

Pentecost - Acts 2:1-21

Introduction

- Today is the second, and last week of our mini-series “The News We Almost Forgot”, in which we’re looking at two specific days, moments in history, that are often overlooked by the church today. We celebrate Christmas, and Easter so faithfully, but these days don’t get quite the recognition that they deserve much of the time.
- Last week Darryl took us through Jesus’ ascension into Heaven, and we saw how Jesus’ work as prophet, priest, and king is fulfilled through his ascension and returning to the Father.
- Today we’re looking at another day that gets often overlooked and can tend to cause some confusion. We’re going to be looking at the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 and talking about the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- Now this is such a huge topic to cover, and we’re not going to be able to get into everything about the Holy Spirit today, there are entire seminary courses dedicated specifically to that, but we are going to get the 10,000 foot view of what’s going on here, and why this day is so significant.
- The term Pentecost itself simply means “50”. It was a day that corresponded with the Jewish Feast of Weeks, which was meant to take place 50 days after the passover, and was a celebration of the grain harvest
- But on this Pentecost specifically, there was something much more going on, and as we look at this passage to get an overview of the day of Pentecost, we’re going to look at two significant things that happened on this day, which make it so important.
- Ultimately, our goal for today is to ask the question: Why is Pentecost so significant for the church, and why is it worth remembering?

Pentecost is the coming of the Holy Spirit? (V. 1-13)

- The first thing that we’re going to see, the first significant things that happens on this day, is probably what pentecost is best known for, which is the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost marks the fulfillment of Jesus’ promises

- Looking back through our series on The Heart of Christ, through the end of Jesus’ life, he promised so many times to his disciples that once he had returned to the Father, and ascended

back to Heaven, it would actually be to their benefit for him to leave, because he would send them another helper, and send them the Spirit, and that when this Spirit came, they would do even greater works than he had done. The day of Pentecost is when we see that promise, which Jesus made to his disciples fulfilled.

Pentecost marks a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit

- Acts 2:1-4 describe this actual event to us, the moment that this promised helper, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity was sent to Jesus' followers. I want to read those verses again.

"When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." - Acts 2:1-4 (ESV)

- So we have this incredible moment where Jesus' followers are all gathered together in one place, and suddenly this gift, this helper that Jesus promised to them arrives. The verse tells us that there was a sound from heaven like a mighty rushing wind, and they were all filled with the Spirit.
- This is such an amazing scene, but it does bring up a question about the Holy Spirit. Where was he, and what was he doing before this point? Was he just sitting on the bench in heaven, waiting since creation for his big moment to shine? Once Jesus had finished his work it was finally time for the Spirit to do his thing?
- That's not quite the case. While there is something significant that changes about the role of the Holy Spirit in this moment, which we're going to look at, it is also important to know that Acts 2 is not the first time that the Spirit shows up in the Bible.
- In reality, the Holy Spirit has been actively involved in our world, and God's plan since the very beginning.
- In Genesis 1:2 we read:

"The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." - Gen. 1:2 (ESV)

- So the Spirit was present even at the moment of creation, and was active in God's plan all the way through the Old Testament.
- Even look at Acts 1:16

“Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas” - Acts 1:16 (ESV)

- So we see that the Holy Spirit was present all through the Old Testament, and would rest on certain people at certain times. We see examples of this in David, in the prophets, those who were involved in the writing of the Scriptures, that God’s Spirit did still rest on certain people in the Old Testament.
- We also see that God’s Spirit was present with his people, the Israelites, in a general sense throughout the Old Testament. Rather than resting on each specific Israelite, God’s Spirit was with the nation as a whole, and we see evidence of that even through the stories of Moses, and God’s presence with the people during their time in the wilderness.
- So the Holy Spirit has always been active in our world, but something changed at Pentecost. Something changed about the role and the presence of the Holy Spirit here in Acts 2. John Piper has written an illustration that I think sums up really well the change that occurred in this moment.
- *“Picture a huge dam for hydroelectric power under construction, like the Aswan High Dam on the Nile, 375 feet high and 11,000 feet across. Egypt’s President Nasser announced the plan for construction in 1953. The dam was completed in 1970 and in 1971 there was a grand dedication ceremony and the 12 turbines with their ten billion kilowatt-hour capacity were unleashed with enough power to light every city in Egypt. During the long period of construction the Nile River wasn’t completely stopped. Even as the reservoir was filling, part of the river was allowed to flow past. The country folk downstream depended on it. They drank it, they washed in it, it watered their crops and turned their mill-wheels. They sailed on it in the moonlight and wrote songs about it. It was their life. But on the day when the reservoir poured through the turbines a power was unleashed that spread far beyond the few folk down river and brought possibilities they had only dreamed of.*
- *Well, Pentecost is like the dedicatory opening of the Aswan High Dam. Before Pentecost the river of God’s Spirit blessed the people of Israel and was their very life. But after Pentecost the power of the Spirit spread out to light the whole world. None of the benefits enjoyed in the pre-Pentecostal days were taken away. But ten billion kilowatts were added to enable the church to take the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ to every tongue and tribe and nation.” (Piper)*
- So on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes on Jesus’ followers in a new, and massively significant way, and his coming is accompanied in this moment by two miraculous signs.
- The first sign is tongues of fire which came to rest on the heads of each of Jesus’ followers. One of the commentaries that I read drew a connection here back to the book of Exodus, where God’s general presence with the nation of Israel was visible to them at night as a pillar

