

## Day of Salvation

If you haven't already figured it out, today is Pentecost Sunday. In Acts 1, at the last Resurrection appearance of Jesus, just before his ascension, he meets with his disciples and tells them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait until the Holy Spirit has come upon them and until they have received power from on high to be Christ's witnesses in Judea, Samaria, and to the rest of the world.

Ten days after Jesus left them, on the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, the disciples didn't know this was the day the Holy Spirit would come, but they had been faithful. They had stayed in Jerusalem as instructed and they were gathered together in one place. They were believing the Lord's promise that He would bless them and empower them.

But when the Holy Spirit, did in fact come upon them, I believe the disciples of Jesus were as surprised at what happened to them as we would be surprised if and when these things should happen to us. Acts 2:1-4 tell us what happened:

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

It was also amazing to them, I'm sure, that the languages they were speaking were being heard and understood by Jews from many different nations and that each one heard the praises of the Lord in his own language.

I remember a vacation we had many years ago that included a trip to Niagara Falls. One of the things that amazed me about my visit there was that there were a lot of different nationalities represented there and that we could hear several different languages being spoken at once. I couldn't understand what these other people were saying and many of them would not understand me. But what would it have been like for me to start speaking and to hear coming out of my mouth a language which they would understand? Or, what if I could suddenly understand them? That's what happened on the Day of Pentecost. The disciples began to praise God, and as they did so, their words were

2

supernaturally translated into languages which people from other nations could understand.

In our Scripture reading from Genesis 11, the bible tells us that all the people were united and spoke one language. But they became arrogant and imagined that they could build a tower which would reach to heaven. The descendants of Noah, disbelieving God's promise, set out to build a flood proof tower (we note they used baked bricks and tar for mortar) that would protect them from God's wrath. In their arrogance, they also sought to build a great city for their own glory. This was in direct disobedience to God's command to scatter across the land and to repopulate the earth. They believed that they could do as they pleased. Like a lot of people today, they believed that they didn't need God. God's response was to send a spirit of confusion among them and to scramble their language so that they could no longer understand each other. Their plot to outsmart God failed and various nations were formed along linguistic lines.

Well, Pentecost--with the miracles of tongues--is a reversal of Babylon. It is a sign of God's intention to raise up a new kingdom, whose people are united under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Even though they speak different dialects, the language of God's love and grace is understood by all. Thus, Pentecost is the birthday of the Church, a birthday marked with the sound of a mighty rushing wind, visible tongues of fire, and supernatural speech.

But what was it all about really? And, what does Pentecost have to do with us today? It seems to me that a lot of people miss the point of Pentecost. Their focus is drawn to the miracles, to the mighty wind, to the tongues of fire, and especially to the supernatural speaking and hearing. But the real point of Pentecost is found in Acts 2:21, which is a quote from Joel 2:32: *"And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* The real point and joy of Pentecost and the result of the coming of the Holy Spirit is that the Good News of Jesus Christ is proclaimed and understood, and that 3,000 people are led to put their trust in him as their Savior and Lord. Acts 2:41 states: *"Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."* Pentecost inaugurates the *"Day of Salvation,"* a time that continues to this day, a period in which all who call upon the Lord in faith will be saved in time for eternity.

Another thing that Pentecost is about is that Pentecost lays down

3

a pattern through which the church is to be continually renewed, a pattern which we need to be aware of and a pattern which we need to be following. This pattern shows us how a few believers can always be multiplied into many believers.

The first part of the pattern is this: **Obedience to God invokes the presence of God.** When Jesus told his disciples not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit, they obeyed him. They went and did as they were told. They stayed put. They were faithful in waiting on God. They did not presume to attempt God's work in their own strength.

Remember that I said the Tower of Babel was all about man's arrogance? Pentecost begins with humble obedience. Remember that I said the Tower of Babel was about man thinking he didn't need God? Pentecost begins with the realization that without God's strength we can do nothing. The first part of the pattern established at Pentecost is that when we obey God, God shows up to affirm obedience with power. When we get down--I mean when our hearts are humble--God will be there to lift us up.

