

The Significance of Pentecost

1980 Years Ago Today

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Joel prophesied that it would come to pass at the end of those days, at the end of what days? Well, in the context of Joel 2, it would be after God dealt with his people and invoked on them the curses and sanctions of the old covenant, those curses and sanctions spelled out in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26. After that, God would begin a time of blessing. He would bring the Jewish people back to their homeland and once they were back in their homeland, he would pour out the Holy Spirit in an unprecedented way and that's what's prophesied here in Joel 2:28, page 1053, and over in verse 32, that wonderful application of a universality that's now available to all people, to women as well as men, to young people as well as old people, to Gentiles as well as Jews, so that this verse, 32, applies to all of us, "it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved." No longer would God's saving work be confined to one place and one people but his saving work would extend to all nations, to all types of people, as I say, the men and women alike, and even he says there, that "in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance," and that happened historically. On Mount Zion and in Jerusalem deliverance came once for all time. The Lord Jesus Christ died and rose again in that very place and in that very place he poured out the Holy Spirit and the result is, as he says there in the last sentence of verse 32, "As the LORD has said, Among the remnant whom the LORD calls." God called a remnant of the Jewish people to a lively faith in Jesus Christ on the day of Pentecost and thousands of people experienced what Joel foretold.

Look with me, if you will, at Acts 2 and when the day of Pentecost had occurred, Acts 2, and look at how he quotes here on page 1253. He says there in verse 14, Peter, chapter 2, verse 14 of Acts, page 1253, "But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, 'Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God.'" Notice the Holy Spirit inspires Peter to interpret Joel's words and to say, "in the last days." When are the last days? We are living in the last days and I want you to understand that when Peter spoke these words, he was speaking them in the last days. The last days refers to that very brief period of time between the first coming of the Messiah and the second coming of the Messiah. We are living in the last days. Peter

was living in the last days. It's a time that is very short. It's a time that Jesus hinted at might have occurred in the lifetime of his apostles.

You remember how Jesus foretold that Peter would die, that Peter would not live to see the return of Christ? One man knew he would not be alive to see Christ return, that was Peter, and then when Peter got that word that he was gonna die, he turned to Jesus in John 21 and said, "Well, what about John over there? Is he gonna get something bad too? If I'm gonna get a whipping, is he gonna get a whipping too? What about him? Is he gonna die?" And Jesus said, "If I want him to be alive when I return, what's that to you? None of your business what I do with somebody else. Your business is what I do with you," he says, in effect. "If I want him to be alive when I return." Now he didn't say that John would not die, but do you know what? Jesus wanted John to believe that he would live to see the return of Christ. I'm gonna tell you something, Jesus wants you to believe that you will not die but you will be alive to see Christ return. That's the blessed hope. The book, the blood, and the blessed hope. That's the blessed hope of the church, to be alive when Jesus comes; that the last enemy to be destroyed will be destroyed in our lifetime, death, and we will not die.

But in that very brief period between Christ's first coming and second coming, you say, "Well, it sure seems a long time. It's been two days already." A thousand years is as a day and the day as a thousand years, and the Lord is not short as we count shortness, or long, excuse me, he doesn't delay the way we count it, but he is long-tempered, he's longsuffering, "he's patient towards us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." Why has it been two days now? Why not just one day? Why not at 1000 AD did Christ return? Because there would be people who would be in hell if Christ had returned in 1000 AD, and there are people that would not be born yet and be in heaven, and so the Lord has delayed his coming because he wants you to be saved. Did you ever think about that? "He's longsuffering to usward," says Peter, "not willing that any should perish but all should come to repentance." So the Lord delays his coming so that you and I would be saved and know the Lord and be in heaven and enjoy God forever.

So it's called the last days by Peter, Acts 2:17, "it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh." I want you to think about the significance of the pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh. If you read the Old Testament, you discover several things that the Spirit of God does. One of the things the Spirit of God does is very plain, that he gives revelation. The prophetic ministry of the Old Testament is the direct result of the Holy Spirit working in select people, at select times, for a select purpose. David could say, "The Spirit of God spoke by me." All the prophets spoke by the Holy Spirit so that prophetic work is there.

