

What *Really* Happened On the Day of Pentecost?

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There is a great confusion and diversification of opinions when it comes to discussing the events that took place on the Day of Pentecost. What exactly did happen? In order to get the correct answer, let us look very carefully at the only record we are given of what actually occurred on that day. It will be necessary for us to move back and see the preparation that was made for the Day of Pentecost, because in God's plan and program, it was vitally important.

The Word of God is filled with paradoxes, and I believe we can gain a great deal of enlightenment on this particular subject by considering one of these seeming contradictions. Dr. Luke presented it when he was concluding his Gospel. He recorded these words of our Lord:

Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. (Luke 24:46-48)

Then Jesus went on to tell them that they were to go into all the world and preach the gospel. He said they would receive power after the Holy Spirit came upon them, and He even marked out the steps, beginning at Jerusalem.

But then in the Book of Acts, Dr. Luke recorded another command of our Lord, which certainly sounds like a contradiction:

And being assembled together with them, [Jesus] commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me." (Acts 1:4)

In one place He said, "You should go out, beginning at Jerusalem," then shortly after that He said, "Wait. Don't go!" What did He mean? Well, may I suggest that these men had the facts, but they were to wait. Why? They were to wait, of course, for *power*. And the two statements present, not a contradiction, but a paradox.

Perhaps an illustration of what a paradox is would be in order. I was recently involved in a very good example. A pastor was giving me directions on how to reach his church, where I was to speak. He told me, "You drive out the freeway and turn off at Reid Avenue." And then he said, "You go right to go left."

I shook my head and said, "Come again?"

He said, "You have to go right in order to go left."

"Well," I said, "if we're going to go left, let's go left. Let's not fool with this right business."

He explained patiently, "You can't turn left because there are several lanes of oncoming traffic to your left. But you can pull off to the right at Reid Avenue, and then you'll come up over an overpass to go left, above the freeway. You go *right* to go *left*." That is not a contradiction on modern freeways – it's a paradox, if you please.

God said *go*, then He said *wait*, and then He said *go*. On every downtown street corner there is a paradox, for street lights represent a paradox. They say *go* and they say *stop*; but they don't do it at the same time. There is a moment that you are to stop and wait; there is a moment that you are to go.

But now will you notice that we have a further complication here in what our Lord said to His disciples after His resurrection:

So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” (John 20:21, 22)

You recall that Jesus had once said to them, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:13).

These men were taken aback! They had never heard of the Holy Spirit being given to sinners – so they had never asked for Him, as far as the record shows. But after His resurrection, in that interval between His resurrection and the Day of Pentecost, Jesus said, breathing upon them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” That was merely a temporary arrangement that was never to be repeated, just as many of the occurrences during that transition period will not bear repetition. These men, therefore, were born again before the Day of Pentecost.

But what *really* happened on the Day of Pentecost? I want to examine this subject from three different vantage points:

Wait for the Holy Spirit.

Want the Holy Spirit.

Witness in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Wait for the Holy Spirit

The events leading up to the Day of Pentecost were all-important, for Pentecost was the “Bethlehem” of the Holy Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit became incarnate in a body of believers. Of those who were present that day and heard the message of the gospel for the first time, three thousand were converted. They were born again and became the tabernacle, the temple, for the Holy Spirit. Simultaneously and instantaneously, they were placed into the body of believers by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Listen to our Lord:

For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. (Acts 1:5)

The baptism of the Holy Spirit put them into the body of believers called the church. Paul said to the Corinthians,

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:13)

It doesn’t make any difference who you are – if you trust Christ as your Savior, you are born again. The Holy Spirit identifies you, putting you into the body of believers, making you a member of the body of Christ, so that you are now identified with Christ. We will discuss that in more detail later, but the thing to note now is that on the Day of Pentecost, the church became the dwelling place for the Holy Spirit.

That is exactly what Paul wrote to the Ephesian believers:

In whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:21, 22)

Today believers are the dwelling place of God through the Spirit.

