

Pentecost – The coming of the Holy Spirit on all flesh

In recent weeks, we have been looking at several people from the OT who had encounters with God: Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Hannah – Samuel's mother, and Isaiah. These were people to whom God revealed himself in special ways. All of them lived in OT times, not in NT times. They lived before Pentecost, not after Pentecost. Why am I saying this? According to the Christian church calendar, it is Pentecost today. Like the Incarnation, Pentecost marks a major milestone in God's self-revelation to man. Believers who lived after the cross and after Pentecost have a fuller revelation of God than those who lived in the OT. To them, God spoke in dreams and visions about the future coming of the Messiah. Then in the fulness of time, God's Messiah became flesh in the incarnation, Immanuel, God with us. And finally at Pentecost, He began to pour out His Holy Spirit on all flesh, on all kinds of people, and the Christian Church was born. Pentecost is the day when we rejoice in the fulness of that revelation. It is the day when Christians around the world celebrate the birth of the Christian church, the body of Christ.

Before Pentecost, the Spirit of God was given by measure and for a time. It was given to specific people for special tasks.

In the OT, God gave his Spirit to individuals for special tasks like building the tabernacle or the temple, serving as priest over Israel, prophesying or reigning over Israel with wisdom. God's Spirit was given for a time, and sometimes it was withdrawn, as in the case of king Saul. The Spirit was given for a time, and it was given by measure. Moses was very much aware that this was a great limitation in his own ministry for God. He found it was too much for him alone to carry the burden of a dissatisfied and grumbling people:

Num 11:25-31 NIV ... (25) Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke with him (i.e. Moses), and he took of the Spirit that was on him and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again. **... (29)** But Moses replied, ... I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"

The first Pentecost after Christ's resurrection and his ascension was the day when Moses' longing was fulfilled. On that day in Jerusalem, for the first time, the Holy Spirit was given in a way in which He had never been given before, and the Christian church was born. Even in Jesus' own day, the Spirit could not be given indiscriminately in such fulness to everybody. Significantly, however, at his baptism, when Jesus identified himself with sinners by undergoing John's baptism of repentance from sin, the Spirit came to rest on him personally in the form of a dove, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. But Jesus first had to complete his mission before the Spirit could be poured out on all flesh. He first had to be slain as the spotless Lamb of God for the sins of world, rise from the dead and ascend

into heaven before the Holy Spirit could shine the spotlight on him. Then on the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, God poured out his Spirit on all flesh with the stunning effect that **all kinds of people encountered God, both individually and corporately**. The apostle Peter reminds us in Acts 2:17-18 that what happened to those present in the temple area in Jerusalem on that day was exactly what the prophet Joel had prophesied. Not all of his prophecy was fulfilled on that day, but it was the beginning of the fulfilment of his prophecy. Joel had spoken of a future day that would usher in the last days when God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh, i.e. on kinds of people, young and old, even the least important, maids and servants. And the result of that outpouring would be that they would prophesy in the best sense of the word, they would declare the wonders of God and restore the knowledge of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the great I AM, who was and is and is to come, in a world in which his knowledge had been obscured ever since God confused their languages at Babel. This was to happen in "the last days", the time between Jesus' first coming and his second coming, the age of the Spirit or the age of grace as it is sometimes called. It is the age in which we live, the age of the church, of which Jesus said: I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Dealing with apprehensions about the Spirit

We should all be glad that in our day and age, God pours out his Spirit on all kinds of people, shouldn't we? Where would our world be today without Christ, without Christians, without the Christian church? But all too often we are like Joshua who told Moses to stop those outside the camp prophesying, because we have forgotten the real meaning of prophecy, declaring the wonders of God. Sometimes we are glad, sometimes afraid or even jealous when God pours out his Holy Spirit on others! It may depend on our temperament: maybe we are naturally open to all things spiritual, or maybe we are skeptics regarding all things spiritual. Maybe there's a good reason for that skepticism. Maybe we've been badly burnt in the past by dabbling with the occult; or maybe we dislike biblical prophecy because there have been too many prophecies about Christ's second coming, esp. the time of his coming, which have proven false; too many lives ruined and damaged by the false teaching of religious cults and sects. Maybe we've been hurt by outrageous, unbiblical claims about the Holy Spirit and his workings, and we have thrown out the baby with the bathwater, we have developed a fear about the Holy Spirit. These are only some of the reasons why we may shy away from the Holy Spirit. It is great pity because by doing so, we miss out on God's blessings. Remember, He is the Spirit of adoption, by which God's children cry "Daddy, Abba Father!". Maybe we are even unsure as to what those blessings are. Or, maybe some well-meaning but insensitive brother or sister in the Lord who wanted us to enjoy God's blessings told us that we need to speak in tongues or pray for a second blessing, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, to be a Christian; and maybe as a result of that or for some other reason we have come to believe that the lack of power or love in our Christian life is proof that we aren't Christian at all. If this is indeed the case, I share your hurts and apprehensions, and I will try to do my little share today to bring some scriptural balance to our understanding of the Holy Spirit and his workings.

