

The Church Alive – Something Radical Has Begun (Part 2)

Acts 2:1-13

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. 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."

We have been considering the extraordinary, the radically divine and life changing events that occurred on the day of Pentecost, some fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. What we read in our text is the start of the church, the practical application and inauguration of the New Covenant, the promise of God to pour forth His Spirit upon His people in such a way that they continue the ministry Jesus began, continuing to do all that Jesus began to do and teach.

Even a casual reading of our text reveals the extraordinary nature of this event. Luke pulls out his thesaurus as it were trying to capture for us the strangeness of this experience using words in verses 6-7 like ***"bewildered," "amazed," "astonished,"*** and in verse 12 ***"amazement,"*** and ***"great perplexity."*** Something truly radical had begun and we need to recapture this awe. John MacArthur noted, "It is absolutely essential that a church perceive itself as an institution for the glory of God." The glory, the majesty, the wonder, the awe-inspiring nature of our God is to be manifested, talked about and lived in light of right here through our experience of worship, fellowship and ministry.

The events of Acts 2 are unique to this particular time, a time of transition from the Old Testament economy and means of worshipping God through the Law and repeated animal sacrifices for temporary forgiveness of sin to the New Testament economy and means of worshipping God through Christ alone and His once for all sacrifice for eternal forgiveness of sins to all who believe upon Him. There had never been anything like this event before and there will be nothing quite like it again. With that said, some important truths remind us of what it means to be filled with the Spirit of God. How are we filled with the Spirit? What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit of God? I say to you that our text gives us answers to these questions; answers that have application to our everyday lives as we seek to follow Christ.

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But before we examine how our Acts 2 text answers these questions, we need to familiarize ourselves with the significance of this day. If I say to you, "September 11, 2001" – what comes to your mind? Is that a significant day in your memory and mind as a terrorist brought down two of the world's tallest and most symbolic of buildings? I might say to you, "December 7, 1941" and what comes to your mind? The attack on Pearl Harbor and America's entrance in World War II. There are days in our lives that have important meaning rooted in history.

In like manner then, what comes to your mind when you heard, "the day of Pentecost?" From our text we know it is the start of the church and the outpouring of the Spirit of God to empower the church; but let me ask you this; is the day of Pentecost significant only because it is when the Spirit of God came upon the disciples to start the church, or did the Spirit of God come on the day of Pentecost because the day itself was important?

This morning, in order to help us rejoice in the greatness, the faithfulness and the wonder of our God, I would like to prove the latter statement, that the Spirit of God came on the day of Pentecost because in the sovereignty and providence of God, that day itself was important. There is a truth that that we need to have constantly reiterated in our minds; constantly reminded of and yet never grow weary – that truth is the faithfulness of God to His promises. To say this another way, **God is always true to His promises.** This is a precept of God's word we do well to remember; that God always fulfills His promises. When Joshua led Israel through the Promised Land in conquest, the conquest itself was a fulfillment of God's promises. We read this in Joshua 21:45, **Not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.** In Psalm 36:5 we read of this promise keeping reality of our God in a testimony of praise, **Your lovingkindness, O Lord, extends to the heavens, Your faithfulness [your promise keeping character] reaches to the skies.**

The Scripture is replete with evidence of this truth. What does this have to do with Acts 2:1? Let us remember that the outpouring of the Spirit of God, the empowering of God's people with His Spirit to carry on His work had been promised in both the Old and New Testaments. In Ezekiel 36:27, one of the promises of the New Covenant at work is described this way, **"I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances."** Peter, in his sermon that follows later in Acts 2, will appeal to the book of Joel to demonstrate that God had promised this outpouring of the Spirit of God.

