated with speaking in tongues rather than the extraordinary power of God to harvest souls in his plan for world evangelism. I will return to the miracle of tongues in our passage this morning in a few minutes. But know the main point is the harvesting of souls for the Kingdom of God, over 3000 souls – tongues was a tool God provided, but tongues was not the main point of Pentecost.

Suddenly

Look in your Bible at verse 2, notice the word "suddenly". "And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire

house where they were sitting.” I want you to focus on the word “suddenly” to drive home a point that the Holy Spirit is sovereign and not bound by anyone’s timing other than carrying out the plan of the triune God. God instructs us by faith we are to pray day and night for the outpouring of His power from on high, but let me clear, we cannot make the Spirit come. God is in charge, not us, it is God’s plan for salvation not ours. We are to seek his daily indwelling presence and surrender our will to his will and walk in obedience, but we do not command God, he commands us. When God the Holy Spirit comes, he comes suddenly and often unexpectedly. The Spirit loves those he is sent to and serves for the glory of God the Father and God the Son, and to carry out his plan, but the Spirit decides when and where to come, not us.

In the summer of 1871 two women of Dwight L. Moody’s congregation felt a burden to pray for Moody. Moody’s son later wrote of this time, “They wanted the Lord to give him a baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire.” Not aware that this was their desire Moody would see them praying in the front row of church and he was irritated by them. After a while he gave in and in September, he began to pray with these ladies every Friday afternoon. Moody had felt he was becoming a sounding brass with little power. The prayer times brought some encouragement. On November 24, 1871 Moody’s church building was destroyed by the Great Chicago Fire. Shortly after he traveled to New York to seek financial help. Day and night he walked the streets praying, desperately desiring the touch of God’s power in his life. Then suddenly, Moody wrote latter of this time, “Oh, what a day! I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it; it is almost too sacred an experience to name ... I can only say that God revealed himself to me and I had such an experience of his love that I had to ask him to stay my hand. I went to preaching again. The sermons were not different; I did not present new truths and yet

hundreds were converted. I would not now be placed back where I was before that blessed experience if you should give me all the world – it would be small dust in the balance.” (W. R. Moody, *The Life of D. L. Moody*, New York, 1900, pg. 149)

Moody prayed and he obeyed and he waited, but he did not make the Spirit come. The Spirit came suddenly and when he came the effect was Pentecostal – his preaching was blessed and many were saved. It was not the experience of tongues but of harvest. When the Spirit comes in power – he comes suddenly – he comes on his own terms and at God’s appointed time and there is a harvesting of souls.

Wind and Fire

The next thing I would like you to take note of is found in verses 2 and 3, “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.” At times the Holy Spirit makes himself known in visible and audible ways. In the Old Testament there was the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire guiding and protecting Israel. At Jesus’ baptism there was a dove. In Acts chapter 4 the building shook. As Stephen was attacked and stoned his face was like the face of an angel. In chapter 16 of Acts there is an earthquake. The Holy Spirit works through miraculous power sometimes quietly and sometimes in dramatic ways. Why the Holy Spirit gives his power in dramatic ways for some and not others, and at some times and not at other times is a mystery to us, but the Spirit’s work is part of God’s sovereign plan of salvation. The Holy Spirit is not fire, nor tongues, nor wind, nor a dove, nor an earthquake, nor an angel. The Holy Spirit uses power in whatever method he chooses and we should not confuse the method with who the Holy Spirit is.

The Spirit may appear to many as was the case with Pentecost or to a few or even one. John White, the psychiatrist, missionary and author, tells us of his experience of the Spirit's manifestation in his book, *When the Spirit Comes with Power, written in 1989*, "On one occasion it was as I prayed with the elders and deacons in my home. I had tried to teach them what worship was . . . We then turned to prayer. Perhaps partly to be a model to them I began to express worship, conscious of the poverty of my words. Then suddenly (*take note the word!*) I saw in front of me a column of flame of about two feet in width. It seemed to arise from beneath the floor and to pass through the ceiling of the room. I knew—without being told—knew by some infallible kind of knowing that transcended the use of my intellect, that I was in the presence of the God of holiness. In stunned amazement I watched a rising column of flames in our own living room, while my brothers remained with their heads quietly bowed and their eyes closed . . . I felt that I was in the presence of reality and that my brothers were asleep. For years afterward I never spoke of the incident. The others who were present could not have perceived the blend of stark terror and joy that threatened to sweep me away. How could I live and see what I saw? Garbled words of love and of worship tumbled out of my mouth as I struggled to hang on to my self-control. I was no longer trying to worship; worship was undoing me, pulling me apart. And to be pulled apart was both terrifying and full of glory." (p. 87–88) White was careful about speaking of this event because it is not about the person it is about the power of God to save and transform and it is about his glory.

From Knowing to Experiencing

This is what happened, it would seem, to the disciples in Acts 2 when they saw tongues of fire and heard the violent wind. It filled them with an overwhelming sense of the presence of God. Until that moment we can imagine

them praying as Luke records just prior to this, “All these (*the disciples*) with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.” (Acts 1:14) They rejoiced that God was present, there with them as they prayed. As Jesus taught, “**where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.**” (Matthew 18:20) They felt and knew his presence.

