

Pentecost: The Gift of the Holy Spirit

1. Pentecost Previously

- Exodus 23:16, 34:22; Leviticus 23:15-21; Numbers 28:26-31;
Deuteronomy 9-12; Acts 1:14; John 17; Acts 1:5;
Romans 12:1

2. Pentecost Provided

- Acts 2:17-21; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

3. Pentecost Personally

- Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; Acts 2:3, 1:4-5; Luke 11:11-13

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Today we celebrate Pentecost, one of the three main holidays, or holy days, of the Christian Church's calendar. What are the other two big Christian holidays? Christmas and Easter. They are big holidays and they are very important to us. There are actually seasons in the church calendar; Advent, with Christmas, Epiphany, lent in preparation for Easter, Pentecost, and then what is called "Ordinary Time" – a long stretch of time of waiting for Advent. But compared to the other two holidays, Pentecost gets very little exposure. We don't give presents or candy or eggs at Pentecost, so I guess for holidays it drew the short stick. Maybe we should give candles? Or a box of matches? Yet when it comes to how important it is in the lives of believers, Pentecost is every bit as significant as the other two.

Most of us know all about Christmas and Easter, but not so much about Pentecost. I think that's partly because there is confusion about what the word means, what it's associated with, and where it comes from.

So I'd like for us to look today at a basic introduction to Pentecost.

Christmas celebrates what? Christ's birth.

Easter celebrates what? Christ's resurrection.

Pentecost celebrates what?

Well, your answer depends on whether we are referring to the Old Testament or New Testament. Christmas and Easter and uniquely Christian holidays; Pentecost, however, originated in the Old Testament, foreshadowing its fulfillment in the New Testament – just like it's Jewish holiday cousin, Passover (I'll explain that in a bit). For us as Christians, Pentecost commemorates the beginning of the New Testament Church and celebrates when God the Holy Spirit was poured out and began filling the lives of believers – something the Spirit does to this very day. That's what was described in that passage from Acts 2 that we saw in the opening video. And the event is just as significant as Christ's birth and death and resurrection. Like all significant biblical events, it has a history behind it as well as a personal application to it. So to understand it better, take out your notes and follow along today. Scripture references are listed for you to study further along with your small group or personal study.

But let's start by looking at...

1. Pentecost Previously

Pentecost comes to us from the Old Testament. The literal meaning of the word "Pentecost" is "fifty days." Pentecost was a season of celebration on the Jewish calendar, culminating on a day seven weeks after the Passover. (I mentioned that Passover and Pentecost were related.) Passover, remember, was the commemoration of when the

Israelites were enslaved in Egypt and God led them out of captivity through Moses, using the plagues. The last plague was the death of every first born in Egypt. But for those who smeared the blood of a sacrificial lamb on their doorposts, the angel of death would “pass over” that household and spare them. So the Israelites annually commemorated Passover. Then came the season of seven weeks—49 days—which culminated on the fiftieth day, the day of Pentecost, with what was called “The Feast of Weeks,” after the seven weeks.

Pentecost is the Greek word meaning “fifty,” and it was the Jewish feast of harvest, much like our Thanksgiving holiday. You can read about Pentecost in the Old Testament references I’ve given you; its details are described in those passages. But essentially, if you were Jewish, this is how it would work: at the highpoint of the celebration—the day of Pentecost—you would bring two loaves of bread made from new wheat – (wheat in all its wheatiness; there were no concerns about gluten back then) two loaves of bread made from new wheat that you had just harvested and would give them to the priest; this represented the dedication of your harvest to God, and you would not eat any produce until the ceremony was held. Its purpose was to show joy and thankfulness to God for His blessings of the harvest. But, there was a deeper symbolism in that celebration that we can understand today as Christians, even if we aren’t Jewish.

