

In October 1864... word came to President Abraham Lincoln of a Mrs. Bixby... a Boston widow whose five sons had all been killed fighting in the Civil War. ... Lincoln later wrote his condolences:

Dear Madam,

I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle.

I feel how weak and fruitless must be any word mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the republic they died to save.

I pray that our heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

Abraham Lincoln.

How beautiful the story would be if it ended here with the simple... literary elegance that was Lincoln's alone. ... But the story took an ironic turn just a few weeks after the letter was sent. ... No sooner had Mrs. Bixby received her letter when it was leaked to the press by someone in the White House. ... It was proclaimed a masterpiece for some weeks until a reporter went to the records of the Adjutant General and discovered that the President had been given bad information.

Mrs. Bixby had not lost all five of her sons in battle. ... One was killed in action at Fredericksburg. ... One was killed in action at Petersburg. ... One was taken prisoner at Gettysburg and later exchanged and returned to his

mother in good health. ... One deserted to the enemy. ... One deserted his post and fled the country.

Word got out... and the press... as well as the rest of the Union... became divided in its support of the President. ... Some said he had been innocently duped. ... Others said his feelings were sincere if the cause was not.

Have you ever acted on wrong information... acted in a way that you thought you were **helping**... only later to find out that your actions caused you trouble...? How can we reduce the likelihood of taking wrong actions in our life... especially when they seem so right... at the time we take them...?

Our passage of study today brings us to the narrative of when the Holy Spirit first came to dwell in the hearts of believers... at Pentecost. ... Such a study naturally evokes a lot of deep questions... and attempts to answer these questions... have divided the church in America... especially since the early 1900's.

- 1) What of Pentecost does God want our 21st Century church to expect in our own day- to-day operations?
- 2) What is repeatable?
- 3) What is **un**repeatable? (and... perhaps most important...)
- 4) How can we increase the likelihood of our knowing the Holy Spirit's leading in our life?

I doubt that a single sermon like this will settle - once and for all - the controversies that have split Evangelicals into two different camps... comprised of "Charismatic believers" and "non-Charismatic believers." ... But I am confident... that our paying attention to what Scripture teaches

about the Holy Spirit... **can** set you and I on a path toward a greater intimacy with God... greater joy in our worship of Him... and a greater sense of what His leading in our life is.

You see... there is one thing we cannot miss from our passage today: Pentecost has opened the door for every believer to have an intimate and supernatural experience with God living *inside* of us. The Christian life is anything BUT a mere rational acceptance of truth... followed by a lot of self-effort to live according to the Bible.

So... as we look today at the narrative of Pentecost in Acts... we will keep our eyes open for a clearer understanding of these four questions that I just raised.

- 1) What of Pentecost does God want our 21st Century church to expect in our own day- to-day operations?
- 2) What is repeatable?
- 3) What is **un**repeatable?
- 4) How can we increase the likelihood of our knowing the Holy Spirit's leading in our life?

Now... last time we were studying Acts together... we were in chapter one... and the Disciples were being obedient to Christ's final instruction before He ascended into Heaven. They are waiting for the promise of the Father... the coming of the Holy Spirit.

During that ten-day wait between the Ascension and Pentecost... they... no doubt became increasingly aware of their **need** to be filled. ... During Christ's life they had known His exhilarating presence. ... Even during the forty days between the Resurrection and Ascension... they had repeatedly been blessed by His visits. ... But those had stopped... They knew they

would not see their Lord again... and during these ten days... the disciples must have felt **empty**... and alone. ... They would have been more aware than ever... of the importance of their Savior's presence — and now Jesus was gone.

What if any of them happened to recall what Jesus told them... as John recorded it for us in John 15:5... "*Apart from me you can do nothing*" ... ? You see now... they **are** apart from Him. This period of waiting... as trying as it was... served a very good purpose. It made them **ready** for Pentecost. They were made to feel their own inadequacy... and their need for something more!

Acts 2:1-4

The fulfillment of Christ's promise of the Holy Spirit... appropriately takes place during a Jewish harvest festival - Pentecost. ... The term (Pentecost is derived from the Gk word which means "fiftieth"). This festival was celebrated on the **fiftieth** day after the Passover. ... It was one of the three Jewish pilgrimage festivals... when individuals were to appear before the Lord with gifts and offerings. (Ex. 23:14-17 names three festivals that required Jewish males to come to Jerusalem to celebrate them... and Pentecost was one of the three). It celebrated the end of one thing (the barley harvest)... and the beginning of something else (the wheat harvest). ...Among the many parallels we could draw from the celebration of Jewish Pentecost... and the coming of the Holy Spirit... It is probably MOST appropriate that we acknowledge how perfect God's timing was... for the Holy Spirit's arrival... The event that was going to propel the gospel to the ends of the earth... took place at a time when people from the ends of the earth were in

Jerusalem. The streets swelled with visitors from all parts of the known world.