Furthermore if we look at the Old Testament, we see a priestly work. It's very apparent. You can read the last few verses of Exodus 40. When Moses completed doing all of the work to build the tabernacle exactly the way that God revealed to him to build it, and when the sacrifice is offered, fire comes from heaven, ignites the sacrifice, and the Holy Spirit is poured out on the tabernacle. The Shekinah glory of God comes down on the

tabernacle, fills it so full that the priests can't enter. It's interesting that hundreds of years later when God authorizes Solomon to build a replacement for the tabernacle, the temple, we find the same exact event. When Solomon completed building the temple, again exactly according to the divine pattern, the Holy Spirit is poured out on the temple and the temple is so filled with the Holy Spirit, with the glory of God, the Shekinah glory of God, that people cannot enter in there. So in this work, this priestly work of the Spirit is there.

You know, it's interesting, the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC, not one stone left standing on another, but God raises up prophetic ministry and the temple is rebuilt and exactly 70 years after the temple was destroyed, the temple is rebuilt, 516 BC. The Holy Spirit is not poured out on that temple. There's no Shekinah glory of God. It's just an ordinary building. No Shekinah glory of God. No divine ownership and dedication so the prophet Haggai said, "Let me tell you about this second temple. The glory of the second temple is going to be greater than the glory of the temple of Solomon." Why? "Because the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight."

You know, the glory of the second temple, the temple that was built in 516 BC is that the Lord himself came down and became a human being and with human feet God Almighty walked in that temple, and he was filled with the Spirit of God when he was baptized by John the Baptist, and he was filled again on the mount of transfiguration, and then an amazing parallel to the priestly work on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God is poured out on the third temple. What is the third temple? The third temple are the living stones that make up the third temple. You and I are the third temple. You and I are a temple made up of living stones as a dwelling place for the Lord who is the Spirit. It's not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, it's your body is a building block in the temple of the Holy Spirit. And the Shekinah glory of God comes over the people of God, all of whom were Jewish. The Jewish people experienced new covenant fulfillment on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit is poured out on them.

Well, there's a third work of the Spirit in the Old Testament that's very plain, and if you would look with me for a moment at the book of Judges, at the book of Judges. Turn with me and let's read about Samson for a moment. Samson, Spirit-filled man. Samson, a Spirit-filled man. The book of Judges 14, turn with me if you will there on page 294, and what do we read? Samson, a Spirit-filled man. You see, in the Old Testament the Spirit came on select people, at select times, for select purposes, and he gave the holy Scriptures through his ministry, the Holy Spirit gave the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit anointed the priesthood and the priestly office when he anointed the temple but I want you to see there's a third work in the Old Testament of the Holy Spirit on select people, at select times, in select places, and that is the kingly work and before the days of the kingship on the judges.

Let's read about this starting at chapter 14 and verse 3. Well, to get it in context, really at verse 1. "Now Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines. So he went up and told his father and mother, saying, 'I have

seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife." Of course, that was not right for him to do, contrary to the Torah.

Verse 3, "Then his father and mother said to him, 'Is there no woman among the daughters of your brethren, or among all my people, that you must go and get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?' And Samson said to his father, 'Get her for me, for she pleases me well.' But his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD--that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines. For at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel. So Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came to the vineyards of Timnah. Now to his surprise, a young lion came roaring against him." And you talk about Holy Spirit baptism, here you go, verse 6, Holy Spirit baptism. What's it like in the Old Testament? Here you go, "And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though he had nothing in his hand. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done."

