

June 8th 2014: Pentecost Sunday: Acts 2:1-11

The account of the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 2 is one of the most inspiring, exciting, encouraging and enriching accounts that we find in the Bible. It reveals the initial act of God the Holy Spirit entering the innermost being of each and every believer gathered in that place that day. And it then proclaims through Peter's message that this gift of the Spirit is guaranteed from then onwards, for everyone who seeks forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, and acknowledges Him as their Lord and Saviour.

This wonderful incident happened on the Day of Pentecost which was **THE** important day as far as the Jewish Festival of Weeks was concerned. Pentecost means fiftieth, and this day was the fiftieth day after the Passover, and on this day the harvest, ready to be gathered, was celebrated.

For those first Christians this was also the fiftieth day since resurrection Sunday, and Luke has already told us in Acts 1 that during the first 40 days of those 50, Jesus had appeared to the Apostles and spoke to them about the kingdom of God. And verses 4-8 tell us that...***On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.'***

Then they gathered round him and asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'

He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

Then Jesus ascended into heaven, the angels gave the Apostles the promise of His still to come return, and the Apostles went back into Jerusalem to wait and to pray.

But they didn't wait alone. They joined together with other believers. Men and women; a group of about 120. And they constantly prayed and they constantly waited.

And so it was that on the day of Pentecost; the day when the Jews gathered to thank God that the physical harvest was there waiting to be gathered; that the believers were all together in one place. And then it happened. An encounter like no other they had ever experienced before, which they never forgot and neither should we.

It was noisy and it was visible and it was hard to describe. **It came with the sound like the blowing of a violent wind. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.**

They knew it was the promised Holy Spirit for His coming had the characteristics associated with the Spirit of God in the OT. Breath or wind and fire. But this coming was so different to the coming upon special people they had read about in the past. Then the Spirit was given for the sake of God's people but He dwelt in one person, or in one covering till God's task for Him was completed. But now He fills all those believers gathered together. Men and women. Those of some importance and those whose names we are never told. Slaves and free.

And Peter has no hesitation in telling the crowds who gather that this gift of the Spirit, as prophesied centuries before by the prophet Joel, is from now on for each one who becomes a child of God and part of His Kingdom. That God gifts His Church with His Spirit through the immersion of each believer in that same Spirit.

If you are truly a member of God's family through repentance and commitment to Jesus then in you the Spirit of God dwells. The Bible allows you to be amazed about that—to be astounded about that—but not to be skeptical about that.

But what is so evident from this account and from the other Biblical teaching about the Spirit's indwelling is that He is given so that God will be glorified in us. For we see in Acts 2:4 that the immediate outcome of the Spirit's presence in those believers was that they began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them. And we

are told that every language was, what we would call today, a heart language and there was at least one person there for every language spoken.

This was not the gift of tongues that we find some believers in the church at Corinth exercising. That was an unknown heavenly language that required interpretation. Here no interpretation is needed. These God-fearing Jews gathered from many countries in Jerusalem for this special feast, suddenly heard someone declaring in the local language that they had grown up with, the wonders of God. And when they investigated this they found to their amazement that they were not the only ones hearing about God's wonders in their native tongue, but that they were one of many. And even more incredible was that the people speaking out these words were ignorant Galileans who even other Jews found hard to understand because of their lousy accent and contorted pronunciation.

God filled His people with His Spirit and then, on this particular occasion, enabled each one to speak about Him in another language so that His Gospel could then be proclaimed. And the vast majority of that crowd focused on this as God at work and not on those individual believers, and were then ready to listen to Peter's sermon and were saved.

The Holy Spirit is only effective in us when the emphasis of what we do is not on us but on The God we worship, His mission in this world, and the Lord we follow.

AC Winn writing in his commentary on Acts states.(Layman's Bible Commentary 1960 p22)

The power of the Holy Spirit is given for a definite task: the mission of the Church. God does not give the Spirit for the selfish glory or ease of the church or an individual. The power of the Spirit is no magic which we may control for our own purposes. It is a power which controls us. In answer to our prayers for a new outpouring of the Spirit's power, God may well respond: "What do you intend to do with it?"

These believers in Acts 2 had been waiting in prayer for the last ten days for this power that would enable them to be Christ's witnesses in

Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. They knew what they intended to do with that power.

And everyone in that place was given that day the opportunity to use that filling of the Spirit for the expression of the Gospel. They all were able to share the wonders of God with another person, even though it may have been from a distance, and they may never have met the person whose language they miraculously spoke for a few minutes. But God used the power of the Spirit in them to further His work of the Kingdom.

With some like Peter and John and James and Stephen and Philip, God the Spirit worked in a more obvious way, but the point we must not miss is that the Spirit used every believer in some way for the furtherance of the Gospel.

You see the Apostle Paul makes it very clear that every believer receives the Holy Spirit within as part of their conversion experience as a gift of God's Grace through Christ Jesus. Talking about the unity of the Body he shows in 1 Corinthians 12:13 how this unity is confirmed by that very fact.

1 Corinthians 12:13

For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

And then he further proclaims in Romans 8:9

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.

But to have the Spirit within is not the same as allowing the Spirit to have all the control over our lives that He wants. Michael Green in his book "I believe in the Holy Spirit", says that for this to happen each believer must be prepared to fully surrender their life over to God and to have an ever growing desire for the Spirit to make them more like

Jesus in their attitudes and priorities, and to want to be used daily for His mission.

This does not mean that the expression of the Spirit's power through us will be the same as it was through those believers in Acts two or in any other believer that we can think of. Neither does it mean that suddenly we become important in the church or are seen as super spiritual by others. God the Spirit works within all as He pleases and often only God truly knows the impact He is having through each individual believer.

Like the story in the Participaper today about the Christian who felt led of the Spirit to programme those TV's that he placed for the government in those remote communities, with Christian channels. Read what God went on to do because he was seeking to live his life according to the leading of the Spirit within.

Or the story of L Milner. A Christian who was moved by the Spirit to invite a young 25 year old student to travel with him on a hiking holiday in Europe. And while they were away the Spirit directed him to read the Bible to that young man and the Spirit opened that young man's heart and he became a Christian. Now hardly anyone has heard of L Milner, but the young man whom he led to the Lord was William Wilberforce who was later moved by the Spirit to wage the war for Christ against slavery.

But what it will mean is that as we ask the Spirit to fill us more each day so we will notice that our prayer life gets deeper and stronger. That our thoughts are more often on our Saviour and the urgent need for others to know Him. That the voice of the Holy Spirit is more persistent about our need to be holy and that the opportunities to serve God and do something for Him in His strength become more obvious.

And deep within we find ourselves calling out to our Lord more and more, "Here I am Lord, use me."