First, the Passover pointed to, and was fulfilled in, Jesus. The blood of the Lamb was what delivered the Israelites from the curse of the death angel, and the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God saves us from sin and spiritual death. Just like Passover comes before Pentecost, if you haven’t been saved by the blood of the Lamb you won’t be able to understand and experience Pentecost personally. Pentecost came *after* the Passover. Now at the ceremony of Pentecost, the consecrating of the bread (consecration means to give completely to God) the consecrating of the bread foreshadowed and symbolizes the personal consecration we make with our lives at our own Pentecost. We offer our gluten filled or gluten free selves completely to God. We offer God our entire lives. Remember that the loaves were presented to the Temple priest, and in the same fashion, so were the lives of the disciples in Acts presented to the High Priest, Jesus. Look at Acts 1:14 and see what they were doing prior to the day of Pentecost:

“They (Jesus’ followers) all joined together constantly in prayer.” (Acts 1:14)

What were they praying about? Well, we know that they weren’t praying for their Christian Passover, or in other words, they weren’t praying to become Christians; that had already happened—they already had confessed their faith in Christ. In John 17 was Jesus’ prayer that we spent the month before Easter looking at in a sermon series, and in that prayer Jesus clearly said that the disciples were his followers and that they were not of the world. So in Acts we see that the disciples, already Christians, were on a ten-day prayer marathon, waiting on God, seeking more of him, desiring a deeper work of God and a deeper walk with God, *consecrating* themselves to God. They were praying for what Jesus had promised: to be baptized, or immersed in, the Holy Spirit. They were Christians consecrating themselves, just like the bread was consecrated in the Old Testament celebration of Pentecost.

I can tell you that if you are going to understand and experience Pentecost for yourself, you will have to first experience your own personal Passover – you will have to become a

Christian first. That means that you will accept what Jesus has done for you on the cross, shedding his blood for you, and you will need to turn from your sin and selfishness and ask Christ to be in charge of your life. Then, when you've done that, you will have to consecrate yourself just like the bread was consecrated in the Old Testament celebration of Pentecost, and just like the disciples were consecrated in the New Testament day of Pentecost. This is what the Bible means in the book of Romans when it says, "I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God." We must give ourselves completely to God.

My wife Shelly was a certified lifeguard in High School and college and did that job every summer in pools for the city of Denver. She could tell you that when you were being trained for being a lifeguard, you would be taught never to attempt to rescue a drowning man *if* he's fighting against you while you are trying to save him. That's a response that a drowning person will often have. If you try to save him while he's fighting against you, you are pretty much committing suicide. As long as the drowning man thinks he can help himself, he is dangerous to anyone who tries to help him. His tendency will be to grab the one trying to rescue him and "climb up on them," thus taking the rescuer down with him. The correct thing to do is to stay just far enough away that he can't grab you. Then, when he finally gets so tired that he gives up, you can make your move and rescue him. At that point he will allow you to rescue him and no longer fight against you. He'll let you take over.

The same thing is true with the Holy Spirit. He is willing to wait for you to surrender yourself to him. He won't strive with you. Just like the bread was consecrated and the disciples consecrated themselves, the Holy Spirit wants you to consecrate yourself; to surrender to him and quit trying to live the Christian life by your own strength. Once you give up and consecrate yourself, the Holy Spirit will move in and fill you and take over. You'll no longer work against Him but with Him.

That's the point of Pentecost previously. But none of that would make any difference unless there was...

2. Pentecost *Provided*

What happened on the day of Pentecost had been promised centuries earlier, but until that day, it was still just a promise. It didn't become a reality until Christ died on the cross. Pentecost's fulfillment awaited Christ's sacrifice, and because He did, the promise was provided for. On the day of Pentecost, Peter stood up and preached a sermon, and in his sermon he confirmed this. Peter was Jesus' follower who, after being filled with the Holy Spirit, stood up to preach and left no doubt that the promise had been provided for on Pentecost Day. Listen to part of his sermon when he quotes the Old Testament Prophet Joel:

"In 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. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in

those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Act 2:17-21, niv)

The promise of long ago from the Old Testament prophets had been provided; finally all of God in his Trinitarian entirety had been revealed to us and made available to us: God the Father whose judgment required justice, was filled with mercy and grace because God the Son gave his life for us, like a lamb to slaughter. Because God loves us so much, he paid the price for our sin and death, with the sacrifice of His Son. That allowed the final person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, to fully fill us and dwell in us. Our salvation started at creation, was redeemed at Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, and restored at the Holy Spirit's filling. Now we await our salvation's culmination when Jesus returns one day.