That's an amazing picture, isn't it? You know, I know growing up I had pictures of Samson looking a little bit like the Governor of California did before he got old and paunchy. Paunchy Arnold, in the old days when he was Conan instead of married to John Kennedy's niece. You know how he looked. The more I've studied the Bible, the more I think that Samson did not look like Arnold Schwarzenegger but Pee-wee Herman, and the reason I think that is everybody is always amazed when he does these incredible feats. I mean, if you see Arnold, you know, Conan the Barbarian, grabbing a lion... Did anybody here grow up going to the movies on Saturday? I always ate Milk Duds and could see two movies every Saturday afternoon for about a quarter. We've come a long way. Are movies more expensive? No, the dollar's worth a whole lot less and going to be worth a whole lot less soon.

Samson, he just takes a lion and he tears it apart. I saw Samson do that. I mean, I saw Tarzan do that in the movies, you know. You're not surprised when you see some muscle-bound guy do some amazing feat but here's this little Jewish guy, Pee-wee Herman type, and the Spirit of God comes on him and this ordinary guy, this ordinary guy takes a lion and tears him to shreds, and we find it over and over again and the Philistines keep asking themselves, "You know, how can he do that? How can this little guy do all this stuff?" You know, they're after the secret, "What's the secret of your great strength? There's gotta be a secret." It's not steroids and dumbbells. "What's the secret of your great strength?" They knew that he was supernaturally empowered and what I want us to see is the power of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. Prophetically he gives the word through the prophets and then the Scriptures. Priestly, he anoints the place of worship with his presence so powerfully. But in the kingly way, he comes on the enemies of God's people, he comes on those who will deliver God's people from their enemies.

As we look further, turn over to chapter 14, verse 19, opposite page, 295. "Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of their men." Does that sound odd? I want you to understand that the Spirit of God is the Spirit of power. I want you to understand the Spirit of God is the Spirit of conquest. I

want you to understand the Spirit of God is the Spirit of dominion over the enemies of God. Understand that. The Spirit of God is not a wimpy spirit. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of power and dominion over the enemies of God.

Here's this little guy with long long hair and a long beard, the kind of guy you see passing by with his thumb out and you make sure you look the other way and don't have eye contact; the kind of guy standing on the street corner and you make sure that you take the other side of the street; this little guy with long hair and a long beard and when the Spirit of God comes on him, he is a man of power and of might. And you notice in the life of Samson, it has nothing to do with his personal commitment to God, it's the power of God and the power of God doesn't depend on human beings.

Look over at chapter 15 for a moment, verse 14, page 296. Judges 15:14, "When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting against him. Then the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him; and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds broke loose from his hands. He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it." The Spirit of God is the Spirit of power and of dominion against the enemies of God. You know, God has real enemies. They hate God and they hate God's people and they want to humiliate and dominate God's people and wipe them out, and the Spirit of God comes mightily on people.

Turn with me, if you will, over to 1 Samuel 11. You see this again. The Spirit of God did this on Gideon. The Spirit of God did this on Jephthah. And now look at the Spirit of God, 1 Samuel 11, page 322. Let's get it in context, verse 1, "Then Nahash the Ammonite came up and encamped against Jabesh Gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, 'Make a covenant with us, and we will serve you.' And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, 'On this condition I will make a covenant with you, that I may put out all your right eyes, and bring reproach on all Israel.'" You know, sometimes we look at the violence of history and we say, "Oh my." I want you to understand the barbarians are at the gate and Christian civilization has restrained barbarism, but Christian civilization is collapsing and what happens when Christian civilization collapses is man will return to his barbarism.

Look at this. Here's what the people of God faced. They faced an enemy, Nahash the Ammonite, who said, "Okay, not only are you gonna submit to me but I'm gonna pluck out the right eyes of all the guys. I may put out all your right eyes and bring reproach on all Israel. Then the elders of Jabesh said to him, 'Hold off for seven days, that we may send messengers to all the territory of Israel. And then, if there is no one to save us, we will come out to you.'" Verse 4, "So the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and told the news in the hearing of the people. And all the people lifted up their voices and wept." They're demoralized. They're discouraged. "What are we gonna do?"

Then look what happens when the Holy Ghost comes. What happens in a pre-Pentecostal, Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament? Here we find it, verse 5, "Now there was Saul, coming behind the herd from the field; and Saul said, 'What troubles the people, that they weep?' And they told him the words of the men of Jabesh.

