

## Rediscovering Pentecost for 2010

I said I wanted to reserve the right to rediscover one more thing this spring and this is Pentecost Sunday so we are going to rediscover Pentecost. In case you think it is the Pentecostals that have made this up, like it is Mother's Day or Grandparents Day and then Pentecost Sunday, this day is one of the feasts or festivals of Israel. It comes fifty days after Passover and was known as the Feast of Weeks or Shavuot. It marked the end of the grain harvest (wheat harvest) and Jews today celebrate the receiving of the Law at Sinai on this festival. The Hellenistic Jews called it Pentecost from the word for fiftieth day, since it was fifty days after Passover. For the Christians, Pentecost comes fifty days after Easter and it marks the day on which the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the 120 who were gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem. We mark it as the beginning, the birthing of the New Testament church. It was an extraordinary day as the gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven was proclaimed to representatives of every nation on earth in their own language. We can read about it in the opening chapters of the New Testament book of Acts.

Here is what happened. **“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”**

**“Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?... we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!’ Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, ‘What does this mean?’” Acts 2:1-8, 12**

What does this mean? That's the question of the hour isn't it? What is Pentecost all about? My fear is that we have lost something of the meaning of this experience. What was it about on that first Pentecost? I suggest it was about three things. It was about obedience to Christ. It was about an outpouring of power and it was about outreach to the lost.

Plain and simple Pentecost was about **Obedience to Christ**. Jesus' was emphatic. Luke

records "...he gave them this command." It wasn't a strongly worded suggestion. "Guys, I really think you are going to need this experience." Jesus commanded them. **"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."** Acts 1:4-5

Jesus had promised his disciples that it would be to their advantage for him to go away because if he did, he would send the Holy Spirit to be with us and to dwell within us. **"But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."** John 16:7. This word translated as Counselor is translated as Comforter in KJV. It is the Greek word we translate as paraclete. It refers to an intercessor, an advocate, one called along side to help. This is one of the many ways of understanding the work of the Holy Spirit in our life as he abides with us. What a comfort to know he is always with us, providing counsel and direction as well as the power we need to live a godly life in Christ!

The disciples didn't know what this experience would be or how it would occur. They just knew that their Savior and Lord had given them instruction concerning this promise of the Father, that this gift, this promise was something they needed, something essential to their spiritual well-being. They needed this spiritual empowerment to be able to fulfil the mission and the call Jesus placed upon them to be witnesses of all they had seen and heard. They knew that as glorious as it had been for Jesus to be among them, if he said it was better for him to go so they could have this experience and this indwelling of his Holy Spirit, then they didn't want to miss this.

The disciples and followers of Christ watched him ascend into heaven and then they walked back to Jerusalem and Luke tells us they went to the upper room and obeying his command, **"they all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brothers."** Acts 1:14. They prayed and waited just as Jesus had instructed them. As I said, they weren't sure what was to come, they were just certain they had to continue to follow Christ in obedience. As it turned out, they didn't have long to wait.

Pentecost was about an **Outpouring of Power**. In his instruction to them concerning this promised gift of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, **"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.” Acts 1:8**

Again in Luke’s gospel, Jesus told them, **“I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” Luke 24:49**

What kind of power was this? It wasn’t about power to conquer political kingdoms, it was about power to live like Christ in the midst of a dark world. It was about power to speak the truth of the gospel when to do so meant death. It was the power to stand against the forces of hell, to speak in the name of Jesus when ordered to be silent. It was the power to announce the breaking in of heaven’s kingdom upon the kingdoms of this world with signs and wonders. It was power to do and power to be. Jesus said this power would be a consequence of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the church and we would be his witnesses, not just about power to do something but power to be something. A witness for Christ! Pentecost was an outpouring of spiritual power.

You only have to read the first few chapters in the book of Acts to see the difference this outpouring of power made. From a tiny group of Christ followers hiding from the Roman authorities before the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost to a bold, public proclamation from Peter and the eleven on the day of Pentecost. 3,000 were saved that day. The crippled beggar at the Beautiful Gate of the temple is miraculously healed in chapter 3 and another 2,000 people believe upon Jesus. Peter and John are arrested and threatened but their prayer was, **“Now Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus. After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” Acts 4:29-31**

Pentecost was about an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that brought spiritual empowerment to the followers of Christ. It was an outpouring and an equipping that brought people to Christ and that is the third focus of Pentecost.

