

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR
"The Pouring Out of the Holy Spirit"
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

 haak@prca.org

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Dear Radio Friends,

Today we are going to talk about one of the greatest events in the history of the world—the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost as recorded in [Acts 2:1-4](#). Comparatively, there is no event in all the history of the world that has had such a profound and long-lasting effect on humanity. We can think of important dates when world-changing events have occurred. We can think of great inventions that have changed the way things are done and the way we live. We can think of names of great and influential people. But all these are nothing compared to the day of Pentecost.

We can even think of great biblical events like the creation of the world, the fall of man, the call of Abraham, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the conquest of Canaan, and, in the New Testament, the birth of Christ, His baptism, His ministry, His suffering and death, His resurrection and ascension—all very important events. But there is no event so profoundly influential on mankind as Pentecost. Christ's own birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension were limited to Galilee and a period in history. But in Pentecost, we have the entrance of God Himself into the world of man to be with us till the end of time. And what a profound effect that has had on the history of the world.

It is this great event that we want to look at from Acts 2:1-4. In verse 1 we read: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." The word "Pentecost" simply means "the fiftieth day," that is, the fiftieth day after the Passover. And on this important day in the Old Testament a feast was celebrated—the Feast of Firstfruits. This was one of seven annual feasts in the Old Testament. And it was a day in which the saints of the Old Testament celebrated the beginning of the harvest season by bringing a gift to God that represented the first things taken from the field in the harvest. It was a day in which the Israelites celebrated the abundance that God would give them from their fields. It was a day of promise. The little gift that they brought to God represented the plenty that was to follow in the harvest.

It was no accident that the Holy Spirit came on the day of this great feast. Verse 1 says, "When the day of Pentecost was fully come." And the idea is that this was the fulfillment of the Old Testament feast. In fact, it is very likely that the disciples were expecting the Holy Spirit to come on this very day. For we read: "They were all with one accord in one place." There was an expectancy in their gathering. Jesus had told them to go to Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Spirit. And in obedience now, they are waiting on this day for the Holy Spirit.

The event that is recorded in these verses is an amazing and breathtaking event. It was a miracle. And it was real. The disciples did not see a vision. It was something that happened within the realm of their experience. They saw, they heard, and they felt the coming of the Holy Spirit.

There were four things that the disciples, gathered that day, experienced, all of which were signs of the Holy Spirit. We call them "signs of Pentecost." They are signs because each of them tells us something about the Holy Spirit and the work that He comes to do as He is poured into the church.

As you read these verses, you get the impression that Luke struggles to find words to describe this event. Something extraordinary has happened. And the best that Luke can do is make comparisons to the

ordinary. And throughout these verses he keeps saying, “It was like this,” or “It was like that,” like wind and like fire, but it was not wind and it was not fire. It was more than just that.

The first sign is mentioned in verse 2 where we read: “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.” This was not a wind storm. But it was the sound of wind, the sound that a tornado would make—louder than a hundred-mile freight train coming past. The word for “spirit” in the Bible literally means “wind” or “breath.” And in [John 3:8](#) Jesus compares the Spirit and His coming to the wind. He says, “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” This sign, this comparison of the Spirit to wind, points to the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit—a creative, life-giving power as well as a destructive, killing power. The Holy Spirit comes to destroy the power of sin in a person, to conquer Satan, to drive him from the throne of a man’s heart. And the Holy Spirit comes to create a new life in the sinner. If any man is in Christ Jesus, he *is* a new creature. And so, though the Holy Spirit is invisible, like the wind, and you cannot see Him, yet, where He comes you can see what He does. He changes a person from being a servant of Satan and sin to being a willing servant of God who lives in holiness. This is the power of the Holy Spirit.

The second sign is mentioned in verse 3, where we read: “And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.” First the disciples hear something. Now the disciples see these strange, tongue-like fiery objects that come down on each of them. What exactly happened, we cannot explain from the text. But the important thing again is the comparison. We have a sign of fire—a sign that compares the Holy Spirit to fire. Fire in the Bible is a symbol of the holy presence of God. God led His people through the wilderness by a cloud of fire that represented His power and His presence. Also, [Hebrews 12:29](#), “Our God is a consuming fire,” the idea being that God is pure and perfectly holy. And so He responds to sin by burning it away in His wrath. Fire has a purifying effect and the Spirit, who is called the Holy Spirit, comes to purify and to make holy.