Then the Spirit of God," this is a Holy Ghost baptism, "Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard this news, and his anger was greatly aroused." That seem unspiritual to you? "We're a spiritual people today." Have you ever heard anybody on tv? "We're so spiritual." What does that mean? "We love demons. We eat no meat." Now if you don't want to eat meat, that's fine, it's probably good for you, too much red meat, you know, is probably bad for you. "We don't eat meat and we're in tune with nature and listen to grandma who's been dead for 40 years. We're very spiritual people." Watch out for that word "spirituality." What does it mean? It means nothing. It means nonsense. If it's not about the Holy Spirit of God, the third person in the Trinity, if it's not about the Holy Spirit who was purchased for you and me by the blood of God's eternal Son, it's about demons. So when you see somebody on tv talking about, "We're so spiritual now," what are they talking about? "We listen to demons every day and we get direction and we feel all peace and wonderful inside because we're spiritual people."

Now read, read about the Spirit of God where the Spirit of God came with power. Saul became angry. I'm suspicious of a Christianity that can never become angry over sin. I'm not talking about self-righteous anger, I'm not talking about sitting here and looking down our noses at people and thinking we're better than other people. I'm talking about getting angry at things that oppress people, anger at things that hurt people, anger at things that wound people. Listen, something's wrong with a person who doesn't get angry over pornography. Who's involved in pornography? The mob is. The mob is involved in pornography. Criminal people are involved in it and they exploit people and they hurt people. They do. Do you understand how evil pornography is? Does pornography absolutely hurt in a provable demonstrable way everyone who looks at it? No, but what pornography does is for a person who's already disturbed, it can take him over the edge. You look at all these people from Jeffrey Dahmer the cannibal, to Ted Bundy the brilliant charming man that you would have been happy to have as a next door neighbor, judging only by external appearances until he stalked your loved one, killed them and dismembered them, and what do you discover? What do you discover? They all got their start with pornography. Pornography is not innocent. You ought to be outraged over it. You ought to be outraged over it. You ought to be outraged over strip clubs and things like that. It hurts women. It destroys women. It dehumanizes women. It ought to make you angry.

There are many things that ought to make you angry. What people do to other people ought to make you angry not at them but at the evil one who exploits human weakness. You need to love people, love sinners, love people, love the mob. I was sharing the Gospel with someone Thursday evening, not Thursday evening, Friday evening, and I told this person, I said, "You know, Jesus died so that a mafia hit-man can be forgiven and go to heaven." Do you know that's true? Jesus died so that a mafia hit-man can be forgiven and go to heaven. There's nothing that anybody's done, the worst pornographer in the world and the nation that peddles pornography more than any other nation in the world, the United States of America today, isn't that something? No wonder the Muslims call us the Great Satan, we spew that filth out on the rest of the world. What do you think of that? Christ died so that the worst pornographer, the head of the mob, a murderer, a rapist, a child molester, whomever, Christ died so that people could be forgiven.

But we ought to get angry over things, things that hurt people, things that oppress people, things that destroy human dignity and human worth. We should get angry over them. Saul got full of the Holy Ghost and he was full of power and he was indignant that the people of God were being oppressed and robbed of their inheritance and he went to battle and he delivered the men of Jabesh Gilead.

Now here's the thing that we come to grips with as we turn back to Acts 2. What's true of the work of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament? The Spirit of God comes on select people, at select times, for a select purpose, whether it's the prophetic work, whether it's the priestly work, whether it's the kingly work, but what I want you to see is in the prophesy of Joel as Peter explains it, there's something unique in the New Testament. What does he say? Look at what he says in verse 17, Acts 2:17, page 1253, "it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on," a select few people, a Samson, a Saul, a Jephthah, a Gideon, "I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh: Your sons and your daughters."

