

Pentecost

by G. Campbell Morgan

The sermon explores the significance of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and its impact on the disciples, the Church, and the world.

Scripture: Acts 1:4

Topics: "The Holy Spirit", "The Birth of the Church"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the significance of Pentecost as the moment when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, transforming them from mere followers of Christ into a unified Church empowered for ministry. He highlights that the disciples were instructed to wait for the Spirit before beginning their mission, and that the coming of the Spirit marked the initiation of a new era in God's plan, creating a new Temple of praise, prayer, and prophecy. Morgan notes that this event was not a result of human merit or prayer but a divine gift, establishing the Church as a living entity filled with the Spirit's power to reach the world.

Transcript

THE Master finished His teaching, and passed to His Cross. Having accomplished its sacred work, He rose from the dead, tarried for forty days among His disciples, appearing to them for special purposes, and giving them commandments through the Holy Spirit. He then ascended, leaving them one immediate instruction--that they should wait for the advent of the Spirit. He had told them that they were to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation;- He had told them also that they were to make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He had given them instructions conditioning all the service that lay before them; and then He charged them that they were not to begin any of the work until they were endued with power from on high. He left upon them that one restricting word: He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father. No command was given to these men to pray for the Comforter, nor is it chronicled that they did so. It is somewhat remarkable that commentators almost without exception seem to have taken it for granted that the ten days of waiting were spent in prayer for the Holy Spirit. Neither in the command of Jesus, nor in the chronicled facts, is there any warrant for imagining that such was the case. They were waiting. It is certainly stated that they gave themselves to prayer; but it is not asserted that this was for the Holy Spirit.

During that time they fell into an undoubted blunder, when they endeavored to choose a successor to Judas. Having selected certain men, they proceeded to cast lots to decide which of them should be in the apostolic succession. It is evident that the one upon whom the lot fell never was an apostle in the intention of the Master. The one chosen by the Lord to fill the gap was Saul of Tarsus. When the City of God, described in Revelation, shall be perfect and complete, it is to have twelve foundations, and in the foundations the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb; and the name of Paul, not Matthias, will surely be the twelfth. Instead of waiting, they proceeded to make appointments. It is no more possible to appoint an officer in the Church, than to preach the Gospel, save by the guidance of the Spirit of God.

After ten days the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the waiting company in that upper room in Jerusalem.

As He came, there was a sound like a mighty rushing wind, heard not only by the people there assembled, but by Jerusalem at large; for it is declared that when the people heard the sound they ran together to see what these things could be. Beside this symbolism that appealed to hearing, the coming was one that appealed to sight; fire, parting asunder, sat in the form of a tongue upon the head of each disciple. Beyond this twofold miracle of sight and sound, there was the wonderful bestowment of the gift of tongues, by which the baptized men and women spoke in other languages than their own.

The place Pentecost occupied in the Divine economy was of great importance.

(i) The Holy Spirit was poured out upon the Day of Pentecost as a gift of God. Man had no claim upon God for that great gift; He was not poured out in answer to any prayer of man, nor on account of any merit in man. He was, as was the gift of Jesus, a gift of grace which all received as from God.

(ii) The pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost was dependent upon the presence in heaven of Him Who was dead and is alive for evermore. Because of the work that He had wrought, in which satisfaction had been given to righteousness, God poured His Spirit upon man, for the initiation of a new movement and the ushering in of a new dispensation.

(iii) Pentecost was the coming of God the Holy Spirit to realize His own ideal in human character, by the administration of the work of Jesus, in its redemptive, possessive, and dominant aspects. It was the coming of God as Administrator, in order that the work which He had done as Saviour might become a real fact within the experience and the character of men of whom He should be able to obtain full possession, and in whom, therefore, He should be able to exercise absolute control. By the Holy Spirit, Jesus is henceforth to be Lord, while loyal subjects to His dominion are, by the indwelling of the Spirit, to pass into the realization of the will of God. The coming of the Holy Spirit was the dawn of the brightest day the world had seen since the Fall. It was for the actual impartation to his inner being of the power that should realize the purpose toward which man had been moving through every previous dispensation.