Back in the Old Testament, God never did actually dwell in a temple. Solomon understood this. In his great dedicatory prayer, Solomon said,

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built! (1 Kings 8:27)

Every instructed Israelite understood this also. For the first time in the history of the world, on the Day of Pentecost, God moved into a temple – a temple made up of individual believers who trusted Christ. Isn't that an amazing thing? They became the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

That work of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was never repeated. It wasn't repeated any more than the birth of Christ was repeated. Having been born once, He does not have to be born again into the world. And, similarly, when the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost to begin the formation of the body of believers and take up His residence in them, He began a work that has never been repeated. In that sense, Pentecost cannot be duplicated.

Our Lord, after the Resurrection, was here for forty days in a vitally important post-resurrection ministry. That is the reason He breathed upon His disciples, so that these men might understand the truth He was giving them in that day. But there was a ten-day wait for the Holy Spirit between Christ's ascension and the descension of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. For ten days the disciples were here alone upon this earth. There was, therefore, a brief period of waiting. That historic waiting period was never to be repeated.

You and I today do not have to wait for the Holy Spirit. He came nearly two thousand years ago at the Day of Pentecost, and nobody has had to wait for Him from that day to this.

This business today of waiting for the Holy Spirit reveals that a lot of folk have their geography mixed up. Jesus said to His disciples, "Wait in Jerusalem" (see Acts 1:4). He did not say to wait on Azusa Street; He said to wait in Jerusalem. And if you understand this to be a commandment for you, you need to go to Jerusalem to wait for Him. But, of course, neither the geography nor the waiting is needed today. Pentecost cannot, nor will it, be repeated or reenacted.

You do not, therefore, need a tarrying service. A great many people today are waiting for some great and sensational moving of the Holy Spirit. There was a man in my congregation who for years sat in front, waiting for some great emotional experience. He was a man with a very tender heart and sentimental nature. He was always waiting for a transforming experience that never came, even to his dying day. I used to tell him, "You don't have to depend on an experience. After all, an experience could be deceptive. You rest upon what God has said to you in His written Word."

There are all sorts of movements today called "revival." They are not revivals at all. A preacher up in northern California was telling me about visiting down here in southern California. He said he attended a certain church and later saw a delayed telecast of the service. On the television broadcast, the preacher made an announcement that the place was packed out.

This pastor told me, “Well, I was there and the place wasn’t half full. I thought that was deception, so I got on the telephone and I called the preacher and said, ‘Now I have just seen your television program and it was taped at the service I attended. You made the statement that the place was packed out. I was there – and it wasn’t. How do you explain that?’ The man replied, ‘You poor, blind man! All of those seats you thought were empty were filled with angels.’”

Such foolishness is typical of the chicanery that is abroad today under the guise of revival. We are calling a great many things by their wrong names. There is no revival going on today in the church. There are a whole lot of pumped-up and trumped-up things *called* revivals, but there is no great moving of the Spirit of God in this land of ours. We hear of a real moving of the Spirit of God in a couple of other countries, but not in ours.

Now, my beloved, although the Day of Pentecost can never be repeated, there is a waiting period in our lives before God can use us. We need that interlude, that waiting period of preparation. Paul the apostle had that period. After his conversion, you remember, the Lord Jesus said, “He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). But before God was willing to send him out, He prepared that man for three years out yonder in the desert of Arabia (see Galatians 1:15-18). That is where God instructed him, and I think that is where the Lord taught him the lessons he later included in his Epistle to the Romans. There had to be that period of waiting, and you will find that during his entire ministry there were periods of waiting. In like manner, we need to wait for the Holy Spirit to direct and lead us.

Let me turn to one instance in the life of the apostle Paul. On his second missionary journey, we find him attempting to go into Bithynia, which in that day was well populated. Because they were having a population explosion in Bithynia, you would think that would be the place to go. But we read:

Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. (Acts 16:6, 7)

Paul made his first attempt to go into the province of Asia, where Ephesus was the capital. Actually there were quite a few cities in that region, and later on we learn of seven churches that came into existence (and there must have been twice that many); yet at this time he could not go there. So he tried Bithynia, but that door, too, was closed. The Holy Spirit left Paul only one direction to go, and that was west.

