

#31 - Pentecost - Acts 2

Engage:

- Since the fall of humankind in the Garden of Eden, the people of God looked to the time when the keystone of **God's redemptive plan** would be clearly seen through the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Now we have arrived at the next step – the establishment of the church whose purpose is to share the message of redemption with the people of the world (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:7-8). This has been called The Birth of a Revolution (the title of a book co-authored by Wayne Shaw and James Strauss).

Here is how they described this revolution in the opening chapter of their book: “On Pentecost God loosed the power that ignited the Christian revolution. Christ had already commissioned the apostles to preach in His name. He told them to spread His message of repentance and forgiveness to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promised gift. . . . The weakness of man waited in an upper room, praying ten days for God's power. . . . God gave the anticipated power when Pentecost arrived. . . . The two-fold promise to believers is forgiveness of sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit. With these we cannot fail; without them we cannot succeed. A revolution must offer a new life to its followers. Christ promises what no one else can give.”

Thus the church, the revolution that will be a force for change in the world until Jesus returns, was born. “The apostles were convinced that they were living as Oscar Cullman has said, between D-Day and V-Day. Jesus' birth was the end of the beginning of **God's redemptive plan**. The decisive battle won at Calvary and the empty tomb were the beginning of the final end and supreme victory.”

“We may lose some battles, but we have already won the war. We may suffer petty failures; but it is only a matter of time until the church militant will become the church triumphant.” “Boldly and without hindrance” (Acts 28:31) – this is the theme which motivated first followers of Jesus beginning at Pentecost. This theme and message will continue to do the same until Jesus returns!

Thoughts about the story:

- Acts 2:1-13 – They waited for and received the Holy Spirit

- Acts 2:1-4 - Pentecost was 50 days past the Sabbath of the Passover (7 weeks plus 1 day). Jesus was crucified at Passover time. He was resurrected three days later on the first day of the week. He ascended to heaven 40 days later. The Holy Spirit came in a special way on Pentecost.

The coming of the Holy Spirit fulfilled what John the Baptist had said would some day happen (Luke 3:16) and was the beginning of the fulfillment to what the Old Testament prophet Joel had prophesied concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit for “all people” in the “last days.” (Joel 2:28-29). See New Testament History - Acts by Gareth Reese.

“Fire” - Fire was present on Mt. Sinai to attest to the validity of God's truth which was revealed through the law. Fire was associated with both the presence of God (Exodus 3:2) and judgment (Luke 3:16-17). Fire was present on Pentecost to add validity to the message of the gospel and the establishment of the church.

God made His presence known in a powerful way through a “violent wind” and the presence of the Holy Spirit. This was in agreement with what Jesus told His disciples Luke 24:49; John 14:26; 15:26; Acts 1:4). These people spoke in other languages (“tongues”) - also see Acts 10:46; 19:6. Note: Who are “all of them?” Some say it was the 120 (Acts 1:15), while the closest antecedent was the 11 (Acts 1:26 and 2:1 - Remember, there were no chapter divisions in the original text.). Also they were said to be Galileans (Acts 2:7). It doesn’t seem likely that the 120 were all Galileans.

There were 15 different geographical locations represented by those who heard the message in their own “tongue” (language). See 1 Kings 19:10-13 for a similar incident when God revealed Himself.

Note: Wiersbe suggested that this event was a reversal of the judgment God brought on the people at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). There, people were not able to understand one another, but on Pentecost they could. Babel had been about the praise of men, while Pentecost was about the praise of God.

- Acts 2:5-13 - Along with the Passover festival, the day of Pentecost was also one of the major Jewish festivals. Consequently Jewish people and “converts to Judaism” (Acts 2:11) from all over the Roman empire were in Jerusalem. (The Romans had placed groups of Jews throughout the Roman empire so as to weaken their presence as a group in their homeland. This was called the dispersion or diaspora.) When they heard the Galilean followers of Jesus speaking in their own languages, they were amazed.

Note: God is interested in people from all over the world, no matter what their skin color, sex, age, race, nationality or language. See Galatians 3:26-28.

As part of God’s plan to see the gospel spread “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8), those who became followers of Jesus that day no doubt took the message back to their new home areas. God’s desire has not changed!

Even though the power and presence of God were very evident, there were some who did not believe. They thought that these men must have been drunk. Peter quickly responded by saying that it was too early in the morning for this to be the case (Acts 2:15).