And then, notice as well that the fiery tongues rested on each of them. In the Old Testament, the presence of God was confined in the cloud to one physical location—first in the tabernacle and later in the temple. But now, under the New Testament, every believer becomes a temple and dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. God’s fellowship with His people is worldwide. As Jesus tells us in [John 4:21](#), “The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father”...but in spirit and in truth, for “God is a Spirit,” and comes in spirit. In the Old Testament the saints went to worship God in the temple. In the New Testament, the Spirit comes to each one so that we can worship Him in churches all over the world. We can worship Him in our homes, in our closets, and anywhere because we worship God in our hearts. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The third sign witnessed by these disciples was tongue-speaking. In verse 4: “They began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” A tongue here is a language. What was heard here was not strange incomprehensible gibberish, but as verses 8-12 make plain, foreign languages that could be understood by visitors to Jerusalem from other parts of the world. The miracle here was a miracle of speaking. The Holy Spirit gave to these disciples, quite suddenly, the ability to speak fluently in languages that they had never learned before. Just imagine that—if suddenly you had the ability to speak fluent Chinese or fluent Portuguese or some other very difficult-to-learn language. This was the miracle here.

And it is deeply significant. The people listed in verses 8-12 who heard the disciples speak in their own language were the Jews of the dispersion who knew Hebrew and Greek, but also had a local language where they lived. And now the disciples were preaching the gospel to them in their local language. The origin of all the different languages of the world from the Old Testament is Babel, where God cursed mankind with confusion of languages—so that different ethnic groups could not understand one another. And the world was divided into nations. Now, in this sign of speaking in tongues, God is saying that the coming of the Spirit in a sense reverses that curse or overcomes it. How difficult it is not to be able to understand and communicate with a foreigner. But now God brings one language to the earth—for all the nations of the earth—and that is the language of the gospel of grace, the gospel of sin and pardon.

The different languages still exist. But the gospel is preached in all the languages of the earth, to all the nations of the earth, as God gathers a universal church from the ends of the earth.

This sign of the Holy Spirit's coming speaks of the New Testament age as a period of missions and of the spread of the gospel. After Christ ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit comes to equip the church to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth, so that, through this preaching, God's elect people from every nation may hear and believe the message of Christ. The sign of speaking in tongues is not intended as a personal blessing to this or that individual. But it is a sign for all the church and for all believers in all ages.

And at the same time, this sign is really a message to Israel and the Jews, that they are no longer the special people of God, but that they, with all the other nations of the earth, must find their salvation by believing the gospel of Christ. Paul says in [Romans 11:25](#), that blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. Now in the New Testament, God works in all nations to gather His people.

There is one more miracle in these verses—not witnessed so much as experienced by the disciples. In the beginning of verse 4 we read, "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost." If you turn back in your Bibles to the earlier promises of the coming of the Holy Spirit you find that various synonymous terms are used to describe this marvel. In [Acts 1:5](#) we read of being baptized with the Holy Spirit; Acts 1:8, of the Holy Spirit coming upon you; [Acts 2:38](#), of receiving the Holy Spirit; and here in the text, being filled with the Holy Spirit. All these refer to one and the same thing. They do not refer to some extraordinary second experience that comes to some Christians only, but to the coming of the Holy Spirit to all who believe in Jesus.

In the Old Testament, Moses expresses his desire and longing that all God's people be filled with the Spirit and be prophets. In [Numbers 11:29](#) he says, "would God that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!" The coming of the Holy Spirit is the fulfillment of this longing of Moses.

