

Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

The Pentecostal Church

July 15th, 2012

Acts 2:1-4

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Open your Bibles this morning to Acts chapter 2 as we look at the story of Pentecost and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the church. If you are tracking with our WTTB reading plan then you read this chapter of Scripture this morning. I want to talk to you about the Pentecostal Church that is filled with the Holy Spirit. Hear the Word of the Lord:

¹When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all [£]with one accord in one place. ²And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1-4. NKJV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Let's begin this morning by placing this story in its Scriptural and historical context. This narrative kicks off the story of the church in Acts in much the same way that the birth narratives of Jesus kick off the Gospel story in Matthew and Luke. The author of Luke is of course the same as the author of this Book of Acts and this story of Pentecost is the hinge between his two

works. In Luke's Gospel he has been very careful to show that everything Jesus did, he did in the power of the Holy Spirit. You recall that before his public ministry Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan and that the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove. Immediately Jesus went out from there into the desert and spent 40 days fasting and praying before the Lord. Look at what Luke says about how Jesus came out of that experience of preparation, in the very next verse after the end of the wilderness narrative he says:

¹⁴Then Jesus returned **in the power of the Spirit** to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. (Luke 4:14. NKJV)

He went into Nazareth his hometown and he was in church on the Sabbath and he was invited to preach and he took the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and he found the place where it was written:

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me.
*Because **He has anointed Me***
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me [£]to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
¹⁹ *To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD. "[£]*

²⁰Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. ²¹And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:18-21. NKJV)

Jesus understood his entire ministry as happening in the power and under the anointing of the Holy Spirit and he told his home town that this spirit empowered ministry was going to begin TODAY. And Luke's Gospel goes on to tell the whole story of all the wonderful ministry that Jesus did in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit. That is the structure of his Gospel and it is also the structure of his Acts of the Apostles. At Pentecost the Spirit comes upon the church, the Spirit anoints them for preaching and for ministries of liberation and illumination and then all of the wonderful things that happen subsequently are to be understood as the outworking of this incredible event. That is the context. Now let's go back through the passage and divide it carefully by God's Grace and with the aid of his Holy Spirit before dealing with some of the commonly asked questions that arise from this text concerning the work of the Spirit. Let's dive back into Acts 2:

Dividing The Text:

¹When the Day of Pentecost had fully come,

The fact that this event took place on Pentecost is very significant and of course, it is no accident. Jesus had told them to wait in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit and the text makes it clear that the outpouring of the Spirit on this day has significance. Pentecost of course existed as a special day long before Acts 2. It was a Jewish festival that commemorated the renewal of the covenant with Noah and with Moses. That word “renewal” is a very important word for us. The word RE-NEWED implies that there is a newness to what is being done and simultaneously there is a continuity with what was previously done. That’s important. Pentecost does not ABOLISH the Old Testament, it develops, expands and fulfills it.

The Jewish feast of Pentecost also celebrated the giving of the Law at Sinai. It is fascinating to me that Jesus appears to have wanted the receiving of the Spirit to be connected in our minds with the receiving of the Law. Perhaps that is because he knew that so many of his people would be inclined to think that the Spirit has nothing whatsoever to do with the law. That heresy, referred to by theologians and historians as “anti-nomianism” has been the bane of the church’s existence for as long as anyone can recall. For whatever reason, people seem inclined to think that now that we have the Holy Spirit, we can live without regard to character of God. We can be spiritual and do what we like with our bodies. We can pray and completely ignore the clear teaching of the Bible. We can go into our closet and seek guidance from the Lord and completely disregard the 99% of God’s will that we already know because it is written in God’s law. That is utter nonsense and foolishness and I don’t know what more Jesus could do to make that point to us. The Bible was written by the Holy Spirit, 2 Timothy 3:16 – “All Scripture is given by INSPIRATION OF GOD” – it is God-breathed, or literally “God spirited”. The Holy Spirit and the Bible are not antagonists, they speak with one voice. The written Word is the sole authenticator of the inner whisper. The Spirit and the Law are friends, church.

In fact one of the main reasons the Spirit is poured out on Pentecost, the celebration of the Law in Israel, was to remind us that without the Spirit we cannot keep the law. It is the gift of the Spirit that allows us to honour the law. The two must go together for either to be properly enjoyed.

The text goes on to say:

they were all with one accord in one place.

Briefly we should notice that this was a thoroughly corporate or communal event. The Spirit did not fall on one disciple here and another disciple over there, it fell on the CHURCH GATHERED. I must tell you that I am very wary of people who claim to be super-spiritual Holy Spirit people yet who manifest an almost palpable disdain for the local church. They seem to think that the more you wish to be led by the Holy Spirit the less you must be led and the less you must belong to the local church. That is non-sense and deception. The Holy Spirit fell on the GATHERED CHURCH. Jesus said: “I will build my CHURCH”; if you require more Scriptural proof that the gathered church matters and is the locus for God’s work in the world then your standards are simply too high. The Spirit is poured out not in the closet but in the HOUSE where God’s people are gathered in one accord. I find that beautiful and a truth in need of some recovery.