of fire. There was the one pillar showing his general presence with the nation as a whole, yet here we have individual tongues of fire coming to rest on each person's head, showing the specific and personal presence of the Holy Spirit with each believer.

- The second sign is the ability given to the disciples to speak different languages.
- This is different from the gift of tongues mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14, which talks about people speaking to God in tongues which no one can understand, except someone gifted to be able to interpret it.
- What we have in this situation specifically, is the disciples being given the ability to speak specifically in known languages to be understood by the crowds.
- Acts 2:6,

“And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.” - Acts 2:6 (ESV)

- One commentary that I read explains what's happening here like this,
 - *“For one brief moment of time, the divisions in humanity expressed through language difference (cf. Gn. 11:1–9) were overcome. These divisions are presented in Genesis as the judgment of God. What happened on the day of Pentecost suggests that God's curse had been removed. But the confusion of tongues was not undone by providing a common Spirit language. Communication actually took place through the diversity of languages represented there. God was expressing his ultimate intention to unite people ‘from every tribe and language and people and nation’ (Rev. 5:9–10; 7:9) under the rule of his Son (Eph. 1:9–10), providing reconciliation through him and ‘access to the Father by one Spirit’ (Eph. 2:14–18)”*
- So in the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, we have a visual picture of the Spirit's presence with those who follow Christ, as well as a special foreshadowing of the future unity of the church, made up of people from every nation, united under Jesus Christ as Lord through the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit is promised to everyone who follows Christ

- We're being given a beautiful picture of our future in this moment. Because each and every one of us, if we've given our lives to Christ, has been given this same gift.
- Now I don't know about you, but when I trusted in Jesus and gave my life to him, I didn't have a tongue of fire show up over my head, and I didn't start to speak in different languages.
- But if you've repented of your sin and put your faith in Christ, in the moment you made that decision you were given that same gift of the Holy Spirit. You have the blessing of God's

presence with you each and every day. Later in the passage in V. 38 Peter calls the crowds to repent of their sin and put their trust in Christ, and promises that they will receive that gift of the Holy Spirit. No longer is the presence of God's Spirit restricted only to the nation of Israel, but it has been made available to all who have trusted in Christ, and this is the future that we have to look forward to.

- A future of worshiping Christ, united with those from every tribe, tongue and nation, unified under Christ as our Lord through the gift of the Holy Spirit, to worship him forever. What a beautiful future that will be, and what a great gift we have been given.
- So that is the first significant thing that happens at the day of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit on all of Christ's followers.

Pentecost is the birth of the church (V. 14-41)

- Beginning in V. 14 Peter begins to preach to the crowds, and this continues all the way until V. 36, and the entire purpose of this sermon is just to preach the Gospel to all that will listen.
- That brings us into the second major thing that we see happen at Pentecost, which is the birth of the church.
- In Matthew 28 Jesus charged his disciples with the great commission, to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them.
- That command is repeated in Acts 1:8 which says

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” - Acts 1:8 (ESV)

- This again, is what we are beginning to see fulfilled at Pentecost. Jesus makes clear that through the coming of the Holy Spirit, the disciples will be empowered to carry out the mission that he has given them.
- Look at what Peter says. He explains clearly who Jesus was, and what he had come to do, and he also points out that Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension were all a part of God's sovereign plan of redemption.
- At the end of his speech, we see how people reacted in V. 37,

“Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”” - Acts 2:37 (ESV)

- And look at how Peter responds in V. 38-39

“And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”” - Acts 2:38-39

- Peter calls people to repent of their sin and put their trust in Jesus Christ, and to be baptized. When you look at what Peter is doing here, it is very clearly living out exactly what Jesus commanded his disciples in the great commission, to make disciples, baptize and teach.
- Now look how people responded.

