



pentecost

By Dr Colton Wickramaratne

Pentecost is the second greatest festival in the Jewish calendar. It was the in-gathering of the harvest and was a great event in the life of Israel. In the New Testament too Pentecost is a great event for it was the in-gathering of souls which began the first century church.

Coming fifty days after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, Pentecost was the fulfillment of the greatest promise that Jesus gave to His disciples before He ascended to heaven, so He told them to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with the power from on high. He said "... 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)

The crisis of the Crucifixion

The power of Pentecost can be visualized and understood as it is demonstrated in the early church. It was a scene that must be pictured so that it will be engraved in the hearts and minds of believers: Jesus is betrayed into the hands of His enemies; the disciples are bewildered and fearful. He is taken to the Chief Priest and some of the disciples follow from afar. Peter is one of those who sit with the people watching the agonizing scenes of Jesus' trial. This is the same Peter who said "I will die with you" but now he is scared of a mere servant girl who says "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." He denies it with curses, saying, "I don't know the man!" (Matthew 26:71-74) This is the natural human reaction to a sudden disastrous

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event that shook to the very rock bottom the faith of the disciples. It is not an unnatural scene. When faced with hostile mobs and going through torture, painfully aware that the majority will win and as the minority is crushed, it can be expected that most people will say anything that will save their lives.

However the friend of Jesus could not be snuffed out by the horrible experiences that he went through. Jesus had made it known to His disciples that He would face many things and would ultimately be put to death. He had also said that He will rise triumphantly; conquering sin, sickness, death, hell and the grave and this was fulfilled on that first Easter morning when Jesus Christ rose from the dead. He showed Himself to the ladies who had come to anoint His body and He instructed them to go and tell the disciples that He had

risen from the dead - and especially to mention it to Peter. The disciples hearing this ran to the tomb, but Peter out-ran them. Looking into the open tomb, to his great astonishment he saw that the grave clothes were laid on a side - even the napkin with which His face had been wrapped; he was struck by the lightning of the resurrected Spirit of Jesus - it shook him from head to foot. After this Peter obeyed the Lord and went to the upper room with 120 followers of Christ.

In the meantime the soldiers who had guarded the tomb, concocted a story that Jesus' body had been stolen by the disciples while they slept, and this was spreading in Jerusalem and causing agitation.

Transformed in the Upper Room

Let's take a closer look at the scene in the upper room - a group of 120 frightened lambs huddled behind bolted doors - scared to even peep through the key hole to see the agitated mob gathering again in the sacred city. It is not hard to imagine what was going through their minds. I am sure their hearts were failing them for fear; not knowing at what moment these crowds would storm the upper room and destroy them. In this moment of great tension something supernatural began to take place. They heard a sound of a mighty, rushing wind and suddenly they saw something like cloven tongues of fire, descending upon each one of them. They began to praise God in unknown languages, the sound piercing through all the obstructions. The Holy Spirit came upon them and they were all filled with power; the fearful lambs became courageous and brave like lions. They opened the door and we see them marching out into the midst of the blood-thirsty pack of wolves that were waiting to tear them apart. Truly God took away from them the spirit of timidity and fear and filled them with the power of the Holy Spirit which had conquered Satan, death, hell and the grave and they were made bold to walk into the hostile, questioning crowd.

True strength then is not in the majority. It is found in the reign of theocracy not democracy. These men did not go out to make an apology and explain to the crowd that they had believed a lie. Instead Peter stepped out. Peter, the unschooled fisherman of the Galilean sea with his weather-beaten clothes smelling of sea salt, his feet stained by mud, his sunburned face now radiant. What amazes us is that this unexpected figure had more than human power, wisdom or ability - he was anointed and clothed with the power of God. He spoke boldly. God can use the base things, the foolish things and the useless things of this world to confound the mighty and to bring to naught the works of the devil.

Speaking with power and authority

Peter opened his mouth and with authority and power said to this now bewildered crowd, "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact." and "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:32, 36) This was a bolt from the blue – they were dumbfounded. Peter, this uneducated man, began to preach and he was led by the Holy Spirit. Jesus had said, "... When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth." (John 16:13) Peter's classic, astonishing sermon, quoting the Old Testament and proving the realities of the New Testament, giving evidence of Jesus Christ who was resurrected from the dead, brought great conviction of sin on the people.

