



Pentecost: From Past Event — To Present Reality

Sermon Outline

Theme Development

Past and present — the church lives in both worlds. Its moorings rest on the ways of God observable in history, and its ongoing thrust depends on its dynamic in the present. The same is true of the believer. His spiritual foundation is laid in the Scriptures, but his spiritual vibrancy and growth depend on daily renewal and commitment.

The intent of this message is to bridge the gap between the historical outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and the present experience of the believer; further, to show how inappropriate is any spiritual experience that is locked up in the past and not allowed to flow forth in the present.

The question then is not so much, “Have you received since you believed?” as it is, “Are you now living the Spirit-filled life?” The arrow of conviction must settle into the heart of every believer who is satisfied merely with the remembrance of an experience rather than the daily renewal that must characterize the Spirit-filled life.

Text and Setting

The text is Acts 2:1–4, and the setting is the celebration of the Feast of Pentecost in approximately A.D. 30. This was the third feast of the Jewish sacred year and was celebrated on the sixth day of the month of Sivan (June). It is sometimes referred to as the Feast of Weeks, the Day of the Firstfruits, and the Feast of Harvests. The name Pentecost, which means 50th, indicates the 50 days between the Celebration of Passover and the Feast of Pentecost. The feast is described in Deuteronomy 16:9–12.

The priest, in the name of the congregation, offered and waved two loaves of unleavened bread made from newly harvested grain. The people were admonished to share in the feast by bringing the firstfruits of their product as an offering to the Lord.

The command of Jesus, recorded in Luke 24:48, provides the immediate backdrop for the event. Jerusalem was to be the place, waiting was to be the activity, and the coming of the Holy Spirit was to be the promise. And so it was.

The event of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2:1–4, is characterized by movement and drama. Note the following words: unity, sound, rush, wind, tongues of fire, Spirit, utterance. This was in no wise the product of mystical imagination; it is the objective record of what actually happened as recorded by Luke, the historian.

Words To Be Defined

Several words call for definition:

1. Cloven: Diamerizo — “divide, separate” (Genesis 10:25; Deuteronomy 32:8).
2. Tongues: Glossa — “tongues” (Isaiah 5:24; “tongues as of fire, distributed” (Acts 2:3, RSV).
3. Utterance: Apophthegomai — “say, speak forth.”

The picture presented here is of “licks of fire” upon each of the worshipers; then the worshipers responding with a verbal speaking forth as the Spirit enabled. Since the bystanders understood they were glorifying God, the verbal speaking

was obviously in the form of language.

Supportive References

The Book of Acts specifically refers to the recurring of this phenomenon in two additional instances:

1. Acts 10:44–48, the outpouring on the house of Cornelius.
2. Acts 19:1–7, the outpouring on the Ephesian believers.

The pattern for the use of tongues in the church is set forth in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14:

1. As an agency in prayer (1 Corinthians 14:2,18).
2. As a public gift to be followed by interpretation (1 Corinthians 14:27,28).

Relevant Questions

In building the bridge between the original outpouring and our day, several questions arise:

1. Can we expect this phenomenon to recur? Yes, as is apparent in Acts 10 and 19, as well as through the testimony of church history.
2. Should not all the accompanying circumstances of the Day of Pentecost be present today? No, it is clear that the presence of tongues is the one consistent phenomenon. (For example, the presence of wind is not noted at the house of Cornelius, nor at Ephesus.)
3. Of what value is the repetition of this outpouring in our day? First, according to Joel's prophecy, the flow of the Spirit is to characterize the last days. Second, the dynamic of the Spirit is to accompany and enable the fulfillment of Acts 1:8. Third, the sovereign purpose of God is to glorify His Son through the outpouring of His Spirit.
4. Since there has been abuse, should the church still proclaim this message? If the directive given in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 is followed, abuses will be eliminated. To eliminate a truth because of abuse is to disregard divine patterns apparent in the Scriptures. Correction is the principle set forth in the Scriptures.
5. Must everyone fit the Acts 2:4 pattern? The question rather should be: "Why would anyone care to be only a spectator to an experience God intended to be open for all?"

Possible Outlines

Following are three suggested sermon outlines in the development of' theme:

Outline 1

1. Pentecost in retrospect
 - a. Describe the Feast of Pentecost, Joel's prophecy, and the outpouring of the Spirit that occurred on the Day of Pentecost.
 - b. Speak of the believer's original filling with the Spirit.
2. Pentecost in introspect
 - a. Describe the personal Pentecost that is available for all: the experience of receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit.
 - b. Speak of the present experience of the Spirit-filled believer.
3. Pentecost in prospect
 - a. Describe the day-by-day dynamic of living the Spirit-filled life and the positive thrust of the modern charismatic movement.
 - b. Speak of the prospect of historical personal infilling being revitalized each day.

Outline 2

1. Joel's vision of Pentecost — a prophetic study
2. Peter's explanation of Pentecost — an individual study

3. The church's experience of Pentecost — an experiential study

Outline 3

1. Living in the past. The celebration of Pentecost historically: the Feast of Pentecost and the original outpouring of the Spirit
2. Living in the memory. The sterility of knowing God only from a past experience: the “40 years ago” syndrome
3. Living in the now. Personally experiencing the power of the Spirit each day and seeing the kingdom of God grow through the ministry of the Spirit

Invitation

Many are living on spiritual momentum begun years ago. But this is the day for renewal and refreshing. It is the last-day outpouring of the Spirit.

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