Pentecost was about **Outreach to the Lost**. Peter stood to explain to those gathered on the day of Pentecost exactly what was happening. Some were amazed, some thought perhaps

they were drunk, but Peter boldly preached the gospel to them. He dared to speak the truth and told them “repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins.” Three thousand were saved. This promise of the Father, this gift of the Holy Spirit, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, there are a number of ways to describe this experience, but it has always been about the fulfillment of the great commission. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” Jesus said, “and you will be my witnesses”. This experience has always been about empowering the church to take the message of Christ to the whole world.

The miracle passages we just referenced in Acts, what was that all about? Thank God for the healing of the crippled man at the temple gate - it was an incredible miracle for this man, but it wasn't just about this man. This miracle was a sign, a wonder. Acts 3:11 tells us people came running from everywhere to see this crippled man who was now walking and leaping. The end result was that Peter used this miracle to testify of the power of Jesus to save. He told the crowd that day, **“You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see....Repent then and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord...” Acts 3:15-19.** And what was the response of the people? **“...many who heard the message believed and the number of men grew to about five thousand.” Acts 4:4.** Another 2,000 men were saved that day because of a powerful sign of healing. Pentecost was about power flowing outward in outreach to bring people to Christ.

This brings me to a concern I have with the focus of the modern Pentecostal/Charismatic movement of which we are a part. Jesus indicated that this Pentecostal experience, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was in order that we would have power to be witnesses of him to the ends of the earth. It was power to live a faithful and godly life that others could see. It was the anointing of the Holy Spirit to be like Christ and be his faithful witness. It was the power to proclaim the good news of Jesus with signs confirming the truth of his gospel. I'm afraid that emphasis has somehow been lost over the centuries.

When the modern Pentecostal outpouring began at the start of the last century, the emphasis was once again on outreach and missions. It was about getting the gospel to the ends

of the earth. Pentecostal missionaries were sent out with signs, wonders and miracles confirming the word of God. It's what the founding of the Assemblies of God was all about - to have a way to send Pentecostal missionaries into all the world. As a result of this spiritual empowerment, the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have been the fastest growing and largest churches in the world.

But then it seems to me that the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement saw a shift take place. It seemed that the emphasis shifted to receiving rather than sending or giving. The Pentecostal experience, Pentecostal empowerment became more and more about empowerment to receive, to receive healing, financial blessing and wealth, the prosperity gospel growing in influence. The focus was on an experience for ourselves, to speak in tongues or to flow in other Charismatic giftings. I'm not condemning all of this and I'm thankful for healing and the blessings of God that have been shown to us as believers. I'm thankful for every Pentecostal experience and manifestation of the Holy Spirit, but consider the danger of turning the focus inward on ourselves. As the focus shifted inward rather than outward – it became about power for our own well-being, power for our healing, power for speaking in tongues, power for our own security and welfare, power for our own fame and acclaim, power to impress, power for celebrity, power to raise money, power to maintain our own religious kingdom and empire. We moved away from the true purpose. We moved away from power to be his witnesses. We moved away from power to live pure and holy lives, to be his pure witnesses and instead we slipped into compromise and selfishness. As we focused more on ourselves and receiving blessings for our selves, it led to moral and spiritual compromise and impurity.

We've still got spiritual gifts operating in the church, but we've also got a lot of impure vessels with impure and unbiblical motives. We've still got Pentecostal power and people are still being converted, but it may be in spite of and not because of our Pentecostal witness. If we don't return to purity in our lives, in the church, eventually it will be a powerless Pentecost. If we don't rediscover the right reasons and motives for Pentecostal empowerment, that it's about outreach and winning the lost and not entertaining ourselves, then we will be the generation to watch the fire of Pentecost grow cold and die, the power of Pentecost lost due to our spiritual misuse and neglect. What must we do?

