

## **Pentecost 2014**

Today is Pentecost Sunday. In case you think we Pentecostals made this up, Pentecost is one of the feasts or festivals of Israel found in the Old Testament. It comes fifty days after Passover and was known as the Feast of Weeks or Shavuot. It marked the end of the grain harvest (wheat harvest) and Jews today celebrate the receiving of the Law at Sinai on this festival. Pentecost comes fifty days after Easter and it marks the day on which the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the 120 who were gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem. We mark it as the beginning or the birth of the New Testament church and it happened in fulfillment of a promise Jesus made to his disciples.

Jesus told the disciples, **“It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” John 16:7.** And in John 14 Jesus said, **“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.” John 14:16.**

We know the Holy Spirit is with us as followers of Christ. Through our faith in Christ as Savior and Lord, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our heart and life. Every believer has the Holy Spirit in their heart and life. We partake of the very nature and life of Christ by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit! Here we are talking about the indwelling or abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

But in Acts 1, Jesus spoke to the disciples about the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, **“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Acts 1:4-5** And once again, just before his ascension he told them, **“...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.” Acts 1:8**

Sure enough, ten days later, here is what happened. **“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled**

them.”

**“Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?... We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!’ Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, ‘What does this mean?’” Acts 2:1-8, 12**

Two thousand years later on this Pentecost Sunday, if we conducted a survey and asked what you associate with the term Pentecost or Pentecostal, I suspect we would hear things like, “speaking in tongues, power, anointing, blessings, prophecy, shouting, dancing, healing.” Some might say, “Charismatic, word of faith,” or perhaps, “holiness, long dresses and long hair, no makeup.”

When you read Acts 2, the list is a bit different. You associate things like, “wind, fire, language, evangelism, crowds, repentance, proclamation, unity, praise.” When you read Acts 1 you come up with things like, “promise, power, witness, waiting, obedience, mission, proclaiming, prayer.” When you boil it all down, you end up with a little different focus than what we seem to be focused upon in many Pentecostal churches today. Jesus indicated the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was to empower us to be witnesses of him to the ends of the earth, power to proclaim the good news of Jesus with signs confirming the truth of his gospel. I’m afraid that emphasis has somehow been lost over time.

When the modern Pentecostal outpouring began at the start of the last century, the emphasis was on outreach and missions. It was about getting the gospel to the ends of the earth. Pentecostal missionaries were sent out with signs, wonders and miracles confirming the word of God. It’s what the founding of the Assemblies of God was all about - to have a way to send Pentecostal missionaries into all the world. As a result of this spiritual empowerment, Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have been the fastest growing and largest churches in the world.

But then it seems to me the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement saw a shift take place. It seemed the emphasis shifted to receiving rather than sending or giving. The Pentecostal experience, Pentecostal empowerment became more and more about empowerment to receive, to

receive healing, financial blessing and wealth, the prosperity gospel growing in influence. The focus was on an experience for ourselves, to speak in tongues or to flow in other Charismatic giftings. I'm not condemning all of this and I'm thankful for healing and the blessings of God that have been shown to us as believers. I'm thankful for every Pentecostal experience and manifestation of the Holy Spirit, but consider the danger of turning the focus inward on ourselves. As the focus shifted inward rather than outward – it became more about power for our own well-being, power so we could be healed, we could speak in tongues, power for our own security and welfare, power for our own fame and acclaim, power to impress, power for celebrity, power to raise money, power to maintain our own religious kingdom and empire. We moved away from the true purpose. We moved away from power to be his humble, authentic witnesses.

According to Jesus, we have a mission. “Go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth and tell what Jesus has done for us and then make disciples of all these folks. See that Christ is formed in them. That is our mission. At home, in the nearby places, in the difficult places, the Samaritans of our world, and to the ends of the earth. That is our mission.

The focus must be on the mission. Why were you baptized in the Holy Spirit? Why would you want to receive this gift promised by the Father? So you can “be Pentecostal?” So you can speak in tongues which is a cool gift...so you can fit in with the rest of your group at church? No. According to Acts 1, the reason and purpose is so you could be empowered, equipped to be a witness for Jesus and to accomplish his plan and purpose in the earth.

How does being baptized in the Holy Spirit equip and empower you to be a witness? I believe that experience opens the door to a greater sensitivity to and awareness of the work and will and plan of the Holy Spirit in spreading the gospel. And look at this:

The immediate change in the New Testament believers was their boldness and ability to communicate the gospel. Less than fifty days before, Peter and the disciples were hiding behind locked doors, afraid to let anyone know of their association with Jesus. But on the day of Pentecost, as a result of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, Peter and the Eleven with him stood before the city of Jerusalem and boldly preached Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah, crucified and risen from the dead. They were empowered for the mission!

**If God can empower you to speak in a language you've never learned, (speaking in**

**tongues), he can empower you to witness in a language you have learned. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is about the mission. It is about empowerment to go and tell what Jesus has done!**

On the day of Pentecost the people that heard the disciples speaking in other tongues declared, “we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” The mission for which the baptism in the Holy Spirit equips us is to go and tell the wonders of what God has done! “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses.” Spirit baptism is the means to carry out the mission.

In Acts 4, Peter and John are arrested and the authorities demand to know by what power or what name they had performed a miracle. Luke writes, **“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them...” Acts 4:8. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is about empowerment to speak, to testify, to be witnesses of Jesus!**

The authorities threatened Peter and John and warned them “to speak no longer to anyone in this name. Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.” Acts 4:17-18. They wanted to get them off of their mission. Go home. Speak to each other. Speak in tongues all you want, just don’t tell others about Jesus.

