

Bethel Christian Church
Growing in Grace

Studies in the Book of Acts
Study 5

The Day of Pentecost

What a day it was? A day when the renewing Israel and world commenced. The effects of sin in a human heart and then in all of the creation had been seen but denied for millennia. But it came into clear view when God sent his Son, Jesus of Nazareth. He was the true man of the Spirit, the true dwelling place of God in human flesh, the true Son and as such true Brother. So against what he revealed to be true humanity we all languished as dry bones on the desert floor. Even Israel, so blessed with the presence and grace of God had shrivelled, dried and joined the rest of humanity. This was a grievous thing for humanity. There was no longer any life let alone heart to be with God in his mission to make a people for himself. It was a grievous thing for God as we had all profaned his holy name. We had all come short of his glory, dragging his name into the mire of our sin. Into that scene the Son had come. But even when he came to his own his own wanted nothing to do with him. Despite seeing a man full of grace and truth the world crucified him. Yet all the time the world was thinking that it had the control, especially at the crucifixion, Jesus was freely giving up his life. When humanity said, "Away with this Son of God!" the Son was entering their dead and dislocated bones. This was not an execution it was God acting in love. This was the true Prophet speaking his words over the valley of dry bones. Only then did the bones unite and the flesh form. But a second word, as at creation would come to these restored bodies. The Spirit, who had brought life and vitality to Jesus, the Son of God, would need to come, and, as with the first Adam, breathe life into the bodies. Only then could the resurrected humanity go to the ends of the earth declaring the great deeds of God.

Fifty days after Calvary that day had come. Jews from all over the world had returned for the popular 'Feast of weeks.' This was one of the three most important feasts for the Jews. Fifty days after the Passover, and from the time the harvest commenced, they celebrated the goodness of God in the cycle of the seasons and the goodness of the creation. It was also the time they celebrated God's giving of the Law. Some see, that as Jesus fulfilled the Passover and brought a whole people for God back from the dead, so Pentecost fulfils the giving of the Law. God's new army are to be those restored from death to life and livingly, spiritedly love and do the Law.

So Christ sacrificed as our true Passover Lamb is evidence of God's eternal covenant presence. Likewise, when he pours out his Spirit upon us we now know him for our hearts beat warmly in tune with his Law. This was what he promised would be so through his Prophets

*They will not teach again, each man his neighbour and each man his brother,
saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to
the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity,
and their sin I will remember no more"*

(Jeremiah 31:34)

So the day for God to fulfill these promises had arrived. The cross and resurrection of the Lord, bringing with him a resurrected people had made the time ripe, not just a time to make prophecy true.

The Dynamics of the Day of Pentecost

Two 'natural' elements featured strongly on that day; wind, or the noise of a wind and tongues of fire. Both the wind and the fire are understood by Luke to be different to normal wind and fire. The sound was *like* the noise of a violent wind. And the fire was *like* tongues of fire. These are obviously direct signs to those gathered that this was a mighty event orchestrated and applied by God himself.

The Sound of a violent Wind

From the beginning spirit and breath are one. The Spirit of God is personal and intimate, God breathed as is the spirit of a man. So the Spirit moving across the waters in the creation account is the breath of God bringing God's intimate life to the fore. When Adam was created God breathed into him and he became a living person. Jesus told Nicodemus that to be born again one must receive the breath of God (John 3:5-8). Just as with Adam God must again breathe his Spirit into all flesh for them to live. So the mighty rushing noise of a wind was God announcing to the Disciples, "I am pouring out my breath upon you, now live!" His breath filled them. Isaiah, when he received his calling, experienced the glory of God filling the Temple. Now the Church, the new temple of Christ, was being filled with God's life. This was the impulse they needed to speak about him. Now, filled with his life and love they had something to say. They were empowered to be witnesses. Ezekiel, if he was able, must have stood and punched the air on the day of Pentecost, crying, "These bones most certainly can live, look at them!"

Tongues like Fire

Fire was often a symbol of God's presence to his people (Exodus 19:18, Isaiah 66:15), and in particular his presence to purify through judgement (Isaiah 4:4; Joel 2:30; Malachi 3:2-4, 4:1). At Pentecost these tongues like fire which 'sat' upon each Disciple are more likely to be linked with the symbol of fire seen in Exodus. There God's presence to comfort and guide his people is at the uppermost (See Exodus 3:2-5, 24:17, 40:38). At Pentecost none were excluded. The tongues, separated from one source, rested upon all thus uniting them in a common relationship. The unity of this relationship as the Church appears clearly in 2:41-47. Each one was filled with the New Covenant promises that God was with them, they were fully his people, and that he would continue to lead them as their true Shepherd. John the Baptist had prophesied that Jesus would flood the Disciples with the Spirit and fire. That is, Jesus was now giving all flesh his gift of knowing the Father's presence and thus the grace to speak the Father's word.

They Spoke of the Mighty Deeds of God

The startling miracle of that day continued when the Disciples spoke. The Jewish crowds, gathered from all over the known world, each heard a recital of God's mighty acts in their own tongue. These acts of God would certainly have been about the cross, resurrection and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth, God's Son and their Messiah. But it would probably have caught up the events of Israel's history which had all been pointing to this day. In that way the Disciples would have laid a strong base for Peter's proclamation.

So often we get stuck on the means and miss the message. This has always been so concerning the way these Disciples spoke when they were filled with the Spirit. The first listeners were bewildered, focusing on the unlikely ability of these humble people to speak so many foreign tongues, rather than on what was being said. Others rationalised their indifference by accusing the Disciples of drunkenness. It seemed that the believers were agents of confusion not power. In the Spirit's hands, when Peter spoke, the peoples ignorance was soon to turn to a gracious revelation. Sufficient to say at this point we are faced here with a picture of the battle against the word of God. The movement of God's word out into the world would be contested at every point. But it would always be free and accomplish God's purpose.