

"Pentecost and its Abiding Relevance" (Acts 1:8; 2:1-47; 4:29-31)

Introduction:-

Great confusion and amazement reigned on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit first came upon the gathered disciples in the upper room. But light came when Peter stood up to explain all that had happened ... And so, the question we need to ask is: "What really happens when the Spirit comes"? And more particularly, in what sense is the Day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2, relevant for the church today? We may begin to answer this question in the following way.

1. First, the Pentecostal Gift is given in order to fulfil the Pentecostal Task (Acts 1:8)

*From the vantage point of Acts 1:8, which is the key to understanding both the structure and meaning of the Book of Acts, the Holy Spirit did not come in order to make us "feel good" about ourselves, nor did the Holy Spirit come to draw attention to himself. Rather, the Holy Spirit came in "power", in order to witness to Jesus Christ, and to make him known, as the only sufficient Saviour of our world (Acts 4:12; John 16:14 = "He will glorify Me"). Further, Paul's testimony at 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 helps to fill this out a bit more: "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony (or mystery) about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you, except **Jesus Christ and him crucified**. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words (as with Greek Orators), but with a demonstration of the **Spirit's power**, so that your faith may not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." And for Paul this was necessary, because the very gospel that he preached was the power of God itself, enabling the salvation of everyone who believes, both Jew and Gentile alike (Romans 1:16).*

2. Secondly, the Pentecostal Gift makes Fellowship Possible (Acts 2:42-47)

When the Spirit came, individual believers came together into the "fellowship" and unity of the church, so that together they continued in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, as well as prayers, and the breaking of bread. This reflects something of the background and meaning of the Feast of Pentecost, when two loaves of bread made of the finest flour baked with yeast, were waved before the Lord, perhaps signifying that the church was not perfect in every respect, yet it would also involve the entrance of both Jew and Gentile into the one body of Christ. Further, we may see here in Pentecost the reversal of Babel, where many languages now become one in the Holy Spirit. In addition, there was the voluntary sharing of goods as each had need, with the result that this fellowship was known as a growing church, on the cutting edge of mission. The best example of this is found at Philippians 4:10-20 with a wonderful promise at verse 19. Paul was also concerned about the unity of the church made possible by the Holy Spirit, and the need to guard this at all costs (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19). In fact, both the "gifts" and the "fruits" of the Spirit only have meaning within the context of the Church, and our love and service toward each other within the fellowship of the church.

Thirdly, the Pentecostal Gift continues as a Special Provision for the Church (Acts 4:29-31)

As the book of Acts continues, the Day of Pentecost at Acts 2, which in one sense was a unique and unrepeatable experience, because it was the occasion of the **initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church in fulfilment of Joel 2:28-32**, now begins to show how it begins to develop in the early church. Some have even spoken of the passage at Acts 4:29-31 as a "Second Pentecost", but for our purposes, it is also a good illustration as to how the Day of Pentecost at Acts 2 continues to have relevance for the church, even down to our own times. The main point of this passage is that regardless of context, and the changing situation of the church throughout history, the Pentecostal gift of the Spirit **remains and continues** as a "**special provision**" for each challenge and task that we encounter in ministry. What a great blessing this truth is for church and ministry today! Personally, I subscribe to the idea of one baptism (in water/conversion/Spirit), and many fillings with God's Spirit as each new task in ministry arises (Ephesians 5:18 = keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit). But in saying this, we must not overlook the fact that at special times in history, God in his sovereign grace and plan, has also visited individuals like Charles Finney in America (1792-1875), with an extraordinary outpouring of his Spirit, in order to arrest the decay of a spiritually backward church and nation, through his powerful preaching. And incidentally, Finney recalls that he was not even consciously thinking of, nor seeking, or expecting such an experience of the Holy Spirit, when such a visitation came upon him during this time. A case of God's sovereign grace and plan! For this reason, it is unwise to try and replicate another's experience. For the Spirit of God, like the wind, blows **where and how** he desires. But coming back to Acts 4:29-31, we read that after prayer for the ability to proclaim God's Word with boldness, the place where they were meeting was shaken, and they were all "filled" with the Holy Spirit, and as a result, spoke the Word of God boldly. A case of a special provision, for a special occasion. In this respect, the grace of God never works mechanically. We are never allowed to live on an experience. We must live on the Lord himself as "branches" of the vine, and when a special need arises, then a special provision is made. This is both a comforting and encouraging thought. When we come to a crisis, let us remember that for that crisis or task, God will give us a special "fullness" of the Spirit. And so the fullness of the Holy Spirit is not only a permanent possibility, but is also a **special provision** given for special service, provided that we obey the word of the Gospel, including the message of the cross (Acts 5:22). Here again we may also be encouraged by Paul's benediction at Ephesians 3:20-21 - "Now unto Him who is able to do immeasurably more than we ever ask or think, according to his **power that is at work within us**, to him be glory in the church, and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, forever and forever, Amen. And so the coming of the Spirit, first associated with Pentecost, enables us to both **be** the people of God in terms of the "fruits of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23), and then **do** the Will of God through the "gifts of the Spirit" (1 Peter 4:10-11; Romans 12:4-8). Without God's Spirit, God's work could never be accomplished, as Zechariah 4:6 puts it: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord Almighty." This truth also applies to the "greater works" of which Jesus spoke at John 14:12.

Conclusion:-

Today we have focused on three important truths about Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit as encouragements to our own faith and witness. The coming of the Spirit made mission, fellowship, and service, a distinct possibility and reality for **all**, regardless of gender, race, or class distinctions. In the light of these things, our most appropriate response will be found in the words of the Hymn-writer, "Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me"... **Amen.**