So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. (Acts 16:8)

Paul arrived at Troas, but he did not know where to go from there. So he waited upon God. Then we read this:

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them. (Acts 16:9, 10)

Had you met Paul the apostle on the street in Troas that day and asked, “Paul, where are you going now?” he would have said, “I don’t know.” I know a lot of young people in training who can tell you exactly where they’re going to be ten years in advance. I’ve heard them say in their testimonies, “God has called me to go to such-and-such a place.” I don’t believe a word of it. Apparently, God had not yet called Paul to go specifically to Europe. When he first arrived at Troas, he didn’t know where he was to go next.

But had you met him on the street the following day, the puzzled look would have been gone. He would have explained, “I had a vision last night of a man of Macedonia who said, ‘Come over and help us.’ I interpret that to mean that God has called us to go to Europe.” So off he went to Europe. That waiting period – waiting on the Holy Spirit for guidance – had ended.

We today are so busy attempting to do Christian work that we forget to wait on the Lord to make sure we are doing the thing *He* has called us to do. In these days of high technology and tension, we need periods of waiting before God. We even find it difficult to wait at the street corner when the light is red. We can’t even wait for the light to change today, and yet God uses the stop-and-go method in our lives.

But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:31)

There is that period in our lives when we need to wait before God for strength.

Want the Holy Spirit

The company in that upstairs room *wanted* the Holy Spirit.

And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. (Acts 1:13, 14)

Here was this company of people who were following Jesus’ instructions. How much they knew about what was going to happen on the Day of Pentecost is a matter of speculation. It is obvious that there was an air of anticipation, because our Lord, just before He ascended, had said,

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

They needed power to go against the pagan society of that massive Roman Empire upon which they would make such a tremendous impact, and they recognized their lack. There they were, so few in number, a small minority against the mob. They had no finances; they did not

have any capital at all – and no church was sending them out. They did not have any buildings in those days (the church got along nicely without buildings for probably the first hundred years of its existence), and the church had no influence. These men were completely without prestige.

They were without all these things and, most of all, they were without Him. The Lord Jesus was gone. He had left them, and for ten days these men were alone – after three years of keeping company with Him. They had learned how to rest upon Him. They knew how dependent they were upon Him. And then there were those ten days of agonizing and waiting.

Jesus had said to them in the great Upper Room Discourse, “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18). These folk, gathered yonder in that upper room, were waiting. Christ had promised to send the Holy Spirit, and they believed Him. They had high hopes and great expectations.

That period between the Ascension and Pentecost (those ten days when Christ was gone and the Holy Spirit had not come) was never to be repeated in the history of this world. They had all the facts – they had been trained by Him for three years. Yet they had been warned, “Don’t you dare venture out to witness to anybody.” Why not get busy and take the gospel out? But He had said, “Wait.” They wanted the Holy Spirit, and they were waiting.

Now, my beloved, there is a real sense in which every believer goes through a period of waiting and wanting. And during that period there is the setting of the sails for life. Decisions are made, habits are formed, directions are taken. I find that all the people God has used mightily have had in their lives that period of waiting and wanting. And may I say this to you, on the authority of the Word of God: every longing soul who is God’s child and truly desires the will of God will be enabled to do His will. God will meet any eager and sincere soul who has this desire. When you say that He won’t, you make God a liar. He says He will, and He will.

What we really want most of the time is our own way, and we want God to put His rubber stamp of approval on it. But He is not in the business of rubber-stamping anything. In fact, one thing God does not have is a rubber stamp. His will must be top priority for the believer.

Do you know why God stopped Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road – why He arrested this one who hated Him, who persecuted Him, and who was the greatest enemy the church has ever had? Paul said that when the Lord appeared to him, He told him he would be sent to the Gentiles “to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me” (Acts 26:18). How did Paul respond? He said:

I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. (Acts 26:19)

Any man who will be obedient, will find out God’s will for his life; God says he will. Our trouble is that we have our own plans made. We have already bought our own ticket, and we are asking God to approve it. He will never do that. We must *want* the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Witness in the Power of the Holy Spirit

Now we come to the Day of Pentecost. What really happened?