Then suddenly something extraordinary happens that transforms their knowledge of God’s presence into the experience of his presence. They see fire on each other’s heads and they hear a loud wind. They are filled and undone at the same moment with experiencing God’s outpouring of the Holy Spirit and then fire not only is on their heads but I am sure they had a similar experience as when the two disciples were on the journey to Emmaus and Jesus appeared and when he left, the disciples said, “**Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?**” (Luke 24:32) They were overwhelmed with God’s greatness and they praised him and like John White they were filled and undone at the same time. We know from verses 12 and 13 in our passage, “**And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’**” The disciples were overwhelmed – filled with wonder and fear of God. In fact, they were so overwhelmed others there ¹³ “**mocking said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’**”

Overwhelming Praise

The disciples were overwhelmed to the point they had to speak. Beginning in verse 4, “**they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. ...** ⁶ **they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ...** ¹¹ **we hear them telling in our**

own tongues the mighty works of God.” They were overwhelmed by the Spirit’s power with the greatness of God – it was no longer just knowledge, but experience as well and this gave them the boldness to preach and witness to all those present from many people and language groups the greatness of God in their own language and many believed.

Fullness of the Spirit

Many people refer to verse 4, “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” as being baptized in the Holy Spirit and have confused this experience as the benchmark of spiritual experiences and the proof of being filled with the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues. We know speaking in a tongue was a vehicle used for God’s glory and to reveal his power, but the focus was for people to experience the power of God and be saved.

In chapter 4 of Acts Luke again speaks of people being filled with the Holy Spirit, “when they had prayed (*Notice they were praying and seeking God*), the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” (Acts 4:31) Here the vehicle the Spirit uses is not tongues but an earthquake or the shaking of the building. The focus is not the shaking, but it is a confirmation used by the Spirit.

In addition, verses 5 to 8 make clear the purpose of tongues given by the Spirit. Reading beginning at verse 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?” Today we have a problem and it found at both extremes. First, one is not saved or is a 2nd class Christian if they do not speak in tongues and not just any tongues but a holy language of tongues that is not understood except by God.

Nowhere in the Bible does one find that tongues is “the” gift from God. In chapter 10 of Acts the Spirit again uses tongues to communicate the power and glory of God. “The gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God.” (Acts 10:45-46) Here again the Gentiles heard the message of God in their own language. The second extreme on the other end of the spectrum is cessationists who believe there is no longer any miraculous gifts of the Spirit. This, like the belief to filled with the Spirit means one must speak in tongues is not found in the Bible. Where does this leave us? The Spirit moves as he chooses, when he chooses and where he chooses. As a young believer I was thought that the gifts of the Spirit has ceased, but I have seen genuine miracles, signs and wonders while working overseas among unreached people groups. Here in the states I have seen biblical tongues one time. Let me quickly relate the story to you. I was visiting a church that Joyce and I had belonged to and served in ministry at before we moved. I had come back for a missions conference. The sanctuary was filled for an evening teaching, suddenly (*notice the word suddenly*) a man stood up and spoke in another language for just a short time maybe 15 to 30 seconds and sat down. This not only got my attention but most of the people there for this church was a cessation church and it was a moment of quiet. Quickly another man stood up and said he was from Africa, I cannot remember which country, and that the first man had spoken in his language, which he was shocked to hear in Reno and the message

was that there was undisclosed sin in the leadership of the church and because of this sin the church was suffering and God would expose the sin. A few days later the sin was exposed and one of the pastors quickly resigned.

Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.” (1 Corinthians 12:7-11) Paul makes it clear tongues is not the benchmark of spiritual gifts, writing, “Now I want you all to speak in tongues (*I believe as spoken of earlier in his letter, Paul is referring to tongues which is a known languages that would enable disciples and followers of Christ to evangelize gentiles of the nations by preaching the gospel in their language.* “Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.” (1 Corinthians 14:5) My experience in Reno fit Paul’s instruction.

So, the purpose of spiritual gifts and for the Holy Spirit to manifest the power of God is for the gospel to go out into the world, so that, people will know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and this brings glory to God.

This is the caution - whenever revival comes - whenever the Holy Spirit is poured out in extraordinary power - this causes division in the Christian community. Some genuinely inquire as to what this is and test all things, and hold

fast to what is good. Others seek new ways that are not consistent with God's Word, and still others stand outside and mock and write off the enthusiasm as merely human, "They are filled with new wine."

There are some signs today that we are in the first stages of a genuine, widespread awakening, maybe not in the broad church, but in the remnant church. Not the least of which is the undying desire and prayer in the hearts of so many of Jesus' remnant church, praying that God would rend the heavens and come down and revive his church and empower us for the final thrust of world evangelization. If this is true, what we need very much is discerning, expectant, open hearts that say, "What indeed is this?" and then listen for a biblical answer. It is my heart's desire to give you sound biblical answers that come from God's Word. Answers that you can test by God's Word for all things are to be tested by the Word of God. This is the bottom line; we are to spend our lives living the Word of God and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ! Amen!