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Resurrection Postlude - Part 5

## Pentecost: The Feast of Shavu'ot

Acts 2:1-39

### Introduction

Pentecost is from the Greek word πεντηκοστή, *pentekosta*, meaning "the fiftieth day." It is one of the prominent feasts on the Jewish calendar, called Shavu'ot, Hebrew שָׁבוּעוֹת, which is celebrated seven weeks following Passover. Shavu'ot is one of the pilgrimage festivals required in the Old Testament. Requirements for Shavu'ot are described in Leviticus 23:4-22 and also in Deuteronomy 16:9-12. Shavu'ot begins with the feast of firstfruits and culminates with Pentecost on the fiftieth day. Firstfruits also marks the beginning of harvest when a sheaf of grain was brought to the Temple and waved above the head of the priest as the firstfruits. Pentecost celebrates the completion and dedication of the spring harvest fifty days later.

### The First Christian Pentecost

The first Pentecost came fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus and ten days after His ascension into heaven. The events of that day fulfilled Jesus' repeated promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit in power to embolden and equip the church to carry the Gospel to a lost world, see John 14:15-18; 15:26-27; 16:5-15; and Acts 1:1-8. In his sermons on the Book of Acts, Dr. Criswell presented eleven messages on the events of the day of Pentecost. The fifth of those messages was entitled "The Pattern of Pentecost." In it he began by pointing out that some of God's miracles and manifestations were never repeated, but were either one-time events, such as creation, or events repeated for a limited time, such as the miracle of manna.

At Pentecost some things were one-time miracles, such as the sound of the rushing mighty wind and the flame of the *shekainah* glory above the head of each one present. All these things happened in the "one place" where they were gathered on that first Pentecost. That "one place" probably was Solomon's Portico, the outer courtyard of the Temple at Jerusalem. The sign repeated only for a limited time was the miracles of languages, repeated at the salvation of Cornelius, Acts 10:46, and the disciples of John the Baptist when they received Jesus as their Savior in 19:6. The issue of "tongues" surfaced as a problem in the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 12:27-14:40. It is clear that the miracle of languages was a "sign," see 1 Cor 14:22. But Paul called it a temporary gift in 13:8, saying the sign would "cease." And cease it did for other than at Corinth, where the sign was perverted, see 1 Cor 14:1-5, the miracle of languages is not found in Scripture. It does not appear in the letters to Galatia, Ephesus, Colossae, Philippi, or Thessalonica. It was not mentioned in Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, Peter's letters, John's epistles,

Jude, or Revelation. Why? As Dr. Criswell says, "Because the sign of tongues [languages] had ceased," being temporary, Criswell, *Acts: An Exposition, Volume I*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978, p. 79. Note that Acts 2:5 states there were "Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven." Yet miraculously they each heard in their own language, γλῶσσα glossa, and the particular idiom of their native dialect. The word "unknown" in reference to "tongues" does not appear in Scripture. The Greek γλῶσσα glossa, has only two meanings. First, it is the organ in the human mouth that allows one to articulate words. Second, it refers to known spoken languages. It never refers to unintelligible speech of any kind.

#### **Four Confirming Signs That Continue**

There are four miracle signs from Pentecost that do continue in the churches and also continue in the churches to the present.

1. **The Filling of the Holy Spirit.** Acts 2:4 says, "They were in one place and in one accord," v. 1, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit . . ." This phrase is repeated six times in Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9, and 52. It also appears in Luke 1:15, 41 of John the Baptist; 1:67 of Zacharias; and 4:8, 31 of Jesus. It is not mentioned elsewhere except for the command to be filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 5:17-18, which is not followed by speaking in languages but "speaking in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord," 5:19. Again in Colossians 3:16, the filling of the Word of God is mentioned as producing the same results, suggesting that the Scripture-filled life is a key component of a Spirit-filled life.

The Holy Spirit brings power and life to an otherwise dead body of Christ, the church. But, to focus on the Holy Spirit as the center of God's work instead of focusing on the Gospel of Christ, is a mistake that many Christians, churches, and denominations make. Jesus stated that the Holy Spirit would "not speak on His own authority, whatever He hears He will speak, and He will tell you of things to come, He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it unto you," John 16:13-14. Clearly, we should not do that which violates the very purpose and role of the Holy Spirit by placing Him ahead of the Gospel, ahead of the Father, and ahead of Christ in our focus and our ministry. The Holy Spirit's ministry is to call attention to the Father and the Son, not to focus on Himself!

In his sermon, "The Pattern of Pentecost," Dr. Criswell adds that "always, somewhere, the fullness of the Spirit is outpoured," *Acts: An Exposition*, p. 80-81. He follows this statement with eleven examples from church history.

