

"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:3).

## **The Church Alive – Something Radical Has Begun (Part 1)**

### **Acts 2:1-4**

***1 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.***

What do you think about when you hear the word "Pentecost?" That is a strange word, is it not? "Pentecost". Perhaps the first thing that comes to mind upon hearing this word is "I have no clue." Some of you may have thought for a moment about this referring to an Old Testament celebration. Still others may have instantly associated the term with what we just read in our text, that somehow Pentecost is associated with something new, something amazing, something extraordinary as it marked the beginning of the New Testament church.

As one reads the words of Acts 2:1-13, something strange is happening, something that on one hand overwhelms and bewilders not only the disciples, but also the very city of Jerusalem. But at the same time, what happened on this particular Jewish holy day should not have been a complete surprise as there was something at this time that was to be expected. I have heard this day of Pentecost described in terms of a birthday. Everyone knows that his or her birthday is coming and that you can generally expect that someone who loves you has a present for you. You may not know what that present is going to be but you know the day is arriving and that something good is bound to come with it.

I had asked you a moment ago what comes to mind when you hear the word "Pentecost." Perhaps I could offer you a fresh means of thinking about this event; an event, that according to our text, the disciples themselves had been prepared for by Jesus. They knew it was coming even though they did not know exactly what it would be like. So, just what would this particular day of Pentecost be like? What would I have you liken to this extraordinary moment in time? In a word, "baptism." If you would like to understand what it is that was taking place here in Acts 2 and why it is so important, then consider with me that this event is likened to baptism. Let me show you what I mean. To do so, please turn with me in your Bible to Luke 3 and follow along in verse 15-17

As we approach Luke's description of the Pentecost event, we should do so fully aware that those who experienced it had been prepared for its arrival, even though they did not know exactly what it would be like. Let us begin by turning to Luke's Gospel and his words regarding the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist in chapter 3:

***15 Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ, 16 John answered and said to them all, "As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 "His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."***

*"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:3).*

Now drop down to verses 21-22 and read with me of the baptism of Jesus:

***21 Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."***

Please bear with me as we make a few observations about the baptism of Jesus as it will bring to light some insights into what is taking place in our Acts 2 text. To begin with, notice that John the Baptist himself makes a contrast between the baptism he offered with the baptism that Jesus would offer. This is an issue of quality. What is the key element of John's baptism? It is water. John said, ***"I baptize you with water...."*** That is simple and straightforward. This is what we ourselves are most familiar. When we baptize a believer in Jesus, we do so in what? We do so in water, just like John the Baptist.

But what is the key element of the baptism that Jesus would offer? The key element, or elements are, the Holy Spirit and fire. You might remember back in Acts 1:5 that Jesus reiterated these very words saying to the disciples. Note them with me in Acts 1:5, ***"for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*** And what is the point John and Jesus were making? Simply this, that the baptism Jesus would offer is significantly superior to the baptism offered by John in the same way that Jesus Himself is superior to John. The point is that the baptism of Jesus would be qualitatively better than that of John's.

A second observation worth noting in the account of our Lord's baptism by John is not only is there a contrast between the baptism of John and the coming baptism that would be offered by Jesus, but also there is an issue of identification. When Jesus was Himself baptized by John, He identified Himself with John and his message of repentance. It was John who was the forerunner of the Messiah and who declared His coming. The baptism of Jesus was simply the formal presentation of Jesus as the very object or subject of John's teaching. But in addition to this, when Jesus was baptized, He was also identifying Himself with us, as people who needed cleansing, who needed a Savior.

But there is more than this. For in addition to Jesus identifying with John and with humanity through His baptism; we also see in Luke's account above that God the Father identified Himself with Jesus. Again in Luke 3:22 we read, ***"You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."*** You see, in believers' baptism, the one being baptized identifies himself or herself with Jesus in His saving work – His death, burial, and resurrection. The amazing and perhaps unexpected thing that happened at our Lord's baptism was that God identified Himself with Jesus. The Father identified Jesus as His beloved Son in whom He was greatly pleased (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). The Holy Spirit identified with Jesus by appearing as a dove who descended upon Him and remained upon Him (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22). Why is important that the Holy Spirit come upon Jesus as a dove? This would be the sign given to John the Baptist by which he would know that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the very Son of God come in the flesh. Turn with me to the gospel of John and let us see this as we read John 1:29-34;

"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:3).

**29 The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' 31 I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." 32 John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 33 I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' 34 I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."**

We have seen then that the baptism of Jesus along with the promised baptism to come from Jesus reveal something of quality and identification. In addition, this baptism would result in an endowment, in a granting, in a bestowing of divine power to do the will of God. In Luke's account, the next recorded event, after Jesus' baptism, reveals this endowed power. Read with me first in Luke 4:1-2 as we see that Jesus, now full of the Spirit, was empowered to resist temptation.

