

# Pentecost!

July 1, 2018

Acts 2:1-13

We come today to the text that describes the first Christian day of Pentecost. Now, in 2018, that day would have been Sunday the 20<sup>th</sup> of May. And I want you to know that if it were up to me, this Pentecost (50<sup>th</sup> day after the Passover) would be celebrated each year on the same level as Christmas and Easter. Certainly, the Scriptures put it at this level. With Christmas, we celebrate the birth of our Savior. With Easter, we celebrate the resurrection of our Savior (following His death on Good Friday.) And on Pentecost, we celebrate the promised coming of the Holy Spirit. And yes, it is on the same level. It is equally important. I would like to begin our study by referencing a few texts that point us forward to this day, this day when the Spirit of God was poured out on His people.

I could spend this whole sermon going back through the various texts, but I hope a flavoring will be enough. I think of the prophet Ezekiel, who was told to announce to the valley of dry bones that there would be a day when these dead, dry bones would come to life, when the breath of God would enter them and they would become a mighty army. This is that day.

Or, I think of the prophet Joel who said that there would be a day when, “I will pour out my Spirit on all people,” (Joel 2:28) when there would be prophesying by not just one or two prophets, but by many, men and women, young and old. There would be cataclysmic events in the natural world. In that day, there would be salvation, deliverance! In fact, Peter is going to quote this prophecy later in the chapter.

Or how about John the Baptist? When he was baptizing people in the wilderness and they were thinking he was the greatest thing since sliced bread, he said, “I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” (Luke 3:16) This was that day.

Or, how about Jesus? He said this to His disciples as He prepared them for His departure, “But I tell you the truth: it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. 8 When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and

righteousness and judgment: [9](#) in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; [10](#) in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; [11](#) and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. [12](#) “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. [13](#) But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. [14](#) He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. [15](#) All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. (John 16:7-15) This is that day.

I will rest my case at this point. The whole of Scripture has pointed to this day in the very same way in which the whole of Scripture has pointed to the coming of Christ. Indeed, the two are connected and parallel. So, let's read the text and see what happened on that day. READ Acts 2:1-13.

Main point: Since the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has come to reside in believers in a tangible, miraculous, and powerful way.

On that day, God poured out His Spirit, a pouring that He continues to this very day. And as we will see, a new aspect of this presence of God is that it is individual as well as corporate. Through the Spirit, we as believers can have a personal relationship with the God of the universe. In other words, God's Spirit not only resides in the midst of His gathered people, but inside the individual believer. Until this point in time, that had never been mankind's experience. But now, it is our normal experience. It is our everyday life. But this is when it began.

So, hang on tight, there is much to take in. But I want you to know from the start how important I view the events of that day. They are every bit as important as the birth, or death, or resurrection of Jesus. (2 parts)

I. Starting that day, God sent His Spirit to all of His people. vv. 1-4

To be sure, in previous times God sent His Spirit upon His people, but then it was only on occasion, to certain select people, and only for a time. As David pleads in Psalm 51, “Don’t take your Spirit from me.” Since the day of Pentecost, we need never fear such a thing. We need never be jealous of other people who have the Spirit. Indeed, if you have Jesus, you have the Spirit. This is totally different, in ways that we would do well to contemplate.

v.1- When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

Again, I could spend much time just on this verse. We associate Pentecost with this event, but the truth is that Pentecost is a Jewish festival. Just as it is significant that Jesus was put to death on the Passover, so it is significant that the coming of the Spirit happened on the Jewish festival of Pentecost (or Weeks, or First Fruits). As the name implies, this festival was on the 50<sup>th</sup> day after Passover, the first day after 7 weeks. So, if Passover was on the Sabbath, this would have been the Sunday after the seventh Sabbath. So, just as it was significant that Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week (Sunday), so it is significant that the Spirit was poured out on the 50<sup>th</sup> day or Sunday.

The festival was first instituted in the Law, Lev. 23, recognizing the end of the various grain harvests. But by Jesus’ day, it was also remembered as a celebration of the giving of the Law based on a time reference in Exodus 19:1. Hmmmm... As Paul would later write in 2 Corinthians 3:6, “He made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

Pentecost was a big deal to the Jews. It was one of the three pilgrimage festivals. You traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. You gathered as a people on that date. And so it is highly significant that as the people gathered to celebrate the giving of the Law, God chose to establish a new covenant based not on the letter, which kills, but on the Spirit, which gives life.

2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

Next we have the accompanying display of natural forces, here in v.2- wind. Already, there is a connection. In both Hebrew and Greek language, the word for wind and the word for spirit are the same word. So, does it surprise us that the coming of the Spirit is accompanied by wind, strong wind, violently terrifying wind? After all, this is the sending of the wind, the breath, the Spirit of God. In many ways, the reality fits the caricature. This is what it is like when God breathes on us. God breathes and we experience a violent wind. Again, we could trace this connection between the Spirit of God and breathing, air and wind, beginning with Genesis 2 and God leaning over Adam, breathing into him the breath of life. Ezekiel and the breathing into those dead piles of bones the breath of life. But we must go on. What you must not miss is that these people are inside a building and experiencing in that confined space a violent wind from heaven. It is described here as filling the whole house, whether the same room as chapter I or the temple as perhaps implied by the last verse of Luke's first volume: Luke 24:53. Wherever it was, they were inside and yet experiencing a violent wind everywhere.