²And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and **it filled the whole house** where they were sitting.

The Greek here is absolutely stunning and the artfulness of it unfortunately does not cross over into English. The Greek word used for “it filled” is *eplay-ro-sen* and if you look the root word up in the dictionary you will see a list of acceptable translations and near the top you will find words like “furnish”, “supply” and then near the bottom “fill”. The phrase literally means “it furnished the whole house”. Now obviously that is a bit of a play on words but it is very beautiful. What Luke means to say, it seems, is that the coming of the Holy Spirit fully FURNISHES THE HOUSE OF GOD. Imagine a house that has been framed and drywalled and carpeted but is essentially an empty shell. Now imagine a wind of God blowing through it and leaving behind furniture, paintings, a stove, a washing machine, a fridge and a freezer full of food! Now, we would say, the house is fully furnished and supplied. That is what is being suggested here in the language.

³Then there appeared to them divided tongues, **as of fire**, and *one* sat upon each of them.

Again this is highly suggestive language. Notice it says “as of fire” not “fire”. If fire rested on you, you would burn. This is suggestive language and most commentators believe it is meant to summon up memories of Sinai. Do you recall in Exodus 19:18 where it says:

¹⁸Now Mount Sinai *was* completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. (Exodus 19:18. NKJV)

That is almost certainly what we are supposed to be thinking of when we read these verses. God is descending on his people again IN FIRE as it were, as he gave them the law, so now he gives them the Spirit of the Law. He will put the Spirit inside of them. Once the words were written on tablets of stone now they will be written on tablets of flesh.

Now notice also that this verse says that one such fiery tongue rested on each of them. Inside the communal aspect of the Holy Spirit's falling there is also a personal and individual aspect. Do you remember that little trick you learned as a kid? Here is the church, here is the steeple, open it up and here are the people? There is one church, but inside the one church are many individual people. What we are learning here is that the Holy Spirit falls on the church, but it also falls on all the individuals in the church! Verse 4 goes on to say:

⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit

Once again the word used is the Greek word *ep-les-the-san* which is from the same root as was used in 2. It literally means they were all furnished and supplied with or by the Holy Spirit. We think the right translation of the genitive here is "by" because these people had already received the Holy Spirit in John 20:22 which happened long before Pentecost:

²²And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, "**Receive the Holy Spirit.**" (John 20:22. NKJV)

In light of that it seems best to understand what is happening here not as a receiving of the Holy Spirit but as an equipping or furnishing BY means of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is pouring out the Holy Spirit in order to supply us with things of the Holy Spirit. We'll deal with some of the questions that arise here at the end of the message. Let's continue with verse 4; these folks were furnished with and supplied BY the Holy Spirit:

and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1-4. NKJV)

The word used for "other tongues" is the word that generally means "languages" and the context certainly indicates that these were known languages. The disciples run down into the street and start preaching the Gospel in the languages of all the people who had gathered in Jerusalem for

the festival and they are understood by those people. They comment on this strange phenomenon in Acts 2:11:

we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” (Acts 2:11. NKJV)

No serious Bible commentator doubts that the gift of tongues seen here at Pentecost was the gift of Gospel preaching in previously unknown foreign languages. The gift of tongues that seems to be causing so much trouble in the church at Corinth appears to be something different. The tongues gift in Corinthians appears to be an angelic tongue that is unintelligible to human listeners, in fact all of Paul’s teaching to them is about how intelligible preaching is to be the norm in the church and unintelligible speech, if it is given to a believer, should be practised in private as an encouragement and edification to that individual believer.

Now, this is not a sermon on tongues and I don’t want it to become one but these questions come up and we need to deal with them. So let me be real clear on this: our church does recognise all the gifts of the Holy Spirit as being in present operation and as being helpful and edifying. We recognise and celebrate the gift of tongues. All the gifts of God are good, amen? Amen. We do however listen carefully to the teaching of the Bible which says that when we come together as a gathered church one intelligible word is to be preferred to 10,000 words in a tongue nobody understands. Therefore, like Paul we do not permit speaking in unintelligible tongues in the public worship service. That isn’t to say that while we are worshipping or praying you can’t speak in tongues, of course you can and many do with our blessing and encouragement. What we are saying is that we are not going to have people pop up and grab the mike and speak in tongues. That glorifies you, but it doesn’t glorify God because no one knows what you are saying, and therefore no one can add the amen.