The church of 2010 needs to rediscover Pentecost. We need to rediscover those three

simple 1<sup>st</sup> century reasons for Pentecost. We need to ask and rediscover the answer from the day of Pentecost. **“What does this mean?”** they asked that day. What does Pentecost mean for 2010? It’s the same three answers.

**Obedience to Christ.** We need to get hungry for a Pentecostal experience, a renewed desire to be baptized in the Holy Spirit because we have a renewed desire to be obedient to Christ. This isn’t a doctrinal issue, this is an obedience issue. This isn’t about whether you are Pentecostal or Baptist or Methodist, it’s just simply about desiring to be obedient to Christ. The issue is not about whether you believe in speaking in tongues or some other spiritual gift, it’s just about whether you are hungry for Jesus and all he has for you. It’s simply a matter of obeying what Jesus said. He wants to give this gift of the Holy Spirit’s power to you. In Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost, he said this wasn’t just an experience for the first century church. He said, **“The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.” Acts 2:39.** That’s us friends. This experience is for us!

This Pentecostal experience may be new to you and may seem strange but there is nothing to fear when we are obedient to Christ. There is certainly nothing frightening about opening our heart to all that Jesus has for us. Jesus told us **“If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” Luke 11:13** This experience of Pentecost, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, is simply a gift promised to us by the Father and given through the grace and mercy of His Son. We need to open our hearts in obedience to Christ and be ready and hungry to receive this promised gift.

What does Pentecost mean for us today? It still means an **Outpouring of Power.** If the first century disciples needed power to be witnesses, and if Jesus knew that the days would become even more evil, to the point that he wondered if he would find faith on the earth, doesn’t it make sense that he would want to continue to empower his disciples for service? The need is greater and here we are, seemingly growing more and more powerless. We desperately need an outpouring of power and that is exactly what he promised. He said we would be clothed with power. Endued with power. It is power to live, power to serve God and to serve others, power to overcome the enemy and all of his temptation and his tricks and snares. It is power to proclaim the word of God, it is power to minister under the guidance and direction and anointing of the

Holy Spirit of God. It is the power to accomplish his plan and purpose. It is power to be his witness in whatever fashion, by whatever means, in whatever circumstance wherever he chooses to place us. It is about living in and walking in the powerful anointing of the Holy Spirit each and every day of our lives.

What does Pentecost mean for us today? It still means **Outreach to the Lost**. I know the word lost is not politically correct really. To tell someone they are lost means nothing. "I know where I am. I'm not lost." But the truth is, apart from Jesus Christ, we are all lost. We are separated from our Creator and Heavenly Father because of sin. We can't find our way to the Father nor can we find our way to the home we lost in the fall, our heavenly home. We are lost. The world is lost. And Pentecost is about spiritual empowerment to effectively reach the lost all over this world. To find people and to speak in their language, in their culture, by whatever methods and means God places in our hands. Pentecost is the spiritual empowerment to go into every person's world and tell them Jesus is the answer, he is the way home, he is the way to the Father, he is the way out of the sin and the mess they are in. He is the way, the truth and the life and you can get to God and to heaven and to home and eternal life through him.

The book of Acts is the book of Pentecost. Jesus in action through his Holy Spirit empowered people, going into all the world, with signs and miracles accompanying the proclamation of the gospel. We need that power at work in us today. We need that power at work in our church. We need that anointing, that quickening of the Holy Spirit upon our lives again today.

Pentecost. It's about obedience, outpouring and outreach. Will you join me as we ask Him again to pour out his Holy Spirit upon us, both individually and corporately? Open your heart to the Father and ask him to baptize you in the Holy Spirit. You may begin to speak in a heavenly language that you've never spoken before. That's great. That too is a sign, a sign of his control, a sign of your surrender, a sign of his purpose to proclaim the wonders of God in every language and to every people.

We need his power, his anointing. We need Jesus to baptize us in the Holy Spirit so we can more effectively be his witnesses in this world. The world won't respond to a powerless church. Let's ask the Lord to empower us again and let's be the church he intended to birth in this world and the church he needs in this last hour!

