

Acts 2: 1-21; “The Meaning of Pentecost”, Sermon # 4 in the series – “Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on May 22nd, 2011, in the Morning Worship Service.

What is the meaning of Pentecost? That is what we want to think about this morning. The word “Pentecost” means “fiftieth”. It means that it had been 50 days since the 2nd day of unleavened bread during the feast of Passover. It was a Sunday, the first day of the week. At this time, according to the Old Testament law, the feast of Harvest would be celebrated, the first-fruits of the labors which were sown in the field would be brought in. In Leviticus 23, verse 16, it says, “Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the Lord.” “You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah.” “They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven.” “They are the firstfruits to the Lord.” “Exodus Chapter 34, verse 22 says, “And you shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest.” This day of Pentecost was the fulfillment of that Old Testament observance; the feast of weeks, for it was the first ingathering of the spiritual harvest related to Christ’s having sown Himself as a grain of wheat, falling into the ground in death for our sins, and then because of His rising from the dead, and His sending the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, there was a great spiritual harvest that was gathered in, in conversions unto God.

It was because Christ was raised from the dead; raised to a position of great glory and power by the Father, that He was able to send the Holy Spirit to give to Peter and those with him, the gifts and the graces which they needed to see the Church added to, that day. It was because Christ had ascended to the Father’s right hand, that the ingathering of these first-fruits, to the Christian Church, took place that day. In Acts Chapter 2, verse 32, Peter says to the Jews who were gathered there that day in Jerusalem, whom he was preaching to, “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.” “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.” This pouring out of the Spirit was the beginning of the first real numerical success in the building of Christ’s Church, but it certainly was not the last.

There is much to learn about what Pentecost meant then, and what Pentecost means to us now. So I want to approach this subject by setting before you the meaning of the emblems that were seen and heard that morning; and what the Apostle Peter said about them. The first emblem is that of the rushing mighty wind. (Verses 1 and 2) The second is the emblem of the tongues of fire. (Verses 3-18) And the third is a cluster; the emblems of blood, fire, and vapor of smoke. (in verses 19-21) It is my prayer that each of us will see what applied to them in that day in the early Church, and what applies to us in our day, now.

1st of all – Let us look at the emblem of the rushing, mighty wind.

(Verses 1 and 2)

“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.” “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.” The Apostles and disciples of our Lord, about a hundred and twenty in number, had been waiting for this event for 10 days; ever since Jesus had said to them, before His ascension, that they were to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit. They had spent their time in prayer. Because just before He left them; after He had manifested Himself at a number of points during the 40 days that He had been with them after His resurrection; He said to them in Luke 24: 46-49: “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” “And you are witnesses of these things.” “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”

These disciples knew that they were going to be more greatly involved with the work of witnessing to the truth of the gospel concerning their Master and Lord. They would be much more involved in the good work of preaching and teaching. They would be much more involved with the Holy Spirit in a greater sense than they ever had been before. And that is why they prayed, and that is why they waited. But Jesus had told them that they, both individually and as a group, that they would experience something more when they were “baptized” with the Spirit; something which would transform them and the ministries that they were each involved in. Verse 8 of Acts Chapter 1 says, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” They were going to receive what they desperately needed in order to see success in their ministries; they were going to receive power.

The emblem of this power, as it manifested itself on the Day of Pentecost, was a rushing, mighty wind. This wind came suddenly, and they heard the sound of it, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. The Apostles and disciples were sitting in a house, and this wind came, and it filled the house. But the wind was not confined to the house, because it says in verse 6 that “when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language.” So it appears that a multitude converged on the house where the disciples were, because they heard this sound. They were attracted to the house where the disciples were by the sound of the wind. And it seems likely that the Apostles and others of the brethren who had just received the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, knew that they were going to have the opportunity to preach and speak of the wonderful works of God, as it says in verse 11. What a great event it was. They had already received the Holy Spirit’s working in their hearts and lives and ministries before this; but now there was to be a great increase in power; power specifically to witness for Christ and to see results.