On Pentecost, God poured his Holy Spirit on all flesh, and the Christian church was born. If we want to understand God's dealings with man in our age as individual Christians and as a body of Christian believers which shares in the life of the body of Christ at large, this passage has great significance for us. Let us read it slowly and carefully.

Act 2:1-13 NIV When the day of Pentecost came (KJV: ... was fully come), they were all together in one place (KJV: ... all with one accord in one place).

(2) Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. (3) They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. **(Describe the picture! – These are the incidentals, not to be repeated)**

(4) **All were filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak in other tongues (glossais = unacquired but known, intelligible languages) **as the Spirit enabled them** (--> controlled by the Spirit, result see v. 11).

(5) Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. (6) When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. (7) Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans (-> **miracle is in the speaking?**) (8) Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? (9) Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, (10) Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (11) (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we **hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!**"

(12) Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" (13) Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Jerusalem was full of God-fearing Jews and Jewish proselytes from the Jewish dispersion; many had moved back to their homeland because they believed that the coming of the Messiah was imminent, others had come to celebrate the three greatest Jewish festivals Passover, the Feast of Firstfruits and Pentecost. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that a times like this the population of Jerusalem could swell from 150.000 to about a million. Whatever happened at Jerusalem at such a time would spread like a wildfire to the rest of the then known world. We have to remember that this was the first Pentecost after Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, and the disciples, probably all 120 of them, including the women, were gathered in one accord in prayer in obedience to Christ's command. We see this in Acts 1.

Act 1:4-8 NIV On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. (5) For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (6) So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (7) He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. (8) But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Also, the foundation for the building of the church had been fully laid by naming Matthias as the twelfth apostle in replacement of Judas.

Vernon McGee: "The words Pentecost *was fully come* could be translated "fulfilled." When the Day of Pentecost was being fulfilled, they were all together in one place. Pentecost took place fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits. **The Feast of Firstfruits speaks of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.** Christ is the firstfruits—"... of those who will be raised from the dead" (1Co 15:23).

The Passover speaks of the death of Jesus Christ, God's passover lamb (see 1Co 5:7). Since the Passover has been fulfilled in the death of Christ, and the Feast of Firstfruits has been fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ, we believe that **the Feast of Pentecost** represents something—that is, it is the fulfillment of something. Its fulfillment is **the birth of the church**, the day the church came into existence.

When the Day of Pentecost "was being fulfilled," or "was fully come," means that this was the fulfillment of the meaning and the purpose for which it was given originally. On Pentecost there was to be a meal offering to the Lord, which was to be presented in two loaves of fine flour baked with leaven (Lev. 23). This was to depict the beginning and origin of the church. It spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit in the very particular ministry of calling a people out of this world to form the body of Christ, which is the church (from among Jews and Gentiles, all sinners saved by grace). Five minutes before the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost there was no church. Five minutes after the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost there was a church. In other words, what Bethlehem was to the birth of Christ, Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost was to the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit became incarnate. He began to baptize believers, which means that the Holy Spirit identified them with Christ as His body here on this earth".

1Co 12:12-13 NIV The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. (13) For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

It is easy to miss the significance of these words. The baptism by the Spirit or baptism with the Spirit speaks of the incorporation of the individual believer into the body of Christ, it is a one time event. Incidentally, on that first Pentecost, as a sign to those Jews who were looking for signs, it was accompanied by the wind and the fire which separated into individual tongues of fire that came to rest on each them, symbols of God's Holy Spirit working both individually and corporately at the same time. It was God who did the baptizing, it was he who gave the Spirit to drink, and it is still so today. Nowhere in Scripture are Christians commanded to pray for the baptism of the Spirit as a second blessing. There seems to be a confusion of language which can be cleared by a careful reading of Scripture.

The **filling of the Spirit** which happens to all those who are gathered in one accord is **separate from the baptism with the Spirit**. It speaks of their being clothed with power for witness and service. It speaks of the believer being controlled by the Spirit rather than being controlled by the effect of wine. There are various places in Scripture where we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. Being filled with Spirit means surrendering our lives to the control of God's Spirit. We may also grieve or even quench the Holy Spirit, then he will withdraw, but never fully.

