

# What Does This Mean?

## Acts 2:1-21

### Introduction

Today is Pentecost, the day on which we Christians celebrate the arrival of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church. Pentecost. The word literally means "50." It has been 50 days since we celebrated the resurrection of Jesus.

If we were Jews, we would call this day "Shavuot."

- For the Jews today and for the Jews on the day we read about in Acts 2, Shavuot is a holiday that commemorates the single most important event in Israel's history: the giving of the Torah (the first five books in the Hebrew Bible) to Moses at Mount Sinai.
- It is one of three major "pilgrim" festivals because in Bible times all Jewish males were required to observe them at the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.
- The other two are Passover and the Feast of Booths.

Jewish Oral Tradition says that it was this day exactly that Moses carried the Ten Commandments down the mountain to give to the people who had just been freed from captivity in Egypt.

- So it was a "big deal" celebration.

Last week I started a new four-week sermon series titled "Great Questions." In each of these sermons I am going to look at a key question that gets asked in the text to see how it applies to our lives today.

- Last week on Ascension Sunday, the question was asked by the two men in white: "Why are you still standing here looking into the sky?"
- Next week on Holy Trinity Sunday, the question will be "Who can we send?"
- And we will wrap up this series on the first Sunday in June with the question "What is lawful on the Sabbath?"

But today our question is found in the story of Pentecost. And what a story it is!

- 53 days ago the disciples and all those gathered in Jerusalem watch as a man named Jesus was crucified along with two thieves on a hillside outside the city limits.
- 50 days ago this same Jesus came back from the dead to miraculously enter a room where those disciples were gathered.
- For the first six weeks since that day and this one, Jesus met with, encouraged and continued to teach His followers ...
- Up until last week when He ascended into heaven right before their very eyes.
- But not before giving them a two-part assignment. Do you remember it?

Part 1 is recorded in Acts 1:4

Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. (Acts 1:4)

Part 2 is recorded four verses later:

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. (Acts 1:8)

Wait. And then witness. That was last Sunday.

Today the waiting is over and the witnessing begins. The Message records it like this:

When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force—no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.

There were many Jews staying in Jerusalem just then, devout pilgrims from all over the world. When they heard the sound, they came on the run. Then when they heard, one after another, their own mother tongues being spoken, they were blown away. They couldn't for the life of them figure out what was going on ... (Acts 2:1-6)

The Jews knew what to expect on Pentecost. It was a well-orchestrated affair. Every year was like the previous year. And this stuff – wind, fire, foreign languages – that wasn't part of the program. All of which prompted today's question:

Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" (Acts 2:12)

So what does this day mean? Specifically, what does it mean for us? Is it just a holiday, a celebration of an historical event? Or is there something here that should make a difference in how you and I live our lives? I make two observations.

### **OBSERVATION #1: PENTECOST CREATES THE CHURCH**

One of the promises Jesus made in the weeks before His crucifixion is fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. You might remember it. Peter makes his profound declaration that Jesus is ...

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."  
(Matthew 16:16)

To which Jesus responds:

Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on

this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. (Matthew 16:17-18)

With the events in Acts 2, the church is born. Big deal, right? A new institution gets established.

- But the church is NOT an institution.
- Jesus did not come to create constitutions and organizational structures.
- He created a people. He created Acts 2:42-47:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

Every time God touches you or impacts you through the life of another believer, you have experienced church.

- We have unfortunately experienced several funerals in the last several weeks. Without fail, someone who is NOT a part of this congregation will tell me how wonderful the people of this congregation are. That's church.
- Frequently I will hear of things you all do for each other – things that aren't programmed. That's church.

And it all started on Pentecost. When you live out your faith, you are living out the meaning of Pentecost.

## **OBSERVATION #2: PENTECOST CONNECTS THE LAW AND THE SPIRIT**

The twelve disciples and many of the other 120 people who were gathered in that meeting room had been followers of Jesus throughout the three years of His earthly ministry.

- They may well have eaten some of that bread and fish in the feeding of the 5,000.
- They heard many parables, and probably spent hours trying to decide which parable was the best parable.
- They watched as blind men regained their sight, and lame people jumped up and walked.
- They no doubt lined the parade route when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

They KNEW all the material. Their HEADS were filled with the teaching of Jesus.

- In fact these followers were good Jews, so they also knew the Law, the Ten Commandments, the rules about ceremonial washings.
- They knew which animals had to be sacrificed for which sins.

But when the Spirit came, everything clicked. And their lives were changed.

- Before Pentecost, it was all words – all head knowledge.
- But on this day and forever after, that knowledge became energized with the power of the Holy Spirit.

The text gives us a perfect example of how that works.

- Before Pentecost, the Apostle Peter was known for the really dumb things he said and did.
- But on this day, in front of thousands of Jewish pilgrims, Peter preaches a powerful sermon, and 5,000 people will get saved.

Because of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has empowered everyone of us who put our faith in Jesus. Each of you has been given special gifts and abilities because of your relationship with Him.

- It might be teaching or hospitality. It might be administrating or serving. It might be leading or caring for others.
- And as you use those gifts, the Holy Spirit fills that simple act with His power, and the result is unbelievable.

Every time you do something and are amazed at the results, you are living out the meaning of Pentecost.

## **APPLICATION**

Pentecost was a day filled with amazing sights and sounds: a rushing wind, tongues of fire, unknown languages. But the day is not about those things. This day is about the coming of the Holy Spirit – the promised gift of God – who resides inside each of us who put our faith in him.

It is this Spirit that ...

- Romans 8 teaches:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. (Romans 8:26)

- John 16 teaches:

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. (John 16:13-14)

- Acts 1:8 teaches:

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. (Acs 1:8)

As one commentator put it:

Those who see Pentecost's main significance as miraculous powers are missing the new thing that was being done, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

It is like someone who receives a beautifully wrapped birthday gift. After carefully removing the velvet ribbon and the expensive paper, the lovely box is opened to reveal the keys to a fancy new Mercedes automobile! But then this confused person tosses aside the keys with a "That's nice." then turns and goes back to the wrapping in which they came. "Wow! What a beautiful box! What wonderful ribbon! What gorgeous wrapping! I love it! I'm going to keep this ribbon and box and paper forever!"

We must be careful not to confuse the Pentecostal gift with the wrappings in which it came.

When you profess Christ as your Lord and Savior, you get the Holy Spirit too. That's what this all means.

Amen.