Paul says in I Corinthians 12:13, "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." This is very important. There is a false teaching that is very popular today that divides Christians into two groups: those who are simply believers, and then the more special group of those who have been baptized with the Holy Spirit. This teaching not only divides the church, but it puts the Holy Spirit above Jesus Christ and puts having the Holy Spirit above believing in Jesus and the gospel. We should not do that. Jesus says of the Holy Spirit in [John 16:13, 14](#): He shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." Jesus means by this that the Holy Spirit comes to bring the gospel of Christ and nothing else to *all* believers. On the day of Pentecost, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

It is important to see here, as well, that the Holy Spirit came sovereignly, that is, these disciples did not receive the Holy Spirit by opening their hearts to Christ. Verse 2 speaks of the Spirit coming suddenly. The idea is that He came sovereignly. And it teaches that for the work of salvation in our hearts we depend entirely on God and His grace. These disciples could do nothing to bring the Holy Spirit from heaven into their hearts. We can do nothing to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit. God does it. God saves you. He sovereignly, according to His will, comes into the heart of His elect people. And we must praise and thank God alone for salvation. It is not by human effort.

What is it to be filled with the Holy Spirit? What is this experience? Well, it is the experience of salvation, of faith in Jesus Christ. When the Holy Spirit comes, He opens our eyes to believe the gospel, to believe as true all that God has revealed in the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit causes us to see the truth about ourselves, to see our sin and sinfulness, and to see Jesus Christ as the only way for us to be delivered from the hell that we deserve. The Holy Spirit makes us look to Christ and trust in His cross for salvation. These signs at Pentecost were not so much for the 120 who received them. These were already saved. But these signs were for the multitudes. And they were recorded in Scripture for us and for our salvation.

What is the importance of these signs? What do they mean for us today?

First, they speak of the presence of God with His people in the New Testament church. Jesus promised as He was leaving: “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” In the Old Testament, God was with His people in the cloud of fire. But now He comes in a way far greater, far more real, far more powerful than He did then. Pentecost is the day of the fullness of the presence of God with His people. It is a day of the fullness of the covenant of God, God dwelling with His people.

That is what we should rejoice in as we remember the coming of the Spirit—God is with His church and with His people, not as a blessing that comes in drips, but a full blessing, the Spirit is poured out into the church today. Now we have the fullness of the revelation of God in, not just the promises of Christ as they had in the Old Testament, but in their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Now we have the whole of the Scriptures, we have the fullness of God in the ability of every Christian to pray on his own and to come to God. We have the fullness of God in the preaching of the gospel and in the church of Christ on the earth. The Spirit has come as the Spirit of God to dwell among us.

And, second, these signs are important because they tell us how the great commission will be fulfilled. The sign of the many languages tells us not only that people from all nations will be saved and the Gentiles brought in, but it tells us also how this will take place. It will take place through the preaching of the Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had told His disciples to bring the gospel to all nations. And they must have wondered, how will we—such a small group of people—do this? And the answer was that the Holy Spirit would go with them and confirm their word and work. The Holy Spirit comes to give faith, to open hearts, to strengthen believers, to convert sinners. He is the power of God that accomplishes the preaching, to make it effectual, and to bring sinners to Christ.

And as you look at the day of Pentecost, you see this happened immediately. One of the first results of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, was a sermon. Peter stood up and he boldly preached a message of sin and repentance and faith in Christ for salvation. And thousands were converted.

Today there is a resistance in the church to preaching. People want to replace preaching with entertainment and other things. But just think, what if Peter had not preached this sermon, if the Holy Spirit had not equipped the church this way, if Peter had not preached, if the disciples had not gone out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth preaching, if Paul had not gone on his missionary journeys? Then everything would have stayed right where it was that day in Jerusalem—a church of 120 that would have all died. And that would have been the end of the church. But the result of the Spirit’s coming was preaching. And the day of Pentecost started a storm, a shot that rang through all the earth, a spark that set the world on fire. And it all started with a sermon from Peter.

What did he preach? He preached sin and the Savior. He preached a sovereign God and the necessity for repentance and faith. This is the result of the Spirit’s work. This is what the church today needs. Where the true gospel is preached, there the Spirit is present in the church today.

Let us pray.

Lord, give us the Spirit and hearts for the true gospel of salvation through Jesus alone. We give thanks for the Spirit who has come. And we pray that His powerful work will continue for the gathering of the church so that all things may be ready for the return of our Savior. In His name do we pray, Amen.