

Pentecost 5-30-04

Acts 2:1-4, 37-39, 42-47

Sometimes the Lord doesn't work according to my schedule. Do you find that to be true too? After all, He is God and we're not! That is for certain, even though a few people seem to be confused about that. I just ask those confused folks to walk on water, and it usually clears up the confusion. Or ask if they've ever instantly stopped a storm with their command. Of course, some will just choose to ignore the facts, but most of us realize we are mere creatures. (Psalms 100:3) That means God's will is what matters, not mine. (Psalms 115:3) I was all set to preach the sermon, "Jesus is willing" on the next passage in Matthew, when the Lord laid it on my heart to share on Pentecost. Lord willing, we'll return to the Matthew series next week.

Pentecost literally means fiftieth. It was the fiftieth day after Passover. It was one of the three mandatory Jewish feasts for those who lived within 20 miles of Jerusalem. It was one of the most heavily attended by those Jews who lived a great distance away, because it was the time of year when weather was most favorable for travel. Pentecost was a celebration of the beginning of barley harvest. It was also a celebration to remember when the Law was given to Moses. Today is Pentecost.

We find that when we look closely to the Old Testament, there is a pattern of all things in the New. (1 Corinthians 10:11) (Hebrews 8:5a) God was teaching the Jewish nation, but was also revealing lessons for mankind, and at the same time showing pictures of what was to come. If anything, this should show us the amazing sovereignty of God over history. It shows us that He has the ultimate say in how things play out. He says, "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." Isaiah 46:10 (NIV) What an amazing God we serve!

As the Jews gathered for Pentecost, some 2000 years ago, a little group of 120 disciples of Jesus gathered in an upper room obeying Jesus' instruction to wait for the power to be a witness. You see, they had been cowering, fearful traitors up until this point. It almost looked as if the three years Jesus invested in them was wasted. But Jesus told them to wait for the Promise of the Father.

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." Acts 1:4 (NIV)

Where had Jesus spoken about that? We find those words in John 15:26-27 (NIV) ²⁶"When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. ²⁷And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning." (also see John 14:26)

The promise goes back much further, all the way to Ezekiel and even Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:33). Ezekiel prophesied about this day with these words, "I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh." Ezekiel 11:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes1]: ³Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Psalms 100:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ³Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. Psalms 115:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ⁵They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. Hebrews 8:5a (NIV)

⁵They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. Hebrews 8:5a (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ²⁶But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. John 14:26 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ³³"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. Jeremiah 31:33 (NIV)

Here was this little band of followers of Jesus waiting in that upper room for the power to testify, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:8) Let's read the account of what happened on Pentecost 2000 years ago.

¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Acts 2:1-4 (NIV)

Did you picture that in your mind? This little band of frightened followers is praying for God to do what Jesus had promised and fill them with power to witness. They knew the Spirit had come upon the prophets. The Spirit had been with them, but Jesus said He was going to come and live in them! (John 14:16-18)

Suddenly it sounds like a hurricane, and a ball of fire appears. In the Old Testament the Lord dwelt with His people in the Holy of holies over the Mercy Seat in the form of a ball of light called the Shekinah Glory. Shekinah means "that which dwells". You won't find the word in the Bible, but it appears in ancient Jewish literature. () This was the manifest presence of God. God cannot be confined to one area, but this was something for them to grasp the reality of His presence. Now the ball of light comes into the room where they are praying. It had been centuries since Israel had seen it, for their rebellion against God caused it to depart. (Ezekiel 10:18-19) Now it is back; the presence of God is back. That alone was cause for great joy, but something that was almost beyond the wildest expectations of man was taking place. The ball of light was separating into little flames of fire, and settling over each person. The prophecies were happening right before their eyes. Jesus had come to live in them, just as He had promised.

This day was a celebration of the gift of the Law. The Law drastically changed their idea of how to relate to one another. But now, another greater and more drastic change was happening on the very day they were celebrating the gift of the Law. The power to live the Spirit of the Law was being given to man. That would drastically alter the way they lived, not just in concept, but also in actual practice. (Romans 8:3-4)

They were so filled with joy and wonder that the gathering crowd thought they were drunk. They began to speak of Jesus to the crowd that had come from great distances to the feast of Pentecost. They were amazed to hear their own languages spoken. (Acts 1:7-8)

Then Peter stood up and explained that this was the fulfillment of the prophecies, and quoted the prophet Joel.

