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A New Era for God's People

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Acts 1:3-5, 2:1-8 (ESV)

He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

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

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?"

Jesus was on the earth after his resurrection for 40 days, the Bible tells us, before he ascended to heaven. Then he told his disciples to go wait in Jerusalem for the arrival—the fulfillment of this promise that he gave us.

We're talking about that today—when that happened on the day of Pentecost. Now, "penta" is a Greek word that means five. When we're talking about Pentecost, "penta" is this word that means five.

We're familiar with this in our world today because of the building that our government has known as the Pentagon. It's a five-sided building. It's called the Pentagon because of the five sides.

When we're talking about Pentecost, we're talking about five-zero—50 days after the Passover celebration or the death of Christ—when this celebration of the Jewish people took place.

I have three things I want you to know about it.

The first is this: This day was a long-celebrated festival for the Jewish people—God's people. It was known as the Feast of Weeks, and it was celebrated 50 days after that Sabbath of Passover.

Leviticus instructed it this way:

"You shall count 50 days to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the Lord."

It was a time when God's people all returned to the temple. As they were there at Passover time celebrating, some of them stayed. If they had to travel a long way, they would stay for 50 days and would bring a portion of their grain offerings from the end of their harvest. It was known as the Feast of Weeks.

Deuteronomy said this:

"You shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the Lord your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the Lord has blessed you with your harvest, your plenty. And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God."

A time of celebration.

So there were many, many Jewish people in Jerusalem on this day to celebrate the Feast of Weeks. And this was the day that God chose to fulfill this major promise of Jesus—the coming of a helper—and this Old Testament prophecy from Joel.

Jesus said it this way:

"I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away," he told his disciples. "If I do not go away, the helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth."

Jesus said many other things about the Holy Spirit coming to us. He said this to the disciples: The Holy Spirit would teach them new things and help them remember what Jesus had said. He can bring remembrance to our mind, and he can illuminate—lead us into new understandings, new teachings, and new spiritual revelations.

Jesus also said he would teach other people in the world—not just his people, but other people—about sin, shortcomings, and failings before God, as well as God's goodness and his righteousness available to them, and about a judgment for sin that is real.

So the Holy Spirit is going to teach us these truths—all people in the world, these truths. And he was going to tell the disciples what they should say in key moments. The Holy Spirit can give us utterance, speak through us, and give us things to say in our minds and hearts.

Jesus said he would give his followers supernatural peace in the middle of this world and also teach them what to say in very challenging times in their lives. He would give them words and utterance to be courageous in challenging moments.

Joel said it this way:

"It shall come to pass after..."—and this is the day of the Lord, the crucifixion of Christ and his resurrection—"...that I, God, through the prophet Joel, said, 'I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. Even on male and female servants, in those days, I will pour out my Spirit.' "

So, as a long-awaited festival celebrated in Jerusalem by God's people, the Jewish people, it was a day that God chose to fulfill this promise of the coming Holy Spirit and fulfill the prophecy of the Old Testament prophet Joel.

And it is now today the recognized start of the Christian church—the church in the world. We know of it maybe as the supernaturally witnessing church in the world.

When Jesus was instructing his followers to wait in Jerusalem—to go there and wait—he said this:

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses—first in the Jerusalem area, then in Judea (the larger community there), and then to Samaria and the very ends of the earth."

Pastor Mike talked about this last week—how the Holy Spirit wants to inspire you and me, and God's people in the world, to be his witnesses.

A witness is a person who, if you go to testimony as a witness—give testimony in a trial—you basically go and speak of what you know to be true about something you've seen and come to understand or believe.

To witness for Jesus is to give testimony about what you've come to understand and know to be true about Jesus. And the Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit will empower us to do this.

And so, let's dive into this day.

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. The Bible tells us there were about 120 of them in one home. So it was a relatively large home.

Suddenly, there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind. This was a big sound—not just a small wind, but like a mighty rushing wind, a sound.

I don't know if you've been out in nature here lately with these winds that we've been having, but you can hear the wind. You can't always see it. You can see evidence of it. You can see that it's blowing. The trees are moving right now because of the wind. And sometimes the wind makes noise. If there's a big gust of wind, you often hear it.

