

Wind & Fire

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Preacher: Darrell Johnson

[0 : 00] When the day of Pentecost came, I submit to you that the Church of Jesus Christ will have finally understood the gospel of Jesus Christ when Pentecost is as important a celebration as Easter and Christmas.

When the day of Pentecost came, in the first century, Pentecost was one of three major festivals the people of Israel celebrated, Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

Pentecost began as an agricultural feast celebrating the first fruits of the spring crop. The feast is therefore called the first fruits.

In Deuteronomy, it's called the feast of the harvest of the first fruits of your labor. It was celebrated 50 days after Passover, hence Pentecost.

Pente 50th, 50 days after Passover, 50 days after that feast that celebrates God's liberating his people from oppression and slavery.

[1 : 09] When the day of Pentecost came, 50 days after Jesus' resurrection, 50 days after Jesus' great victory over the forces that keep human beings from living fully human, fully alive.

50 days after his victory over sin, death, and evil. When the day of Pentecost came, the Spirit of God came.

And suddenly, says Luke, the author of the Pentecost story, suddenly there came from heaven. Suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a mighty rushing wind, and there appeared to them tongues as of fire.

And the world has never been the same. We will have truly understood the gospel of Jesus Christ when Pentecost becomes as big a celebration as Easter and Christmas.

For like Christmas, Pentecost also celebrates the coming of God into the world. On the first Christmas, the living God comes to live among us.

[2 : 20] On the first Pentecost, the living God comes to live within us. And like Christmas, Pentecost also celebrates the fulfillment of promise.

On the first Christmas, God sent the promised Redeemer, Jesus our Emmanuel, as God had promised through the prophet Isaiah. For unto you a child is born, unto us a son is given.

On the first Pentecost, God sent the promised Paraclete, the Comforter, the one called in alongside. Through the prophet Isaiah, God had promised, I will pour my spirit on your descendants and my blessing on your offering.

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God had promised, I will not hide my face from you anymore when I pour my spirit upon the house of Israel. A number of times, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the promise of the Father.

On Easter evening, for instance, he said, I am sending you the promise of my Father. Forty days after Easter, Jesus said, wait for the promise of the Father, which you have heard from me.

[3 : 28] John baptized in and with water, but you shall be baptized in and with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. So, like Christmas, Pentecost also is the fulfillment of promise.

Which is why Peter begins his Pentecost Day sermon the way he does. This is that. This is that which was spoken. This is that which was spoken of the prophet Joel.

It shall be in the last days, says God, that I will pour forth of my spirit upon all flesh. Not just upon Israel, but upon all peoples. And we will have begun to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ when Pentecost becomes as big a celebration as Christmas.

Christmas, God sends his son to become one of us, to be God with us. Pentecost, God sends his spirit to take up permanent residence to be God in us.

On Pentecost, the one who is born in a stable, crucified between two thieves, raised from a borrowed tomb, lifted to the highest station of the universe, then pours out on his disciples the very life of God.

[4 : 44] And, says Luke, there was wind and fire. Suddenly, says Luke, suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind.

And it filled the house where they had gathered. It filled the whole house, he says. As God had done in the past, when his glory filled the tabernacle in the wilderness and filled the temple in Jerusalem.

Suddenly, says Luke, suddenly there appeared to them tongues as of fire resting on each of them. Burning, but not destroying.

Like the living God did when he met Moses at the burning bush. The bush was ablaze, but it was not being consumed. Wind and fire. Wind and fire.

Throughout the history of God's dealing with humanity, these two phenomena have consistently marked the presence and activity of the living God. For instance, Psalm 50, verses 1 to 3.

[5 : 46] The mighty one, God, Yahweh, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting. From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth. Our God comes, will not be silent.

A fire devours before him, and around him a tempest rages. Wind and fire. On the day of Pentecost, when the living God moved in to move within our lives, there seemed to be wind and fire.

From heaven, says Luke. That is, from outside the created order. From outside of us. From heaven, says Luke. That is, no human being created this phenomena.

Or as I like to put it, no committee met to plan and orchestrate Pentecost. Just as, no committee met to plan and orchestrate Christmas or Easter.

Pentecost, like Christmas, is all about the inbreaking of the transcendent, suddenly from heaven. And there was what seemed to be wind and fire.

[6 : 58] Why does the Spirit manifest Himself in these two ways? And what are the implications for us right now? Reflect with me on each of these images.