¹⁷In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. Acts 2:17-18 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: ⁸But 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 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever--
¹⁷the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.
¹⁸I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.
John 14:16-18 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: ¹⁸Then the glory of the LORD departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim.
¹⁹While I watched, the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground, and as they went, the wheels went with them. They stopped at the entrance to the east gate of the LORD's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.
Ezekiel 10:18-19 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: ³For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man,
⁴in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.
Romans 8:3-4 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: ⁷Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?
⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?
Acts 2:7-8 (NIV)

The Promise of the Father through the prophets was taking place. The Spirit of God no longer just came upon people, but because the sacrifice of Jesus had made, those who would receive Him and by faith be right with God would now find the Spirit living in them.

Peter went on to tell them that King David had predicted the resurrection of Christ 1000 years earlier. He told them that they were witnesses that God had indeed raised Jesus in fulfillment of that prophecy. He accused them of being responsible for killing the Messiah. Because we are all born rebels against God, defiantly going our own way, we could say this was true of all of us. It is not likely that that crowd was the same one that shouted, "Crucify Him!" fifty days earlier. But Jesus did die for their sins and ours. Their reaction was the only that one man should have.

³⁷When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Acts 2:37 (NIV)

Peter tells us what we should do when we realize we have been living a life as if we were the Creator and not the creation. He tells us what to do when we realize that God sent His only Son to save us, to die for our rebellion against God, to take the justice that should have been dealt out to us. (John 3:16)

³⁸Peter 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."

³⁹The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call." Acts 2:38-39 (NIV)

Let's examine what Peter said, or better yet, what the Holy Spirit said through Peter. Repent! That means to have a revolution in the way you think. You once thought you were boss. Pleasure and personal gain were all that mattered. "Take what you can before someone else does" was your motto. A revolution in your thinking is to think like Jesus taught us on the Sermon on the Mount. Recognize you are in desperate spiritual need. You need to hunger and thirst for righteousness, not worldly pleasures or even physical needs. You are blessed when people badmouth you because you are faithful to Jesus. Most of all, it doesn't matter if you do what looks good to men, but whether or not your heart belongs to Jesus. Does He know you? Are you seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness? That is a revolution in the way man thinks. Before it was all about you. Now you realize it is all about Jesus. That is repentance. You have been master of your life, now you realize you need to invite Jesus to be your Master.

Then Peter said, "Be baptized." Baptism showed ownership. It says, "I belong to Jesus." It declares that there has been a death to my old life, and I am born again in Christ, raised to a new life empowered by the Holy Spirit. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Next Peter declares that you will receive the Holy Spirit. The amazing power of the presence of God in your life is yours when you repent and are baptized. The promise God made through the prophets, the promise that Jesus made, will be yours! The Spirit of God will come and make His home in you. (John 14:23)

The church gets all bogged down in the theology of what happens when. Listen! Peter said the promise is to you! You don't have to be good enough. You don't have to beg and plead for a second blessing. God wants to give the Spirit to those who ask

Commented [notes13]: ¹⁶"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: ²³Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. John 14:23 (NIV)

Him. (Luke 11:13) You may be filled again. (Acts 4:31) You may not have a sensation of feeling, you may make more space for Him at a later time and be fuller than you are now, but the promise is to all who repent and are baptized.

I'm afraid there are many who have acknowledged the fact that Jesus died for them and have prayed for the gift of salvation but have not had a change of mind. They have not crossed that crucial bridge of repentance. Imagine this. Your child is rebellious and disobedient. Because of that, you are not going to take them into your arms and love on them and give them gifts and privileges. You want to hear them acknowledge that they are wrong and need to change. If they ask for their toy and a snack and your loving favor and have had no change of heart, they are being presumptuous about your love. They are presuming they are so special they can get away with anything and expect you to overlook it all, letting them continue to rebel and disobey. That isn't a loving parent. That child is headed for a good spanking, or self-destruction. (Proverbs 19:18)

There must be a change for relationship to be restored. There has to be a turning around in the way they are thinking. Baptism is a declaration that the change has taken place. It says, "I'm burying my old way, and rising up to a new life." Then, only then, is the promise yours. That very day of Pentecost, 3000 were baptized and received the promise!