“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” - Acts 2:41 (ESV)

- When people heard the Gospel, they responded, and about 3000 people came to faith in Christ.
- The next section, V. 42-47 give us a description of what this new community of believers looked like, and how they treated one another.

“They devoted themselves together to the apostles teaching, fellowship together, breaking of bread, and prayer” - Acts 2:42 (ESV)

- They were generous with one another, they shared life and met together, and they worshiped together.
- This passage shows the very beginnings of the church, where it got its start, and the entire rest of the book of Acts is all about the expansion of the Gospel, and the building of the church. And we see in Acts that as the Gospel spreads, and people come to faith in Christ, new churches are established in each new city where the Gospel is preached. The Great Commission is being fulfilled all throughout the book of Acts, because of the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- This is where it all started. We exist here, as a church together, because of what happened on this day of Pentecost when the church was born, because the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus’ followers to live out the great commission that Jesus had given them.

The Spirit empowers us to fulfill the great commission

- This goes along with the evangelism series, because we are called to follow the example of what we see happening here in the book of Acts. We have received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and as a result, we should also be passionate about seeing this great commission fulfilled in our community.

- A few weeks ago we looked at what it takes to share the Gospel without fear, and we saw that one of the most important things that we need in order to carry out the mission that Jesus has given us, is the Holy Spirit. He is the one who equips us, and empowers us to obey Jesus by spreading the Gospel.
- Because of the Holy Spirit's work through the disciples we see explosive growth of the church all throughout the book of Acts, and it is this same kind of attitude that led to Liberty Grace Church being planted in the first place. Darryl and Charlene felt God working on their hearts to preach the Gospel and establish a church in a community where there was no church, and now almost 8 years later, here we are.
- Friends, we have been given this gift of the Spirit in order to live out the mission that Jesus has given us, so let's commit as a church to living out that mission, through the power of the Spirit, to preach the Gospel to those around us, and pray that the Spirit would be working in the hearts of those who will hear us so that we might be able to see that 1% of Liberty Village come to faith in Christ.
- Not everyone who hears us preach the Gospel will listen to what we have to say. In V. 12 we see that there were some who mocked the disciples, simply claiming that they were drunk, yet the disciples continued to preach.

Conclusion

- So that really gives us an answer to our question. Why does Pentecost matter so much for the church, and why is it worth remembering?
- Pentecost matters because it is the birth of the church, and the beginning of the fulfillment of the Great Commission through the gift and the empowering of the Holy Spirit.
- So how do we respond to this? This happened thousands of years ago, how do we as a church today respond to what we see God doing at Pentecost?
- This really should prompt three responses from us today.
- First, it should cause us to have confidence in the presence of the Holy Spirit with us, and energize us for the mission that Christ has given us.
- We see so much of God's faithfulness in this passage, and we see him fulfilling his promises through this amazing gift.
- And the reality that this gift, which was given to the disciples on the day of Pentecost is the same gift that is given to those of us who follow Christ today.
- We have the Spirit of God with us in each day and in every situation, and I am again reminded of the words of Paul in Romans 8:31, "If God is for us, who can be against us". So let's have confidence in this amazing gift and his presence with us.

- Second, it should cause us to be amazed by all that God has done, and should drive us to worship him.
- Look at how people respond to Pentecost in Acts 2.
- As the passage describes how people responded to the message that they were hearing here are a few of the words that were used. People were bewildered, perplexed, amazed, and astonished.
- It was such an amazing thing that was happening here, that people could barely comprehend, and we are living proof of what God has done through his Son, and the gift that was given at Pentecost. When we reflect on the amazing things that happen in this moment it should absolutely amaze us, and cause us to worship our Lord for all that he has done.
- So church let's not lose the significance of this day and what it means for us. Let's not forget the faithfulness of God that is shown at Pentecost. The amazing gift that we've been given. And as we reflect on, and celebrate this day, let it give us confidence of God's continuing presence with us, and let it cause us to worship him for the amazing things that he has done.