

May 11, 2008
Pentecost

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Acts 2:1-21

God's Gracious Pour

Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" **13**Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine." **14**Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. **15**These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! **16**No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: **17**" 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. **18**Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. **19**I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. **21**And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Today is Pentecost Sunday. Pentecost literally means "fiftieth day." For seven weeks after Passover, the Israelites, would harvest grain. On the "fifty day", the feast of Pentecost would begin. During this festival, farmers would offer to the Lord the "first fruits" of the harvest.

Because this was one of the three major festivals for Israel, Jews from all over the ancient world attended. In verses 9-11 we see a list of the countries represented: "Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs." These were people from North, South, East, and West. They represent Asia, Asia Minor, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. These people gathered to offer their "first fruits" to God!

However, God had a different plan in mind. Instead of receiving their "first fruits," God made them "first fruits" of his church. On that Pentecost, God sent the Holy Spirit to call, gather, and enlighten them with the gospel. Three-thousand men, not to mention women and children, were baptized on that day.

The question for us on this Pentecost Sunday is the same question asked by the crowd: "What does this mean?" What does it mean that the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples? What does it mean that they were declaring the mighty deeds of God in many languages? What does it mean that many were amazed while others mocked the disciples? Even more, what does it mean for us today as we live in a time and place when more churches are closing than opening? What does this mean?

Thankfully we do not have to guess because Peter answers this question.

Peter begins by telling what this day is not. In verses 14 and 15, Peter says, "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. **15**These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!" Obviously Peter had not been to a college football game.

It is important that they were not drinking just as it was important the John the Baptist did not drink. The importance is not that God is a tea-toddler. The importance is that John's ministry and the day of Pentecost is the work of God and not human manipulation. Pentecost is not man produced.

We in the church have to constantly be reminded of this truth. We too often take ourselves too seriously. As churches are shut down, many are standing up to offer their solutions. They tell us we need traditional worship, contemporary worship, new church programs, and more synod gatherings. God forbid. We do not need more assemblies. We need more Holy Spirit. Peter is telling us this very truth.

Whenever God is at work, there is going to be both law & gospel. We see this in the following verses. In verse 16, Peter goes on to say, "No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel..." You might remember that Joel was a prophet of Israel during the time of a devastating plague. Joel describes the plague by saying, "What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust has left, the destroying locust has eaten" (1:4). And then in Joel 2:3 he says, "The land is like the garden of Eden before them, but after them a desolate wilderness and nothing escapes them."

Joel knew the plague was no accident. Joel saw it as a judgment from God on the people who had left the Lord. The locusts were God's army. Joel writes: "The Lord utters his voice before his army, and his host is exceedingly great; he that executes his word is powerful."

The people knew this as well. The problem was that the plague left them with no grain or wine to make an offering. Joel 1:9 explains, "The cereal offering and drink offering are cut off from the house of the Lord. The priests mourn and the ministers of the Lord" (1:9). Thus they were guilty and could not fix it. What could they do?

I imagine the Pentecost crowd felt the same way. In verses 22-23 Peter tells the crowd that they are guilty of killing Christ:

"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross (Acts 2:22-23).

How do you atone for killing Jesus? There is not enough grain or wine to offer God. What could they do?

Many of us feel this way as well. As Christians we know what God wants for us. And yet we continue to sin. Most of the time we do not think twice about our sin. But there are moments when we do. When the weight of sin comes upon us and we wonder how in the world can we call ourselves Christian? We have nothing to appease God. What can we do?

Peter knew this as well. Peter knew what it was like to stand guilty before his Lord. Peter had nothing to offer Christ. Peter could do nothing. Peter could say nothing. And that is the point. That is exactly how God wants it. God does not want us to stand before him and appease him. God does not want our grain or wine. God wants us. To have us, he must lavish his grace and mercy on us. That is why Peter continues his sermon.

Verse 17, "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." Each word is important.

"Pour" is a Hebrew term implying the full gift of the Spirit. To pour out does not mean merely to give in drops, but to pour out in great abundance.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:4-6).

"and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5).

Notice the word play. The crowd thought the disciples had poured too much wine. The truth was that God was doing the pouring and he was pouring a different spirit altogether. He was pouring 200 proof grace.

"On all people" means God's blessing is not longer reserved for Israel. It is for Jew and Greek, male and female, young and old. Paul speaks about this in Ephesians 3:

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (Ephesians 3:4-6)

This is what Moses had wished when he wanted the Lord to put His Spirit upon all people:

Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, "My lord Moses, stop them." But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp (Numbers 11:26-30).

I think Aaron was the first bishop. He was trying to limit the Spirit's work in order to keep order.

“Dreams, visions, and prophecy” refers to the fullness of God’s gift. He does not pour out part of his Spirit, but his whole Spirit. As Luther explains, “What are all other gifts together compared to this gift, that the Spirit of God himself, the eternal God, comes down into our hearts, yea, into our bodies and dwells in us, rules, guides, leads us! Thus now, as concerning the passage of the prophet, prophesying, visions, dreams are all one thing, namely the knowledge of God through Christ, which the Holy Spirit kindles and makes to burn through the Word of the gospel” (Lenski, p. 74).

You see Pentecost is God is pouring out the fullness of the Spirit upon the world so that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved (2:21).

What does this mean for us? It means that we cannot fix our churches with programs. We can only pray “Come H.S.”

It means like the people of Israel, all of us stand guilty before the Lord. We have nothing to offer God. There is not enough grain. There is not enough wine. The good news is the God does not want us to come before him in this way. Instead, God come to us. God makes us the first fruits. God pours out his Spirit upon us. In the waters of baptism, God richly pours the Spirit upon us making us heirs of eternal life.

It means Pentecost happens whenever God pours out his Spirit to create faith in dead hearts and to illumine dark minds. Pentecost happened a few weeks ago as Michael was baptized. Pentecost happened in the life of Matt McKane five years ago. Pentecost happened in the life of Marv Combs. Marv was an inactive church member. God violently broke into his life. Now Marv is a diaconal minister and licensed preacher. Pentecost happens in Sunday School when the Holy Spirit causes one child to understand the faith.

This has huge implications for us. Pentecost means that we should never give up on our loved ones. A violent wind can come upon them at any time and give them faith. Pentecost means that we should not give up on our neighbors. The fire of God’s Word can illumine dark minds and warm cold hearts! Pentecost means we should not give up on world missions. God has provided the necessary tongues to declare his wondrous deeds.

Pentecost means that God loves us. Instead of pouring out wrath, he graciously pours out his Spirit.
Come Holy Spirit!

**In Jesus’ name,
Amen!**