Have you ever thought about what it was like to be a woman in the Old Testament? Well, let me say one thing about being a woman in the Old Testament: it was a whole lot better to be a woman in the Old Testament than be a woman anywhere else. Never forget that. But think about it, to be a woman was just to be one step above a Gentile. Gentiles could not come into the place of worship in the Old Testament, and then there's the court of the women, a Jewish woman could come to that place but no further. Only a Jewish man could go beyond that point, and then not all Jewish men could go beyond that point, only those who were of the tribe of Levi could go beyond that point. Then into the very place of worship, into the very heart of worship, into the very presence of God, only one person, not only a Jewish person, that is, not only an Israelite and not only a male and not only of the tribe of Levi, he has to be a descendant of Aaron. Only the high priest can ever truly worship God in the Old Testament and he can only do it on one day out of the year, Yom Kippur. Twice on that day he goes in the presence of God. But listen to what happens on the day of Pentecost: women are empowered for ministry. I'm gonna say it again: on the day of Pentecost, women are empowered for ministry. That doesn't mean that a woman should be a pastor/teacher, but it does mean that a woman at Pentecost is empowered for ministry. It means that whether she is nursing a baby or changing diapers or cooking a meal or teaching school or being a nurse in a hospital, she is empowered to do what she's doing under the Spirit of God bringing the presence of God to a troubled, hurting, wounded, confused world. In Pentecost, women are empowered for ministry.

Something else we see here in Pentecost, it's no longer a select few, at a select time, and for a selective end, but he says, "I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh: Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams." No longer do you have to be 25 for one group of Levites, or 30 for another, and no longer do you have to retire at the age of 50. You know, in the Old Testament that's the length of service, for some Levites 25, for others 30, and then mandatory retirement at age 50. Mandatory retirement.

But look what happens with the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God comes on the day of Pentecost, people who are under the age of 25, teenagers, teenagers can be full of the Spirit of God. Old people, everybody over 50, all the old people here today. "Boy, you done it now, Bob. You said everybody over..." Well, if you're in the Old Testament, you're retired. When you hit 50, it's over. "It's over now, I've turned 50." Boy, oh my, that was a long time ago. Old people, young people, male people, female people. Do you see? There's a universality about the Spirit of God.

Turn with me, if you will, to Matthew 11. Let's see how this works out. Matthew 11, page 1123. You want to look here with me. What's the significance of what happened 1,980 years ago today on Sunday, Pentecost Sunday 1,980 years ago today? Let me show you the significance of it. It is an amazing truth. You need some power in your life? When those lions comes after you, roaring lions seeking whom they may devour, do you need the power of the Holy Ghost to grab them and tear them apart as if they're a young kid like Samson did? When the enemies of God come in and say, "We're gonna put out the eyes of your children. We're gonna blind them and bind them and humiliate them," do you want the Spirit of God power in your life to stand in the gap for your children?

Let's look at Matthew 11. Let's start at verse 7. It's just so packed with meaning. Matthew 11:7, page 1123, "As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind' But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft clothing? Indeed, those who wear Hart Schaffner Marx clothing are in kings' houses." That's how we would translate it if we were real contemporary. "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.'" What is that? Well, that's the prophesy of Malachi. What did Malachi prophesy? Malachi prophesied that before the Lord came he would send Elijah. Are you waiting for Elijah to come? You can wait all day long. Elijah's not coming in the future, Elijah's already come.

Here's what happened. You remember that before Elijah was caught up in that chariot of fire and he never saw death, do you remember that Elisha said, "I want your spirit. I want your power. I want your anointing." And Elijah says to Elisha, "If you see me go, you'll get my spirit, you'll get a double portion of my spirit." I want you to know that Elisha came across the Jordan River having caught the mantle, literal mantle of Elijah, and at the same time, the spiritual mantle, the prophet's mantle of the anointing of the prophet Elijah, and when he slapped that mantel of Elijah on the Jordan River, the waters parted for him and what the Scripture says, and you're gonna see in a moment that this is true, what the Scripture says is that John the Baptist was not the reincarnation of Elijah but John the Baptist in the same way that Elisha had the anointing of Elijah on his life, so John the Baptist had the anointing of Elijah in an even greater way.

