

Pentecost

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[0 : 00] One of my favourite questions to ask young people is birthday or Christmas?! Not whether they only get one of them but they choose which is their favourite.

! It's an interesting question because sometimes some of them say straight away! and they know exactly which one they choose. It's usually birthday.

But for others it's so difficult that they can never really decide and it usually gets a good discussion going. But these are both good times of celebration and they really just want to say I love both please.

But Pentecost was one of the three main pilgrim festivals or celebrations in Judaism. The other two being Passover when they remembered how God saved them from death in Egypt by spreading the blood of the lamb over the doorposts and then brought them out of the land of slavery and started them on their journey to the promised land.

The second is the Feast of Tabernacles when they remembered the time that their ancestors spent during the Exodus living in tents or tabernacles during their journey.

[1 : 19] And Jewish people made an effort wherever possible to be in Jerusalem for some or all of these festivals. The Pentecost took place 50 days after the Passover celebrations and was originally a celebration of the conclusion of the barley harvest.

There also came to be a time when they remembered the giving of the law to Moses at Mount Sinai. So there was a theme of completion and finality around this time which fitted in with the completion of Jesus' earthly life and ministry marked by the outpouring of the Spirit and a new beginning from the church which was about to grow at Jesus' command.

Now the gospel writer Luke who wrote Acts, he really knows how to tell a good story and his account of what happened on that day is suitably dramatic.

The disciples and up to around 120 others were gathered together in one place. They heard the sound of a roaring wind which filled the whole house and then tongues of fire settling on everyone who was there.

The wind and fire are very significant signs of God at work and there are examples of this throughout the Old Testament. And we can think about the wind which blew across the Red Sea, partly the waters so that Moses and the people were able to cross.

[2 : 43] Or the burning bush much before that where God used fire to show his presence to Moses in the desert. Then there's also the Valley of Dry Bones in Ezekiel where the wind blew through them and they began to come back to life.

And then finally that mighty demonstration of God's power on Mount Carmel when Elijah challenged a false prophet to show who was God and who was real and who wasn't and that God sent flame blazing down to burn up the altar.

That's really one of my favorite stories from the Old Testament and a really good one to share with children and young people. But perhaps most significantly for this story are the words of John the Baptist.

I think I've gotten my slides have gone a bit. Let me just check. Yeah, there we go. The words of John the Baptist in Luke 3.16. And there we read his prophecy concerning Jesus.

And John answered their questions by saying, I baptize you with water, but someone is coming who is greater than I am, so much greater, I'm not even worthy to be a slave and to untie the straps of his sandals.

[3 : 58] He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. And then the next thing we read about in that account is Jesus' baptism. And again, that brings up the theme of completion.

Jesus' ministry begins with his baptism in the waters of the River Jordan and was completed when the Spirit came on the disciples in a baptism of fire at Pentecost. John was saying, here's my baptism of repentance, but a greater baptism is to come.

And we can notice at the start of Acts 2, in verse 2, the word suddenly, that is showing that this was something that they had, sorry, the word suddenly, this is not something they had planned.

Jesus told them in Acts 1 to stay in Jerusalem until the Father sent the gift he had promised, but he didn't tell them what to expect or when it was coming. So this was an act of a sovereign God working out redemption according to his will.

Something of heaven coming down to earth. The next thing we notice at this is for everyone. You can see from this map, the people who had come to see what was going on among these disciples were from a very wide area.

[5 : 15] As we have said, it was common for people to be in Jerusalem at that time of year for Passover and many would have stayed on for Pentecost and the other festivals. Having come so far, we might as well stay and celebrate all of them.

Some people estimate that the population of Jerusalem quadrupled at this time, somewhat like Edinburgh in about a month's time or even sooner. Again, God's purposes are made clear. The coming of the Holy Spirit was initially on Jesus' followers, but the fact that they then started to speak in all these different languages shows that the message was for the whole world.

I can see that by going back again to Acts 1, just before Jesus ascended to heaven, he told them that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Sumeria, and to the ends of the earth.

God wants to speak to every person in his or her own language and giving them the saving message of salvation in Jesus Christ. The emphasis in the book of Acts is worldwide evangelization.

[6 : 25] And here's a powerful demonstration of that. When people from all over heard the disciples praising God, but in languages that they who heard them could understand. The fact that the people who were speaking these languages, as we see in verses 7 and 8, where Galilean is also a demonstration of God's power.

Galileans were a rural and unsophisticated people with very strange and distinctive accents. Those who heard could not believe that such people could have mastery of so many languages.

And we know this wouldn't just be phrasebook language like we might learn on holiday and try to order a meal or book a taxi or something in another country. When God gives us a gift, as he did to these people, he gives it properly so that the people who heard their language spoken would have heard it spoken fluently.

These Galileans did not have proficiency in these languages through their own learning or abilities. They spoke not through their own intellect, but by God's power through the Holy Spirit.

Now you've probably heard of something called imposter syndrome, which is this psychological phenomenon when individuals experience persistent feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt.

[7 : 43] It's a real thing, and you might be there sitting there thinking, I know it's real because I'm experiencing it sometimes. But we can have something like imposter syndrome when it comes to our belief that God can use us.

Not me, we think. There are better, more clever, more spiritual, more experienced people than me that God will want to use. And your view of yourself might be that you are the equivalent of an uneducated backcountry yokel like these Galileans.

