

Last time we took a close look at the account of the ascension of Jesus, and the disciples choosing a replacement for Judas, so that there might be twelve key disciples, as there was when Jesus walked the earth. Peter, took the leadership role among the group, and determined from the Psalms that this is what they were to do. They cast lots, the lot fell to Mathias, and then they waited for the promised Holy Spirit as Jesus had told them to do.

In our passage of scripture this evening we will read of the account of the coming of the Holy Spirit, and take a close look at what happened, and determine what the event means to believers today. Please read along with me, Acts 2:1-13.

Verse one tells us that the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost. Pentecost is also called the Feast of Weeks, because the Jews observe the event seven weeks after the Feast of First Fruits, which they celebrated the day after Passover. Pentecost is the Jewish celebration of the day God gave Moses the Law on Mount Sinai. The significance of the Holy Spirit coming on Pentecost is seen in Paul's teachings that the New Covenant, where believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit, replaces the Old Covenant of the Law.

The second half of verse one tells us that they were all together in one place. Notice the word, they, does not specify who they were, or how many of them were gathered together. The phrase, in one place, does not specify where exactly they were when the Holy Spirit came. Were they in the upper room? Did the Spirit fall on just the twelve, or on the 120? The words "all together" in verse one, and the phrase "the whole house", suggests to me that the Spirit came on more than just the 12 disciples. I believe that when the spirit came, He filled all of the followers of Christ, at least those who were gathered together on that day. This also suggests that they all spoke in tongues, not just the twelve.

The word suddenly in verse 2 shows that this great movement of God caught them off guard. It happened all at once. Jesus told them the Holy Spirit would come, but they could not anticipate the power and the glory they experienced in His coming. The words wind in verse two and fire in verse three signify the presence of God perceived in an audible and visual sense. His presence was unmistakable. Here Luke sums up their eyewitness testimonies of that event.

The Greek word here translated as "wind" can also be translated as Spirit or breath. It is translated as wind because of the adjective violent and because it is described as a sound. The sound like a violent wind alerted the believers to the presence of the Holy Spirit. The sound came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

As God appeared to Moses in a burning bush, at the giving of the Law, in verse three the Holy Spirit came visually in what seemed to be tongues of fire. Notice that what the believers saw only appeared to be tongues of fire. It wasn't as if their hair was set on fire, but this was the best analogy they could come up with to describe what they saw.

Some months ago I built a fire pit in our back yard. Debby and I sometimes cook out on the grill in the evenings and we watch the fire into the night. When I stoke the fire and the flames rise above the ring, they dance above the wood and reach into the air. The fire has the power to turn wood into ash. It provides the energy to cook our food. It is a beautiful sight and it has a very comforting effect as we sit there and enjoy the glow. It would be hard to set there and not think about God. I imagine that the coming of the Holy Spirit had a similar effect, only multiplied countless times over.

Notice that this visual manifestation of the Holy Spirit separated and came to rest on each of them. Then as today, the Holy Spirit is the personal presence of God in each believer. Because

of the Holy Spirit we live, breath, and have our being, enveloped into the sphere of the Holy Spirit. No matter what we may have to go through, no matter what challenges we may have to face, in good times, and in bad, we are never alone once we surrender our lives in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of Christ. Our God is always with us, no matter what happens in this world.

It is His personal presence that sustains our brothers, and sisters, in Christ, who have been martyred because of their faith. The Holy Spirit sustains us as well when we are challenged because of our faith. Elsewhere He is called the comforter, or advocate, and God's instrument to lead believers into all truth. The Holy Spirit empowers believers' lives, gifts us, and produces the fruits of the Spirit in us. Because I have the Holy Spirit, I can know God's will. I can understand and apply God's word. I can go to Him and call upon Him at any moment, and I know that God the Father, and Jesus the Son, are always with me, through the Holy Spirit.

Verse four tells us that they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit enabled them. Notice that the text does not say that they were baptized in the Holy Spirit; it says they were filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came, and rested on them, and then they were filled with the Spirit. Today, a person is baptized in the Holy Spirit when he or she first surrenders their life in faith to Jesus Christ. God sets His seal of ownership on the believer through the presence of the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a once in a lifetime event, but being filled with the Holy Spirit is something we should strive for all the time.

When they were filled with the Holy Spirit, the Bible says that they began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit enabled them. Notice that this was not a manufactured event; it was something God did in the moment, according to His purpose. As we work through the book of Acts we will observe that there is no record of any of these people ever speaking in tongues again. The phenomena of speaking in tongues is recorded in chapter ten when Peter shares the gospel with Cornelius, a gentile and his household, and again in chapter 19 when Paul shares the gospel with a group of people who were followers of John the Baptist. Each recorded occurrence of anyone speaking in tongues, in the book of Acts, is given as a sign that the gospel has been received by a new people group. As the gospel advanced, the evidence of speaking in tongues was evidence of the love of God for all people, but not something that believers practiced as ongoing evidence of their faith.