Let's look at what he says. Jesus, the most infallible interpreter of all of Scripture quotes from Malachi 3:1 and listen to what he says, verse 11, "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist." Look at what he says, verse 12, "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of

heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." Now look at verse 13, "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it," and you'd better be willing to receive it if you call yourself a Christian, "he is Elijah who is to come." Who is John the Baptist? He is Elijah. Who is John the Baptist? He is the one who was foretold in Malachi 3 that he would come before the great day of the Lord. He is the one that was foretold to come to prepare the way of the Lord. He is Elijah. He has the anointing and mantle of Elijah on his life.

Notice what else we're told here, verse 13, "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John." There are several ways that Jewish people refer to the Old Testament but they never refer to it as the Old Testament. It's an insult to a Jewish person to refer to their Bible as the Old Testament because that implies it's old and there's something new. How do Jewish people refer to their Bible? The most common way of referring to their Bible is the Tanach, taken from the first letter of the three major divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures: the Torah, the Nevi'im or the prophets, and the Ketuvim or the writings. And in Luke 24, Jesus refers to the Old Testament that way, as the Tanach: the law, the prophets and the writings, except he refers to the Ketuvim or the writings by the first book of the writings which happens to be the Tehillim which you and I call the Psalms. The law, the prophets and the Psalms. Threefold division of the Old Testament.

But there's also another way of referring to it and the way of referring to it as the law and the prophets is a way of underscoring the Sadducees view of the Bible. You see, the Sadducees, and it's corny and it's not original with me, they were sad, you see, the Sadducees believed that only the Torah was fully inspired by God. Now they thought the rest of the Old Testament was good and useful to read but they only were bound by the Torah. And so the Sadducees didn't believe in predestination, the Sadducees didn't believe in life after death, the Sadducees didn't believe in miracles, and the Sadducees didn't believe in spirits, that's why they had demons telling them what to do all the time. So they were sad, you see, and they believed in the Torah and the rest of the thing, and the rest of the thing could be called the prophets.

Now I want you to see what Jesus is saying. Do you understand that, do you see what he's saying? He's saying in verse 13, "all the prophets and the law prophesied until John." What's he saying? He's saying John is the pivotal figure in history apart from Christ himself. Now let's look at verse 11 again, "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist." What's he saying? He's saying John the Baptist was greater than Elijah. John the Baptist was greater than Elisha. John the Baptist was greater than King David and King Solomon. John the Baptist was greater than the prophet Isaiah and the prophet Jeremiah, the prophet Ezekiel. John the Baptist was greater than Gideon and Barack and Samson and Jephthah. John the Baptist was the greatest prophet of the Old Testament.

Listen to what he says, he says, "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist." Have you been born of women? Yes, but you've also been born of the Holy Spirit. You have experienced the out-poured Spirit who came on the day of Pentecost. Listen to what he says here, look at that next

clause in verse 11, "but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven." If somebody would tell you there's a difference between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God, anybody tells you that is an ignorant person. The words are used interchangeably. It simply goes to the Jewish way of avoiding taking God's name in vain. That's why when a Jew reads the four letters, the Tetragrammaton, Y-H-VorW-H, he will never pronounce those words, those letters, those letters are pronounced Yahweh. He'll never pronounce that word, he will substitute something like Lord, Adonai, Lord, or sometimes the word for God, Elohim. He will never say God's proper name and so Jews went to great length in the Pharisaical period to avoid ever saying "God," and so they substituted "heaven" for "God." So they would never say, you know, think about it yourself, aren't you a Pharisee? Come on, isn't there a little Pharisee in you and me? What do you think when somebody says, "Oh, my God," but you don't think anything of it when they say, "Oh, my heavens." You're just being a Pharisee. "By God, we're gonna do this." You say, "Oh, man, that guy said 'by God,'" so you say, "Well, by heavens, we're gonna do that." You see, that's the same thing. So in order to avoid offending the Jewish people, Matthew oftentimes would render Jesus' words as "heaven" instead of "God," and then Mark, for example, writing to Romans, would use the word "God" because they didn't understand that minced oath, you see.

