

Pentecost Sunday

June 4, 2017

Introduction

Sometimes Pentecost is referred to as the birthday of the NT Church. But it's actually an ancient festival that finds its origins in the worship laws that God gave the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Starting with the Sunday immediately after Passover, they were to count off 50 days and then offer the firstfruits of their grain harvest to the Lord.

It's really quite amazing that... on the day God's people were searching for their Passover lambs, Jesus rode into Jerusalem; that on the day they offered and ate those lambs, Jesus went on the cross as the death-defeating sacrifice; that on the day they offered the first sheaf of grain, Jesus rose from the dead as **"the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep"**; and that on the day when they brought the firstfruits of the harvest, the first gathering of souls into the New Testament Church took place. One can't help but see how those old covenant festivals prefigured the new covenant of God's grace.

Theme: Unwrap the Spirit's Pentecostal Gifts.

Whether one considers Pentecost an Old Testament festival (when the people offered something to God) or a New Testament festival (when God offered something to the people), the focus on gifts is unmistakable. Let's also have that as our focus this morning as we consider this Word of God. On this, the Church's birthday, let's **UNWRAP THE SPIRIT'S PENTECOSTAL GIFTS. He's given special signs. He's given an understanding of the truth. He's given boldness.**

Part I: He's given special signs.

In both Old and New Testament times, special signs and wonders were never an end in themselves. The apostle John says that every single one of Jesus' miracles was performed so that someone might know for certain that Jesus is the Christ and the only life-giving object of faith. The miracles God performed through Moses before the throne of Pharaoh were intended to be a loud wake-up call to acknowledge God's ultimate authority. God's prophet Ezekiel used living dioramas and made a spectacle of himself to draw attention to God's message that he was proclaiming. Later on, signs would accompany the apostles so that people might know that they were truly sent out from God.

The Spirit's gift of special signs on Pentecost served that exact same purpose. They were intended first to attract the people's attention and then to accommodate the gospel message to the pilgrims from foreign lands. **"Suddenly a sound like the rushing of a violent wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw divided tongues that were like fire resting on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, since the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak fluently... When this sound was heard, a crowd came together and was confused, because each one heard them speaking in his own language."**

There were three special signs given by the Holy Spirit: a loud noise similar to what a tornado might make; something like fire that came down and rested upon the apostles' heads; and their ability to speak in at least fifteen different foreign dialects. The first and last were signs for everyone. It's unclear whether or not the crowd saw the tongues of fire, or if that display was only for the apostles. In any case – yeah, I think I would've gone and checked it out, too!

Peter quickly dismisses the charge raised by some that they were drunk – not only is that sinful behavior, but an absurd accusation, considering the time of day. Then he simply says that this is exactly what the prophet Joel had foretold of the last days. The end times really began with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, didn't they? And the final judgment, of which Joel also speaks, is the other bookend to the last days. During that period, God would miraculously bestow his Spirit upon all believers. So, what special signs has he given us? The Spirit's allowed each and every one of us to miraculously envision the culmination of God's promises and the power of the gospel at work throughout the world.

Before we move on, I think it's important to note that Jesus nowhere promised that every single believer would receive charismatic gifts – ecstatic visions, speaking in tongues, healing, snake handling, etc. – in the way Pentecostal churches teach. When Paul speaks about the gift of tongues to the Corinthians, he puts it at the very bottom of a list that seems to be arranged hierarchically. Keep in mind that, at the time of the apostles, the Christian Church was a relatively unknown entity. So, God chose to authenticate his message with miraculous signs and wonders. Now, however, the Christian Church *is* firmly established as a credible entity. It's not that God *couldn't* bestow these gifts upon his Church, but we should neither expect them nor let them distract us from the greatly superior gift we have in God's revealed Word.

Transition

That leads directly into the second of the Spirit's pentecostal gifts. He's given an understanding of the truth.