This filling of the Holy Spirit is important to understand. It was something God had always wanted to do, but had not done until the day of Pentecost in the book of Acts. Before that, there were only a select few times that God chose people that the Holy Spirit momentarily worked in and through. You can read about them in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, God was at work in the world through the Holy Spirit, working in and through circumstances to lead and persuade God's people. But the Holy Spirit was not *in* people; he worked *outside* of people. But Pentecost means that now, because of the sacrifice of the Lamb, the Holy Spirit is available to actually fill and work *IN* and *THROUGH* God's people all the time, bringing a cleansing of sin and its grip and bringing God's complete power to work in and through all of God's people who consecrate themselves, so they can be and bring the presence of Christ into the world.

That's what the Bible means when it says:

"You realize, don't you, that you are the temple of God, and God himself is present in you? No one will get by with vandalizing God's temple, you can be sure of that. God's temple is sacred--and you, remember, are the temple." (1 Corinthians 3:16-17, tmt)

The Holy Spirit is God's presence in you, provided for you. And, by the way, it's not something you can create on your own.



Lorenzo de' Medici of the Renaissance Era was the great Florentine ruler. Handsome and happy fellow, isn't he? He was and patron of the arts who was very proud of the dramatic spectacles he staged for his citizens. Among his productions were several amazingly realistic religious pageants performed in church. Here is a painting about one of those. But one Pentecost, Lorenzo went too far: he used actual fire to depict the descent of the tongues of flames on the apostles. The fragile stage set caught fire and, before horrified onlookers, the entire church burned to the ground.¹ The moral of that story is clear: pray for Pentecost power to fill you, but don't try to manufacture it! It



¹ *Marching off the Map*, Harper, 1952

comes about *only* by the Holy Spirit, provided for you because of the Lamb of God, that makes your personal Pentecost possible.

So we've seen Pentecost in the context of what it was previously and we see that through Christ, Pentecost has been provided for us. Now we can finally realize and experience...

3. Pentecost *Personally*

You can experience this Pentecost that we've been talking about personally. Jesus Himself predicted it and so did John the Baptist. John the Baptist was the one who was sent ahead of Jesus to prepare the way for Him by preaching to people that they should repent of their sins and be baptized.

In both Mark's and Luke's Gospels, John the Baptist is recorded as saying very clearly that, while he baptized with water, it was Jesus who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. And remember what happened in Acts 2? There were single flames of fire hovering above the head of each person. Fire in the Bible represents God's powerful, cleansing presence, so hot that it burns away everything that is unclean and unnecessary. Fire represents the Holy Spirit, and this was the very thing that Jesus promised. Just before He ascended into Heaven, Jesus told his followers:

"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:4-5, niv)

What was previously promised has been provided for you to experience personally, in your own life! Jesus promised it, and Jesus always keeps his promises! You must consecrate yourself to Him, surrender yourself and allow him to move in and fill you. If you have first accepted Christ (remember, Passover comes before Pentecost), then you must surrender yourself to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to fill you, baptizing you, immersing you in His Spirit. It's available to you, but you must consecrate yourself and receive the Holy Spirit. Ask God to give you the Spirit. Jesus said:

"You fathers—if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! So if you sinful people 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 11:11-13, nlt)

God is eager to give you his Spirit. If you are a Christian, you have available to you incredible power to live the Christian life. You need to access it.

Dr. Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ told this story of a famous oil field called Yates Pool: During the depression this field was a sheep ranch owned by a man named Ira, and his wife Anne Yates. Mr. Yates wasn't able to make enough on his ranching operation to pay the principal and interest on the mortgage, so he was in danger of losing his ranch. With little money for clothes and food, his family (like many others) had to live on government subsidy or what we now call welfare.

Day after day, as he grazed his sheep over those rolling West Texas hills, he was not doubt greatly troubled about how he would pay his bills. Then a seismographic crew from an oil

company came into the area and told him there might be oil on his land. They asked permission to drill a wildcat well, and he signed a contract.