So here we go, listen to what Jesus is saying, zero in, this is very important, this is about what happened 1,980 years ago today and has profound implications for you and me. Let's look at that last clause, "he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." Now would you do a little thinking with me for a moment? In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God came on select people, at select time, for select purposes, but Pentecost is about the Spirit of God coming on all flesh. What does the Spirit of God do in the Old Testament? He takes ordinary people like Peewee Herman and enables them with a jawbone of a donkey to kill 1,000 Philistines. I mean, that's very impressive. He takes an ordinary person that might have looked like Peewee Herman when a lion comes charging and is gonna tear him to shreds, and enables him amazingly to tear that lion apart as if it's a young kid, goat. He takes an ordinary person that you and I look at and say, "Nothing special about him. No bulges of muscles on muscles. Obviously not a steroid user." And enables him to kill 30 Philistines.

What's the significance of Pentecost? The significance of Pentecost is that that same Spirit of God who did extraordinary things in ordinary people is available to you and to me, and the significance of that is expressed profoundly in the second half of Matthew 11:11. Now who's John the Baptist? John the Baptist is the greatest of those born among women. That means he's greater, you name the person in the Old Testament, John the Baptist greater than he is. Now this is an amazing truth, this is about you. Jesus says that if you're in his kingdom, if you know him, you're greater than John the Baptist and I want that to sink in. What's the significance of today? The significance of today is that 1,980 years ago the Spirit of God who worked in the Old Testament in ordinary people, to do extraordinary things, selectively here and there but not on all people powerfully, is available to you and to me so that we can do and we can be extraordinary people.

What am I saying? I'm simply saying what Jesus said. If you know Jesus, you're greater than Solomon. If you know Jesus, you're greater than David. If you know Jesus, you're greater than Gideon and Jephthah and Samson. If you know Jesus, you're greater than Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and, yes, even the prophet Daniel. If you know Jesus, you're greater than Elijah and Elisha. You don't believe that, do you? Do you know why you don't believe it? Because the Western church has been boiled and pickled in atheism for over 100 years. It started in the Enlightenment hundreds of years ago, and then about 150 years ago it kicked into high gear, and it took it a while to work its way here to the United States but, you know, the 20th century is a century of a loss of power.

It's amazing. You can look at it this way: when I was a boy, America was "a Christian nation"; we had a facade of religiosity. After WWII, churches were being built everywhere. Was the Gospel preached everywhere? No, ma'am. No, sir. It was a weak, anemic, secularized, semi-atheistic kind of Christianity but what I want you to understand is the Christianity of the New Testament is Pentecostal power and that means you can tear up a lion to shreds. It means that the Spirit of God comes on you when you're in trouble and empowers you and equips you and enables you to do what you could never do without him. It means in the darkest night when you're burying your husband or burying your daughter or burying your son, the Spirit of God will come on you as the Spirit of power and praise and you'll be able cheerfully not only to get through it but to be a light shining in a dark place that Jesus is real and the Gospel is real, and when you're talking to someone who's suicidal because they've committed terrible sins and they're hopeless and despairing, the Spirit of God can come on you with power, the same kind of power that came on Samson and you can share the love of Jesus with them in a supernatural way and see them set free in a moment of time from a lifetime of bondage and degradation, humiliation and hopelessness.

That's what Pentecost is about. Pentecost is not about feeling good and goosebumps. Where's that? Pentecost is about equipping ordinary people in an extraordinary way to live extraordinary lives in a world that's dying and in despair. Do you know what's about to happen to your country? Do you know? Can you not see the future? Do you know what's coming? Let me tell you, the Spirit of God is stirring the church so that God's people will be able to thrive in the days that are coming in the greatest opportunity for evangelism that we have seen in over 100 years. That's coming. God is equipping people now.

