

## Sermon: Fire from Heaven

Scripture: Acts 2:1-13

April 26, 2015

The last time I preached I talked about a very significant post resurrection event that involved the Apostle Thomas. Over two Sundays I am going to address possibly the most important post Resurrection event, the Day of Pentecost. Today I am going to focus on the coming of the Holy Spirit on the group of disciples who would go on to be the church of Jesus Christ or the new Israel. But before I address that I would like to draw your attention to an amazing irony that relates to Jesus' death on the cross on Good Friday. It does relate to the day of Pentecost and I will connect the dots for you soon, so please listen closely. Firstly, in the three short years of Jesus' earthly ministry, the religious authorities had fairly quickly caught on to the fact that Jesus was going to be a big problem for them and so wanted to get rid of him. Now every time they tried to trap him either with words or even physically they were always unsuccessful. Jesus always escaped. However when they did have Jesus in their custody the timing was horrible for them because the religious authorities really wanted a quiet assassination when nobody was looking. They really wanted to avoid having to deal with Jesus at the time of a big Jewish festival. But that is exactly what happens. Jesus is arrested two days before the Passover when Jews from all over the world were gathered. Then Jesus dies on the Passover allowing His death to signal to the Jewish world that he was the real Passover lamb, thereby transforming the most important Jewish festival forever. One for little nugget about Good Friday before I move on. You see as Jesus gave up his spirit on the cross, the sun was darkened for three whole hours. As a result, the Passover lambs that the Jews were going to sacrifice could not actually be sacrificed as long as the sun was darkened. So no sacrifices of lambs took place when Jesus was hanging on the cross. Jesus was the Passover lamb and God was not going to have his people go through a symbol when the real thing was in progress. So much to the horror of the religious authorities, Jesus not only died on the most important Jewish Festival but they would soon realize that he would transform this festival forever. And Jesus was not done yet.

After the Passover festival the next big Jewish festival you have is the Festival of the weeks or the Festival of Pentecost. Now you know where I am going with this. Now before I tell you how Jesus transforms this festival let me tell you what it was historically. You see the festival of Pentecost was also called the Festival of Weeks because it is supposed to take place 7 weeks and a day after the Passover. 7X7 is 49 and

one is 50. That is 50 days and so Pentecost literally means 50<sup>th</sup> day in Greek. Now the Pentecost is the harvest festival. In the Jewish calendar by this time, the harvesting has been completed and this is the time to enjoy the abundance. So the people are free from all the harvest related work, they have grain stored in the barns, the weather at this time is very pleasant and so it is a perfect time to celebrate. So the Jewish harvest festival of Pentecost involved making bread with the new wheat. Because the weather is actually better at this time of year than at the Passover, you have even more people in Jerusalem for the Festival of Pentecost than even for the Passover. And Jesus is about to transform even this next big Jewish celebration.

Here is how it happens. Just before Jesus ascends to heaven He gives them some critical instructions. He tells his disciples to go and wait in Jerusalem. He tells them that John baptized you with water symbolizing your repentance. But that baptism only prepared you for another baptism is coming, a baptism by fire. Then he ascends into heaven. At this point it is a fairly large group of people. 120 disciples including 12 apostles. They did replace Judas at this point with Matthias. These 120 people have gone through quite a roller coaster in their life. They followed Jesus having great hopes. Then he was crucified. Just when they were grieving, he suddenly reappears, and just when they are figuring that out he ascends into heaven after instructing them to go wait in Jerusalem for something big to happen. So you have trouble dealing with change in your life, just think what these disciples went through.

OK, so the disciples are all together now, in Jerusalem. It is day 50 since the Passover. It is festival time again and this time the full harvest festival. Suddenly a strange thing happens. There is a big sound from above. Like wind blowing violently. In fact this sound fills the room. Then if that was not terrifying enough, there seems to be what looks like a big tongue of fire comes down on them that then separating into individual tongues of fire and rests on each one's head. Wait, why tongues of fire? Remember the first time God appeared to Moses in the burning bush? He appears as a flame that does not consume the bush. God was presents himself to humankind as one who is powerful enough to burn anything on contact and yet it is a power that is so controlled as to preserve even a little bush. So on the day of Pentecost God's Spirit once again appears as a burning fire that does not destroy. But unlike what happened to Moses, this time this fire comes down from heaven and then it separates into individual tongues of fire and rests on the head of each person in the room. As soon as that happens everyone gets this amazing capacity to speak in a new tongue. Now this was a perfect power to have at a time when people from all over the world were in the city because suddenly

everybody in Jerusalem can understand what these disciples are saying. Everybody is amazed. What is the result, 3000 people become believers on that day. This brings us to why Jesus chose the Jewish harvest festival to send His Spirit. So you the harvest was going to be given a new meaning as well. He wanted people to know that this was time to bring in the harvest of souls. Jesus had said earlier, unless a grain of wheat dies it will just remain a single grain of wheat. However if the grain where to die it will grow into a plant and bear fruit 40, 60 and a 100 fold. Well on Pentecost we see exactly what Jesus means. I would like to get to Peter's Pentecost sermon and the harvest of souls in more detail but I will keep that though for the real day of Pentecost, which this year will fall on May 24<sup>th</sup>. But today's passage raises a few questions about how the Holy Spirit functions and I want to deal with those issues right now.