**1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness 2 for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry.**

In addition to being empowered to stand firm against the devil, we read a few verses down, in Luke 4:14-15, that it would be in the power of the Spirit that Jesus would be enabled to effectively teach, preach and proclaim the gospel.

**14 And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district. 15 And He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all.**

Let me recap then; the baptism of Jesus was an issue of quality, of identification and of power. Now then, what does all this have to do with our text, with this extraordinary events that occurred on that first feast of Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ? Let us note the similarities between the baptism of our Lord Jesus and what we can rightly refer to as the "baptism" of the church that occurred at Pentecost. Let us read again from Luke 3:21-22.

**21 Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."**

And now, let us read again Acts 2:1-4 and I would have you listen for the similarities. We read...

"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:3).

**1 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.**

What are the similarities between our Lord's baptism by John and the baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? First, we see a similarity in that there was prayer. In Luke 3, we are told that after Jesus had been baptized, that is, as He is coming up out of the water, that Jesus was praying. And then the Spirit came upon Jesus.

In the Acts account, what do we see? We have the apostles and others all praying. Let me remind you that in Acts 1:14 we read...

***These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.***

And now, as the day of Pentecost arrives, they were again, all together in one place and by implication, they were devoting themselves to prayer. And what happens as they are praying? The Spirit comes upon them.

The second similarity between the baptism of Jesus and the baptism of the church is that there is a divine sound. Also, in Luke's account, a voice, namely the voice of God the Father, **came out of heaven** - "*ex ouranu*" in the Greek. In Acts 2:2 we read of "**a noise**" that **came from... heaven**" or again "*ex ouranu*". There is clearly a divine utterance associated with both these events.

The third similarity is seen in some kind of physical form picturing the event. In the Luke account, we read that the Spirit came in the form of a dove and **descended upon** Jesus – meaning that the Holy Spirit landed or rested upon Jesus. In Acts 2, the Spirit's coming is seen not in the form of a dove but in the form of **tongues of fire**, which came upon or descended and then **rested on each one of them**. Each one of them received the gift of the Spirit. Every believer is baptized with the Spirit of God.

We see a fourth similarity between Jesus baptism and that of the church in the empowering for ministry. In the coming of the Spirit upon Jesus in Luke 3 we see it preceding the beginning of our Lord's ministry, a ministry that would be marked by marvelous manifestations of power, even as we have already noted. And in Acts 2, the day of Pentecost is the event that preceded the going forth of the apostles and the church in the promised power of the Holy Spirit as they proclaimed the gospel.

As we prepare to unwrap all that this day of Pentecost is to the church, I would submit to you to keep in mind the baptism of Jesus. For yet another similarity, the fifth if you are counting, between this event and the baptism of Jesus is that of identification. As we noted, it is clear that in His baptism, Jesus clearly identified Himself with John, with John's ministry and message. We also noted and have been taught that in Jesus' baptism, He identified Himself with lost sinners, that is, He identified Himself with us as needing a cleansing and hence a Savior. Let me remind you once more that we see an even greater identification than just this however as we see God the Father and God the Holy Spirit identifying, associating with and confirming allegiance with the

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Son and His ministry. For it is from the baptism of Jesus on that He is endowed with the power of the Spirit, divine power from heaven by which He would conduct His earthly ministry.

And what do we find in Acts 2 for the church, the body of Christ sanctioned with continuing all the work that Jesus began to do and to teach? I do not think it a stretch to suggest here that God is identifying Himself with the church, with you and with me. Let me be clear. Generally speaking, when we practice water baptism, it is a means by which we identify ourselves with Christ. We are proclaiming to all who witness the event that even as Christ died to sin and arose alive to God, that in union with Him, this is what has happened to us, that we count ourselves dead to sin as it is paid for and buried in the tomb; and alive to God. We identify ourselves with this saving work of Christ.

But extraordinarily, at the inception of the church, God identifies Himself with the church. Remember again that the things our Lord Jesus began to do and to teach (Acts 1:1-2), He continued to do and to teach through His apostles and continues to do through us who have come to faith through the ministry of the apostles. And so, even as Jesus did not begin His public ministry until the Father identified Himself with Him by bestowing His Spirit on Him, so the apostles were told to wait until He identified Himself with them at Pentecost. When God sent His Holy Spirit upon the apostles and the church on the day of Pentecost, it was as if He said, "This is My beloved Son's body in whom I am well-pleased." Well-pleased enough to empower her with His own Holy Spirit.