In addition to this, our Lord Jesus Himself also promised the filling of the Spirit of God. In John 14:16-17, Jesus promised saying, **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.**

Beloved, is this not radical? Is this not extraordinary? Jesus promised the Spirit of God to come to abide with us and to be in us. Just a bit later in John 16:7, Jesus said, **But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.**

This is the promise of Jesus and of God; the coming and filling of the Holy Spirit. And now, in our text in Acts 2:1 we read, **"When the day of Pentecost had come..."** If you notice in your NASB margin the alternate reading, **"When the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled..."** This implies promise. The day of Pentecost was being "fulfilled". The promise of the coming and filling

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with the Spirit was in the process of being fulfilled at this moment. Once again, God was proving Himself faithful to His word.

So we find Luke setting the scene for Pentecost. Notice with me how brief this description is, ***"When the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled..."***. The verb translated "had come" has the meaning *"to arrive as the timely moment for an event to take place."* It was happening at just the right time. It is much like what we read in Galatians 4:4 where Paul reminds the Galatians that Jesus came at just the right time according to the plan and purpose of God. We read there, ***"But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law..."*** There are no accidents with God. Everything unfolds according to His plan. And here in Acts 2:1, Luke informs the reader that this is not an event that has been brought about by the apostles or by other believers, or even by chance circumstance, but rather that Pentecost is the sovereign activity of the faithful, promise keeping God. We must know that the Feast of Pentecost had found its fulfillment in time, and in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was this exact time. It did not "just happen" on Pentecost; it happened on Pentecost to fulfill its eternally determined destiny.

The Spirit came upon these saints at this moment, this celebration that came some 50 days after the celebration of Passover. This was the day God had purposed to fulfill His promise of sending the Spirit. Thus we can conclude that there is a connection between the Old Testament Feast of Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. This is what I would like to explore in our time remaining – a little history lesson concerning Pentecost.

As I read the Scriptures, I have concluded that God purposed to send His Spirit to the church during the Feast of Pentecost because this Old Testament feast foreshadowed this specific day of Acts 2:1. We find in the Old Testament foreshadows, pictures of something greater to come, that are fulfilled in the New Testament. We are not left to come up subjectively with these on our own but are told in the New Testament that this is so. In Colossians 2:16-17 we see that there is a connection between Old Testament institutions and days with New Testament realities. We read...

16 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day — 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

In the book of Hebrews we find the same idea stated in 10:1 where we read the words...

For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.

If it is true that there were activities and events in the Law or Old Testament that were only shadows of good things to come, then we should be able to look at the Old Testament texts which speak of the Feast of Pentecost and then see if these find a greater fulfillment in the New Testament. As we will see as we read through some texts, the Feast of Pentecost was known by several names in the Old Testament: it is called the **"Feast of the Harvest"** (Exodus 23:16), the **"Feast of Weeks"** (Exodus 34:22; Deuteronomy 16:10), and the **"day of the first fruits"**

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(Numbers 28:26). We are going to read these texts so be ready to turn to them in your Bible. We begin in Exodus 23:16 and the Feast of Harvest...

Also you shall observe the Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits of your labors from what you sow in the field; also the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field.

Turning now to Exodus 34:22 we read...

You shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks, that is, the first fruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year.

And in Leviticus 23:15-17 we see this Feast of Weeks defined for us, a counting off of seven weeks or 49 days, plus the one day to get you to the seventh Sabbath or 50 days...

15 'You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete sabbaths. 16 'You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the Lord. 17 'You shall bring in from your dwelling places two loaves of bread for a wave offering, made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of a fine flour, baked with leaven as first fruits to the Lord.

One final title by which the day of Pentecost as known in the Old Testament is found in Numbers 28:26...

Also on the day of the first fruits, when you present a new grain offering to the Lord in your Feast of Weeks, you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work.