The first question I want to deal with is, is this the first time that the disciples are receiving the Holy Spirit? This question arises because in John 20:22 we have the description of Jesus's first appearance to a group of his disciples after his resurrection. In that instance he breaths on them and says Receive the Spirit. And people have struggled with trying to understand, how Jesus' act in John relates to what is happening on the Pentecost. Well, I am not going to tell you all the theories out there but for lack of time, I am going to explain to you how I understand it if that is OK with you. I believe to understand how John relates to Acts chapter 2, we have to realize that no one can accomplish the simplest act of obedience to God without the Holy Spirit prompting and enabling. Nobody can praise God or declare who Jesus is or even follow Jesus without the Holy Spirit working with them in some way. In our world this is similar to what is going on in life of a seeker. There are students who I interact with every week who are not followers of Christ but they are willing to read the Bible, they are willing to pray and they are willing to ask deep faith questions in all sincerity. Even though they are not believers, they are willing to turn their face towards the truth. In these instances it is like the Holy Spirit is guiding the seeker from the outside, even though the Holy Spirit is not in them yet through the process of being Born Again. One more thing. You see when you look at Jesus, there is an important difference between the resurrected Jesus and the ascended Jesus. I want to make sure you are following me here. I want you to consider the difference between the resurrected Jesus and the ascended Jesus. Now the resurrected Jesus as I described in an earlier sermon had a new body that had special abilities that we don't have. But he was still on earth, in this fallen world surrounded by fallen people. So for him to interact with the people around him his body was deliberately held back from its fully glorified state. And in His not fully glorified state he was not able to pass on His Spirit in its fullness like on Pentecost. For that he would have

to ascend to Heaven, where He lives in full glory. In Ezekiel 43:2 the prophet is given a vision of the glory of God and He describes it like this, "I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory". You see the whole creation would be glowing in God's presence and there would be no need for the sun and moon even. But creation is not ready for that yet. On the other hand when Christ had ascended to Heaven where he can receive all the glory due to Him in the presence of His father. At that point He is able to send His Spirit in a fuller measure so that those who believe are able to take new birth in the Spirit world. This is what happened on the day of Pentecost. You see on the day of Pentecost for the first time in the history of the world you have Christ in his fully glorified form in Heaven and the sins of the people on earth fully paid for. So at this point if people were willing to repent and accept God's spirit He would be able to send them His spirit in a measure that was not previously possible. Yes there were some individuals in the Old Testament who received God's spirit and even Jesus' disciples had the Spirit guiding them. But Pentecost was a new event for the world. And what started on Pentecost was not going to be limited to the 120. In fact the numbers of those who would receive the Spirit of God was about to explode.

Now before I go further I want to deal with one more question about the Pentecost experience that you may be wondering about. Is there a difference between being born again as represented by the first Pentecost and being filled by the spirit? Have you ever wondered about that? Well if you haven't earlier you are wondering about it now. Well, let me clarify then. The baptism of fire is a one time act. Once you are born again, the Holy Spirit comes and resides in you and He said he will never leave you or forsake you. You can however suppress the Holy Spirit who is already in you and allow your own spirit to be in the driver seat of our lives. This is why in Ephesians 5:18 we have a commandment to be filled with the spirit. This is where we ask God on a daily or even moment by moment basis to fill us and in essence take control of our lives so that our lives at that point we can be glorifying to God. This is why we pray regularly. If not we would just need to pray once to receive Christ and never pray again!

But being filled with the spirit starts with the baptism of fire or being born again. And the first time anybody experienced the baptism of fire was on that first day of Pentecost. That was the day Jesus said I am going to do a new thing. I am going to give people the capacity to co-operate with each other by being able to understand each other in a way that was previously impossible. You see many years ago people wanted to team up to build a tower that would go all the way up to God. This was foolish because as humans we are finite and God is infinite. And finite beings cannot simply

make a tower to walk upto an infinite God. But God had to confuse people's tongues so that humans will always be reminded of our finiteness. But once Christ died on the cross paying the price for human sin, those who believed are now crucified in Christ and therefore don't need to be reminded of their finiteness. On the other hand the children of God do need to cooperate with each other to make God known to the world. This is now the most important project in the world. To get this project going on the first Pentecost he gives his very first disciples a gift of being able to speak in different tongues. Then they scattered all over the world just like the builders of the tower of Babel but this time within one generation the disciples had proclaimed the Gospel and made disciples even in the far corners of the earth.

Today we continue to have two tasks as hand. If we have never had the experience of being born again, we have to tell God we are ready and willing. He will then send fire from Heaven to baptize you with the baptism of fire. If you have been born again but your faith has gone cold and God is remote, what you need is to be filled once more with the Spirit. Maybe the Spirit of God has become a small portion of your life and God's Spirit needs to fill you and take over the controls of your life. May God take the controls of each one of our lives so that by the incredible power of His Spirit we can make Him known to the world around us. Let us pray.

Ge 2:7 | Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person.

Jn 7:39 | (When he said "living water," he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.)

Jn 14:17 | He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you.