Let me also state very clearly that this text does not teach that tongues is always the sign of conversion and Spirit Baptism. That is simply and demonstrably false. Now I know that we hear people say that sometimes but that doesn’t make it true. Look at 1 Corinthians 12:29-30. The Apostle Paul is rebuking a church in Corinth for thinking that tongues was the mark of the super Spiritual Christian and he flatly denies that there is any such thing:

²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? ³⁰Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? (1 Corinthians 12:29-30. NKJV)

Now even in English it seems brutally clear what Paul is driving at. He is saying that there is no one universal spiritual gift that proves you are a believer. Are you all apostles? Are you all prophets? Are you all teachers? Are you all miracle workers? Do you all speak in tongues? Now strangely enough, some folks will say that Paul meant for them to answer the last one “Yes!”, yes we do all speak in tongues but again that flows from a failure to understand the original Greek text not to mention the entire context. In Greek there is a negating particle, it is pronounced *may* and it functions kind of like a special question mark. Greek doesn’t have punctuation like English, it uses small words to make connections between thoughts. When you put the particle *may* inside a question it indicates that the answer is NO! It indicates that the question is rhetorical and supplies the negative answer. We don’t have that in English; in English we do it with tone of voice. We say: “Do you think money grows on trees?” Our tone of voice indicates that money does not grow on trees and you know that very well. In Greek they do it with an inserted particle. The answer to all of these questions is NO according to Paul. You do not all work miracles and you are not all apostles and you do NOT ALL SPEAK IN TONGUES.

Now what comes after the last verse in 1 Corinthians 12? The first verse in chapter 13.

¹Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. (1 Corinthians 13:1. NKJV)

Paul is saying clearly: “It is not a universal gift you should be looking for it is a universal attribute. Not all Christians speak in tongues, but all Christians love.” So let’s just be very clear on this, speaking in tongues can be a sign that you have been saved and baptised in the Holy Spirit but it is not the ONLY sign and in fact it is not the main sign that we should be looking for. The universal sign of salvation and Spirit baptism is love. Love for Christ and his righteousness and love for the brethren, for the people of God.

Having said all of that; the focus of Acts 2 is not the gift of tongues, in fact as you keep reading the story you get the impression that it was a mechanism more or less simply to get people’s attention so that Peter could preach a sermon in Hebrew. The tongues dynamic slips away and Peter speaks to all these gathered Jews in one language they could all understand and the

emphasis of the chapter is on the content of the sermon and the fact that freshly supplied and equipped by the Holy Spirit there are tremendous results from that sermon. 3000 people were cut to the heart and truly repented and believed on the Lord Jesus for salvation. The supply and equipping of the Holy Spirit functions to empower the Gospel witness of the GATHERED CHURCH by convicting people of their sins and leading people to the cross of Jesus Christ unto salvation. That is the main point and we mustn't allow fascination with the gift of tongues to in anyway obscure that.

Well; that is the text as we have it in God's perfect inerrant Word but there are several commonly asked questions that arise from this text that we will address two of them briefly by way of closing. There are one or two others that I will send out by way of the FAQ e-mails that we have been making available. If you would like to receive those please leave your address in the Worship Register.

Pentecostal FAQ:

Q1. What is the relationship of the present day believer to this onetime historical event?

That is a good question because Pentecost is a historical event, it is not a term we use to describe your personal conversion, it is an event that belongs to the whole church. I think we all need to be careful how we name ourselves as Christians. We have called ourselves "Baptists" which is kind of confusing because almost all Christians baptize, so it might sound like we are saying that we are the only people who do baptism correctly. That kind of sounds arrogant and unfriendly doesn't it? I think the Alliance people or the Lutherans might be offended by that. The Pentecostals call themselves the Pentecostals which kind of sounds like they have planted the flag on Pentecost and might not want to share that with the rest of us, and I'm sure that's not what they mean, but maybe in the future we should all choose our names more carefully. That's a sidebar, but it raises the question of how it is that all true believers relate to this historical event. Perhaps the best way to explain this would be to use a time tested illustration. I didn't invent this, I'm just repeating it. Our relationship to Pentecost can be compared to the opening of a new public water system by the mayor of a town. It is a one-time event. The mayor cuts the ribbon and turns on the station and the town now and forevermore has water. The benefits of that one time experience are enjoyed every day on an on-going basis by the citizens of the town. Some

use more water, some use less. When new people become citizens of the town they are hooked into the previously existing water system. So when you become a believer it is like your home is being hooked into the town's water system. You are now sharing in the supply that was put in place for all citizens many years ago. A one-time historical event is freshly, daily, increasingly enjoyed by all the citizens of the town, and by all of those new citizens that are added. No citizen is shut out, there is plenty of water to go around. Does that bring some clarity?

The second question is actually the most commonly asked and it is asked in many different ways but I think the substance of the matter is this:

Q2. What is the best way to speak about the post-conversion experiences that we have of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit?