First, wind. Suddenly, the sound like a rush of a mighty wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting. We should not be surprised that the Holy Spirit is manifested in this way.

For both the Hebrew and the Greek word for spirit mean breath or wind. The Greek word is pneuma, which works its way into the English language in the words pneumatic and pneumonia.

The Hebrew word is ruach. Ruach is one of those words that mimics the sound of what it represents. Ruach. Wind or breath.

Now, what does this image tell us about the coming of the paraclete spirit to the church and to the city? Well, first of all, wind refreshes.

[7 : 59] Especially on a hot and humid day. There's nothing like a breeze moving the stagnant air around and invigorating weary bodies. So, too, the Holy Spirit.

When the Holy Spirit moves, the whole atmosphere changes. Gloom is lifted. The sense of suffocation is broken. And there's a new aroma.

This aroma of fresh life. Wind also disturbs. The wind blows. The wind blows, kicking up the dust and dirt. Sometimes blowing so hard, it knocks things down and it uproots things.

So, too, the Holy Spirit. The ruach, Adonai, comes and stirs things up. Sometimes he even overturns things. Structures and traditions that are no longer supporting authentic spiritual life are swept away.

This explains, by the way, why when we pray for spiritual renewal, either in our lives or in the life of the church, we often enter into a period of what feels like upheaval.

[9 : 08] The renewing spirit is moving. But first, he's unsettling things that are no longer working. And he's unsettling those things to make room for his new work.

And is this not what is happening to the church in the western world right now? Part of the change that's come upon us is due to profound cultural change. But part of the change is also due to the work of the Spirit who is shaking us out of patterns of being the church that no longer work.

Wind disturbs. Wind also cleanses. After kicking up the dust, it blows it away. And so, too, the Holy Spirit.

The Ruach Adonai comes and blows out the cobwebs and the dust. The Spirit comes to sweep the house clean, making it a more fit dwelling place for divine glory.

But that which stands out the most about wind is its freedom. The wind cannot be controlled. It can be used, yes, but it cannot be controlled.

[10 : 16] This is why the disciples were so startled when Jesus stilled the violent wind on the Sea of Galilee. Who then is this that even the winds obey him? No human being can exercise such control over the mysterious wind.

Many people like to call the day of Pentecost the birthday of the church. Well, on its birthday, a sound like a mighty rushing wind came from heaven.

Suddenly, suddenly, suddenly. Luke really likes that word, suddenly. Right from the beginning, the church is being told that we will never be able to get the Spirit of God under our control.

Should I say that again? On our birthday, on the birthday of the church, the church is being told that we'll never get the Spirit of God under our control.

The paraclete is the sovereign God who moves in sovereign freedom. Jesus told Nicodemus, speaking of the life-giving work of the Spirit, The wind, the pneuma, blows where it wills.

[11 : 20] You hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. The Holy Spirit, who comes to live among us and within us, cannot be controlled by us.

We try to control Him, don't we? We limit the workings of the Spirit to our timetables. We limit the working of the Spirit to our ways of doing things.

Suddenly, says Luke, suddenly. The Spirit blows where and when and how He chooses. Canon Michael Green of the Church of England reminds us that in speaking of the Spirit as wind, the biblical authors are stressing that the beyond has come into our midst, and we can neither organize nor domesticate Him.

Green goes on, I believe we have to take this aspect of the Spirit very seriously today. We have grown used to expecting the Spirit of God to speak in a gentle whisper, not in a roaring wind.

We have sought Him in the promptings of our heart or the resolutions of our committees. We are in danger of forgetting that it is God we are talking about. The God who created us, the God who sustains us, and the God who has sovereign rights over us.

- [12 : 34] This God can and does break into human life, and sometimes He does it in the unexpected and the alien. This is why Annie Dillard not so jokingly suggests that on Sunday mornings, along with the order of worship, ushers also ought to hand out crash helmets and life preservers.

Just in case the Holy Spirit decides to be all that He is in our midst.

We cannot organize nor domesticate the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Like the wind, the Ruach Adonai is beyond our control.

Bless His name. You can see then why one of the most important, if not the most important, discipline of the Christian life is waiting.

Waiting for the divine wind to blow. Let me ask you a question. What is the last command Jesus gave His disciples before going to the throne?

- [13 : 43] What is His last command? Most people will say, go, make disciples of all nations. Right? That's not the last command.

That's the second to the last command. The last command is wait. Luke 24, 49. Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.