What does it mean, this Pentecostal power? It means simply this, do you know the greatest evidence of Pentecostal power in a person's life is not speaking in tongues, and I'm not against speaking in tongues, it's not getting all happy and excited, although if you read the worship service on the first worship service of the church 1,980 years ago, it does remind you more of Tiger Stadium than of most churches, but what's it really about? What it's really about is people who are cheerful in the wake of the darkest night. What it's about is people who can be optimists even in the darkest night. What it's about is people who have an inner happiness that spills over and splashes all around their lives even though all hell has come against them. It's about people that are, what? When the world says joining with Mrs. Job, "Go ahead and curse God and die," you say, "No, I'm

not gonna curse God and die. God's good and the future's good and the future's bright because my life is in the hands of God and God's my Father and He's in control of the world." That's Pentecostal power and that Pentecostal power is available to you and me today.

You can see the difference between two kinds of people in the world. There are a lot of people that are gonna be in heaven who seem never to enjoy the New Testament experience of God because they have trusted in Christ and they do try to live for the Lord, they obviously repented of their sins and obviously trusted in Christ, but I'm gonna tell you that Jesus died to make you happy. "Are you serious?" I am absolutely serious. If you're down-in-the-mouth, you're not full of the Spirit of God. What changes people when they see a Christian? You don't drink and smoke, you don't gamble, you don't wear open-toed shoes, you don't go to ball games? What is it? Do you know what? Do you know what identifies a Christian to the world? Somebody who when the gates of hell have opened up and have poured out on that person all kinds of misery, uncertainty and torment like the collapse of the economy, like the chaos of 2010 that's getting worse, that that person can say, "You know, I'm not a pessimist. I know whom I have believed and I'm persuaded that He's able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day. I have within me a well of joy springing up and splashing over."

Do you want that? That is available to every Christian and I promise you, very few Christians walk in that reality. Would you want to walk in that today? We find as we read the Scriptures people had to be filled with the Spirit again and again and again. Ephesians 5:18, translating it quite literally, "Do not be drunk with wine in which is dissipation but be being filled with the Holy Spirit."

I want to invite you to pray with me right now. In a world that's dark and getting darker, in a world of financial uncertainty that is about to take you for a roller-coaster ride that you cannot imagine, greater than in over 100 years, God wants to give you joy, he wants to give you peace, he wants to give you an assurance and an optimism about the future, he wants you to stand out in a dark world as a light and how do you do that? As with Samson, it's not based on you, it's based on what Jesus did on the cross for you. I just want you to pray with me something like this and I invite you to pray along.

Lord, I thank You that Jesus earned the power and presence of the Holy Spirit for me just the way I am, and I'm asking You right now for the sake of Jesus who died and rose again in my place, that You would empty me of self, self-centeredness, self-absorption, self-confidence, self-awareness, that You would empty me of self and instead, Lord, You would dominate and control me and fill me just as a person who is full of whiskey is dominated and controlled by whiskey so that anybody looking at him can say, "He's full of whiskey." I'm asking, Lord, that You would so control me and so fill me that when people meet me, when people talk with me, when people see me, when I sit down with my children and talk or my grandchildren, when I talk to my employer, employees, peers, my wife, my husband, that they will have a sense, "This person is different. This person is under the influence of something I can't put my finger on but something that I want. How can he be happy at his child's grave? Oh, he shed tears, he's obviously wounded,

wounded, wounded, but there's an underlying happiness that's sustaining him, an underlying peace that's sustaining him, there's an underlying love even for the man that killed his child, a compassion even for his enemies." Lord, I want to be a person like that. I want to be and that's only going to be, Lord, as today on the 1,980 anniversary of Your first coming on the Jewish remnant and then on the Gentiles, You would come again with power in my life so that when people see me, they smell Jesus. Thank You, Lord, that I don't have to pray without violating mixed metaphors. You know what I mean. I want people to smell Jesus when they're around me. Lord, let there be Jesus on my breath. Help me, Lord. I want to enjoy the Christian life. Help me. Fill me. For Jesus' sake. Amen.