

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Holy Spirit: Pentecost

The holiday that we have this Spring Bank Holiday weekend, is the celebration of the wonderful event that is recorded in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit came down and indwelt the company of Christian believers. As Acts 2:1 tells us it was at the time of the Jewish feast of Pentecost, or as it can also be called, the Feast of Weeks. "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." The next verses tell us what happened on that day, "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost."

We often think about the time when the Son of God came into this world and was born of a virgin at Bethlehem. This was the most wonderful event that had ever happened in the world's history, when its Creator became a man and God dwelt among us. It is equally right that we think about the time that the Holy Spirit came down - not to become a man but to dwell in the believers. The Holy Spirit is One in the Godhead just as the Son and the Father, and we must not think for one moment that He is a lesser person than the Son of God or the Father.

It will help us to understand what the descent of the Holy Spirit means if we think for a while about the Old Testament feasts of Jehovah. We read about these seven feasts in the Leviticus 23. We shall think about three of these. Firstly, the Passover, in verse 5: "In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD'S Passover." Then in verse 10: "When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD." And then in verses 15 and 16: "And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven Sabbaths shall be complete: even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meal offering unto the LORD."

Pentecost actually means 'fifty days'. The children of Israel had to count from the feast of firstfruits fifty days, that is seven Sabbaths (or weeks) and one day. These three feasts that we have read about typify the death of the Lord Jesus, His resurrection and then the descent of the Holy Spirit. We have the right to apply these Old Testament pictures to the Christian today because they are used in a spiritual way in the New Testament. For example, the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:7 says, "For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." Then in that wonderful chapter 15 where the resurrection of Christ is expounded, he says in verse 23, "Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming."

The Passover was the beginning of the Jewish year. In Exodus 12:2, we read, "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you." The nation of Israel did not begin then, but their relation to Jehovah as a redeemed people did. God started with a picture of the death of Christ. We also have to realise that we can have no relation with God at all except by the death of the Lord Jesus. He was that true Pascal lamb, provided by God. Even as John the Baptist said in John 1:29: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

Equally important as the death of the Lord Jesus is His resurrection. Going to 1 Corinthians 15 again, in verse 17 we read: "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." Sadly there are those who deny the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and call it a myth. These persons cannot be Christians. The resurrection of Christ is a corner stone of Christianity. Without it, everything falls down. Likewise, without the descent of the Holy Spirit, there can be no power in the Christian life and no Church. The Holy Spirit is the life and power of the Church today. Without it, it is dead.

So the Passover speaks of the death of the Lord Jesus which we should remember every Lord's day. It is the basis of our relationship with God. Then three days after this we have the Feast of Firstfruits, which speaks of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The idea of firstfruits in Scripture is very interesting. In Old Testament days, the priest went into the field at the time of barley harvest, before any of the harvest was cut, and gathered one sheaf. This was presented to God as a wave offering. That one sheaf was the same as all the rest of the harvest. The New Testament teaching behind this is; the Lord Jesus as raised from among the dead was the beginning of a new harvest for God. Remember His words in John 12:24: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth

forth much fruit." We have already thought of 1 Corinthians 15:23: "Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming." The Lord Jesus, when He was raised from the dead, became the beginning of something that was completely new. Every believer has a part in this. His death and resurrection has given us who believe, a new life and nature which is the same as His own.

Then we come to Pentecost. After the Lord Jesus was raised from among the dead He was on earth for forty days. Scripture records for us the occasions when He appeared to His disciples. Then He was taken up into heaven as recorded in Luke 24 and Acts 1. Then we have a gap of ten days. So the full fifty days are counted. We must understand the significance of fifty days and not seven weeks. The fifty days were counted from the Sabbath of that first week; it was the last day of the Jewish week. This would correspond to our Saturday. Seven weeks and one day would bring us to the first day of a new week. This in the New Testament is called the Lord's day. It was also the eighth day of the Jewish week which we occasionally read of in the Old Testament, for instance in Leviticus 23 concerning the Feast of Tabernacles which was the last Feast. We understand that the eighth day brings in something new. The day of Pentecost brought in something completely new, something that had never been on earth before. The Holy Spirit came down and dwelt in men so bringing about the Church, which never existed until that moment.

The Lord Jesus had spoken to His disciples about this event in John 14 to 16, the detail of which we cannot go into other than to note a few comments. These chapters were dealt with more fully last week. In 14:16-18 we read, "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." The Lord Jesus warned His disciples that He was going to leave them. He was going back to His Father as a man, but He was not going to leave them like orphans. The Father would send down the Holy Spirit, who would be to them all that the Lord Jesus had been when He was with them. And not only so, He would abide in them. The Lord Jesus had been with His disciples, but He could not be in them when He was a man here. But the Spirit was to be in them and that forever. In the power of the Holy Spirit they would do even greater works than He had done, as verse 12 says, "He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to My Father."