Eph 5:18-20 NIV Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. **(19)** Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, **(20)** always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I find it extremely helpful to look at the events of Pentecost in terms of the birthday of the Christian church. All too often we hear the word "tongues" or "baptism with the Spirit" and immediately get sidetracked from the more important issues of this passage, we major on issues which have caused confusion and division in the body of Christ, without seeing them in their proper context. The proper context for Pentecost is the birthday of the Christian church! Pentecost marks the birth of the one Christian body, the Christian church, which is composed of all those who believe in Christ and have been given to drink of his Spirit. On that first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, 3000 people in one fell swoop were identified with Jesus as their Messiah, they received God's forgiveness for their sins that day, and they were baptized by one and the same Spirit, God's Holy Spirit into the one body of Christ. The same happens today whenever believers identify with Jesus Christ as their sin-bearer. The church is the ekklesia, the assembly of those who are being called out from among the nations as God's peculiar people to declare the wonders of their God, those who have access to the Father by one Spirit. In closing I want to briefly look at Christ's own teaching concerning the Holy Spirit, which is full of assurance:

Jesus' teaching concerning the Holy Spirit – with you and in you!

Joh 16:12-15 NIV "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. **(13)** But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you

into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. (14) He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. (15) All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, he is the one who reveals the deep things of God, which will otherwise remain hidden. He does not bring glory to himself, he always bring glory to Jesus, and by bringing glory to Jesus, He brings glory to the Father. He does it by taking from what belongs to Jesus and making it known to us, he opens our eyes to all the heavenly blessings and treasures hidden for us in Christ Jesus through faith in him. The Holy Spirit is the one who inspired the Holy Scriptures and He is the one who illuminates and expounds all its teachings concerning Jesus to us. The Spirit of God and the Word of God go hand in hand, they must never be separated from each other, they must never be played off against one another. They both testify to each other's divine origin, majesty and utter trustworthiness, together they bring glory to Jesus, God's Son. Without the Spirit of God, the Bible is little more than a dead, lifeless book. On the other hand, if we claim that the Spirit is at work in our lives in clear contradiction of what the Word of God teaches, our experience may be sincere but little more than emotionalism at best or a counterfeit working of the devil at worst. The NT Scriptures are full of warnings about false teachers and prophets, those who in sheep's clothing seek to devour God's sheep. This is why we are called to test the spirits and to prove all things by the Word of God at all times. Then we will know the truth, and the truth will set us free to live as God intends us to live.

Joh 14:16-17 NIV And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— (17) the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

These words of Jesus in John 14 are stunning. Jesus told his disciples that the Spirit of truth already lived with them! What? The Spirit of God, my invisible friend! How? Because I am with you, He is with you. Because he rests on me in all his fulness, because I am filled with the Spirit, He, too, is right here with you. Many of the things that you have experienced can only be explained by my/his presence with you. And when I am gone and the paraclete will come in his own right, as the third person of the Trinity, you will recognize him because He was already with you before. You will recognize him because He will teach just like I taught, with authority; but better still, He will teach you even the things that I could not teach you because my time here on earth was limited, even the things you couldn't bear to hear because you weren't ready for them yet. He will guide you into ALL truth concerning me in the OT scriptures. Your eyes will be opened and you will understand why the one who dwelt with God the Father in glory in eternity past had to come to dwell among men as the God-man, and why I had to be crucified and raised on the third day according to the Scriptures; and you will understand that I am now ascended on high and all power in heaven and earth is given to me,

and that I am calling out a people unto myself from all nations, an assembly of called out ones, my church who bear my name, that I am preparing a bride for myself, spotless and without blemish. I AM the truth, the way and the life. You will know it because the Holy Spirit will take from what is mine and will reveal it to you beyond any doubt. And you will write it down in the inspired pages of the NT for all future generations. The Gospel writer Luke put it in these words:

Act 1:1-2 NIV In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about **all that Jesus began to do and to teach (2) until the day he was taken up to heaven,** after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

Luke tells us that the ascended Jesus is alive and well. **Jesus continues to do and teach what he began before he was taken up to heaven.** He is still building his church and the gates of Hades shall not overcome it. And his church consists of ordinary believers like you and me, who have access to the father by the Spirit, with the Spirit counseling and comforting us just like Jesus did; yes, with the Holy Spirit living in us, ministering the life of Jesus to us, ever-changing us into his likeness. This is the mystery of godliness. Christ in us, the hope of glory.