- Acts 2:14-41 – The message of hope – the gospel – was proclaimed by Peter

- Acts 2:14-21 - The Holy Spirit came on Pentecost after the ascension of Jesus as promised. Peter, who had denied Jesus (John 18:15-18, 25-27) and then was restored by Jesus (John 21:15-23) spoke boldly and humbly to the crowd. He put what happened that day into proper context. In summary, Peter’s message was that Jesus, who had been rejected and crucified, was the promised Messiah. Thus, he addressed the following: 1) Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled (Acts 2:14-21); 2) the resurrected Christ was the Messiah (Acts 2:25-36) and 3) the power of Christ through the grace of forgiveness and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit changes the lives of all who become followers of Jesus (Acts 2:37-40).

The NIV Study Bible outlined Peter’s message in a slightly different way: “1) an explanation of events (vv. 14-21); 2) the gospel of Jesus Christ—His death, resurrection and exaltation (vv. 22-36); 3) an exhortation to repentance and baptism (vv.37-40). The outline of this sermon is similar to those in chs. 3; 10; 13.”

Note: Here Peter references the “last days” or “later times” or “last times” (See 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1; Hebrews 2:1; 1 Peter 1:20). This is the period of time between the first and eventual second coming of Jesus. In other words, we are living in the “last days” and will until the “last day” comes (the return of Jesus and the judgment - John 6:39; 11:24; 12:48).

- Acts 2:22-35 - Jesus had been resurrected as promised. Here Peter references Psalm 16:8-11 written by David. David was a prophet who spoke of a time when the Messiah would be resurrected. Unlike David’s body, the body of Jesus did not go to the grave to “see decay.” When Jesus was raised, He revealed Himself to hundreds of people before He ascended back to heaven (1 Corinthians 15:1-10) to sit at the “right hand” of the Father where He now reigns. Note: The resurrection of Jesus was a major theme in the book of Acts. For example: Acts 3:25, 26; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 33-34, 37; 17:31; 26:23).

- Acts 2:36-41 - About 3,000 became followers of Jesus on the day of Pentecost, the church was born. The power of the preaching of Peter that day caused many to be “cut to the heart” because of their sin. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah. They asked: “What shall we do?” The answer was simple, yet powerful. They were told to “repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). The message has not, nor will it ever need to be changed (Acts 2:39).

Those who respond in faith, which is expressed through repentance and baptism, are added by the Lord to His body the church (Acts 2:41). To repent and be baptized means to turn from a life of sin and rebellion against the way of God so that you can turn to Jesus Christ. Also see Romans 6:1-13;

- Acts 2:42-47 - The first Christians modeled the work of the church

“They devoted themselves” to the following practices. (I have used the thoughts of J. R. W. Stott from his commentary on Acts to identify in simple terms what they did.)

1) “the apostles teaching” - The first followers of Jesus were a learning church (Stott). Their desire was to imitate the life of Jesus in the world.

2) “fellowship” - The first followers of Jesus were a **loving** church (Stott). They joined together as followers to Jesus to live their lives to the praise and glory of God, which was a powerful example to those who did not know Jesus.

3) “the breaking of bread and prayer” - The first followers of Jesus were a worshiping church (Stott). This included both observing the Lord’s Supper and prayer.

The Lord’s Supper was introduced by Jesus as a means of keeping the significance of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus always present on the minds of followers of Jesus (Matthew 26:26-29). The writer of Hebrews said that Jesus “. . . has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:26-28).

Prayer, whether it is private or public, is shown to be an integral part of the life of the follower of Jesus. For example, see Acts 1:14; 3:1; 6:4; 10:4, 31; 12:5; 16:13, 16)

4) “the Lord added to their number daily” - The first followers of Jesus were an **evangelistic church** (Stott). A healthy church or community of believers attracts people to Christ. This raises the obvious question: What can we do to do a better job of attracting people to Christ? Here is a three fold way of answering this question from a summary found in The Birth Of A Revolution:

- 1) Preach a revolutionary message.
- 2) Respond in a revolutionary way (faith, repentance and baptism).
- 3) Live a revolutionary life.

“They constantly attended to the apostle’s teachings, to the Lord’s Supper, to prayers, and to fellowship. They were of one mind. They were generous with their possessions, looking to the needs of others. They were joyous, thankful believers who continued to worship in the temple.

They enjoyed the goodwill of all the people, and the Lord kept adding daily to their number. They combined revolutionary doctrine and revolutionary fellowship, and so must we.”

Discussion starters:

- In this story we have seen how people were challenged on the Day of Pentecost to become followers of Jesus. How were you challenged? Who and what influenced you? What convinced you of your need for Jesus?
- In what ways can you become like Peter and the first Christians? Or what can you do to challenge your friends and neighbors to hear the good news of God and how their lives can be changed if they will become followers of Jesus?
- The first church demonstrated that they were others- centered, rather than self-centered. How can the church today emulate their example?
- What part should prayer play in this effort?