So there was this sound like a mighty rushing wind from heaven in this home, around this home, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

It had to be a very interesting experience. If you've ever been in a building where a big part of the building is open, or you've been in a big barn or something with a garage door open and a big wind comes, you can feel that wind blow through there. Sometimes the house adjusts or shifts a little bit. That must have been what it was like here.

The sound of a mighty rushing wind came in and filled the entire house where they were sitting.

And then they saw this. It says, "Divided tongues as of fire appeared to them." So they saw something like fire—flaming tongues of fire appeared and then came and rested on each one of them.

The Bible is the story of the natural and the supernatural, and sometimes God exposes both to us. We see the unseen in some way. We sense the unseen in some way.

And that happened in this room. They were sitting in this room, and all of a sudden, a sound from heaven like a mighty wind came. Fire came in and divided into tongues.

And it says it rested on each of them, as if taking up residence on each of them.

Then it simply says this: "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit"—the fulfillment of this promise that Jesus had made, the promise of Joel that God would pour out His Spirit on people.

This word "filled" literally means like a cup being filled—filled to the point of fullness, where it starts to overflow. Like somehow, God entering our spirit and filling us with Himself, where it starts to overflow.

It also has the meaning of a sail in a sailboat being filled by the wind—where it is animated or moved by the wind.

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, just as the prophet Joel had said. The Spirit of God was being poured out on God's people—young and old, male and female.

And it says they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

This harkens back to Genesis 11. When we know the story of the Bible, human beings on the earth started to build a tower unto themselves—for self-promotion, self-pleasure, self-accolades. And God confused humanity on the earth by confusing its language—the language of people—so they could no longer communicate together as one.

If you study linguistics, you'll know that the languages of the world all trace back to one language. There, God confused the language, the Bible says, and separated us around the earth to help us get off of our own personal throne and fulfill His command to populate His image around the world.

But here at Pentecost, God is showing us that He knows all peoples from every nation, tribe, and tongue. He knows every language.

And by His Spirit, He is starting to bring a new unity to humanity—in His family, in the body of Christ, in the church, in the world.

And so, they're all hearing from God in their own language, in their own tongue.

The Scripture says this:

"There were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation on the earth at that time. From every nation, they were represented."

And at this sound—the sound of this mighty wind—the multitude came together, more than the 120.

They were bewildered because each one was hearing them speak in their own language.

They were amazed and astonished, saying, *"Are not all these Galileans who only speak one language? How is it that we each hear in our own language?"*

Amazed and perplexed, they said, *"We hear them telling this in our own tongues—the mighty works of God."*

I know that God, when you read through the Scriptures, when He exposes Himself to people, likes to get us in a sense of wonder and awe.

Because when we're in a sense of wonder and awe, there's a sense of humility that we have in our hearts—a posture for learning, trying to absorb what we're experiencing.

And this helps us learn more about the majesty and greatness of who God is.

So they're in wonder and awe. They're hearing from God in their own language—uniquely—from people who don't know their languages.

What is happening?

Others around them said, "*They are filled with wine. They are in a drunken stupor.*"

I don't know if you've ever had this sense, but I have this sense in the world—that when God does something big and miraculous, something wonderful or marvelous, there are those who revel in it and enjoy it and marvel in it.

And then there are those who doubt it and are cynical about it.

I remember one time I was listening to a preacher who was just so impassioned. It was a big auditorium I was sitting in. He was so infused by God, I could feel it in the room. But there were two people in front of me who were mocking him the whole way, talking about how he was putting on a show and just entertaining people.

I listened to them mock him, even while I was sensing God use this man to draw me.

And we see that right here. There are some who are in marvel and wonder over what God is doing, and others who are saying, *These people are drunk. They're in a drunken stupor.*

Peter would stand up and say to them, *Friends, these people are not drunk. It's 9 a.m. in the morning. It's too early for that.*

And then he went on to talk to them about the truths of God and the Holy Spirit. The Bible says 3,000 were cut to the heart that day, and the church started—the Church of God.

These people were not drunk. What God tells us—we might say that they were getting inspired by the Holy Spirit. To *inspire* is to breathe into.