Beloved, if we do not grasp this, if we do not appreciate God's identifying Himself with the church; with His loving the church, with His empowering the church, we will never fully be what God intends. This event of Acts 2 is an extraordinarily unique event, a part of something new; in fact we call it the New Covenant. That there is something new to be begun implies that there was something old.

Let me take you back to the book of Exodus. In Exodus 32-34 we have Moses receiving the Ten Commandments, written in stone by the finger of God. While Moses is on the mountain in the glorious and terrifying presence of God, the children of Israel are down below, anxiously awaiting their mandate from God, right? No. Rather, in full view of the awesome display of God's power and presence on the mountain, they thought it best to fashion for themselves an idol and celebrated in worship of that idol. In Exodus 32:7-14 God threatened to destroy them all for this act of treason and to start a new nation through Moses. Moses interceded for the people and God spared them. Through various intercessions on the part of Moses, God promised to go with, to identify with His people. God was with them, but not in an inward and intimate way. Because of the Law, there were always barricades and barriers, which separated men from God. And then Jesus came. And during a time of teaching with the disciples, Jesus spoke of a time in the near future when He would dwell within His disciples in an entirely new and much more intimate way. We read of this promise in John 14:15-21:

***15 If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. 16 I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. 20 In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and***

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***you in Me, and I in you. 21 He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.***

When would this promise begin? Right here, at the day of Pentecost and on, God would come to dwell in His people, manifesting His person and presence in a way that is more intimate than anything we ever find in the Old Testament. The glory of Pentecost is that God now identifies Himself with His people in a most intimate way. Why does He do this now, here at Pentecost and not before? Because now our sins have been atoned for on the cross of Calvary. Pentecost, that feast that occurs after Passover, can come because our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed. This is what Paul was getting after in 1 Corinthians 5:7

***Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.***

Something new began at Pentecost. The church was born. A New Covenant people were empowered for service. It would do us well to remember that the events of Acts 2 are all flowing from what Jesus taught His disciples. And one of these teachings was to pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit with the assurance that this prayer would be answered. That we might be encouraged to pray the promises of God, let us walk through this teaching of Jesus. Look with me at Luke 11:9-13 were we read:

***9 So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. 11 Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? 12 Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? 13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"***

Here they are called to pray or ask for the Holy Spirit, something they evidently were doing in Acts 1:12-14 and was fulfilled in Acts 2:1-12. Let us look at Luke 24:45-49 were we see another call to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit. There we read:

***45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."***

After His resurrection, Jesus appears to His disciples. He explains His death and resurrection as the good news of the gospel, for by trusting in Him men can obtain the forgiveness of sins. He tells His disciples that their mission is to be witnesses to His resurrection

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and to the good news of the gospel. They are to take the gospel to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. This is Luke's Great Commission and is very similar to Acts 1:8. Jesus also tells His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they are clothed with power from on high, which occurs at Pentecost. Finally, we are told that the disciples joyfully returned to Jerusalem after His ascension, and there they spent much time in the temple courts, praising God.

What does all this mean for us? As we will come to see as we progress through Acts 2 and beyond, the disciples were empowered to know, understand and proclaim the essentials of the gospel. They knew and proclaimed the death and resurrection of Christ as the foundation for the gospel. Do you know and understand the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Do you know these truths not as mere fact, but rather by experience, namely that Christ died for your sins and was raised to life to give you life, a life that is not lived for self but for God? Are you living your life for God?

And further, do you proclaim these truths? The evidence that the Spirit of God has come upon you is the proclamation of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that He is both Savior and Lord.

So, have you been born again? Have you begun a life in the newness of Christ? Have you been baptized by or into the Holy Spirit by which you have a new quality of life; by which you identify with Christ and Christ identifies with you, by which you have received a divine power that not only instructs you, but also enables you to do the will of God? This is what it means to be born again. This is what happens when you are baptized by the Holy Spirit.

And to you believers I exhort you not to neglect or forsake the importance of the church. Yes, individuals are baptized by the Holy Spirit, but they are not baptized into or for themselves, but into the body of Christ, into the church, for serving and ministering to the church while actively proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. The most explicit teaching we have of what it means to be baptized by the Holy Spirit is found in 1 Corinthians 12:13

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

The baptism from Jesus is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, by which you have become not only one with Jesus, but one with His people. How are you using the divine power from on high for the two-fold purpose intended, first for the edification of the body, the people of God, and second the evangelism of the lost, that other may hear and know Christ. This is the church of Jesus Christ, those who have been baptized by the Holy Spirit to serve Him and His people.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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