



PENTECOST

(Acts 2:1-21; Joel 2:28-32) Ross Pogson

Good Morning Grace Church, to people here, and to those at home! We are continuing our study of the events of Easter, and last week Dinesh brought us a message about the Ascension of Jesus. Now we come to a very special day, Pentecost, which came 10 days after the Ascension. Pentecost has a special meaning for Christians, celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit, but there was a previous '50 days' celebration, a Feast for Israel in the Laws given by God to Moses.

Pentecost – Original Jewish Meaning

In the Laws given by God to Moses there was an agricultural festival celebrated on the 50th day after the Sabbath of Passover week. It was known as the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot), a harvest festival (mentioned in Leviticus 23). It came the day after 7 full weeks following the first harvest of grain. After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem harvest offerings could no longer be presented at the Temple, so the focus of the festival shifted to a celebration of the giving of the Law by God to Moses on Mt Sinai.

Pentecost – Christian Meaning

But now Pentecost has a special Christian meaning. Pentecost is from the Greek word '*Pentekostos*', which means 'fifty'. In Christian tradition It is the 7th Sunday (50th day) from Easter Sunday, and is also called Whitsunday or White Sunday. It celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit descending on the Disciples and other followers of Jesus in Jerusalem. Many people regard it as the birthday of the Christian Church. In terms of timing, this event was 10 days after Jesus' Ascension, and 50 days after the death of Jesus.

Pentecost Foretold – Old Testament

The coming of the Holy Spirit was prophesied long ago, in the Old Testament Book of Joel. We don't know when Joel was written, as there are no clues in the text, and guesses have ranged from the 8th to the 4th century BC. In Acts Chapter 2, Peter quotes from Joel 2:28 to the first half of verse 32.

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.....” (Joel 2:28-32)

This passage deserves a whole sermon on its own, but I will just give a few comments on its first part. Joel prophesied a day when God’s Holy Spirit would be poured out on all people, regardless of age, sex or class, and not just priests and prophets, but ordinary people too, of all nations, not just Israel, including Gentiles as well as Jews.

Pentecost Foretold – New Testament

Jesus himself and John the Baptist foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit, sometimes translated as Councillor, Helper, or Spirit of Truth, many times. I can do no better than quote directly from sets of verses from the Gospels of Matthew and John, and Acts.

(John the Baptist speaking) *“He shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”*
(Matthew 3:11)

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. (John 7:37)

But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Councillor (Helper) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.
(John 16:7-8)

*I will ask the Father, and He will give you **another** helper, that He may be with you forever. 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. (John 14:16)*

When Councillor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about Me, but you also must testify, because you have been with Me from the beginning. (John 15:26)

“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4-5)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.
(some of the last words of Jesus before His Ascension). (Acts 1:8)

The Day of Pentecost

It was the Day of Pentecost, and in Jerusalem a group of Jesus' Disciples and other believers were gathered together in a room of a house. We are not told exactly where they were gathered or how many were there, but possibly it was the same room where they gathered before – the upstairs room of Acts 1:13, where about 120 were gathered. They were together for a common purpose - unity was a mark of the early church. They were possibly meeting to pray, or in obedience to Jesus' words in Acts 1:4-5 they were waiting in the city for the Holy Spirit to come.

The Sound of Rushing Wind

Suddenly there was a sound like the blowing of a violent wind from heaven which filled the house. The sound signified the powerful influence and working of the Holy Spirit. The common Greek word for 'wind' '*anemos*' is not used here, but *pneuma* is used, meaning 'breath' or 'spirit'. We use the same word when referring to compressed air – pneumatic. Note it is described as being *like* a rushing wind – we are to understand it was not an actual gale of wind which could be felt, but it was the sound of a rushing wind. I am reminded of what was said about the sound of fire storms in NSW around Christmas 2019 - like the sound of a ferocious hurricane or many freight trains approaching together.

The Tongues of Fire

Also, there appeared what *looked like* tongues of fire over the heads of the Disciples and other believers. Fire is very symbolic, it purifies, burns off dross, and consumes sacrifices on altars. It has been associated with the Divine presence of God. We are reminded of the burning bush which was not consumed, on Mt Sinai, where fire signified God's divine presence (Exodus 3:2-5). The tongues of fire may represent several things at the same time. As well as a sign of the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the tongues of fire may also indicate the ability of every believer to witness by the power of the Holy Spirit, since the tongues of fire rested on each one, and may also signify language tongues, the ability to speak in many languages. The Acts record calls them cloven or divided tongues of fire, suggesting that either it was one fire which divided itself into many parts to rest individually above the heads of the believers, or the tongues of fire above every believer were divided in several parts.

