

AO-20090101: Pentecost
Acts 2:32,33 (J.B. Philips)

Acts 2
outline

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PENTECOST

You can knock them down, but you can't knock out the light that is in them! You put them in prison and they win others, so you have to take them out, otherwise your prisoners will all become Christians!

This is what happens to ordinary men and women when the Holy Spirit is poured into them and Jesus Christ comes to His throne in their hearts.

Apart from the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus remains a story in the Bible. When the church lacks His presence, it is not attractive. It is an organization of people whose heads are going round and round in a cycle of theology, but whose lives are not attractive at all.

I come from a group of Christians in my country of Uganda and all East Africa, men and women in whose hearts the Lord Jesus has become such a friend that they walk with Him day by day. We use the word "walk" very much back home. We call a fellowship a "walk," we call living day by day "walking with Christ," which is a continual liberation.

It wasn't always so. Missionaries came to Africa and preached the love of Christ to Africans like myself who had never known the God who loves people. We were groping in darkness. We were taught the Bible and we loved it, but we missed Him.

You know, you can be in the church and appreciate the church's teaching and these beautiful hymns we are singing without meeting Him about whom they speak. When you don't meet Him, the hymns are dry, the Bible is a hollow book and the church becomes tiresome.

Even Peter, who had been with Jesus for three years, became rather bored. It shows in his question, "Master, we who have left everything and followed You, what shall we get?" He had not yet got what he wanted! His question said, You are not all that we need. We are with You, true, but we are expecting something else.

What else shall we get?

Although Jesus was there in the body physically, Peter's eyes were still a little bit beclouded. He had not yet discovered that where Jesus was, the Father was, and all Heaven was there.

This is the reason why Peter denied Him whom he loved very much. He had given up everything for Jesus, but when the test came, he was still living in the shadows. The shadows had not given place to realities. The shadows made him a little bit insecure, which meant he was not quite sure.

It wasn't until the Holy Spirit came that he discovered that in Jesus' presence you are actually in a stream of grace, surrounded with all the blessings of Heaven.

On the day of Pentecost, we meet a crowd of people, some women and some men, who were just like you and me: no wonderful people at all. There was Thomas, doubting, as some of us do. There was Peter with his impetuous nature and his guilt feelings. There was John with his usual ambition, wanting to be on the right hand of God. James and John were called the "sons of thunder," which probably means they were the bad-tempered ones. In other words, this was a normal, human crowd of people.

They were waiting, praying, repenting of their sins, asking each other for forgiveness, expecting Heaven to open, but they did not know how.

Yes, they expected the risen King of Glory to come back. And He did! In all the rushing noise and fire, it was the Holy Spirit of God coming down to His throne -- the risen King coming to His throne in their hearts. It was a tremendous day -- the Day the King Came! Suddenly they knew that there is nothing that is withheld by God.

Weakness^{was} taken up by strength. Defeat had been replaced by victory. People like Peter and John and Thomas and the women were all shouting the psalms of David. They caught themselves speaking in tongues they never knew before. Without going to college, they were speaking all the languages of the people who were in Jerusalem at that time, because the Gospel had to be preached.

Peter preached his greatest sermon that day. He was a liberated personality. You know what he said:

"Christ is the man Jesus, whom God raised up -- a fact of which all of us are eye-witnesses!" He has been raised to the right hand of God; he has received from the Father and poured out upon us the promised Holy Spirit -- that is what you now see and hear!" (Acts 2: 32,33, J.B.Phillips).

Peter connected what was happening here with the glorified Christ up there. The vision which set Peter free was that, in the Holy Spirit, the expected King of Glory had come to His throne in their hearts.

Because the Lord Jesus ^{stands} ~~stood~~ before the Throne of Mercy, there at the right hand of God, there is nothing left in Heaven which is not yours. He entered Heaven with all your needs written in His hand. Everything that happened to the Lord Jesus speaks of one thing: your needs can be met. He died, rose again, ascended and was glorified and all Heaven is at His disposal. So "all things are yours, for you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God" (I Corinthians 3: 21,23).

If you are Thomas, your doubts are thoroughly answered. If you are Peter, suffering from guilt and an impetuous nature, there is plenty of grace to cover all your sins. If you are bad-tempered like James and John, abide in Him. Heaven opens and all the sweetness of His nature comes to be yours.