So we have the Feast of the Harvest, the Feast of Weeks and the day of first fruits all referring to what would become known as Pentecost – the celebration that came 50 days after the Jewish Passover. As most of you know, the Jewish calendar is very different from our own. The first spring holiday is that of Passover, which commemorates God's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage by means of the exodus. The Passover feast recalls the ten plagues, the observance of the first Passover meal (by means of which the first-born males were spared), and the crossing of the Red Sea. Passover began on the 14th day of the first month of Abib, which falls roughly in our months of March or April. The day after Passover, on the 15th of the month, began a one week celebration of the "**Feast of Unleavened Bread**" (Exodus 12:15-20; 13:8-9; Leviticus 23:6-8). In this feast, all leaven was to be removed for a period of one week. One of the seven days of the "**Feast of Unleavened Bread**" would naturally be a Sabbath. The day following this Sabbath there was to be the celebration of the wave offering of Israel's "**First Fruits**" (Leviticus 23:9-14). The first sheaf of the new spring barley crop was brought to the priest who waved this offering before the Lord. Next came the Feast of Pentecost (or, more commonly in Old Testament terms, the "**Feast of Weeks**") which was celebrated 50 days after the offering of the first fruits. In this way, we can see that Pentecost followed Passover, but was actually 50 days

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after the offering of first fruits. Pentecost occurs in the third month of the Jewish calendar, which would be during the months of May or June on our calendar, just about this very time of year we find ourselves in now.

All this history aside, as I do not want to see a bunch of eyes glazed over, how is all this important for our understanding and application of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2? Please follow along with me as I see two key points that we need to flesh out about Pentecost and I believe foreshadow what we read would happen and did happen in our Act 2 text.

First of all, Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks, marked the transition from Israel's barley harvest to her wheat harvest. As I understand it, the wheat crop would ripen just as the barley harvest would end. So, in this way it marked the transition from harvesting barley to harvesting wheat. Wheat was a more highly regarded and highly prized crop than that of barley. Could this somehow picture our Lord's promise to His disciples of the coming Holy Spirit? Look with me again at John 14:12-18 as we note again the context of Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit. Here we read...

12 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father. 13 Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. 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.

In verse 12, Jesus promised that those who believe in Him would do greater works than even Jesus did by means of what? By means of Jesus returning to the Father, by means of His people praying and most specifically by His sending of the Holy Spirit. What are these greater works? They are certainly not our doing greater miracles, or even better teaching, but the word "greater" here speaks of extent or scope. That because of the coming Holy Spirit, the followers of Jesus would go further and take His teachings far beyond the borders of Israel. Indeed, even as Jesus promised in Acts 1:8, to the ends of the earth. When Jesus left the earth, there were 11 apostles and a congregation of about 120 people. Not a huge group for three years of work. But once the Holy Spirit came, that group would explode almost instantly as once Peter delivers the first sermon of the church, some 3000 people were saved. In three years Jesus has 120, in about 3 hours the church expands to 3000, nearly 30 times larger or greater than what Jesus had experienced. That is radical Christianity, the power of the Spirit at work through the preaching and proclamation of the Word. So then, whatever the "harvest" had been during the life and ministry of our Lord, it would suddenly increase, beginning with Pentecost. The day of Pentecost in Acts 2 marked the transition from the ordinary harvest of Jesus as it were (primarily because Jesus had not come to do the work of harvesting Himself but rather to provide salvation by dying on the cross), to the greater harvest of the church through the proclamation of salvation in Jesus name. That is what you and I get to participate in as a result of this day of Pentecost – we are part of this greater work, this greater harvest. By way of application, do you realize that each one

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of us in here, who because of our faith in Jesus have been filled with the Holy Spirit of God, has the opportunity in our lives to affect at least as many, if not more, people than Jesus did with the gospel message? What kind of influence are you being with and for the gospel?

But there is a second picture that the Feast of Weeks provides for us as a foreshadow of greater things. Let us refer back to Leviticus 23:15-17, noting something interesting in verse 17 in particular...

15 'You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete sabbaths. 16 'You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the Lord. 17 'You shall bring in from your dwelling places two loaves of bread for a wave offering, made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of a fine flour, baked with leaven as first fruits to the Lord.