The verses that follow tell us what life is to look like when we are in a group of people who have repented and were baptized and received the promise of the Spirit. *⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising 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 (NIV)

They devoted themselves to several things. The first was learning about the life and teachings of Jesus, called the apostles' teaching. We all need to regularly study our Bibles individually and participate in the study groups. As I taught last week, if we don't have enough love to remember Jesus' instruction, we don't love Him much. Take time to be in God's word! I get up every morning at 5AM so I can have some quiet time in the Bible, memorizing, praying, and letting the Word of God speak to my heart. It is essential for spiritual growth to take time in God's word.

They devoted themselves to fellowship. You can study on your own, but when you share your life with your brothers and sisters in Christ, it becomes much more practical. We need to share our lives. We were designed to work together.

They devoted themselves to communion, which is remembering what Jesus did for them. And they devoted themselves to prayer. (Colossians 4:2) Are you spending time alone with the Lord to share your heart with Him? Do you communicate with

Commented [notes16]: ¹³If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Luke 11:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: ³¹After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. Acts 4:31 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: ¹⁸Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death. Proverbs 19:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: ²Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. Colossians 4:2 (NIV)

Him as you go through your day? He wants to hear your heart and direct your life if you will let Him. Devote yourselves to prayer. You remember what I am praying for you. I trust you remember what I have asked you to pray for me. (Ephesians 6:17-20)

Verses 44 and 45 tell us that they were more than ready to meet one another's needs. Self came last. Their love for each other was manifested in their care for one another. We continue to pray that our love for one another increases more and more so that the world can see we are Jesus' disciples. (2 Thessalonians 1:3)

⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,

I keep encouraging you to invite one another over. Something happens when we eat together. We let our guard down and let others into our lives. After the service today we will enjoy a Barbeque together with glad and sincere hearts. Find out about one another's families, hobbies, how you came to Christ, what He is showing you, and how He is working in your lives. God means for us to be a spiritual family.

Now, when all that is in place, look what happens. They were

⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

God doesn't bring people in when we will not be ready to care for and nurture and be an example to them. If we just teach them to be Sunday only Christians, He will send His lambs somewhere else. But when we are a family that loves one another, that has Jesus' mindset, wanting to serve one another, devoted to learning, communion, fellowship and prayer, God can send His lambs to us. May the Lord keep us moving in this direction, as we yield to the Holy Spirit within us.

It's Pentecost. It's about the promise of the Father available to us, the power to live as a testimony of Jesus. He lives in us to bring the life of Christ to those we come in contact with. (2 Corinthians 4:10-11) That doesn't only mean to tell others about Jesus, but to sincerely love, appreciate and bless those you come in contact with.

Do you need the power that Jesus promised? This morning have you realized that you need to align your thinking with Jesus, and that that is going to take a complete turn around in your thought life? Or perhaps you have never been baptized. When I return from India we will have a baptism service. It will be another chance for you to follow Jesus' instruction to us to follow His example in baptism, confessing to the world that you have died with Christ and been raised with Him to newness of life.

Or perhaps you have believed in Jesus, but you have been your own master. You need to ask for the Holy Spirit to come and master you. Accepting Jesus as your Savior includes making Him Lord of your life, and that only happens as the Holy Spirit is allowed to direct you. I invite you to come this morning and ask. Make it public so that we can pray for you and hold you to your commitment. If you really mean it, you will want others to know. The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come. Come Lord Jesus this morning and fill us with your Spirit to change the way think and live. Come!"

Commented [notes20]: ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. ¹⁹Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. Ephesians 6:17-20 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: ³We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. 2 Thessalonians 1:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: ¹⁰We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. 2 Corinthians 4:10-11 (NIV)