Now this emblem of the wind representing the Holy Spirit’s working in a powerful way spiritually, was something that the Lord Jesus had already taught His disciples about; during His earthly ministry. If you will turn with me over to John Chapter 3 with me; you will see this. You may remember what happened here. Nicodemus, who was a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus by night. He said to Jesus in verse 2 – “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” “Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old?’” “Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” You see, Nicodemus was not understanding; he was not yet able to comprehend spiritual things. He thought that Jesus was speaking in a literal physical way. “Jesus answers him in verse 5, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’” “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’” Here is what I want you to see – “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes.” “So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

To be born of the Spirit is to receive the gift of a New Heart. It is to be regenerated; to be given new life in Jesus’ name in relation to the gospel in New Testament times. In Old Testament times it was to be given that new life by means of believing the promises concerning Christ and God’s future working in relation to Christ. That life which you are given when you are born again consists of the ability to be able to see things spiritually, and the power to begin to do what is right by faith. It is to have the ability to perceive the difference between good and evil, right and wrong, truth and error. It is to have the discernment to make progress in relation to these things, to grow up and become more discerning, by abiding in God’s word. Verse 11 – “Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.” “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”, Jesus says.

But the truth is, that “the wind blows where it wishes.” God is perfectly sovereign in regard to where the wind blows and how strongly it blows and even the people whom He attracts to the sound of the wind. In Psalm 135, verse 5, it says, “For I know that the Lord is great and our Lord is above all gods.” “Whatever the Lord pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places.” “He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He bring the wind out of His treasures.” And this is just referring to His abilities to create physical wind. This was a spiritual wind which was blowing on the Day of Pentecost. As we see from this passage, the Lord the Spirit is well pictured by the wind blowing where it will. Here; the evidence of His mighty working is spoken of as a “mighty rushing wind.” It was a work of great spiritual power that the Spirit was doing in relation to the whole early Church. He had already given each believer in Jesus the gift of regeneration, and now on this day, a day particularly chosen by God, He came upon His gathered Church in mighty power to spiritually and formally unite them as Christ’s Church, and give to them the gifts which they would need to fulfill the mandate which He had given to them. It was His commandment that they should go and teach all the nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

To apply this truth, let me ask you whether the wind has ever blown in your soul, so that you have been born again of the Spirit of God? In Romans Chapter 8, verse 9, the Apostle Paul says, “Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.” It is the Spirit’s work in your heart that makes you a Christian. It is the Spirit’s work in your heart that leads you to greater holiness. It is the Spirit’s work in our hearts that causes us to be of one accord, and to seek the power that we need to be faithful witnesses. Listen to Adam Clarke on this: “With one accord, ὁμοθυμαδον; this word is very expressive: it signifies that all their minds, affections, desires, and wishes, were concentrated in one object, every man having the same end in view; and, having but one desire, they had but one prayer to God, and every heart uttered it. There was no person uninterested - none unconcerned - none lukewarm; all were in earnest; and the Spirit of God came down to meet their united faith and prayer. When any assembly of God’s people meet in the same spirit they may expect every blessing they need.”

Let me ask whether you are in one accord with the rest of us here in seeking for this blessing of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who so fills us, as believers, that we become successful in our witness and then people are brought to faith in Christ and added to His Church. O do you see how important it is that we do not grieve the Holy Spirit who has been given to us as a gift of the Father and the Son. How important the Spirit’s work is, for our being able to see this church grow, and bear fruit unto God, that we “endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Because “there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.” (Ephesians 4: 3 and 4) The Spirit manifests Himself like the wind. We cannot tell where He comes from and where He is going in the manifestation of His holy influences.

But here in this passage we should notice the suddenness of His influences being known and felt. We should notice that it was like a rushing, mighty wind; the gifts that He gave were given suddenly. The ability for Peter to preach with power and results to be seen in the hearts of His hearers; it was like the wind moving the trees of the field. The Spirit would sweep men and women into the kingdom that day. And He is fully capable of doing the same today. He is still the all-powerful Spirit of Christ who is at work in the Church today. Do you believe this? Do you pray for more of His powerful influences to be seen in our midst. Are you willing to continue to pray and to wait for more of His blessed influences, even as our society seems to be growing darker spiritually and the Holy Spirit appears to be withdrawing His influences and showing us less of His power at this time. We have the Holy Spirit as individual believers. But we may not always experience the power of the Holy Spirit in our life, or the corporate life of our church. But we should seek for more of the experience of Him there. He can turn and come back, and manifest His presence in our experience of Him, at a moment’s notice.

Now 2nd – We want to think of this emblem of the tongues of fire.