1. When the church at Jerusalem was lost in Judaizing legalism, the churches at Ephesus and at Antioch were abounding in spiritual glory.
2. When waning piety in Antioch turned the church into an empty shell, the Spirit of God was waxing strong in Milan.
3. While the churches of Alexandria and Carthage and North Africa were sinking into formalism, the churches of Gaul were battling the voices of imperial oppression and winning converts from the dark depths of barbarianism.
4. While the church at Rome was falling into empty pretense, all Ireland was turning to the holiness and beauty of the Savior.
5. While Mohammed was destroying the churches of Syria, Egypt, and Asia Minor, the scholars of Iona were studying the Bible and their preachers were evangelizing all of Scotland.
6. While the papal court of Avignon was disgracing the name of religion in luxury and in vice, pious men were writing books, preaching sermons, and practicing godly virtues in the cities of Germany.
7. When Italian fields were covered over with worthless, rotten stubble, Bohemia was ripening white unto harvest.
8. When the night of religious superstition and despotism was getting darker in continental Europe, the morning star of the Reformation was rising in England.
9. While the Unitarian defection was emptying the churches of New England, the pioneer preacher was pressing beyond the Alleghenies, across the frontiers of the wilderness and of the prairies, establishing the churches and the Christian institutions that bless us and our children today.
10. While the voices of a thousand sterile, decadent church leaders decry mass evangelism, Billy Graham is preaching to the greatest throngs in human history.
11. While the fetid breath of liberalism is destroying the witness of the mainline denominations in America, there is revival of unusual proportion in Indonesia, in South Korea, and on the continent of Africa, *Acts: An Exposition*, pp. 80-81.

Criswell then stated, "That is Pentecost, and it is intended for all of God's people through the ages. The dead church is a disgrace to the name of Christ. There ought to be power, life, quickening presence, and revival among our people. God intends His church to be alive and growing," *Acts: An Exposition*, p. 81.

- 2. The Boldness of Those Filled with the Holy Spirit.** The disciples are a perfect example of the boldness that characterizes the people of God when they are empowered by the Holy Spirit. They were cowered and cowardly after Jesus was arrested. "They all forsook Him and fled," Matt 26:56. They feared for their own lives and personal safety, hiding in the shadows of the cross. They met behind closed doors in secret, until the day of Pentecost. On that day Peter stood and boldly proclaimed the Gospel by saying, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ," Acts 2:36. Later, when the disciples appeared before the Sanhedrin, Acts 4:5-12, Peter again spoke out challenging, that "This is the stone which was rejected by the builders, which has become the chief cornerstone, nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved," Acts 4:11-12. Then Luke adds, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized they had been with Jesus," Acts 4:13.

Dr. Criswell told how in his first church he confessed to one of his older men his timidity and fear of talking to others about Jesus. It is often a mark of culture, polish, and education to be reserved in our approach to others. But this man said, "Do you know what the matter is?" "No, I don't," replied Criswell. "You ain't got no religion!" Criswell got the point, and so do I. If we have Jesus we have something to say, and the good news of Pentecost is that the Holy Spirit will help us and embolden us to share the Good News of God's saving grace in Jesus Christ.

- 3. The Conviction of the Holy Spirit.** When Peter delivered the message at Pentecost, Luke states, "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'" Acts 2:37. So Peter gave the invitation, "Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit," Acts 2:38. Our mission is to share the Gospel. The Holy Spirit alone can convict the lost and draw them to receive Christ as their own Savior. On that first Pentecost day in the life of the New Testament church, three thousand were saved, baptized, and added to the church, Acts 2:40-41.

Revival and renewal come when the people of God get under conviction about our responsibility to share the Gospel with the lost. No one can be saved without the conviction of the Holy Spirit. When you hear the Word of God, the Holy Spirit must be the agent of conviction that draws and seals your heart to the power of God for salvation, Eph 1:13-14.

- 4. The Sustaining Power of the Holy Spirit for All Believers.** Note Acts 2:42-47. Especially note verse 46 that says, "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple. . . ." Then verse 47 adds, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship. . . ." The Christian Pentecost was born in the Temple precincts and probably took place on Solomon's Portico. The message of Pentecost is the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit evidenced then and now. Our salvation is secure because of the saving work of Christ and the sealing work of the Holy Spirit, Eph 1:13-14. Our salvation is secure because we are held by the hands of Christ, John 10:28-29. Our salvation is maintained by the inseparable love of Christ, Rom 8:35-39. Our salvation is preserved by the superlative work of Jesus our Great High Priest, Heb 7:25. Our salvation is unwavering because of the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus, Heb 9:28; 10:8-10. Our salvation is guarded and kept by the unalterable will of God in Christ, Jude 24-25. In all these things the writer of Hebrews says the Holy Spirit speaks to us, 2:4, 7; 3:7; convicts us, 6:4; 9:8; and witnesses to us, 10:15.

### **Conclusion**

God has blessed the church with the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish the assignment that Jesus left for us. First, He sent the Holy Spirit as an inner witness, filling us with God's presence and power. Second, the Holy Spirit gives us the wisdom and boldness to do the work God has for us. Third, the Holy Spirit convicts every believer of our need for salvation, and of the need to confess all other sins to keep our way to God clear, 1 John 1:8-9. Fourth, the Holy Spirit is active in helping to preserve the work of salvation in the life of every believer. What a wonderful expression of God's love and extended care. I always think of my friend who as a young boy would not accept Jesus because he said, "I am afraid I couldn't hold out." If I had only known then what I know now, I could have assured him that he would not have to "hold out." God is more than able to hold on. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ," Philippians 1:6.