Passover occurred in mid-April... so Pentecost was at the beginning of June. ... It was the best-attended of the mandated feasts... because traveling conditions were at their best. ... There was never a more cosmopolitan gathering in Jerusalem. ... It was the perfect time for the descent of the Holy Spirit of God.

Even though they knew that they were waiting for the Holy Spirit... (Jesus had told them several times)... their human anticipation was still overwhelmed by surprise and unexpectedness. Verse 2 says “*and **suddenly** there came from heaven...*” The word in the Greek is *apno*... which carries the idea of astonishment... like shock and awe... and unexpectedness.

Zechariah 2:13 (ESV)

Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.

The prophet Zechariah and the example we see here in Acts 2... seem to declare that When God comes... it is so utterly different... and sheerly supernatural... that all the human preparation which may have authentically anticipated the event is effectively eliminated from consideration. In John chapter 3... we see Jesus talking to Nicodemus... and Jesus compares the coming and going of the fullness of the Holy Spirit... to the wind that blows. We can't control it... It blows wherever it will.

Here is one element of that first coming of the Holy Spirit... which seems to be **repeatable**. He often comes on believers today in a fresh new way...

often in a startling fashion... which is like a wind that momentarily fills our sails... and moves us along. ... But those times happen... completely at His discretion – we can't control it in any way. ... There have been many times where I have sensed the Spirit's activity in and through my life... as a very special dynamic. But that isn't normal. Those times of increased sensitivity come and go. And they astonish me whenever they do occur.

(I don't mind looking **more** like one of our Charismatic brothers and sisters in the Lord... **than** a typical Baptist... by telling you this)... But these are times of excessive joy that suddenly come over me... They are always accompanied by feelings of gratitude... along with a greater sense of intimacy with Christ. ... And by the way... Singing is one of the supreme expressions of our joy over the intimacy we have in Christ. ... Just as love songs express the joy of human love... Christian songs express the joy we have in our love relationship with God. ... John Wesley has said, "Singing is as much the language of holy joy as praying is of holy desire."

Look how the Apostle Paul paints a picture of what it looks like to be filled with the Spirit...

Ephesians 5:18 (ESV)

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

...And just so we are clear... this is what it looks like... Paul continues on...

Ephesians 5:19-21 (ESV)

addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Sometimes... seemingly from out of nowhere... God's Spirit will overwhelm us... with an extra dynamic of this. ...

Now... verse two also presents something that I **don't** think is repeatable. I believe it was a one-time occurrence... when the Holy Spirit **first** came. It was the powerful sound of a rushing wind... from heaven.

The sound filled *all the house*... that is... it was localized upon the house where they were *sitting*. ... Does that mean that only those who were in the house could hear it...? No. ... First of all... the sound came from heaven... and second... verse six is going to tell us... that the masses who were in Jerusalem were amazed by that sound.

The sound was like the rushing of a *mighty* wind... a sound like the deafening roar... or a hurricane... tornado... or fierce gale. I have never experienced a hurricane or tornado... but I have heard their sound described as that of a thousand freight trains.

But why was this necessary...? ... There are at least three reasons.

First... people needed to be startled and alarmed... attracted to gather from all over Jerusalem... seeking to know what had happened. ... An audience needed to be gathered for the first preaching of the gospel. ...

(Remember... verse 6... which we will get to... makes it clear that the noise attracted them to the house. ... From all over the city crowds came... and those who were in that room spilled out into the streets to preach to them.

The second reason for the sound... was for emboldening the disciples. The mighty power of the Spirit was symbolized and dramatized for them. ...

They needed strong confidence instilled within them... in order to stand and preach the gospel before the very persons... who had crucified the Lord... and who had hunted them down as accomplices.

The third reason was for what the sound of the mighty rushing wind symbolized. ... Did you know that the Hebrew word for wind... is the same word for Spirit...? (Ruach) ... And did you even further realize that the Greek word of wind... is the same Greek word for spirit...? (Pneuma). So the sound of wind... was very appropriate for the sound of the Holy Spirit. I'm sure everyone in that room immediately knew that this was the promised Holy Spirit. ... He came !!!

Another element that happened at Pentecost... which I do not believe is repeatable today... was the divided tongues... as of fire... that we read of in verse 3. ... The picture that we get from the Greek wording of this verse is that a single tongue appeared and then split... and divided itself... resting upon each of the disciples.

I do not believe that we are to expect – today - tongues of fire that appear over anyone who has the Holy Spirit. This part of the narrative is not repeatable. However... what this demonstrates is. ... The gift of the Holy Spirit is both corporate and personal. ... It is to the church... and to us... as individual believers.

The Spirit comes upon the community (the church)... to energize its life and mission... but is received individually. ... He is not so much a general spiritual power or force... as a personal... indwelling companion.