(Verses 3-18)

“Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.” “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” All of the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. And all were given this visible emblem of the Spirit’s working through them; the emblem of the tongue of fire resting upon each of them. All were given the ability to do what they never could have thought of doing without the power of the Holy Spirit. God’s sons and daughters (verse 17) prophesied by speaking in tongues that day. And they were all declaring the wonderful works of God; by preaching and sharing with those around them; declaring “the wonderful works of God” to them, in their own dialects (Verse 11) This was an extraordinary miracle; one that has not been duplicated since. It has direct reference the overcoming of what God Himself did in the days of yore, thousands of years before, when the tower of Babel was being built and God came down to see what the men of that age were trying to do on their own. They were trying to build a tower to the heavens, and God saw it as an attempt at making their own false religion of selfish ambitions. And so he baffled their building of it by confusing their tongues so that they could not understand one another, and they had to cease building.

Here is the reversing His own work of judgment, for that time of the Early Church, and the Spirit’s giving the Apostles and disciples gifts which would promote and facilitate the building of the Church. The Church has the gospel of Christ, which will take men to heaven. “The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it, and they are safe.” (Proverbs 18: 10) God will build, but not with the plans and thoughts and devises of man. It will rather be – “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord.” (Zechariah 4: 6) It will be by God’s using men and women who are filled with His Holy Spirit, that others will be added to the Church of Jesus Christ.

This leads me to ask whether you are being filled with the Spirit of God, so that you are able to do what you would normally not be able to do by your own wisdom and your own determination; that is, to share the gospel and declare the mighty works of God, to people around you? It is not something that you should feel guilty about, so much as it is something that you should pray for, and look for the opportunities that the Spirit of God will bring to you to speak for Christ and do for Christ. We do not need to wait for the baptism of the Spirit, for it comes to us in the time of our conversion. We have our duty set before us as a church by our Lord, but we very much need the Holy Spirit’s power.

I believe that this is the way that we should apply this text to ourselves today. It is not for us to covet the extraordinary gifts that the Apostles and disciples of that day had. For those gifts have ceased. They were for the babyish days of the early church, the days before the Scriptures were completed and canonized. 1st Corinthians 14, verse 20 says, “Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.” “In the law it is written: ‘With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; and yet, for all that they will not hear Me,’ says the Lord.” “Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.”

The emblem of fire on the head of every disciple who had the spirit poured out upon him or her; enabling them to speak, was a fulfillment of the prophecy of John the Baptist in Matthew Chapter 3, verse 11. “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry.” “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” The emblem of fire is the emblem of the zeal of the Lord working through His Spirit’s power to give His disciples the ability to declare the wonderful works which Christ did for us in His going to the cross, His taking upon Himself our sins; His zealously living His life for God, to keep His commandments and thus fulfill His holy law. His zeal was to see His kingdom advance and conquer among the nations, even in that first generation of the church. The emblem of the tongues of fire upon the heads of the disciples show us the zeal which the Lord gave them, when His Spirit rested upon them, so that they could prophesy and speak with other tongues.

Turn with me to Isaiah Chapter 10, and verse 15. Here it says, “Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it?” “Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it?” “As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up, or as if a staff could lift up, as if it were not wood!” “Therefore the Lord, the Lord of hosts, will send leanness among his fat ones; and under his glory He will kindle a burning like the burning of a fire.” “So the light of Israel will be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame; it will burn and devour His thorns and his briers in one day.” “And it will consume the glory of his forest and of his fruitful field.” Although this is a prophecy which pertains to Isaiah’s days, it is also a prophecy which shows us why the disciples had tongues of fire resting on their heads. This prophecy looks forward to Pentecost. The disciples were given this emblem of the tongues of fire resting upon them so that they would not be seen as spiritual in themselves as they spoke in this miraculous way. All the glory would go to God; for this was something that God the Holy Spirit was producing in them and through them. All the briars and thorns of pride and selfish ambition would be devoured that day. All the fear of man would be taken away. Under man’s glory the Spirit would kindle a burning like the burning of a fire.

But the Light of Israel would be for a fire on the Day of Pentecost. The Lord Jesus was sending His Spirit to enable the disciples to preach to, and for, His glory. The zeal of the Lord of hosts would do this marvelous work through them, of speaking in tongues. This is something that you and I should remember in the use of our spiritual gift, or gifts. We should be zealous to speak of Christ and promote His glory by the things that we say and do for His name’s sake, and for the advance of His kingdom. It is for us to use the more ordinary spiritual gifts which have been given to us, praying to be able to be filled with the Spirit and with love for other unsaved people around us. We should pray to be filled with the Spirit in such a way that we can demonstrate the love of Christ to them. We should pray to do good works in relation to them, and pray that through that means we might come to share the gospel with them in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is what we should pray for; looking for the Spirit to come to us and to powerfully help us.