To take a leap in interpretation to say that a person must show evidence of his or her salvation through speaking in tongues, or that being filled with the Holy Spirit is accompanied by speaking in tongues is to take the scriptures out of context. Nowhere in the gospel is it suggested that a believer must speak in tongues. If it were a requirement for salvation, I'm sure Jesus would have said something about it, but He didn't. In fact, nowhere in the bible is speaking in tongues commanded, taught, expected, or listed as a condition for salvation.

Paul does address the issue of speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians, because its practice had become a disruption in the church. The people in the churches of Corinth came from a pagan background, and carried many of the traditions of their worship with them when they became Christian. There Paul encourages believers not to become too critical of those who speak in tongues, so long as it is orderly and this is a true expression of their worship of Christ, but he also makes it clear that speaking in tongues or not speaking in tongues means nothing, just as circumcision or uncircumcision means nothing.

In 1 Corinthians Paul mentions speaking in the tongues of angels as an example to make his point that what is important is that we love God, and we love one another. In Romans 8, Paul

speaks about praying with groans that only the Spirit can understand and discern. Putting these two verses together, some have built a doctrine of speaking in tongues that is nothing at all like what happened in the book of Acts. This so called prayer language is taught to others as being a necessary part of their relationship with the Lord.

Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't know how to pray? Maybe in your prayers you become so overwhelmed with the presence of the Spirit that you couldn't say anything, but understood God was with you and He knew exactly what was in your heart. The Holy Spirit perfectly unites our spirit with God's spirit, and it goes much deeper than words can express. This is what Paul describes in Romans 8 and contextually it does not even hint at speaking in tongues the way many practice it today.

If we are honest with scripture, and take a close look at the remainder of our passage, we see that the phenomena of biblical tongues is the God given ability to communicate the gospel in different languages, so that otherwise unreached people might be able to hear the gospel, and have an opportunity to be saved.

The Greek word "glossais" is properly translated as tongues, but the meaning of the word is languages. This meaning is confirmed by the context of the passage. Because it was the Feast of Pentecost, there were Jews and converts to Judaism, in Jerusalem, from all over the known world. Verse 6 tells us that the people in Jerusalem gathered around because they heard a sound. The closest reference to sound in the passage is in verse two which describes the sound of the Holy Spirit, like the sound of a blowing and violent wind.

The sound the crowd heard was the Holy Spirit, and from within this sound the Holy Spirit spoke through the mouths of the believers, to the crowd, so that each person could hear, and understand, what was being said in their own native language. Some say that the biblical miracle of tongues is actually a miracle of hearing. What is important is not how God did what He did, but the message He conveyed through the Holy Spirit.

Verse 11 tells us that the people were saying, "we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own language." There are many times when I experience the presence of God so powerfully that I say that I was filled with the Holy Spirit. Sometimes this experience comes during a time of prayer and meditation, or when I am reading God's word. Sometimes it happens while I am in a worship service and the spirit of God comes over me so powerfully that I can hardly breath. I love it when it happens while I'm preaching. It is a very personal and intimate experience with the Lord.

This is how we often think of being filled with the Holy Spirit, and I cherish those times, but that is not the biblical model. In every instance in scripture, being filled with the Holy Spirit has as an immediate result, a declaration of the wonders of God to the people. In the New Testament, every instance of being filled with the Holy Spirit is followed immediately with sharing the gospel with the people who were there.

As a practical matter, if you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit, fill your heart, your soul, and your life with Jesus Christ, and share Him with others at every opportunity. Allow His Holy Spirit to use you, and to speak through you. You will never experience the power of the Holy Spirit in your life so strongly, as when you yield yourself, completely, to let the Holy Spirit speak through you.

Verse 12 tells us that the people who heard were amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" That's what happens when we give our testimonies, and share the love of Jesus with others. It gets them asking questions. It plants seeds in their hearts and

makes a fertile place for God to go to work to bring about their salvation. But that doesn't guarantee that everyone who hears will respond in faith.

Verse 13 tells us that some of those who witnessed the miracle, and heard the good news in their own language, dismissed the word of God, and scoffed at His witnesses. They had every opportunity to turn to the Lord in faith, but for whatever reason they refused, and instead attacked those who were witnessing. Not everyone you reach out to is going to respond to Christ in faith, in fact, it seems to me to be getting harder and harder to get people to listen to the truth. In so many ways the spirit of Antichrist is taking over our culture and the world. But that is all the more reason why believers today must stand firm in our faith, and be the Lord's witnesses to a lost and dying world.

Perhaps there is even someone here tonight, who has not yet trusted Jesus Christ as his or her personal Lord and Savior. It is not such a great thing that God asks of us. He just says trust me. Surrender your life in faith in Jesus and His sacrifice. Receive the forgiveness of your sins. Invite Jesus into your heart as Savior and Lord. Allow Him to seal you with His Holy Spirit and you will become a child of God.