I don't know if you've ever felt this—this stirring inside of you, where it's welling up in you because God is stirring you in some way, that you get to that point where you have to respond to what God is doing inside of you.

That's what happened with these people. The Spirit of God came to rest on each of them, and all of a sudden, they couldn't help themselves.

They started speaking in other languages—languages that other people around them could understand—because the Spirit was inspiring them in this way.

God wants to do this for us.

To be inspired is to be animated, awakened, enlivened, or exerted upon by some outside influence. It literally means to be *breathed into*.

But when you go back in the definition of Webster's second edition, before they took the supernatural out of the definition of our words, Webster said it this way.

This was the common understanding of how human beings are inspired in our world today—not horizontally by temporary things, but true inspiration comes from the eternal, out of heaven, into our hearts.

True inspiration is to be influenced, moved, or guided by divine or supernatural inspiration. And that is what is happening.

And this is the era we're living in, friends—where God is willing to pour out His Spirit on all people, anytime, anywhere, to fill us with His Spirit, to move us, to instruct us, to guide us, to lead us, to give us courage, to give us peace.

I don't know if you've been around many people who are deeply inspired, but I have two observations about them. And you can say this about the early disciples.

Number one: Truly inspired people are hard to control. They're just hard to control.

I watched my grandson get inspired. He's recently been inspired by the animated movie *Spirit*. *Spirit* is a horse—a strong, stallion-like horse.

After the show is turned on, he'll often—moved by the inspiration of the horse *Spirit*—crawl around our whole house on all fours like a horse. And he'll paw like a horse, just moving in this inspiration of *Spirit*.

My wife gets deeply inspired. She's an easily inspired woman, and she's an artist.

So what happens? She'll sit in our kitchen and look around the house. She'll start to have thoughts about redecorating.

And this inspiration will overtake her, and she'll start to ask me questions. *What do I think about this? What do I think about that?*

And I'm like, *Babe, I think it's just fine.*

And she will think, *No, it's not quite right.*

She'll start to move decorations and furniture and these kinds of things.

One of the things I've learned when this happens is just stay out of the way—be supportive. Because when she gets on a roll in her artist gear with inspiration, there's no stopping her.

These early disciples, moved by the Holy Spirit, were uncontrollable, friends. They were uncontrollable.

The religious leaders tried to quiet them down. The Roman government tried to quiet them down.

They crucified them, put them in prison, threw them in for torture, put them in the arenas—and the Holy Spirit of God inside of these people just kept giving them courage and faith and perseverance.

They couldn't be stopped because Jesus was working in them.

And he's the one who said, *I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not stand against it.*

And is Jesus still doing this—working in the hearts of people in the world today?

And if we're open to His Spirit, who knows what He will do?

When God inspires people, they're hard to control.

If the Spirit is really reigning in their lives, you never know what God's going to lead them to do.

And the second thing is this: When you look in the history of the world, it is God-inspired people—God-inspired people—who've brought about the most change for good in our world.

They changed the status quo.

And if I would just encourage us in this, just as a pastor and watching our world and listening to the news—we just need more people.

More people who will say, *God, here I am. Whatever you want. Anywhere, anytime, anything, at any cost.*

I'll do it for You. I'll do it for You.

We stand on the shoulders of these early disciples.

And now—we are the church.

It's us.

And who knows what God wants to do through us?

We're going to head up through Easter with this Bible overview. And then we're going to spend more time in the book of Acts—going through how God led the early church and what that can mean for us today, as He leads us in our communities and world today.

Let's pray together, shall we?

Father,

Thank You for Your word, which teaches us so clearly about our history and how You've worked in the world.

And today, we're reminded that we're living under a new covenant with You—a time after Christ—where the Holy Spirit is no longer residing in the Ark of the Covenant and just temporarily inspiring people.

But now, Your Spirit is living in Your people—Your church.

We are Your temple, and Your Spirit is here to correct us, instruct us, train us, and lead us in righteousness—to give us peace and courage.

Father, would You stir in our hearts a great hunger to want to walk in step with Your Spirit more and more closely—to be led by Your Spirit?

For we know that all who are led by Your Spirit are Your sons and daughters.

We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.