Acts 1, 4. Wait for what the Father promised. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. Is it possible that we, as a church, a church I'm speaking large now in the whole sense of it, is it possible that we are not as effective in discipling the nations because we have not waited long enough?

And that we so often struggle and strive in our own strength in places we have not yet been called to go. Wait. Wait. Pentecost happened while the disciples were waiting.

Now, waiting for the wind is not a passive act. It requires the highest of human faculties. It requires alertness, discernment, concentration, readiness.

- [14 : 57] And we see this expectant waiting lived out in the eagle, as I tried to illustrate a couple of weeks ago. Early in the morning, the eagle mounts a limb of a tall tree or the ledge of a high rock.

Its wings are tucked in close to its body. It looks passive, but it is anything but. It is concentrating, testing the thermal currents rising from the ground below.

It waits and waits and waits until at the right moment it simply spreads its wings and glides on the wind. No frantic flapping of the wings just spreads the wings and rises on the power of the thermals.

God says to us through the prophet Isaiah, those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run and not get tired.

They will not become weary. Do you, like me, ever feel like a pelican or a turkey? Trying to mount up by flapping my wings and never really flying?

- [16 : 10] Wait, says Jesus. Wait for the thermals. Wait for the updrafts of the sovereign wind of God. Tuck the wings in and concentrate.

Once in a while, test it. Test it. See if it's blowing. If it's not, bring the wings back in. And then when you know the wind is blowing, you simply spread the wings.

And you fly. The crucial question I think we need to keep asking ourselves as individuals and as a church is, therefore, where is the wind blowing?

Where are God's thermal currents moving right now? When we live and work from that perspective, we discover what Michael Cassidy of South Africa discovered, that we are no longer working for God.

We are working with God. Suddenly, a sound like a mighty rushing wind came from heaven, and 120 people were invigorated for ministry.

[17 : 12] And they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and rested on them. Fire. We should not be surprised that the Holy Spirit should manifest himself under this image of fire, given the word holy.

Throughout his history of dealing with his people, his presence has been marked by fire. God calls to Moses out of the burning bush.

God leads his people across the wilderness through a pillar of fire. When God gave the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, the text says the mountain was all in smoke, because Yahweh descended upon it as a fire.

Fire. What does this tell us about the coming of the paraclete into the church and the city? Well, fire illumines.

Fire helps us see what is going on in the darkness. The light of the fire helps us see the other faces around the campfire. The light of the fire helps us see the path and the obstacles that lie across it.

[18 : 18] So too the Holy Spirit. The Spirit comes and he illumines. Jesus, after all, calls him the Spirit of Truth, who opens up the really real, who helps us see ourselves as God sees us, and who helps us see the city as God sees it.

The Spirit moves to shine in the dark places of our lives, revealing the hidden things, not to shame us, but to heal us and free us. Fire also warms.

It takes the chill out of the air. It melts the coldness in the room. So too the Holy Spirit. The Spirit comes and warms humans' hearts.

I've seen this over and over again. As a group of people meet and the Spirit begins to move, there's this warmth, melting the coldness of fear and the chill of doubt, and igniting new affections for the living God.

The Spirit melts our natural resistance to the Lordship of Jesus, and he warms our wills so that we will seek first the kingdom.

[19 : 21] The Spirit melts through the walls that separate the human family. The fire of God ignites a new kind of love, where the Spirit of the Lord is theirs warmth, for Jesus and for those whom he loves.

Fire also purifies. Fire especially purifies precious metals. In the process, it consumes, but the goal is purification.

So too the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit. The Spirit comes and he begins this process of holification. Jesus says, mixing metaphors, that everyone shall be salted with fire.

Again, from the beginning, the church is being told what we are in for. The fire is going to burn away all impurities.

The fire intends to make us shine like the one who sent him. Our God says the author of Hebrews is a consuming fire.

[20 : 26] And as Tim Stafford observes, the fire will burn until it is out of fuel, until all that is left is the shining metal reflecting the glory of God.

Amy Carmichael gave herself to the neglected children of India. One day she took a group of orphans to watch a goldsmith refine gold. At one point, the goldsmith lifted a piece of gold out of the fire with a set of tongs, let it cool, and then rubbed it between his fingers.

He was not satisfied. So he put the piece of gold back in the fire, and he blew the fire hotter. The children were alarmed, and they asked, How do you know when the gold is refined?