So what did they do? They went back to the church and told them what had been said to them and then they had a prayer meeting. Luke records, **“After they prayed the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” Acts 4:31** It doesn’t say they were all filled with the Holy Spirit so they started a Pentecostal, tongue-talking church and denomination. It doesn’t say they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they started a church so they would feel comfortable speaking in tongues around each other. It doesn’t say they were all filled with the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues and they made that the criteria from then on as to whether you were really a Spirit-filled person. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. They were equipped with a gift and resource needed to carry out and fulfill the mission!

That’s what Pentecost is about. Being filled with the Spirit isn’t about a rite of passage at youth camp, or joining the ranks of the spiritually experienced. Being baptized in the Holy Spirit is empowerment to speak God’s message, to be witnesses, to speak with a special sensitivity what the Holy Spirit puts in your heart. We speak as his witnesses, depending upon God’s power

and the Holy Spirit to make our witness effective and productive.

I want us to consider what that Spirit empowered church of Acts 2 looked like because I believe it is the model for us. **The Acts 2 church was on a mission.** They probably couldn't articulate a mission statement and they didn't have brochures printed up explaining their core values, but they were on a mission all right. As a result of Peter's witness on the day of Pentecost 3,000 people were saved. All they knew was something happened to them in that upper room that made them want to tell others who Jesus is and what he had done for them! They were so focused that not even arrest or the threat of beating and death could silence them. They were on a mission!

Acts 2:5 tells us the crowd was made up of Jews from every known part of the world. Consider this: **The Acts 2 church was multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-generational from day one!** People from all over the known world had returned to Jerusalem for Passover. God fearing Jews Luke tells us. But also visitors from Rome that included "converts to Judaism." You had Hellenistic Jews, influenced by Greek culture, converts to Judaism influenced by Roman culture, folks from Egypt, Asia, Cretans and Arabs, Luke says.

Peter said what was happening on the day of Pentecost was the fulfillment of a prophecy spoken by the prophet Joel, that in the last days God would pour his Spirit out upon all people, sons and daughters, men and women, old folks and young folks. That first century Acts 2 church was diverse, stepping across gender lines and generational lines and ethnic lines as the Gentiles would soon join the ranks of the redeemed as well. Multi generational, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, it was about people hungering for Jesus, coming to know him. What joins us together is not age, gender, ethnicity, hobbies, likes or dislikes, politics or interests - it is our need for and love for Jesus.

The first century church of Pentecost was filled with people united by their love for Jesus and their decision to make a change in lifestyle because of their love for him. **The Acts 2 church consisted of radically changed people.** Look with me at Acts 2:37. As Peter brought his testimony of Christ to a conclusion, Luke records, **"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is**

**for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.’ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’” Acts 2:37-40**

Peter called the people to a decision. If you want to be saved and have your sins forgiven, then you need to repent - it means to turn around and go a new direction. Turn around from the way you’ve been going and come and follow Christ and live in obedience to Him and his word. They were radically saved and radically changed as they repented, turned from their sin and followed Christ.

People often think the church is a bunch of self-righteous do-gooders. I love what Paul wrote regarding the church at Corinth. A wicked city full of immorality and idolatry, Paul reminds them of what they once were and what they have become in Christ. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). This is who we are – radically saved and changed by grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit!

Then he calls them to live counter-culturally. **The Acts 2 church was counter-cultural.** Peter told the crowd, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” The church was called to live like Jesus and embrace his values instead of living like the world and embracing its distorted and twisted values. The first century church of Pentecost was called to live in a way that was in direct opposition to most of the values of its culture. Little has changed in 2,000 years. We too are called to live counter-culturally. The first century church, the Acts 2 church needed spiritual empowerment to enable them to stand against a culture of wickedness and compromise and we need that same spiritual empowerment. “Holy Spirit, come empower us to stand for Christ and to live counter-culturally to the sin, the greed and avarice, the compromise and injustice and shallowness of American culture. Empower us to live for Jesus, regardless of the cost!”

**What if we looked like the church of Acts 2? A church on a mission. A diverse church, multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-generational. A church committed to a lifestyle of following Christ, living counter-culturally to the values of the world and our culture.** What if we lived like that? What effect would the church have in our community?

Being a church like the church of Acts 2 is messy. They had difficulties. Problems arose. The different generations and cultures clashed. Often. But this is the reason for Pentecost. It’s not about getting a blessing so we can feel good in church, it is about empowerment to live for

Christ and reach the world with the gospel. Pentecost must have shaken the 120 in that upper room as they discovered the message wasn't just for them, but it was for the 3,000 folks out in the street. The disciples found the gospel was even for Roman soldiers, Gentiles, heathen. It was for everyone and they were equipped, empowered and commissioned to spread that message!

We look at the first Pentecost in Acts 2 and realize we have sometimes been guilty of making Pentecost a criteria for allowing people in rather than empowerment for sending people out! **Pentecost: Spiritual empowerment for the mission!** That's why you were baptized in the Holy Spirit: spiritual empowerment to proclaim the message of salvation to everyone! That's why he empowered and equipped you, so you could boldly speak of what God has done to those who haven't heard. Pentecost is not just about the evidence, it's about the mission! That's why he empowered and equipped you, so you could boldly live a life of faithfulness, so you could live an authentic and holy life of testimony concerning Christ and his kingdom.

Let's be filled with the Holy Spirit. On this day of Pentecost, let's ask Jesus to once again baptize us in the Holy Spirit, to impart his power, his anointing upon us so we can be witnesses to those in our world. Let's ask Jesus to empower us so we can live a life that matters, a life that is pleasing to Christ, a life that makes a difference. Let's ask him to empower us to live that authentic, Spirit filled life so that others can know Christ.