3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

Next we have fire. We've already seen that John the Baptist predicted this baptizing with fire. Clearly it points back to the burning bush and Moses' experience at Sinai and Elijah's experience at the top of Mt. Carmel. It is not unusual, shall we say, that God showing up is accompanied by fire. What strikes us here is that it is "tongues of fire", coming to rest on each of them. That is new and different.

Clearly, this points to the fact that the Spirit is not just with them, but on them, on each of them. In previous times, the Spirit rested on one or a few, or the Spirit was in a place as in the temple or tent of meeting. But here, the Spirit comes as tongues, strips of this fire on each of them. All of the believers instantly and permanently now had the Holy Spirit of God present on them, in them. Once more, since we still live in such a situation, it might seem routine or insignificant to us. But let me assure you, it

is not insignificant, nor inconsequential that the Holy Spirit of God comes upon each and every believer. Indeed, it shapes our existence, as people, as a church. It shapes how we decide on issues, why our membership process is as it is. We want to make sure people have the Spirit of God in them if they are going to have a say in our decisions. We want to hear their testimonies. We want to make sure God is leading us. How can we know? When His Spirit convinces each one of us. There is a collective and individual aspect to this presence of the Spirit. It is how God leads His people. Can you see why this day ought to be celebrated? This is the day the Church received the Spirit!!!

4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Oh no! Here we go! This is where the book of Acts starts getting controversial. And this church is not immune from the controversy. I am quite confident there are many of you sitting there, on edge, wondering how I am going to handle this issue. The people there that day started speaking in other tongues. Well, guess what? Most of you are going to be disappointed. You see, the text here is quite clear that the languages spoken that day were known languages. No one needed an interpreter. In fact, as we will see in a few moments, they were speaking in certain dialects. In other words, this is not a good passage to sort through the issue of the speaking in tongues as a gift of the Spirit, at least the way we think of the issue today. You're going to have to wait to have your questions answered about the speaking in tongues.

What I want you to see here is that the people were filled with the Spirit. What does that mean? Well from elsewhere we know that being filled with the Spirit is not an automatic, that the Scriptures call us to be filled with the Spirit. It is not automatic as is the indwelling of the Spirit in each believer. In other words, some believers are filled with the Spirit and some are not. On that day, they were all filled with the Spirit.

So, the filling of the Spirit must be in some senses measurable. In other words, these that day were filled. Perhaps it would be like gas in your car. Without gas, your car will not run. With a little bit of gas, it will go a certain distance. But if your car is filled with gas, you can go far. Being filled with the Spirit then, means in some sense you are being prompted and controlled by the Spirit. In other words, there are not

pieces of the Spirit, with some having a few pieces and others having more pieces. Instead, it measures the amount of influence the Spirit has over you. Paul compares it in Ephesians 5 to being drunk with wine or filled with the Spirit. When you are filled with wine, it controls your whole body. Similarly, when you are filled with the Spirit, it controls your whole body. So the believers that day were all filled with the Spirit, controlled by the Spirit, doing things they would never have done under their own power. They were being enabled by the Spirit of God to do things otherwise impossible.

So, here we have it, the sending of the Spirit. He has come in a way that could not be missed, in a dramatic way, in a powerful way, individually and corporately. A new era has begun, an era we still live in. Now notice the impact on those nearby.

II. Through the Spirit, the gospel spreads to everyone, everywhere. vv. 5-13

The impact that day was beyond our comprehension. It will take us a few weeks to get to the end, but we must know that this group of 120 adds 3,000 converts on this first day. Are you catching that? They started from scratch and added 3,000. How many were added the day before? None. The day before that? None. But on the day the Spirit was poured out on them, 3,000 were added, and probably most of them were in the crowd that was yelling, "Crucify! Crucify." This was not the gospel moving to a new area where it was received. This was the gospel starting from scratch, being preached in its entirety for the first time, with 3,000 skeptics being added. That's beyond comprehension. All of it due to the presence of the Spirit.

5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.

Imagine that, it just so happens that on the very day that the Spirit is poured out, people were there from all over the world. They were gathered there for perhaps many reasons, but clearly they were together to celebrate the feast of Pentecost. These were not Christians, there weren't any of them yet. These were Jews, people who worshipped the God of Scripture. They happened to be living in Jerusalem or visiting there for the festival. But the important detail to note is that God had gathered people who believed in Him yet were natives of elsewhere, therefore speaking different languages.

Pause: I often teach this aspect in a different context, the tower of Babel in Genesis 11. There, because of man's rebellion against God, He spreads them over the whole earth and confuses their languages. They were stopped from accomplishing their plans by confusing their languages and spreading them out. When was that reversed? On this day. On this day, people were gathered and heard the good news in their native tongues. The Spirit brought together what God had separated as a result of their rebellion. Can you see the significance? The whole world was represented in Jerusalem that day. These were God-fearing Jews, so God had already reached into the whole world. But now, they were united by the Spirit to accomplish things unimaginable before. The curse of the tower of Babel was being reversed! Resume.