And of course, the truth is that if we did try to follow Jesus' commands by ourselves and using our own resources, we wouldn't be able to do it. If you want to drive your car, you've got to put fuel in it, or you've got to put a charge in it, depending on what car you've got.

Otherwise, it's not going to work. But just like these disciples on the day of Pentecost, all we do for God is done when he gives us his power through the Holy Spirit.

Then we're no imposters because God is working in us through our obedience to his call and by his empowering. Jesus commissioned his followers to go and make disciples and gave them the power through the Holy Spirit to obey his commands.

[8 : 58] So then, what did they do? Well, that's what we're going to be coming to in the next little section after our second reading, which tells us what Peter and the other disciples did.

But for now, let's join together. Not too long before the event of the day we'll be looking at, Peter was standing in a courtyard in front of a fire, vehemently denying that he knew Jesus.

The Lord Jesus had told him he would do this, and Peter strongly rejected the idea. And no doubt at the time he was completely sincere, but still on three occasions he told people that he did not know this man.

Then we have the moving account in John 21 of the disciples coming back from a fruitless night of fishing, then seeing Jesus on the shore cooking their breakfast.

And later Jesus takes Peter aside and three times asks him, Peter, do you love me? I'm giving Peter the opportunity to make up for the three denials.

[10:03] What a wonderful testimony of God's grace and loving forgiveness. And now here's the same Peter, standing up before the crowd of thousands, this uneducated Galilean fisherman, boldly proclaiming the good news that Jesus died and rose again.

Most of the people who were there in that crowd were Jewish, so Peter starts in their scriptures with the prophecy of Joel. The context of this prophecy was to call the people to repentance during a difficult time for the nation.

But while it talked to those people, it also spoke of events to come, and Peter is saying that this is the time that Joel had been talking about. An outpouring of the Spirit on everyone so that they will dream dreams and see visions.

But most significantly, the quotation ends with the promise that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And that's the subject of the rest of Peter's sermon because he focuses completely on Jesus.

He starts off in verse 22 with Jesus' life and ministry. People of Israel, listen. God publicly endorsed Jesus in Nazareth by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know.

[11:24] Clearly, many of the people in the crowd were very familiar with who Jesus was and what he'd done. Peter shows this by saying, as you well know, at the end of this verse, the life Jesus lived, the power he demonstrated, the authority of his teaching, all showed that he was no normal rabbi.

The mighty works done by Jesus were signs that the Messiah had come. But then he goes on in verse 23. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge, and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death, nailing him to a cross.

A crucified Messiah was a stumbling block to the Jews. It went against everything they believed about who the Messiah would be. But Peter presents it as a triumph that God had planned from the beginning.

Peter was reminding him that they, that is the crowd who called for Jesus' death, and who willingly handed him over to the Romans to kill him, are responsible for Jesus' death.

But that was all part of God's plan. This is a hard thing for them to get their heads around. The idea the Messiah could be killed and in this shameful fashion was not something they could easily accept.

[12:46] Even Peter, in Matthew 16, found it hard to accept when Jesus tells his disciples that he will die. Peter takes him aside and rebukes him.

Far be it from you, Lord, he says. This will never happen to you. But now he recognizes that everything that happened to Jesus was part of God's plan of salvation.

And how do we know that? Verse 24. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

God's divine plan took Jesus from suffering to exaltation as Savior and Lord. It could not be otherwise. God raised up Jesus because it was impossible for death to hold him.

Jesus is the Messiah and it is not possible for death to hold the Messiah. Peter again looks back to the Old Testament and quotes a psalm and talking about how David was also talking about the coming of the Messiah.

[13:51] But we're going to skip forward a little bit to the end of the passage because we want to think about our response to what we've been thinking about this morning. Because the people in the crowd asked the right question.

In verse 37. When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, brothers, what shall we do? Then Peter's response in verse 38 and 39.

Peter replied, repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off and for all who call, all whom the Lord our God will call.

Someone described Peter's words here as a plank after a shipwreck. He showed them the terrible mistake they'd made, how they were separated from what God had been doing in the events that had dropped on that city.

And now he holds out hope to them that is a hope for us as well. To repent is to turn around, to be going in one direction and then turning around and going in the complete opposite way.

[15 : 04] It's a decisive forsaking of one way of living and turning fully to Jesus and living his way as we're guided by the Holy Spirit. And it's a realization of the mercy of God in Christ.

No matter what you've done, Jesus' death and resurrection covers it. Now some people describe Pentecost as the church's birthday. And as we read about it in Acts 1, we see that the early church was born that day because 120 people became 3,000.

Then the next verse, which we didn't read earlier, says that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship. The birthdays are great. Yes, of course, we're a year older, but mostly we get to celebrate them as times of happiness.

And the birthday of the church can be a birthday for you if you don't know Jesus as your Savior. If you felt God speaking to you and you know that it's time for you to turn around and go in the opposite direction, then a new birth that's possible through Jesus, in fact, that's a new birth that's possible through Jesus' loving sacrifice and glorious resurrection.

And I hope you'll take the opportunity and start that new life in Christ to turn away from one way of living and towards Jesus and the life you were created to live.

[16 : 26] And if that's you, we'd love to chat and pray with you after the service. Or if it's anyone watching on the live stream, please do get in touch and we'd love to chat to you. Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, we thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out on Pentecost. Thank you for the power you displayed in the lives of these humble followers. and thank you that you have poured out that same Spirit into our lives to live for you and serve you.

Open us up to your voice this morning, Lord. Help us to respond to your message of love and the offer of new life. In Jesus' name, Amen.