Peter, the chief spokesman on the Day of Pentecost writes in his first epistle, chapter 5: *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time."* James says in chapter 4, *"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up."* God says to Daniel in Daniel 10:12: *"Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them."* Obedience to God, which includes humility before God, always invokes the presence of God. God will show up. God will answer our prayers. Great and wonderful things will happen when we humble our hearts before the Lord and when we obey him.

The second item in this pattern which leads to the multiplication of believers is: **The presence of God brings power--power to speak, power to love and power to serve.**

The gift of tongues on Pentecost was the power to speak and it was a wonder to all who heard that speaking. Acts 2:7-8 say: *"Utterly amazed, they asked: 'Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native*

language?" Later, Peter and John are hauled in to face the Jewish council: Acts 4:13 says of the Jewish leaders: *"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus."* When God shows up to be with us, we are empowered to speak with boldness.

We are also given the power to love. Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost was not an angry sermon. Even though he was preaching to people who had just been involved in putting Jesus to death on the cross, and even though Peter had been terrified of them only the day before, there was no meanness in Peter's speech. He addressed those present as fellow Jews and he passionately encouraged them to come to faith in Christ. The power to love is also revealed in the fellowship established in the early church. Acts 2:44-46 report: *"All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he 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."* Rachelle's gift of a part of her liver to Bud is an awesome sign that the Holy Spirit still empowers us to love in amazing ways.

And, finally, when the presence of God comes, we are given the power to serve. Peter's message to his fellow Jews on the Day of Pentecost was offered as a service; Peter was telling everyone where and how to find forgiveness. Acts 2:47 says that the early believers *"were found to be praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. . . ."* Do you suppose the early believers enjoyed the favor of the people around them because the believers acted ugly toward their neighbors or because they ignored their neighbors? **of course not!** No, it was because the believers were empowered to keep the golden rule--to treat others according to the way they themselves wanted to be treated, that they had the favor of all the people.

Humble obedience to God invokes the presence of God and the presence of God brings power to speak, power to love, and power to serve. The third item in the pattern that leads to the multiplication of believers is: **Such power grabs attention to God.** This is very simple. When people see our boldness to speak, accompanied by a commitment to love them and to serve them in practical ways, their attention is focused on the God we proclaim. People want to know

about the God Who transforms lives. I heard a testimony after church last Sunday. Someone received a card and an unexpected gift from another one our members. When the person saw the gift, the response was "Who does this?" **God's power in action draws others to God.**

The fourth item in the pattern which leads to the multiplication of believers is: **Attention to God brings salvation.** The disciples on the Day of Pentecost humbly obeyed God and the presence of God came upon them. When the presence of God came upon them they were given the power to speak, to love, and to serve. When they were given the power to speak, to love, and to serve the people around them noticed and began to pay attention to what God was saying to them. And, when they began to pay attention to what God was saying to them they cried out to the Lord and were saved. 3000 were baptized and came to Christ on that one day.

The last item in the pattern leading to the multiplication of believers is: **Salvation leads to humble obedience.** That's right. In other words the pattern starts all over again. Humble Obedience invokes the presence of God. The presence of God brings power to speak, to love, and to serve. Seeing the power of God in action in these ways, calls people's attention to God. People's attention to God yields salvation. And, salvation leads to humble obedience.

Now let me ask you one last question. What part of this pattern is up to us? **Only the 1st part.** Humble obedience invokes the presence of God, and when His Holy Spirit is present we have everything we need.

The great evangelist, D.L. Moody gave the following illustration: "They have a saying in the East among the Arabs, that as the tares and the wheat grow they show which God has blessed. The ears that God has blessed bow their heads and acknowledge every grain, and the more fruitful they are the lower their heads are bowed. The tares which God has sent as a curse, lift up their heads erect, high above the wheat, but they are only fruitful of evil." Then Moody said, "If we only get down low enough, my friends, God will use every one of us to His glory."

The Day of Salvation begins with humble obedience on the part of the servants of God. When we humble ourselves before the Lord and when we obey him, the floodgates of salvation are opened for us. Through us, the flood gates of salvation are opened for all the world.

## The Fourth Street Church of God

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Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-21

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