In verses 26 and 27, He says, "The Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you." And then further on, in 16:7, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." It may seem hard for us to understand that the disciples would be better off after He went away, but it is so, and in verse 13 and 14 He begins to explain this by telling them what the Holy Spirit would do when He came. "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come. He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you."

How often during the lifetime of the Lord Jesus His disciples did not understand the things He said and made so many mistakes. What a contrast when we come to the Acts to see those same men, so bold and so powerful in their witness. The Spirit of God brought to their remembrance everything that Jesus had taught them and gave them the power to understand it. What a change came into their lives when the Holy Spirit indwelt them! Also they bore witness to the Lord's resurrection and that He was alive at God's right hand. They could not possibly know this apart from the testimony of the Holy Spirit. We could not know anything at all about where Jesus is and what He has won for us in the presence of God, were it not for the Holy Spirit making these things real in our lives.

If we go back to Leviticus 23, we read in verses 16 and 17, "And ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD. Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the LORD". Earlier, in verse 13, we read about the offering of Firstfruits "And the meat offering thereof shall be two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto the LORD for a sweet savour." This verse refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, but verse 23 refers to that company we have read about in Acts 2. We must notice the difference between the two meat offerings. When it spoke of the Lord Jesus it was "fine flour mingled with oil" and it was a sweet savour to the LORD. At His birth He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and during His life He was anointed with the Holy Spirit. He always did everything that was pleasing to His Father in His life; He was always a sweet savour to God. But when we read of the new meat offering on the day of Pentecost, there were two loaves. They were of fine flour but not mingled with oil and they were made with leaven. In the fine flour we see that they had the same life as the Lord Jesus, but in the leaven, (which is always a picture of evil in Scripture), we see that the flesh was still in them, and so they could fail. Moreover there were two loaves not one. The Church of God is composed of Jews and Gentiles. They were brought together to be a new company. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:13 "For by one Spirit we are all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

They were all partakers of the same Spirit, so all social and national differences disappeared. Unfortunately, there is an error abroad today that talks of a fresh baptism of the Spirit and the need of a new experience in our lives. Scripture speaks of only one baptism of the Holy Spirit and that took place on the day of Pentecost. Since then that same Holy Spirit has indwelt every believer on the Lord Jesus and so they have a part in what the Spirit formed on that day, which is the Church of God. We must distinguish between our profession, when we are baptised, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is what we do; the gift of the Holy Spirit is what God has done. We do not come into the Church by being baptised, but we make a profession. We are all brought into the Church by the work of God the Holy Spirit when He sealed us.

When the Lord Jesus publicly received the Holy Spirit, we read in Matthew 3:16-17, "The Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." But when we read in Acts 2:2-3, the Spirit is described as a mighty rushing wind and cloven tongues of fire. In both instances there was a sound and something that could be seen. With the Lord Jesus, the Spirit was like a dove and then the voice of the Father was heard. The dove is a pure bird; it will not eat anything unclean. The Spirit of God is the Holy Spirit and there was absolutely nothing in the Lord Jesus that had to be cleansed before He could abide on Him. Then the Father's voice declared His delight and pleasure in Him. But when the Spirit came down on the 120 disciples that were all together at that time, the sound was a rushing mighty wind, which "filled all the house where they were sitting." Then appeared the cloven tongues of fire, which "sat on each of them".

The word for 'wind' here could be translated 'breath' and is only used elsewhere in Acts 17:25: "seeing He giveth to all life, and breath". From that moment, the disciples were going to express a completely different life than they had previously. The Holy Spirit inside them was the power to do this. But the tongues of fire sitting on them would speak of the power that was to be seen outwardly as they were controlled by the Spirit. The thought behind sitting on them is, to take possession and control of them. Just like when the Lord Chancellor commences proceedings in the House of Lords, he sits on the woolsack. He takes control of the house.

The effect of this descent of the Holy Spirit was immediately apparent. We read in verse 4, "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." The Lord Jesus in John 15:27 said, "And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning." The very first effect of the Spirit was to do with God speaking to men. The disciples had been with the Lord Jesus and had a great deal to tell. God had the good news of salvation that He wanted everyone to hear. The Spirit gave these people the power to speak for God in the world, and the rest of this wonderful chapter tells us how successful they were.

Let us today rejoice that we have the same Spirit who came down at the beginning of Christianity and so we also are able to bear witness for God. That can be as effective now as it was at the beginning.

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