Notice the two loaves that were to be made and made specifically of leaven. Anyone familiar with Passover knows what a contrast this is as in the Passover and the Feast that followed it, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, absolutely no leaven, no yeast was tolerated! And this begs a question, what happened so that the Feast of Pentecost actually requires bread made with leaven? How can that which is leavened, leaven typically being a picture of sin, actually be presented to God as an acceptable offering?

I must admit that I am perhaps inferring some of this from the Bible as we have no explicit teachings to this end, but it is interesting to see in the progression of the Jewish holy days the work of Christ. We do know for certain that the Passover feast clearly anticipated the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and His saving work on the cross. In 1 Corinthians 5:7, Jesus is called our Passover Lamb. We also know that at the Feast of Unleavened Bread which immediately follows Passover, and all leaven must be removed. The death of our Lord Jesus on the cross removes the guilt and punishment of our sins, and thus we must come to hate sin and desire that it be put far from us. We get this idea from 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 where we read...

6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 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. 8 Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Believers in Christ are to see the old nature and its sinful desires as old leaven and reckon ourselves as unleavened. Because Christ dealt with the power and penalty of our sin on the cross, we can count ourselves dead to sin (unleavened) and alive to God. Do you desire your life to be characterized by sincerity, genuineness, faithfulness and the truth of God's word? This is a result of the day of Pentecost, of the Spirit being poured out upon the church, upon the people of God.

After the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the next celebration was that of offering the first fruits. The offering of the first fruits always occurred on the day after Sabbath, or Sunday. Sunday after Passover was also the day our Lord Jesus rose from the dead, the first fruits from

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the dead according to 1 Corinthians 15:20. And then, fifty days later, Israel celebrated the Feast of Pentecost. Does the ending of the barley season picture for us the Old Covenant and the beginning of the wheat harvest the New and Better Covenant?

As we noted last week, it would be here on the day of Pentecost that God identified Himself with the church. It would be the time when He endowed the saints with power so that they could carry out all that Jesus began to do and to teach. In a phrase, the church would be given the power to fulfill the Great Commission. This would be the very time when God came to indwell His saints in a way that was more intimate than any saint had ever experienced before. It would be the time, thanks to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, when God could now indwell and empower those who were not yet free from sin and its corrupting influences to do His will on earth.

The Gospel of Matthew actually begins and ends with this theme of God with us moving to God empowering doing the work which Jesus began. In Matthew 1:20-23 we read:

20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." 22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US."

And notice how Matthew ends his gospel as recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 where we read...

18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Did you catch it? Jesus said, ***"and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*** God is still with us. Jesus is still with us. How? By means of the coming of the promised Holy Spirit. So then, what does Pentecost mean to us? The account of Pentecost in Acts 2 tells us how our Lord is now present with His church – through the Holy Spirit, whom He has sent. Pentecost assures us that God is present with His people, even though we are not yet sinless. We are forgiven sinners, who will one day be freed from the suffering and groaning that is the result of sin (Romans 8:18-25). But, because of the atoning work of Christ and the abiding of the Spirit, God is with us in a way that no Old Testament saint ever knew. He is with us, to not only teach, comfort, and guide us, but also to empower us to carry out the Great Commission; the great privilege of teaching others to observe all that Jesus commanded. Apart from our salvation from sin, what news could be better than this? Joint participants with Christ in His work on earth through the church! All of this is what ought to come to our mind when we hear the phrase, ***"the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled."*** It is the day on which God demonstrated once again His faithfulness, to fulfill His promise, to empower us for service and all to His glory!

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And so I leave you with just one question – have you ever and are you now experiencing the power of God in you. Next week we will look more closely at what this looks like, but have you experienced the radical change that comes as you are baptized and filled with the Spirit of God? If not, why not? Have you repented of and confessed your sin? Have you trusted in Jesus Christ alone as your Savior and Lord? Are you entertaining God-separating sins that are hindering your coming, depending and trusting in Christ alone as your Captain and guide? Confess your sins to God, repent of your sins and turn to Him and to His ways and ask Him to empower you to be a radical Christian for His glory!

Soli Deo Gloria

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