And the goldsmith responded, When I can see my face in the gold. The Spirit of the living God burns in us until he can see the face of Jesus Christ in us.

The burning may hurt, but only for a while, for soon we begin to glow with the brilliant fire of divine love.

[21 : 34] And that leads us to one more thing about fire. Fire spreads, especially when you blow the wind on it. Indeed, one of the chief qualities of fire is its capacity to set something else on fire.

So too the Holy Spirit. The Spirit comes, and he sets people on fire who intend to set others on fire. On the first Pentecost, the Spirit fell on 120 frightened people gathered in the upper room, and by the end of the day, 3,000 more were on fire.

3,000 people in one day. By the way, 3,000 is the number of people coming to confess Jesus Christ as Lord every hour in Latin America right now.

3,000 people an hour in Latin America coming to confess Jesus Christ. That's one new Pentecost every hour.

Dr. Gretis McGregor of the University of Southern California writes this, The Spirit lights an inextinguishable fire in the depths of our being.

[22 : 49] When that fire catches at the core of our being, it sets us ablaze with the love of God. And as we pass among other men and women, we transmit sparks of that fire that they may likewise catch in them and so inflame them.

It would seem then that the Holy Spirit has a very simple evangelistic strategy. The Spirit lights fires and then He blows on them.

For the fire by its nature spreads and sets everything else on fire around it. When, therefore, the church loses its desire or energy to share the good news, the solution is not to exhort people, get out there, folks, the solution is to exhort, Brothers and sisters, let the fire burn.

Again, the last command is not go, but wait. Wait for what the Father promised. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in all the earth.

Being witnesses is not a command. It's a promise. When the fire of God falls, we cannot help but transmit sparks.

[24 : 08] Which is what happened on the first Pentecost. Luke tells us that there were present that day people from all over the world, Parthenians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Egypt, and Rome.

And wonder of wonders. All of these people from other parts of the world were hearing the good news in their own tongue, in their own language. Jesus' Jewish disciples were speaking in their own tongue.

They were speaking in either Hebrew or Aramaic. And yet, these people from all over the world were hearing this message in their own tongues. What does Luke want us to know about Pentecost?

Pentecost. Pentecost is the great reversal. It's the great reversal of the judgment at the Tower of Babel. Long ago, as the story goes, the peoples of the earth bound together in rebellion against God and tried to build a city.

They tried to build a new civilization without God. They tried to build a tower whose top would go into heaven, says the text. Genesis 11, verse 4.

[25 : 14] Whose top would go into heaven. God, knowing that this rebellion would only lead to further ruin, confused their languages so that humanity could not succeed in building a civilization around a false center.

At Pentecost, God, as it were then, unconfused human language. For now, in Jesus, humanity can build a new civilization around the true center.

for 50 days before, the true center had emerged from the grave. 50 days before, the true center had overcome the destructive powers of sin and evil and death and is now the one in whom humanity can indeed become fully human.

When the day of Pentecost came, Pentecost is the fulfillment of promise. Like Christmas, the fulfillment of promise. I will pour my spirit on all flesh.

And suddenly, the sound like a mighty wind filled the whole house and there seemed to be tongues of fire resting on them, enabling disciples of Jesus to move into the city with the good news of God's mighty deeds.

[26 : 29] On this Pentecost Sunday, would you, like me, like a fresh in breaking of the wind and fire of God?

The Spirit has come and He does not leave us, but we sure do lose touch with Him. We grieve Him, we quench Him, we ignore Him, we forget Him.

So would you, like me, like to see the risen and exalted Jesus, blow the wind across the face of the church and cause fire of His love to fall in all the sections of our city?

In many Christian circles today, believers are praying the simple prayer, Come, Holy Spirit, come. Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Would you pray that with me? Just repeat after me. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Let me give you some other phrases you can just repeat after me.

[27 : 37] Come as Holy Wind and lift me. Come as Holy Wind and lift me. Come as Holy Fire and burn in me.

Come as Holy Fire and burn in me. Come as Holy Love and hold me. Come as Holy Love and hold me.

Come as Holy Light and lead me. Come as Holy Light and lead me. Come as Holy Life and fill me.

Come as Holy Life and fill me. Breathe on me, O breath of God. Come as Holy Hills and Aurora and let me use Instagram and read me.

Come as Holy Betty and LinkedIn and ■i and see you and DIE as Holy and I have all come as Holy and I can any or to the and all all the flow and you and