Pentecost affected the whole position of the disciples. In the moment when the Holy Spirit fell upon them, the company of apostles and disciples, about one hundred and twenty in number, were changed from being merely followers of the Messiah into members of the risen Lord. The Lord had exercised a purely Jewish Messiahship; He had fulfilled all the prophecies and promises of the past in His own Person. He came unto His own is the word that characterizes His mission up to the Cross; and the Cross is the final emphasis of the other fact-- that they that were His own received Him not. But: out of that great nation, which as a nation thus rejected Him, there had been gathered an elect remnant, in succession to that elect remnant which had always existed, even in the ages most characterized by spiritual decadence. Peter, James, John, and others to the number of about five hundred, were followers of Jesus, the Jewish

Messiah; and so they continued up to the Day of Pentecost. When one hundred and twenty of these five hundred souls gathered in obedience to the parting command of their Lord, they were still disciples of the Messiah--the little company of people who, amidst the darkness of the nation, had discovered the light of God and had been true to it. They were the people who, failing, trembling in the hour of darkness, had nevertheless loved their Lord through all--the people who had been utterly amazed at the miracle of the Resurrection, and who were now waiting in obedience to the new voice of authority that had sounded in their ears, the voice of their risen Lord. These disciples of the Messiah were waiting for something differing entirely from the expectations of the past; but even now they did not clearly understand their position.

When the Spirit came, they were born again. Hitherto they had been followers of the Christ; and in the purpose of God, in company with faithful Abraham and all who preceded them in a life obedient to the measure of light received, were reckoned as sharers in the work of Christ. But, as an actual fact of life, it was only when the Spirit came--outpoured in baptismal flood, as the result of the work of Jesus upon the Cross--that these men began to live. They were then baptized in the Spirit, and filled with the Spirit.

The result of Pentecost was, moreover, one that affected them not as individuals only, but also in their relation the one to the other. By that baptism they were united into one, and Peter, James, and John were no longer three separate individuals, standing apart from each other while holding the same broad sentiment, but they were members of the one catholic Church. In that moment when the Spirit fell upon the one hundred and twenty or more, the mystical Church of Christ was created. Up to the moment of the coming of the Spirit, they were a concurrence of individuals, a company of units, having a bond of sympathy in their common love to Christ, but no actual, vital, necessary, eternal union. When the Spirit came, the concurrence of individuals was fused into a unity, the Church was formed. The catholic Church was created by the baptism of the Spirit. There was no Church in this sense until the Spirit came; and from then until now the Church has continued. God alone knows the limits of His own Church. It to-day consists of those, in heaven and on earth, who have, by this self-same Spirit, been baptized into the sacred unity of the living Christ. It was when the Spirit fell, that individual disciples of Jesus were transformed from the former association with Him into actual living unity. The mystical Church was formed, by this fusion into a unity, of those who were baptized by the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

As the result of the great work of the Son of God, in life, death, resurrection, and ascension, there was poured upon a little company of men and women, who had chosen to suffer with Him, the great gift of the Holy Spirit. They were thus created a corporate unity, one with Christ and with each other, and there was brought into the world a new creation, the Church, consisting of Christ and all those thus united to Him.

The coming of the Spirit and the fusing of these individuals into one great whole affected the relation of the whole race to God. It was the coming into the world of a new temple--the Church. "Ye are a temple of God"--an individual truth, but a collective truth also. It was the coming into the world of that of which the old Temple, with its priesthood, its offerings, and its ritual, was prophetic; it was the building in the world of a dwelling-place of God through the Spirit.

A question arises as to what became of the rest of the five hundred disciples of Jesus who saw Him after His resurrection --He appeared to above five hundred brethren at once (i Cor. xv. 6)--but who did not tarry in obedience to His command in Jerusalem. No definite statement can be made concerning them. It is certain, however, that they were not on the Day of Pentecost included in the Church, their disobedience preventing this. It is probable that, as the time passed on, many of them would become more fully instructed, and by submission would receive the gift. Nothing can be said with any certainty, as nothing

has been revealed in Scripture.

The Temple was the place of praise, whence the song, the chant, and the hallelujah ascended perpetually into the presence of God. Man is created for the glory of God, and whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth Me. It is the Divine intention that man should say, not only with his lip, but in every power of his nature, Hallelujah! First the Tabernacle, then the Temple, was given to man as a place of praise.

But the Temple meant more than praise; it meant a possibility of prayer. Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? "It was a point to which humanity might come and tell its agony in the listening ear of Heaven, a place where men might pray. Men are, first, to praise; but praise must oftentimes cease, choked by the sob of sorrow; then let men pray.

Beyond that, the Temple was the place of prophetic utterance--prophecy being, in its largest meaning, a Divine answer to prayer. Prayer is the voice of man in his need speaking to God: prophecy is the voice of God in His power speaking to man. These things had been symbolized in the Temple.

