

Acts | *The Incendiary Fellowship*

The Descent of the Spirit

Acts 2:1-13

4:24-16

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. ⁵ Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ "And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?" ⁹ "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs-- we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." ¹² And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others were mocking and saying, "They are full of sweet wine."

Last week we began a new sermon series on this earliest book of Church History following the resurrection of Jesus Christ, i.e. The Acts of the Apostles.

Please listen to that introductory sermon online because I DO think it sort of sets up what's to come.

Today we begin a three-week celebration of Pentecost. The actual date for of this Christian Holy Day is May 15th but we plan to look at the EVENT here in Acts Chapter 2 for a few weeks in a row. The celebration of this event is the Third Most Important date on the Christian calendar...and even though the Bible itself never commands that we celebrate any of these three (believe it or NOT we are never commanded to celebrate Easter, Christmas OR Pentecost or any other day but Sunday...as far as I can TELL [Rom. 14.5]) BUT STILL the Christian Church in its three major branches (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox AND

Protestant) Christians have from early on celebrated these three days...and yet today WE only really celebrate TWO (Easter and Christmas). Why IS that? (good to ponder)

One scholar that I like very much has argued that Pentecost is the Third Great Act of God after Creation and Incarnation...Pentecost (Third Great Act of God). What does that writer know that WE don't and that earlier generations of Christians knew too?

So...three weeks...to help us answer this question ...help us recapture/reclaim this EVENT...and even if we don't commemorate it (with gift giving...or a special meal) to at least VALUE it and receive it as the gift it IS.

Today, Pentecost Part One: 1) OBSERVATION 2) INTERPRETATION 3) CELEBRATION
OBSERVATION – what would you have observed on that day (seen/heard)? Well, it was around 30 AD... in Jerusalem. The death of Jesus Christ and the Passover had taken place 50 days prior to this...

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ had taken place, and for a period of 40 days He appeared to His little flock, the eleven Apostles and the circle of believers ("120" in 1.15). After 40 days convincing them with irrefutable evidence that it really was the same Man who had died and been put in a tomb...and that He really IS RISEN with an indestructible LIFE...the First Born of the dead, the New Creation embodied in One Person... He was teaching them about the Kingdom of God...like winding strips of cloth on a pole to make a torch and then saturating that torch for 40 days in the Truth of the Kingdom...like soaking in rich flammable fuel for 40 days...and THEN He tells them to wait in Jerusalem for the fire to fall...and they wait.

"They all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer" (1.14).

And as they wait and pray...maybe in the rented room...the Upper Room (1.13)...the City is filling with people. You could have observed that.

It's a great festival on the Jewish calendar...Jewish pilgrims coming from all over the world to the Center of All Things, to Jerusalem, the City of God, to the Temple. It's the Day of Pentecost and when that day came... there were happenings. First, the sound of wind came from Heaven.

It would have attracted a lot of attention in this overcrowded city...and it did: the roar of rushing wind ...crowds running to see what it was.

Then, there are individual flames or tongues of fire resting on or hovering above each of these believers in Jesus of Nazareth ...maybe it was the 120 believers (maybe some men, women and children; 2.17). You would have observed that spectacle.

And they were filled with the Holy Spirit...which you may NOT have observed except that it resulted in an observable miracle: the followers of Jesus Christ spoke in foreign languages they had never studied or learned to speak. You would have observed that too.

So...what does it all mean? It's an event packed with symbolism...everything about it is communicating ...but what? Some ask, "what does it mean? What's the interpretation of these things we're observing?"

And Peter will get up and explain it...and we hope to look at that next week...but LOOKING back on it in light of the whole Big Story we saw last week...if we look through the eyes of God's promises to Abraham and Moses and the Prophets...this event is bursting with significance and meaning!

The Spirit of God who moved over the surface of the waters and brought order and beauty out of chaos is here (Gen 1.2) The wind of the Spirit who blew into the nostrils of the first man and he became a living SOUL is here... and who swept over the Valley of Dry Bones and they LIVED – that Spirit of life, the Lord and Giver of Life (Nicene Creed) is HERE!

He is a refining Spirit of fire...He purifies and ignites and as flame consumes and spreads. He is on the move. And He is the Spirit who SPEAKS for God, the Person of the Trinity who communicates; He spoke through the Prophets who "moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." (2 Peter 1.21)

He's the Person who speaks and communicates or applies the promises of God...He inwardly convinces people...makes them alive to believe. This is the meaning of the event...the Spirit is come down.

The ancient Hebrew Prophets SAID He would come, the very Heart of God would be poured out. And Jesus Christ said, "I will NOT leave you as orphans... I will send you another Comforter." And here He is come at the Feast of Harvest to reap a harvest...to gather people from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the Earth. The pilgrims are the first fruits!

This is the Feast of Weeks (as it's called in Exodus and in the Hebrew Scriptures); it means 7 weeks plus one day – 7 x 7 i.e. the number of completion times completion (7 x 7) the completest of completeness, 49 + ONE meaning the time is complete/ripe and a New Day has begun. Pentecost means 50.