Filled with the Holy Spirit

All the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, and a crowd had gathered. This is the first appearance of the words 'filled with the Holy Spirit' in this context in Acts. It is significant that '**all of them**' experienced this power of the Holy Spirit, because it points to the whole group as corporate witnesses to this fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. By the time people in the crowd heard Peter address them the Disciples and other believers had moved outside to a larger open area where a larger group of people, several thousand could gather. The crowd was curious and was drawn by the unusual sounds they

could hear - the sound of the rushing wind may or may not still be heard, but they would have heard many voices speaking in their own individual languages.

Different Languages

No doubt many of the people were in Jerusalem as visitors or pilgrims for the Feast of Weeks, but some would have been residents of Jerusalem. Each person heard the words of Peter, the Disciples and other believers in their own language. An impressive list of 15 countries or language groups is given for the people, and they stretch from east to west in the known world. The Jewishness of the crowd is emphasised – they were ‘God-fearing Jews’, either Jews; or Gentile converts (proselytes) - who believe in God, and have been allowed to join the synagogues. The speaking in different tongues also emphasises and confirms the inclusion of various people groups into God’s elect. The people were amazed and perplexed to hear the words spoken in their own language. The amazing thing is that they heard not just their own language, but even their own regional dialect of these languages! The Phrygians and Pamphylans, for example, both spoke Greek, but in different dialects; the Parthians, Medes, and Elamites all spoke Persian, but in different provincial forms.

The crowd was amazed “*Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?*” Their accents would have given them away as ‘country bumpkins’. Galileans had difficulty pronouncing the guttural sounds in language and had the habit of swallowing syllables when speaking, so they were looked down upon by the people of Jerusalem as being provincial. Judeans in the south generally felt contempt for the Galileans in the north, who were regarded as compromised by being too closely associated with Gentiles. The Galileans were considered as awkward and uncultured. They were blamed for neglecting the study of their language, and charged with errors in grammar and ridiculous mispronunciations.

Yet, it was these same provincial Galileans who were specially chosen by God to proclaim the Gospel with great eloquence, clarity and persuasion. This was no private and secret event, but a public manifestation of the Holy Spirit, announcing the arrival of a new era. This event heralded a new relationship between believers and the Holy Spirit. The Church had been started, but it was not going to grow and continue on into the future without the Divine energising spark of the Holy Spirit, its powerhouse.

The Prophecy of Joel

Most of the crowd listened respectfully but others mocked the Disciples saying “*They have had too much wine*”. Peter replied with maybe a slight touch of humour “*These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning!*” He could have been inferring “These people are not drunk, as you suppose, the taverns are not even open yet!” However, a more convincing reason is that on a festival day such as Pentecost, a religiously observant Jew would not break his fast until at least 10 am. Peter explains that this strange happening is really a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel, and he quotes from Joel 2:28-32. Peter links the speaking in different languages to what was spoken about by the prophet Joel, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit and the gift of prophecy. Peter understands that the prophecy of Joel concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was being fulfilled that very day. This filling with the Holy Spirit, foretold by Joel, was also shown by the bold, fearless proclaiming of the Gospel

by Peter and the other disciples and by their ability to be effective and persuasive witnesses for their faith.

Peter, before-and-after

Nothing shows the immense power of the of the Holy Spirit more vividly than the dramatic change in the Apostle Peter. Let us examine this remarkable before-and-after story. To set the scene we find Peter sitting in the courtyard while Jesus is being questioned by the High Priest and the Sanhedrin. In the Gospel of Matthew 26, a servant girl says “*you also were with Jesus of Galilee*”, but Peter replies “*I don’t know what you’re talking about*”, and he later says “*I don’t know the man*”. Here we see a dejected and frightened Peter, trying to protect himself from the unfolding events and wishing he could just melt into the background. But now we move to Acts Chapter 2, and what a difference! Now we see Peter boldly proclaiming the Gospel, and identifying with Jesus. Peter’s speech is clear and articulate and delivered with great skill, just as if he had studied rhetoric, grammar and languages for years instead of being a poorly educated fisherman.

A Commentator, **Derek Thomas has said** "What on earth has happened to Peter? In a month and a half, he has changed from the whimpering coward we saw in the high priests' courtyard to the brave and outspoken preacher portrayed in this chapter". Well, that was the power of the Holy Spirit – the power to energise and transform completely! Peter’s transformation, along with the other signs and wonders, is evidence of the coming of the Holy Spirit on that day, the Day of Pentecost.