

THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES AT PENTECOST

Acts 2:1-21

Key Verse: 2:4

“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”

In the last passage we learned how the early Christians prepared for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The first part of Acts 1:14 says, “They all joined together constantly in prayer....” The early Christians became one in Jesus. Though they were all different, they could become one when they had Jesus in their hearts. They could become one when they knew the love of God in their hearts. They could become one when they had one prayer topic based on Jesus’ world mission command. Our Lord Jesus wants us to be one in him so that we may pray together to fulfill the task of world mission that he has given us.

Today’s passage is about the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came on the Christian fellowship while they united in prayer. The Holy Spirit enabled them to carry out the world mission command in their generation. May the Holy Spirit enable us to fulfill the world mission command in our generation.

First, the Holy Spirit filled the apostles (1-4).

Look at verse 1. “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.” It had been ten days since Christ’s ascension. The believers were waiting in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit. They had been praying all together constantly for ten days. And they were still all there. No one left the prayer meeting to attend to personal business or take a break. Then it happened.

Look at verse 2. “Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.” It was the coming of the Holy Spirit. He is compared to the blowing of a violent wind. We can see the power of wind in tornados and hurricanes. Such wind can pick up houses and put them down in another place. Wind can be everywhere at one time. Like the wind, the Holy Spirit is invisible, but powerful and everywhere present. Jesus himself compared the Holy Spirit to a life-giving wind, saying, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (Jn 3:8). In both Hebrew (“ruach”), and Greek (“pneuma”), the same word refers to wind, spirit and breath. After God formed man from the dust of the ground, he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being (Gen 2:7). In the same way, the Holy Spirit gives birth to a new spiritual life in those who believe in Jesus (Jn 3:5,6). The Holy Spirit can give new life to any kind of person. The Holy Spirit can even raise the dead (Ro 8:11).

Look at verse 3. “They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.” Though the Holy Spirit is one, he was given to each of the apostles individually. He came to them as tongues of fire. His manifestation as tongues of fire has deep meaning. The tongue is the instrument of speech. Fire represents the holiness of God. Jesus had said that they would be baptized by the Holy Spirit (Ac 1:5). The Holy Spirit baptizes with holy fire (Lk 3:16) that cleanses and purifies the inner man from all sin and iniquity. He would especially sanctify their hearts and tongues. The Holy Spirit would help them speak the truth about the holy God. This reminds us of the prophet Isaiah. When Isaiah met the Holy God personally he realized that he was a man of unclean lips who spoke unbelieving words. He knew he deserved God’s punishment. Then an angel took a live coal from the holy fire and

touched his lips (Isa 6:7). His lips were cleansed and his sin atoned for. Isaiah became the greatest prophet who spoke and wrote about the holy God and his world salvation plan. The apostles had been mundane men. Even though they were taught and trained by Jesus, they could not get out of their human thinking and often said mundane words at the worst times. When the Holy Spirit came to each of them as tongues of fire, he burned away their impurities and enabled them to speak and write about the holy God. They gave us the New Testament.

Look at verse 4. "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." Each of the apostles was filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came to live in them as his dwelling place. In the Old Testament, from time to time the Holy Spirit came upon a leader of Israel to give him wisdom and power. But the dwelling place of God was known to be the temple. The temple ministry had to be maintained through an elaborate and costly sacrificial system carried out by priests. But Jesus came to this world to fulfill the role of the temple. Through Jesus' death and resurrection the problem of sin is solved. When Jesus breathed his last, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Lk 23:45). It symbolized the end of the temple system and the dawning of a new era when God would dwell in the hearts of men through faith in Jesus. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, he filled the apostles one by one with his own presence.

Jesus called the Holy Spirit the gift of God (Ac 1:4). Indeed the Holy Spirit is the best blessing that God can give to mankind. When the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, he drives out evil spirits and the power of sin and death. The Holy Spirit, like fire, warms our hearts with the love of God. Paul said in Romans 8:5b, "God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us." Many people are cold-hearted and hard-hearted. It is because of evil spirits and the power of sin. Even if they are loved to the maximum degree, they never feel loved in their hearts. But the Holy Spirit melts all the hardness and coldness in our hearts and fills us with the love of God. He gives us true joy and peace. He gives us confidence and courage and strength to live in this world as victors.

Then, what did the apostles do? They began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. According to Paul, there are two kinds of tongues: the tongues of men and the tongues of angels (1Co 12-14). At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to speak the tongues of men. The words they spoke had meaning to people of other nations whom they had never met before. The Holy Spirit's primary purpose was to enable the apostles to preach the gospel to men in a way that they could understand.

Second, we hear the wonders of God in our own tongues (5-13).

Look at verse 5. "Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven." These people had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. They feared God and wanted to honor God according to the teaching of the Bible. When the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, these people heard the sound. They knew something unusual was happening. They came to the place where the apostles were. They saw them and heard them speaking their own language. When they heard Galilean hillbillies speaking in the native language of each respective country, they were utterly amazed.

Look at verses 9-11. "Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappodicia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Parthia, Media and Elam were to the east. Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, and Pontus

were to the north. Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Rome, Crete and Cyrene were to the west. Egypt and Arabia were to the south. These places encompassed Jerusalem. They represent the entire world of the time.