Part II: He's given an understanding of the truth.

In John 16, we heard Jesus tell the disciples: **“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.”** Even their regular visits with the risen Savior over those forty days hadn't cleared everything up in the minds of the disciples. On the very day of his ascension, we hear them asking if Jesus was going to finally restore the glory to Israel. His response was to just sit tight in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit, who'd fill in the gaps in their knowledge. Another statement in John's Gospel seems to indicate that on Pentecost the apostles were given the Spirit's gift of “total recall.” They immediately were taught “all things” and were reminded of everything Jesus had ever said in their hearing. Like a complete and high-speed osmosis, all spiritual truth was poured right into their hearts and minds.

In the last verse of the text, Peter preaches the primary truth of the kingdom: **“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”** I think Paul's words to the Romans are very much appropriate in this context. Just as Peter just did, he quotes Joel 2:32, and says that those who call on the name of the Lord are those who believe. And those who believe are those who've heard. And those who've heard are those to whom someone has preached. And those who preach have been sent by God himself to proclaim the truth of his Word.

As we unwrap this pentecostal gift, we recall that the Spirit calls and builds up his Church through the precious gospel of Christ crucified. Peter proclaimed that life-giving message to the gathered crowd, and – wouldn't you know it – 3,000 people became a part of the Church of God that day! Sometimes people get so focused on the outwardly amazing spiritual gifts that they forget that the greatest of all the gifts of the Spirit is the gift of faith. This faith is no less miraculous than any other gift. Faith is simple *trust* in Jesus, but there's also an *understanding* component. Faith grabs onto the truths of God's promises. It trusts / knows / believes that, though we were once lost in sin and doomed to hell, Jesus stood as our substitute, took the wrath of God upon himself, rose triumphantly, ascended to glory, rules his Church, and sends forth the Spirit to work through those who proclaim his good news even today.

Transition

To carry out that work, we unwrap the last of the Spirit's pentecostal gifts. He's given boldness to those who proclaim the Word of God.

Part III: He's given boldness.

On the Sea of Galilee, Peter boldly stepped out of a boat to walk to Jesus... and saw how quickly faith can dwindle away. One time, Peter boldly tried to prevent Jesus from walking the way of the cross... and Jesus had to put him in his place. In Gethsemane, Peter boldly tried to raise up arms to fight for his Lord and Savior... and Jesus had to reprimand him again. A few hours later, Peter boldly spoke up regarding his relationship to Jesus (namely, that he had none; he didn't even know him)... and had to slink away in the sheer terror and sorrow over what he'd done. On Easter morning, Peter boldly ran to the tomb... but went away confused – at least for the time being – over what had happened to Jesus' body.

Starting on Pentecost, we see a whole new side to Peter's boldness. As far as the "**Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria**" are concerned regarding Jesus' Great Commission, Peter steps to the forefront of the evangelism efforts. He kicks off that work with a powerful Pentecost sermon that can only be credited to the empowering of the Holy Spirit. It's a sermon that focuses clearly and entirely on Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

And that's what's given us boldness, too. The Holy Spirit has poured out God's love into our hearts. We've been led to know the truth and love the truth and hold onto that truth – literally for dear life. The Spirit's gift of a bold faith, given through his working in the Word, allows us to boldly dedicate our speech, our skills – yes, our very lives – to the ministry of his gospel. Our prayer is that we all might boldly rededicate ourselves often to proclaiming Christ Jesus as we have the opportunity. What a fitting encouragement to join in the *Friendship Evangelism* study we're starting this morning! Come and learn why we want to and how we can better proclaim Jesus to our friends, relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors.

Conclusion

You and I are bold, not because the Spirit's come to rest on us in what appeared to be tongues of fire, but because he's been poured out on us through Water, Word, Wafer, and Wine. Through those amazing gifts, he's given us an understanding of the truth and the boldness to share it. May we rest in God's grace all the days of our life! Amen.