That's why the historian records the first verse the way he does; not simply "when the Day of Pentecost came"... but literally "the Day of Pentecost was fulfilled..." (like Paul in Galatians 4.4 "when the fullness of time had come" – same wording!) The types and shadows are fulfilled – it's full of meaning!

And this is Babel in reverse (Gen 11). The people of the earth tried to band together to be independent of God – but this would have destroyed the human race, so God confused their languages and chose one nation for Himself...and God promised "through YOU, Abraham, will all the nations of the earth be blessed" and NOW Babel is being reversed. The confusion of the languages is undone because Abraham's Seed, Jesus Christ has carried His people and fulfilled their obligations... He satisfied the demands of the Covenant and said, "It is finished".

The Jewish people associate this feast (Pentecost or Weeks) with the giving of the Law at Sinai. It took the Israelites 50 days to go from Egypt to Sinai (Ex. 16.1) .

Moses went UP on the Mountain and brought down the Law...and now the Better Moses has come; Jesus Christ is the only human Being who kept the Law of Moses and He ALSO went UP... Psalm 24 asks "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place?" And the ANSWER: "He who has clean hands and a pure heart... He shall receive a blessing from the LORD..." (vv. 4-5)

We saw it last week (Acts Ch 1) Jesus Christ went up... "He ascended into Heaven". And when this Better Moses went up to the Mountain, into the very Presence of Holiness, then He got the Blessing and He comes down NOT with the Law of Sinai that crushes us but with the Spirit who gives us life! And all this on the 50th Day... when we celebrate the Law...Pentecost is fulfilled...the Law is fulfilled... the fullness of time and the Blessing has come!

So, we looked at OBSERVATION and INTERPRETATION, what we would have seen and heard AND what it MEANS... So, what should we do about it? Observation, interpretation and CELEBRATION. What does it mean to be a truly Pentecostal Church and what is ours to celebrate because of this event?

Well, since the early part of the 20th Century there's been a lot of debate about what parts of the Book of Acts should be normative for the modern church and what parts are NOT normative but either a ONE TIME event or somehow limited to this early era of Church life. AND that really IS a big question – should we for instance pool all our money...and IF someone lies about how much he gives will that person ...die (as it happened in ch. 5)?

So, just a caution against a wooden, one-size-fits-all approach to application. If we get lost in the “Tongues Question” here (i.e. Is speaking in tongues for today? ...is THIS the same kind of tongues found in other places in the NT?)...we’re sure to MISS the way, WAY BIGGER significance of what happened here as a kind of culmination event in God’s plan.

This is the start of God fulfilling His great Promises to Abraham that IN HIM “all the families if the earth will be blessed”. The Spirit’s movement inward is now reversing and moving outward...from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the Earth. This is so revolutionary that it will require visions and miracles to convince the Apostles that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (Eph 3.6).

We have to be astonished at what’s happening here?

There are words in this passage that we have to rediscover, “bewildered...amazed...astonished... amazement with great perplexity.” These are words you find in Genesis 11 when God “confused their languages”. And THIS is the great reversal. It’s a paradigm shift and it has to permeate a church’s life.

A Pentecostal church is one where the MIGHTY ACTS OF GOD (v. 11) astound us. What God did in Jesus Christ to fulfill our obligations, to satisfy the demands of the Law, to fulfill the promises to Abraham and pour out grace on all people, to “bless all Nations through Abraham’s Seed” – if the Spirit makes us astounded and marveling at that...and if we are SO SATISFIED and joyous to be swept UP in this Story that we want to tell others “the mighty acts of God”...then WE are a Pentecostal Church.

I used to BE a Pentecostal Christian... I mean I wore that label and was part of a movement that stressed certain ecstatic experiences... I still have many friends and family members in churches where these things are emphasized...and I MYSELF had (or thought I had) some of these experiences...

BUT ...what really makes a truly Pentecostal Church is NOT to wear the label Pentecostal OR Presbyterian NOR is it to have OR NOT TO HAVE these experiences ... it’s to be astonished daily at the grace and the great plan...and the mighty acts of God in Jesus Christ.

We get the Spirit (read it in Galatians 3.1-5) we get the Spirit and He gets more and more of US NOT BY STUFF that we do or experiences we work up. It’s not by getting emotionally roused OR (on the other hand) by getting all staunch and studied and obedient and serious.

Galatians Ch 3 teaches it...we first get the Holy Spirit AND we continue to get His power and presence as we simply keep believing the Good News...humbling ourselves and looking to Him...who ascended into the Mountain of the Lord.

Churches that believe that together (notice the stress on “they all” and “each one” and “all together”) churches that believe that together... they are truly celebrating Pentecost...

Those are the churches that whether they're rich and successful or just a bunch of fishermen and uneducated Galileans, God uses those “gospel amazed” churches. The communicating Spirit hovers over them and uses them to show and tell the world the Mighty Acts of God.

Those churches leave people wondering, “what’s going on there?”...and there will also be people mocking... There will be light AND heat...and bewilderment...and astonishment...the evidence of the Spirit...who comes on people believing the Gospel.

Are we that kind of Church?...May God make it so.