It is indeed meaningful that people from all the surrounding nations could hear the wonders of God in their own tongues. It was a great expression of God's love for mankind. Until this time, God had used Israel as his chosen people. He had spoken to them and made them Bible teachers for the world. They spoke mostly Aramaic and Greek. The Old Testament was written in Greek. If foreigners wanted to study the Bible they had to know Greek. But now God was speaking through the apostles to peoples of all nations in their own tongues, declaring the "wonders of God" to them (11). The "wonders of God" means the gospel of Jesus. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." At Pentecost, God expressed his love for peoples of all nations. God must have longed for this day since the time at Babel when he confused men's languages to scatter them (Ge 11:7). It was to keep them from uniting to do mischief. The strife that came from that division caused pain to God's heart and to mankind as well. Moreover, God had been greatly misunderstood because he focused his redemptive work on the Jews. At last, God could say what he really wanted to say to all peoples of all nations, that he loved them, in their own native language.

When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, he enabled the apostles to speak in other languages to peoples of all nations. Usually, it takes bone-crushing effort to learn a foreign language. But the Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to speak other languages with no study. This teaches us the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. It also teaches us that God wanted to communicate with peoples of other nations immediately. This must have deeply impressed the apostles. The Risen Christ had said in Acts 1:8 that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria; it was reasonable. Then he also said, "to the ends of the earth." It seemed too fantastic. They might have thought their grandchildren could go to the ends of the earth as missionaries in the future. However, when the Holy Spirit came, the apostles themselves could share the gospel with the peoples of all nations immediately. This must have convinced them that God wanted to preach the gospel to the whole world in their generation. Indeed, we see that this happened. By the time the book of Acts ends, Christian churches had been planted throughout the known world, including Rome. Paul had a vision to go to Spain, the ends of the earth. The gospel spread to the whole world in the Apostles' lifetimes. God's hearts' desire has ever been to spread the gospel of Jesus to the ends of the earth in each generation. The motto of the Student Volunteer Movement was, "To evangelize the world in this generation."

Since the apostolic time, the world seems to have gotten smaller. It took them months to travel to the ends of the earth; we can do so in hours. Modern communication gives us instant access to any people. What are we doing? Most people are doing business or being entertained. Modern technology gives us new means to preach the gospel, but it does not give us the power to do so—not at all. Spirit is everything. Only the Holy Spirit with his tongues of fire can burn away our business minds and pleasure-seeking desires. Only the Holy Spirit can empower us to preach the gospel to all nations in this generation. We pray to make North America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We recite this prayer topic every Sunday. But sometimes we sound like students taking a pop quiz. God wants to fulfill this prayer topic in our generation. Of course, we confront cultural barriers and a "generation gap." But when the Holy Spirit comes, he enables us to share the gospel with young people in a meaningful way. May the Holy Spirit enables us to share the gospel meaningfully with young Americans and peoples of all nations until they can hear the wonders of God in their own tongues.

When the mighty work of the Holy Spirit happened, there were two responses. God-fearing people wanted to know the spiritual meaning of the event. But scoffers began to make fun of the disciples, saying, "They have had too much wine." Even at Pentecost, the enemies of God were there to discredit the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit. We should not be surprised that this still happens today.

Third, God pours out his Spirit on all people (14-21).

When Apostle Peter heard the scoffers, he was not daunted. He stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel." Then he quoted the prophecy of Joel exactly. It is the best explanation in the Old Testament for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Look at verse 17. "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, you old men will dream dreams." According to this prophecy, the Holy Spirit was poured out on all people. The Holy Spirit was not given only to special people, but to all people, including sons and daughters, young men and old men. At that time there were many kinds of class distinctions among men, but not to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came upon all people, including servants, both men and women. The Holy Spirit comes on all who repent and accept the gospel.

When the Holy Spirit comes, sons and daughters will prophesy. They will speak about what God has done, is doing and will do in the future. Recently, many second generation missionaries have gone to other countries on short-term mission journeys. They have taught the Bible and shared the gospel. God has opened their eyes to see his vision for world salvation. It is the work of the Holy Spirit among them.

When the Holy Spirit comes, young men see visions. This means God's vision for them and for the whole world. Without the Holy Spirit, young men think about girls and money, cars and sports. But when the Holy Spirit comes upon them they realize that God made them to do great things. They can see how God wants to use them and can dedicate themselves to a holy life. One young man saw God's vision through Bible study. Since then, he has given his heart to carry out 12-15 Bible studies per week and is getting straight A's in his classes. He wants to go as a missionary to Africa in the future.

Look at verse 17 again. "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams." When the Holy Spirit comes upon us, we can all proclaim the good news of Jesus. Even the youngest among us can bring new sheep to the summer Bible conference. The oldest among us can do so too.

The coming of the Holy Spirit is the dawn of a new age in which God comes into men's hearts to work out their salvation. His life-giving work is amazing among men, and he also gives signs in nature. His work on earth will continue until the great and glorious day of the Lord, that is, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Look at verse 21. "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Whoever accepts the gospel and calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

In this passage we studied the Holy Spirit's coming at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit enables us to preach the gospel powerfully to fellow Americans and people of all nations. The Holy Spirit fills us with the love of God and true joy. May the Holy Spirit come upon you and be with you.