They were set free on the Day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit brought the Lord Jesus in a remarkable way. When Jesus takes the throne, no accuser can come there. When Christ takes the throne of the heart, no poverty is there, because He is the King, rich in grace and mercy and fullness. And the Spirit floods the heart with the love of God and liberates the personality.

They began to preach. The men of Jerusalem were confronted with a group of liberated fishermen and women. The preachers were all laymen, there were no professional preachers, just fishermen and such, men and women witnessing with a tremendous excitement that He had come.

Jerusalem didn't know what to do with these people. It was obvious that they were nobody special, they did not speak a sophisticated language. What confounded the listeners was not the words, but the hearts speaking in tune with God! The church

began that way. And the Gospel began to spread that way.

They were emancipated, in fellowship with Christ by the Holy Spirit. They were excited because they were now walking in the newness of life in Christ. The Holy Spirit did a beautiful job, and He is still doing a beautiful job.

I could tell you what happened in my Anglican Church. Anglicans are carefully trained, unemotional, almost sticky, and we are very orderly in our services. My! you should have seen some of our Anglican people singing and rejoicing in the marketplaces, preaching and giving their testimonies. When you see Anglicans doing that, you know something is going on. They are not easy people to move. Not at all.

But when the Holy Spirit comes, it doesn't matter whether it is in a Catholic Church, a Presbyterian Church, a Baptist Church, or any other. People are people and God loves to bless them. The prayer book, the liturgy, the songs all become alive. There is joy, there is blessing, there is relaxation. The Bible begins to speak, and lips also move, quickly telling the glory of Jesus Christ.

Let me take you over to Indonesia. With Roy Hession of England, I was invited there by these churches which have experienced a mighty movement of God. They knew we had experienced this in our own area in East Africa for more than forty years.

Do you know what we saw? Not what some of you have read about. Some of the extraordinary miracles have subsided because they came for a purpose -- to announce, The King is Here! This is where many people make a mistake. They think those miracles came to be the main thing. Not at all. They came to announce to that society of Muslims and dead Christians that the King of Life had come!

So these people were healed, water was turned into wine, some dead ones received life, the excitement was tremendous. There was a rumbling as in the prophet Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones, and what had been bones now became an army. There is an army in Indonesia, a tremendous army of those who love Jesus. Thousands of Muslims have become Christians.

Only don't get hung up on gifts. In Indonesia, I found them confused. Some of them had knocked each other on the head with their gifts, and then the Holy Spirit was grieved. If God gives

you gifts, use them, praise God for them. Don't get scared about gifts, they come from the Father. But don't use them to knock each other on the head, because that is misusing the gifts your Father gave you. You are not better than another because you have gifts.

Let the gifts of God bow you down. When a branch is loaded with fruit -- oranges or grapes -- does it stick out or bend down? And when a Christian has been given gifts, he should be broken, bending down at the Master's feet, not sticking up like a proud, fruitless branch. When you focus on Jesus, your King, the Dove flies in. When you focus on the Dove, He flies out.

These days the Holy Spirit is reconciling men and women, healing our wounds, touching us where no one else could have touched us. Denominations no longer present a barrier. They were never meant to be barriers. We have misused our denominations. They were meant to be traditions through which we are taught to love our brother, not to keep him at arm's length.

When the Holy Spirit comes like a wind, He sweeps in like your tornadoes and blows those fences down! Before you know what is happening, you are embracing one another.

We saw this beautifully in a recent crusade we had in the city of Dar es Salaam. We had a team to work with for the big, ten-day job of reaching that city, and you will laugh at the assortment: two Anglican bishops, two Roman Catholic priests, a Moravian bishop, a Baptist minister, two Mennonites, three laymen and two housewives! What a conglomeration! But there was no confusion at all. We loved one another and Jesus was King.

The Holy Spirit brings a unique quality of life. When Christians are absolutely one with the Lord Jesus, you can do anything you like to them and they enjoy it. Somehow they have received a kind of light which you can't knock out.

That is what happened on the day of Pentecost. And they did get knocked down. Saul of Tarsus kept knocking them down, but he failed to knock them out. Some of them were stoned to death. But as Stephen was being stoned, Heaven opened and he saw the angels and the Son of God standing at the right hand of God!

That is exactly what the fullness of the Holy Spirit means. When Jesus Christ has come to His throne in the life of a man or

woman, this person is given the capacity to accept every experience of life and use it for Jesus in such a way that everything becomes beautiful and God is greatly glorified.