This comes up because some folks will say that they got saved when they were 17 but they were not "baptized in the Holy Spirit" until they were 27 or something like that. Now that sort of language raises all sorts of questions for a Bible reading question and the vast majority of Christians have rejected that language. They are not rejecting the experience, they are rejecting the language used to describe the experience. Let me explain. It is true that in the Book of Acts this baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was subsequent to the salvation experience of the disciples. The disciples appear to have been fully saved in John 20 and they received the Holy Spirit as you would expect of fully saved people. Then quite a bit later there is this story of Pentecost. Some say that this time lag in the Bible justifies our speaking of our own subsequent experiences of the Holy Spirit as a Spirit Baptism, but I think we can demonstrate that this is not a very wise use of language.

We have to remember that the lifetime of Jesus and the early days of the church represented a transition in the working of God. We mark that transition with words like "New Testament" and "last or latter days". Something changed forever because of the work of God in Jesus Christ and those changes had to work themselves out in space and time. The life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ ushered in a new and deeper and far more glorious experience of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church and in the experience of the individual and we see that transition taking place in the time and space occupied by the Gospels and the Book of Acts. Jesus full of the Holy Spirit, rich in his furnishing power, goes around preaching with authority,

healing and setting people free. Then he accomplishes his cross work, he dies and rises again and he ascends to the Father's hand and sits down – having accomplished HIS work. And then he pours out the Holy Spirit upon the church so that we can carry his work on. Of course, for the first disciples there was a time lag between conversion and this outpouring, or baptising in the Spirit but then the Apostle Paul speaking nearly a generation later and AFTER the onetime event of Pentecost says:

¹²For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³For **by one Spirit** we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink [£]into one Spirit. ¹⁴For in fact the body is not one member but many. (1 Corinthians 12:12-14. NKJV)

So here we see that in the context of a teaching on church UNITY, Paul reminds folks that if they are believers then they have ALL been baptized into the one Spirit, there are not two levels of Christianity, there is a oneness in the Spirit and in Christ and to be a Christian is to be BAPTIZED IN THE SPIRIT. Some are a little distracted by the switch he to the phrase “by one Spirit” but that confusion exists only in English. In the original Greek the language is the same as every other place where the English versions say “baptized in the Spirit”. It sounds funny in English to say: “For IN one Spirit we were all baptized IN one body” but that is exactly what it says in Greek. The point Paul is clearly making is that our common sharing of the Holy Spirit and his gracious furnishing and supply is the basis for our unity and fellowship.

So, while it was true that in the historical transition from Old covenant to New the disciples were converted and then subsequently were baptised in the Spirit, AFTER the historical event of Pentecost those things occur simultaneously and form the basis of Christian unity.

In light of this, most Bible scholars suggest, and I join with them in suggesting that it is best to use language that distinguishes between your initial connection to and your subsequent enjoyments of the Holy Spirit. The term “baptism in the Holy Spirit” which the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 teaches occurs at conversion, should be reserved for discussions of what Jesus does for us at conversion. He applies to us all the Holy Spirit authority, power and supply that he enjoyed during his earthly ministry. He hooks us up. All of our subsequent experiences of the Spirit's daily fresh supply should be referred to as “fillings” and “anointings”. Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:18 that fillings can and should be on-going and subsequent:

¹⁸And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18. NKJV)

His use of the present imperative implies that this must be our regular habit. Paul is saying: “Make it your regular habit to seek subsequent experiences of the Holy Spirit” but he calls these experiences “fillings” and so should we. He doesn’t call them “a higher level” or a fresh Spirit Baptism and neither should we.

Conclusion:

Now I want to conclude by drawing you back from the controversy of this text to the main point. Controversy is wonderfully stimulating but it is often just a trick of the devil to get us to miss the main point. The main point is not about tongues and who has it and who doesn’t and where it should be used and where it shouldn’t. Neither is it about the best language for describing subsequent experiences of the Holy Spirit. Those things are important to understand but they are only distantly peripheral to this text. The main point of this text is wonderfully clear. The Holy Spirit of God has fallen upon His People. Jesus is seated at the Right Hand of God Almighty and he has HOOKED US UP! He has fully furnished his house. He has amply supplied us with every good and perfect gift to live and serve as He did. If that is true then every real church full of saved people is a Pentecostal church and these then are surely the last days.

¹⁷ ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your young men shall see visions,
Your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸ And on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;
And they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ I will show wonders in heaven above
And signs in the earth beneath:
Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.

²¹ And it shall come to pass
That whoever calls on the name of the LORD
Shall be saved.’ (Acts 2:17-21. NKJV)

The fully furnished, generously supplied house of God will speak prophetically to a world that is coming undone. She will hear and she will speak and by God's grace before the coming of the Great and Final Day of the Lord whosoever calls on the Name of Jesus will be saved. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Greg, will you come and lead us?