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. (Acts 2:1)

Where was that place? Well, two places have been suggested. One is the upstairs room. Some assume that because they had met there for prayer, they were there again at this time. I personally do not think so. Then where were they? They were in a public place. To what public place would these men go? To the temple. And those at the temple witnessed something that had not been seen since the days of Solomon – the coming of the shekinah glory, not to the Holy of Holies, but into the hearts of frail, feeble men. That was Pentecost.

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. (Acts 2:2)

It was not a wind; it was *like* a wind. It was an appeal to the ear-gate.

Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. (Acts 2:3)

It was not the baptism of fire that so many say took place at Pentecost. The baptism of fire is judgment, which is yet to come – we read of that in the Book of Revelation. When the wrath of God is revealed, fire will come from heaven. That, my friend, is the baptism of fire. And if men will not have the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they must have the other. What came at Pentecost was not fire; but it was *as of* fire. It appealed to the eye-gate, you see.

Now will you notice the most remarkable thing of all:

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:4)

Were they baptized with the Holy Spirit? Notice – *it does not say so*. It says they were *filled* with the Holy Spirit. This is probably the most important thing one can say today when there is so much wild theology on the doctrine of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit.

Now somebody will ask, “But don’t you think they were baptized?” I know they were; but, you see, the only thing that is recorded is the *experience* they had, and nobody experiences the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It happens, but it was not and is not an experience. He had baptized them, for you cannot be filled with the Holy Spirit until you have been baptized with the Holy Spirit. But the only experience they had on the Day of Pentecost was the filling with the Holy Spirit. Then they began to speak.

Nowhere will you find a commandment for any believer to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. The minute you trust Christ you *are* baptized, you are identified with Christ and put into the body of believers. You are not asked to do anything about it. You do not even have to know it. But, my beloved, you and I are given this command:

Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit. (Ephesians 5:18)

This is something that was repeated for these men again and again after the Day of Pentecost, because they needed constant filling.

These apostles of Christ were then filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter could stand up and preach in the power of the Spirit. They began to move out with the gospel, and the church started

to spread to the ends of the earth. The church did not bog down until men went forth who were *not* filled with the Holy Spirit.

There is power today in *waiting*. There is purpose today in *wanting*. There is God's program today in *witnessing* – for that *is* His program.

Doing Christian work – going through Christian acts, performing Christian exercises – may be simply the expression of a religious zombie. But the filling of the Holy Spirit is essential for any service that God can honor. The Bible is a dead book to you unless you are filled with the Holy Spirit. Prayer is meaningless without a filling of the Holy Spirit. And your relationship with Christ Himself will become ashes unless the Spirit of God fills you, my beloved.

In my ministry, I meet many people who are going through the motions of Christianity – they don't do this, and they don't do that, and they wouldn't dream of doing the other thing. But their lives are vacuums, utterly lacking in the joy of the Lord. What's the matter with them? They are not filled with the Holy Spirit. They need a daily filling of the Holy Spirit of God. You can be regenerated, you can be indwelt, you can be baptized by the Spirit of God and still not be ready for service.

Such Christians are like Samson. Samson went forth after he got his hair cut (there was no strength in his hair; the strength was in the Holy Spirit) – “But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him” (Judges 16:20). God have mercy on us. It can happen to us today. We can so toy and play with evil that there does come a time when the Holy Spirit is grieved, and we go forth in our own strength. Stephen said to the Sanhedrin, a religious body of the Jews:

You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. (Acts 7:51)

You, today, do not need to seek for the Holy Spirit. If you are a child of God, a believer, He indwells you. And you need not seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit, for that was accomplished when you trusted Christ. But I do believe that if you and I are going to do anything for God today, we must have a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit. And, my beloved, it is only as you and I yield to Him and our will moves out of the way that the Spirit of God can move in and bring God's will to bear in our lives.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1)

Wait upon God for His direction in serving. *Want* the Holy Spirit to fill you for serving. *Witness* in obedience as the Holy Spirit directs, fills, and empowers you.

May He fill us in the days that lie ahead as He filled and empowered those men on the Day of Pentecost. Oh, how all God's children need it!