Fire is a symbol of God's presence throughout the Bible, beginning with Moses and the burning bush... (Exodus 3:2-4) and continuing with the consuming fire on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:17). ... The fire at Pentecost indicated God's presence... just as its resting on Israel demonstrated a corporate unity. ... However... a new significance came when the fire divided into flames... and danced over the individual apostles. ... The Spirit now rests upon each believer individually. ... The emphasis from Pentecost onwards... is on the personal relationship of God to the believer... through the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore... His gifting is inclusive of **all** the disciple company. He came to women (like 'Mary')... as to men (like 'Jesus' brothers'... who were among them). He came to the important leaders (like Peter... and all of Christ's 12 named Disciples)... as well as to the many nameless ones... who were part of the one hundred and twenty. ... The Holy Spirit fell upon the specially chosen (like Matthias)... and also upon the not so chosen (like Barsabbas, who was not selected as the choice to replace Judas). ... With reference to this last distinction... that between Matthias and Barsabbas, it is important to underline that *not* being called to a particular position... even one we may have had sincere and godly hopes of attaining... in no way excludes us from the personal approval of God... nor from His subsequent blessing in our lives... and through us in the lives of others.

Acts 2:4

With respect to the third element - the filling with the Spirit and the Spirit-enabled tongues of witness – we should carefully note... that this third element will be seen three more times in Acts... and Paul will write of it

(using the same wording – glossalia in three passages of 1 Corinthians.)
Speaking in tongues we will continue to see... but the other phenomena of wind and fire completely recede from view. We don't see those again.

This carries a very important implication. ... And that is... the uniqueness of Pentecost... The presence of the non-recurring phenomena... demonstrate this to be a distinguishable event. This was a very unique incident... and it was marked by exclusive occurrences. ... Pentecost was a **climactic** moment in human history... *the birth of the church!* ... Warren Wiersbe writes:

We must not conclude that this ten-day prayer meeting brought about the miracles of Pentecost, or that we today may pray as they did and experience "another Pentecost." Like our Lord's death at Calvary, Pentecost was a once-for-all event that will not be repeated. The church may experience new fillings of the Spirit, and certainly patient prayer is an essential element to spiritual power, but we would not ask for another Pentecost any more than we would ask for another Calvary.

At Pentecost believers were BOTH **baptized** with the Holy Spirit... as well as **filled** with the Holy Spirit. ... In Acts 1:5... Jesus told His followers to wait in Jerusalem for the "BAPTISM of the Holy Spirit. ... And in Luke's description of this very event... here in Acts chapter two... verse 4... Luke says nothing of baptism... He writes that they were FILLED with the Holy Spirit. ... Are they the same thing...? ... Is "baptism of the Holy Spirit" the same thing as being "filled with the Holy Spirit"? ... My answer is "No, they're not."

Acts 1:4-5 (ESV)

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

Jesus made the parallel of the Holy Spirit’s baptism with John’s immersion under water in the Jordan River. ... Now why did John the Baptist do that...? He asked people to repent... place their faith in the imminent (about to happen) Kingdom of God... and to demonstrate their faith by being baptized. ... The word “baptism” means to become forever identified with. It was a Greek word that was used for ships that sank to the bottom of the Mediterranean. Since they could not be pulled back up... they were forever identified with the ocean... they were “one with the ocean” – inseparable... baptized with the ocean. ... Also tanners... whenever they wanted to die a piece of cloth... (red for example)... the cloth would be baptized into red dye... and thereafter be forever identified with the red dye... even though it COULD come back up... out of the red water... it was forever one... with the red dye water.

John baptized believers in the coming Kingdom of God. ... These were people who wanted to be forever identified with God’s imminent Kingdom. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit... is where the Holy Spirit forever identifies believers with the Kingdom of God... the Universal Church.

1 Corinthians 12:13 (ESV)

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

This happened at Pentecost... according to what Jesus promised in Acts 1:5... and Paul indicates that every believer (even those who were not in Jerusalem at Pentecost – because the Corinthians to whom Paul wrote... definitely were not) – every believer subsequent to Pentecost is baptized by

the Spirit into the body... (the universal... cross denominational... cross cultural... cross generational... down through the ages – **church!**) We become forever identified with it.

That is “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” It happens at the moment of our salvation and is part of the process of our being saved... according to Titus 3:5-7. ... Being filled with the Spirit is different.

I spent a little time on Friday in my office... studying the Greek word that is used in our passage for “filled” – **πιμπλημι** (pim-play-me)... Before Luke employed this word in our passage... the ancient Greek writer Homer had used it... as well as others. Their use of this word was for a filling within ourselves... such as being “filled with enthusiasm...” ... Another usage from ancient Greek was for “being filled with fear...” ... I used to think that to be filled with the Holy Spirit was like my water bottle being filled with water... but it isn’t. ... When I am filled with enthusiasm... it has not filled me in the same way my water bottle is filled. It means that I am temporarily **controlled** by enthusiasm. ... When I am filled by fear... I am temporarily **controlled** by my fear. So... when I am filled (**πιμπλημι**) by the Holy Spirit – what does it mean...? I am temporarily under the control of the Holy Spirit.