I do not want to elaborate on the ministry of Pentecost but I want you to know that Peter's great, inspiring theological masterpiece brought people under heavy conviction of sin and 3,000 souls were born into the kingdom on that first day of Pentecost. We cannot underrate this outstanding event that is history today, which has given birth to the greatest institution on earth – the Church. It was not built by man, it was built by Jesus Christ Himself who had said "I will build my church, and

the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” (Matthew 16:18) The Church which was birthed by the Holy Spirit lives by the Holy Spirit and it will achieve its final purpose by the Holy Spirit.

The fire that purifies

The forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ at his first advent, John the Baptist, told the people “I baptize you with water. ... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” (Luke 3:16) It was significant to note that on the first day of Pentecost cloven tongues like fire rested upon those who were waiting and expecting the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This phenomenal experience did something in them. I think fire is associated with this experience because it has a specific function in the life of the believer. It is true we are cleansed by the precious blood of the Lamb, but it is essential that we be also purified by the fire of God. The final cleansing of pure gold is through fire. Fire penetrates the areas which are hidden even to the natural eye. Therefore the Baptism of the Holy Spirit has the important work of purifying the believer so that the Holy Spirit of God can indwell him and make his body the temple of God. This is not just a superficial experience with a natural manifestation. The real work of the Holy Spirit is to make us holy as He is holy because “without holiness no one will see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14) The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is not an award for our holiness but it is the sanctifying power of God to make us holy, for the great function of the Holy Spirit is to form Christ within us and to manifest His attributes through

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It is of vital importance in this present day to emphasize this great work of the Holy Spirit - to make men and women to be like Jesus Christ and to become His true ambassadors. But this experience has become superficial. Many people are not even aware that it is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity who has taken residence within, for they say 'I have the Holy Spirit because I speak in tongues' or 'I have the manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit' and the spirituality of people is so superficial some even feel that if they are not knocked flat by the Holy Spirit they have not received the Holy Spirit; some feel that they must laugh their hearts out as a manifestation of the Spirit; some feel that they must have gold dust resting upon their hands and body and others say the

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manifestations of God fills the cavities of their teeth with gold. How can these be an inducement to lead us into this dynamic experience? How superficial we have become and how much we have belittled the supernatural work of the Third Person of the Trinity, making it a fad. This is the sorrowful state that believers and the church have come to. What does it mean to be filled in the Holy Spirit, with the initial physical evidence that is shown in the Scriptures? As we see in the Scriptures, they "were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." (Acts 2:4) Why is it essential to note that this is the

evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit? In James chapter 3 you find that a ship is controlled by a small rudder, a horse is controlled by a small bit, and the body by the little tongue. It

is the smallest organ, without a bone or cartilage that is fenced behind 28 or 32 teeth, but still has great power, for with this little organ we curse and bless people. But many do not have control over this little 'muscle' that operates within their mouth. As the Scripture says, it can set a city on fire; it can tear people to shreds. It has done great harm to people, nations and the countries of the world. The initial sign of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs when the Holy Spirit gets control of the human spirit, He finally subdues the tongue and it then comes under His control. Thereafter the tongue is yielded to the Spirit and it speaks in an unknown language. The brain may accuse the tongue of speaking 'gibberish' but the tongue is no longer in control, having yielded to the Spirit of God. The Scripture says that they "began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." (Acts 2:4)

At any cost, we need another Pentecost

What does speaking in tongues do to you and me? It is the most important gift because it edifies or blesses the believer forming a line of communication between the Father and His child. It is said, "... anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God." (1 Corinthians 14:2) It is a time of talking mysteries which are beyond the comprehension of the natural mind. Some people belittle this experience. People would ask me "are you also like those people who foolishly jabber in tongues, not knowing what they are speaking?" If I am a fool, the Apostle Paul is the greater fool – for he said "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you." (1 Corinthians 14:18) He was a man who communicated with God, understood the mysteries of the Kingdom and unfolded revelation knowledge. I have seen the gifts of God - the manifestations of God - flowing through me, in casting out demons, healing the sick, solving personal and family problems, meeting great financial and other needs, and even raising the dead, but the greatest of

all these miracles to me is the speaking in other tongues and having communion with the Father. I know the devil cannot intercept this line of communication between God and me where He unfolds to me His very thoughts. It is of vital importance for every believer to build up this wonderful line of communication with God. I cherish and relish this wonderful means of communication which also builds me up in my holy faith. The question Paul asked the Ephesians is still relevant, "have you received the Holy Spirit, since you believed?" If not today is the day and now is the time to continuously "be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 5:18-20).

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