At 1,115 feet down they struck a huge oil reserve. The first well came in at 80,000 barrels a day. Many subsequent wells were more than twice that large. In fact, 30 years after the discovery, a government test of one of the wells showed it still had the potential flow of 125,000 barrels of oil a day. Ironically, Mr. and Mrs. Yates named the spot "Iraan," with two "A's" for Ira and Ann.

The amazing thing is that Mr. and Mrs. Yates owned all that oil. The day he purchased the land he had received the oil and mineral rights, but he'd been living on welfare! He was a multimillionaire who was living in poverty. The problem? He had no idea – he didn't know the oil was there, even though all of it was available to him and it was all his.

Here's the point, if you haven't figured it out: many Christians live in spiritual poverty. They are entitled to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to live in and through them, but they are not even aware of it, living their Christian life as though they were on welfare.

You do not have to struggle anymore in your Christian life with sin, doubt, or frustration. If you have become a Christian, then tap into what is there for you; consecrate yourself, surrender to Him and ask him to fill you. You might have to wait—it may take you days of prayer like it did the apostles. It might even take weeks. But it's worth it. It will happen; he will arrive and fill you, baptizing you with the Holy Spirit!

Pentecost previously was setting the stage for Pentecost provided because of the work of Jesus Christ. If you have experienced your personal Passover by accepting Christ, then you can experience Pentecost personally. It doesn't mean you'll suddenly be able to be understood in multiple languages, but it does mean you will have a new power and position to live completely for Christ, telling and showing everyone everywhere the Gospel of God's love for the world, just like the disciples.

Pray

We are going to share together in communion this morning. If you are Christian, this is a great way to affirm your personal Passover. If you are not a Christian, maybe this will be the way for you to say, yes, I am ready to accept what Christ has done for me on the cross.

If you are not a Christian and don't desire to be, well, then this won't amount to much more than some fairly good tasting bread and some warm grape juice. Regardless, you do not have to be a member of this church to join us at the Table.

If you are not able, physically, to come forward, simply raise your hand, and someone will bring the elements to you.

Christian, as you prepare yourself for communion, I want to encourage you to examine yourself before receiving these elements. The Apostle Paul told Christians that if they were to receive communion without examining themselves, and approached the table flippantly or carelessly or with known sin in their lives, they would be receiving judgment upon themselves.

So in a moment, you will be invited to come and receive the elements. Do not come until you are ready, and when you are, let this be an offering of yourself, consecrating yourself by

what Christ has done for you, and a way for you ask God the Father to give you his Spirit.

The Communion Supper, instituted by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is a sacrament, which proclaims His life, His sufferings, His sacrificial death, and resurrection, and the hope of His coming again. It demonstrates and reminds us of the Lord's death until His return.

The Supper is a means of grace in which Christ is present by the Spirit. It is to be received in reverent appreciation and gratefulness for the work of Christ.

All those who are truly repentant, forsaking their sins, and believing in Christ for salvation are invited to participate in the death and resurrection of Christ. We come to the table that we may be renewed in life and salvation and be made one by the Spirit.

In unity with the Church, we confess our faith (repeat after me):

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. And so we pray...

Holy God,

We gather at this, your table, in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, who by your Spirit was anointed to preach good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, set at liberty those who are oppressed. Christ healed the sick, fed the hungry, ate with sinners, and established the new covenant for forgiveness of sins. We live in the hope of His coming again.

On the night in which He was betrayed, He took bread, gave thanks, broke the bread, gave it to His disciples, and said:

"This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me." Likewise, when the supper was over, He took the cup, gave thanks, gave it to His disciples, and said: "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me."

(Matthew 26:27-29, Luke 22:19)

And so, we gather as the Body of Christ to offer ourselves to you in praise and thanksgiving. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us and on these your gifts. Make them by the power of your Spirit to be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the Body of Christ, redeemed by His blood.

By your Spirit make us one in Christ, one with each other, and one in the ministry of Christ to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, broken for you, preserve you blameless, unto everlasting life. Eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and be thankful.

The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, shed for you, preserve you blameless unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and be thankful.