We are only baptized by the Holy Spirit ONCE. He identifies us forever with the church... and no more baptizing is needed. ... But we need to be **filled** often. ... This is a repeatable event. ... In fact... we need several times of filling. ... Every day... several times a day... anytime we recognize

that we have grieved the Holy Spirit by giving in to unGodly thoughts... attitudes... and actions.

When I was involved in Campus Crusade for Christ back in college... we used to call this Spiritual Breathing (a term which I believe Bill Bright developed.) ... We need to exhale (confess a known sin... agree with God that it was wrong)... and then inhale (ask for God's filling and agree to yield to the Holy Spirit's leading.)

Here in Acts 2:4... believers were both baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit... and the Holy Spirit's coming.

And now lets look at the gathered... and curious crowd's response...

Acts 2:5-13

Why did God have them miraculously speak in these languages? ... For one thing... Pentecost was a reversal of the judgment at the Tower of Babel when God confused man's language (Gen. 11:1-9). ... God's judgment at Babel scattered the people... but God's blessing at Pentecost united the believers in the Spirit. ... At Babel... the people were unable to understand each other... but at Pentecost... men heard God's praises and understood what was said. ... The Tower of Babel created many different communities and cultures... out of a single community. ... Pentecost created a single community (the Universal Church) out of many. ...What a contrast!

But... perhaps a greater reason for this gift of tongues... was to let the people know that the Gospel is for the whole world. ... God wants to speak to every person in his or her own language... and give the saving message of salvation in Jesus Christ. ... God's heart is missional... through and

through. ... The emphasis in the Book of Acts is on worldwide evangelization, "unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). "*The Spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions,*" said Henry Martyn, "*and the nearer we get to Him, the more intensely missionary we must become.*"

But there will always some... in every crowd... who don't get it. ... So some criticized the people speaking in other languages... as being drunk. This criticism... like much criticism of God's work... made no sense at all... for the people speaking were speaking in another language as is attested by the testimony of many from other countries. ... These drunk folks figured out a way to make a sound that had never been heard before... somehow made the appearance of fire on themselves... and surprisingly were instantly fluent in many languages. ... Yeah... being drunk sure explains it! But these kind of critics do not pay attention to facts or common sense.

It is important for us to anticipate rejection and not be disillusioned when it comes. If **everyone** is pleased with what we do... we have probably not been truly faithful to God. ...The gospel and God's truth are so radically different to the thinking of the world... that those who follow Christ should expect some to oppose them.

According to Paul, the apostles are "the smell of death" to some and "the fragrance of life" to others (2 Cor. 2:16). Thus, when rebellious people in Acts 2 see the Pentecostal phenomena and hear Peter preach, their rebellion is intensified. Their mocking response reminds us that whenever we follow God faithfully... by being filled with the Holy Spirit... **we** will face rejection.

Since we have plowed through a passage of Scripture this morning... that has presented many churches with division and controversy... should we now be so bold as to ask... What does this passage in Acts 2 have for me...? What does this mean for us in the 21st Century...?

It means that the Holy Spirit brings new life to those who believe in Jesus Christ... and with that life... comes a continuing power to those who are continually filled. ... It means fire in our lives... individually burning away the chaff and flaming out... to those around us. ... It means the truth of God going forth from us... in a way we would never have dreamed of—the divine utterance of God through us. ... It means communication... joy... thankfulness... submission. ... Submission... yielding to the Holy Spirit's leading... as He directs us to obey Christ – is what being filled with the Holy Spirit means. ... It is how we get the message right. Do you remember how we began this morning... “How can we reduce the likelihood of taking wrong actions in our life...? ... The answer is to be filled – regularly – with the Holy Spirit.

What does this require of us? The same thing it required from the apostles and those 3,000 followers—*emptiness*, an acknowledgment that we need Christ. God helps us have faith and respond to the gospel, and that is how we become Christians and receive the saving baptism and fullness of the Holy Spirit. Then, once we are Christians, God's persistent work in our lives liberates us from the idea that we can live the Christian life on our own. Each time we acknowledge our inadequacy, he fills us with more of his Spirit so we can carry on his work. He will not fill our sails with the wind of the Holy Spirit unless we admit that the sails are empty. This requires

humility and confession. The apostles were living in empty dependency until the filling came.

The key to the Spirit-filled Christian life is found in a paradox: cultivating an attitude of perpetual emptiness brings with it a perpetual fullness. Jesus said it like this: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."