6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?"

There you have it. What went on in that room was noticed by those outside that room. Whether they heard the wind, saw the fire, or heard the languages spoken, we are not told. All we know is that the event inside captured the attention of those outside, and they gathered together to find out what it was all about. The Spirit filled these believers and they started proclaiming the things of God not only in different languages, but in the distinct dialects of the people gathered. Indeed, the precise word "dialect" is used here. In other words, the disciples were not only speaking English, but to the Brits, it was the king's English. To those from the south, there was a southern drawl. The people from Wisconsin heard it in their native tongue, don't you know!

And those speaking were Galileans! They were not educated people who learned 12 languages each at Harvard. These were a bunch of union fishermen and construction workers, hicks from the sticks if you will. How did they suddenly learn Mandarin from a certain region of China??? That would bewilder me as well. It was not just that those gathered heard it in their own native tongue, but that those speaking didn't look like them. They would never have predicted that those words, spoken that way, would come from the mouths of "those" people. Only God could do a thing like that! In other words, it worked. The miraculous means got the attention of the crowd. And then we have the list of nations.

9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome 11(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”

Can you see how this parallels the list of nations in Genesis 10? God spread them out, God gathered them all together. God confused their speech, God sent His Spirit so that they might all be able to speak the same language, to get on the same page, to accomplish things among them greater than they could imagine, despite their cultural barriers, language barriers, nation and empire barriers, ethnic barriers. All of these were broken down by the work of the Spirit. The gospel went out that day to people from every nation and tongue on earth! They were there from nations and empires we know (Rome, Egypt, Libya) as well as from places we probably have never heard of (Pamphylia, Phrygia). Did you notice that even some Arabs were there? On day one!

Can you see how this sets the tone and direction for the whole book? Clearly, we have not tackled the Jew/Gentile issue. That will come. Nevertheless, on day one, people from all over the world are hearing the good news of Jesus Christ. The gospel was designed to spread. The Spirit would empower, enable, guide the message to spread, to the ends of the earth.

12 Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” 13 Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

And yet, we can see the other side as well. They all saw the same thing, they all had the same information. And yet, not all of them came to the same conclusion. Some were amazed, some were confused or perplexed. And some of them just passed them off as a bunch of drunks. How could they come to that conclusion? It seems to me that the other languages sounded to them like slurred speech, the mumblings of people who weren't in control of their faculties. And that would be correct! They were not in control. They were filled with the Spirit of God, who was poured out on them,

all of them, each of them with accompanying signs and great power for the very first time.

Can you see how this connects with the giving of the Law, which they were there to celebrate? What was the people's reaction when they saw what was happening on the top of Mt. Sinai? They were confused, frightened. They did not want to draw in, come up the mountain, experience what Moses was experiencing. Instead, they wanted to stay off the mountain, stay away, send Moses in their places. It reminds me of shooting off fireworks. I can't hardly believe that some of you don't want to be on the field with me on Wednesday, feeling the ground shake as the shells leave the tube. Really, it's a hoot!

Now, the task before us is to figure out what aspects of that day were unique, what aspects were sporadic, and what were normative. In other words, are any of you feeling the wind blowing through the building this morning? Have you ever witnessed tongues of fire lighting on a room full of people? Should we all be speaking in tongues? Would that help me when I go to Haiti next month and try to communicate to my Haitian friends who speak Creole?

Clearly, the day was unique, either before or since. This was THE day of Pentecost. And yet, the presence of the Spirit is something that is just as tangible, just as visible today. I believe you can walk into a church and sense the presence of the Spirit. And I believe you can sense it in varying degrees. I believe some of us gathered here came in as not yet believers but were drawn in by the presence of the Spirit of God. You might not have identified it as such, but it was clear to you that you were supposed to be here. And it is not just that we preach the Bible, or we talk about Jesus. Many places do that who do not have this overwhelming presence of the Spirit of God. But I do believe it is just as present now as it was that day.

And I also believe it was intended so that the gospel might spread. It empowers the preacher, it empowers the message, it cuts through the filters of the hearer. I have experienced the strange phenomenon of having someone come up to me after a sermon, telling me how much something I said spoke to them. The problem is, I never said what they claimed I said. I used to try to correct them and clarify what I did say. I came to understand that they were hearing the message in their own language. The Spirit of God was speaking to them in a way they understood. Now, I just nod my head and say, "Thank you, Lord."

As I said earlier, concerning the gift of tongues, we will have to wait until later passages. I believe this text deals with a specific kind of speech that fit the occasion. So I am not ready to say we ought to end the service by all speaking in tongues and seeing what dialects come out of our mouths. Make sense?

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

1) We will celebrate the gift of the Spirit.

2) We will celebrate the fact that He comes to us with power.

3) We will celebrate the fact that He comes to us as individuals, all of us.

4) We will celebrate the fact that this new covenant of the Spirit gives life, unlike the Law.

5) We will speak as He empowers us to speak, even if we don't fully understand what He is prompting us to say.