Turn with me to 1st Corinthians 13: 1 – “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.” “And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” Verse 8 – “Love never fails.” “But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge (that is; supernaturally imparted knowledge; discernment of spirits, etc.), it will vanish away.” “For we know in part and we prophecy in part.” “But when that which is perfect has come, then that which in part will be done away.” I believe that this verse shows us that the extraordinary gift of tongues would cease when the perfect (the “complete” it says in the margin) had come. The completed Scriptures are infallible, and inerrant, and sufficient for all areas of faith and practice, most especially in regard to the salvation of sinners and the building up of the saints. This is not to say that spiritual gifts are not necessary for us to facilitate our speaking and using the knowledge which has been given to us there. They are very necessary. It is just that we are not to expect that extraordinary gifts are the means which God has chosen to advance the kingdom and cause of Christ since the early days of the church. His main means is love. Love never fails. It is something that speaks to all men in all nations, and in every condition.

Why was the gift of tongues such a great demonstration of the Spirit’s power on the Day of Pentecost? It was because the people listening to them; the Parthians, the Medes, the Elamites, those from Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt and part of Libya, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs; they were all hearing the disciples speaking of the wonderful works of God in their own tongues. They were being taught the truth of the Bible and the gospel in this marvelous way. It was prophesying in tongues. This is why Paul says in 1st Corinthians 14: 6 – “But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?” The answer is; not much. But on this day, it was very

profitable indeed! The extraordinary gift of prophecy no longer exists, but the gift of teaching and preaching by the power of the Spirit can still be called prophesying if understood in this way.

1st Corinthians 14: 3 says, “But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.” This is still desirable in the preaching of the word of God in all the churches in every place, today. The puritan William Perkins wrote a book entitled, “The Art of Prophesying”. In it he says, “There are two parts to prophecy: preaching the Word and public prayer.” “For the prophet has only two duties.” “One is preaching the Word and the other is praying to God in the name of the people.” This is what we should pray for in our day; the anointing of the Spirit upon the preaching of the word. This is the prophesying of our day. Pray that even though there is no divided tongue of fire resting upon the preacher’s head as he preaches, that there would be evident earnestness and zeal in his speaking for the Lord of hosts, which is produced by the Spirit.

And then finally – Let us briefly consider the emblems of blood, fire and vapor of smoke. (Verses 19-21)

“I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood and fire and vapor of smoke.” “The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord.” “And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” In Peter’s sermon he quotes the prophet Joel to show the people who were listening to all these disciples who were speaking in tongues, that they were not drunk. Rather; their doing this was the fulfillment of the Spirit being poured out on all flesh. These extraordinary gifts were in evidence, so that many people might be shown the mercy of the Lord, and be saved by faith in the gospel which was being preached to them. “And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams.” “And on My menservants and on my maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy.” This was what was happening that day.

But why did Peter quote the words that follow; about the wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath; blood, fire and vapor of smoke? It is because these signs; these emblems; do not relate to that day of the preaching of the gospel, but they are rather a warning. If those Jews who were listening that day did not call upon the Lord and find salvation, they would eventually live long enough,(if God so willed), to see the destruction of Jerusalem and their “heavens and earth” destroyed. That is what these emblems mean, I believe. The blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke are emblems of what the city would look like when God’s judgment came upon it. There would be over a million people perish in the conflagration; much blood shed, many stately building set on fire, and columns of smoke going up from these many fires. This is what these emblems mean. But whoever would call upon the Lord would be saved; saved spiritually and most of them also delivered from being killed.

I am told that God’s warnings in this regard were heeded by the Christians, who before the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. fled to Pella for refuge. May each of us here understand the meaning of the emblems which we have spoken about this morning and flee to the Lord Jesus for refuge. The words, “the pouring out of My Spirit on all flesh” in verse 17 related specifically to the Day of Pentecost with the disciple’s use of their extraordinary gifts. But may we not also expect that God will in the years to come pour out His Spirit upon all flesh so that many people will be raised up to preach the gospel, and the knowledge of the Lord cover the earth as the waters cover the sea? Let us pray that it would be so. And may each of us treasure the gifts and grace of the Holy Spirit more; His precious work in our hearts and lives, so that Christ’s kingdom might advance here in our community, and in the world in which we live.