Now those men and women in the upper room--being no longer simply a company, but Christ's Church--form a Divine institution of praise. Through them there is to ascend from the earth to heaven the praise of men. The outsiders will join the praise as they enter the Church; they will find the opportunity of praise as they come into the new Temple of God given to man.

That company of people, having now become one Church, is also a medium of prayer. They are a kingdom of priests: that is, a company of individuals who will unite prayer to prayer and intercession to intercession; a company of men and women who will carry on their hearts the surging sorrow of the earth, and will pour its tale out in the listening ear of Heaven; a company of men and women who will always be conscious of the suffering of humanity, and will tell it out to God. The multitudes outside will begin to pray as they enter the Church. Their prayer will become prevailing as they join the new medium of prayer, which is the new Temple, the Church of Jesus Christ.

The Church will not only praise and pray,--all its members have become prophets. They will pass from the upper room, and scatter themselves over the whole earth, reaching out into all the places where men abide. They will not be divided; they will still be the Church. The sigh of Moses long ago, Would God that all the 'Lord's people were prophets! finds its answer in the Pentecostal effusion and the bestowment of the prophetic gift upon the living members of the new Church. Before one hundred years had passed, every known nation and all human institutions had felt the touch of the new power by the prophesying of the Church.

A new Temple was given to men upon the Day of Pentecost--that is, a new centre of praise, a new power of prayer, and a new power of prophecy. No longer is Jerusalem the place where men ought to worship; no longer is this mountain, as Christ characterized the Samaritan centre, the only place; but everywhere men may worship God. Christ is the Door of the Church; and men through belief in Him pass thereinto, the Spirit baptizing them into living union with Him. The Temple grows and expands by this incorporation of individual members. Whether in a far-off land or at home, whether in Jerusalem or at the end of the earth, men pass into the new Temple by this self-same Spirit Who was poured out upon the day of Pentecost for their admission into the relationship with God which should fit them for praise, prayer, and prophecy. When Peter handled the keys of the kingdom for the first time, he opened the door to the Jew, and three thousand entered. Then he opened the door to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, and the Gentiles

began to crowd in. That handling of the keys was not Peter's peculiar prerogative. It was also the prerogative of every member of the Church. It is the prerogative of every person who, as a prophet of the Cross, in the demonstration of the Spirit, speaks to some soul, so that there opens before that soul a vision of the things of the kingdom. That is the true exercise of the power of the keys. Pentecost meant for the world the creation of a new Temple, no longer limited, localized, and material, but unlimited, to be found everywhere, and spiritual, for the Spirit is everywhere. Entrance to this Temple is found wherever man in his need and agony submits himself to Christ.

This throws light upon the sacerdotal question. With a strange confusion men have imagined that the keys were the symbols of priestly power. They were not. They were the insignia of the prophetic office.

Before closing this chapter, it is necessary to notice the difference between the events of the Day of Pentecost with the period immediately following, and the occurrence in the house of Cornelius with the subsequent history of the Book of the Acts. The whole of the men and women upon whom the Spirit fell on the Day of Pentecost were Jewish; and the period immediately following Pentecost may be spoken of as peculiarly Jewish. There are two remarkable characteristics of the work of the Spirit during that period that ceased immediately afterwards. This period is dealt with in the first nine chapters, and during it there seems to have been an interval between the acceptance of the good tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the reception of the Holy Spirit. People believed the tidings, and yet they did not receive the Holy Spirit. Moreover, there was some intervention on the part of another disciple before the gift of the Spirit was received.

The Gospel was preached to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, and it is never again recorded that those who believed in Jesus received the Holy Spirit as a subsequent blessing. The apostles preached the kingdom of God; and when a Jew heard about the kingdom, he did exactly what had been done in the days of Christ's ministry--he thought of earthly power, had no conception of the spiritual reality, and believed in Jesus as a Restorer of the temporal kingdom. His conception was material; and in every such case it was necessary for some more enlightened disciple to teach him the spiritual reality, in order that he might receive the Holy Spirit.

The work of Philip in Samaria and the conversion of Saul are instances. They will be considered in Chapter XV.

When Peter preached in the house of Cornelius, he announced good tidings of peace, and the lordship of Jesus, and remission of sins. This the Gentiles heard, not from the Jewish standpoint. The story of the kingdom was not all. They heard also the story of salvation from sin. When they believed, it was the whole Gospel, and the Spirit fell upon them straightway. There was no second blessing. This, then, represents the normal condition of things under the present dispensation. Men believe in Jesus as King and Saviour, and are baptized by the Spirit into relationship with Him, that being the hour of their new birth, and that in which they become members of the catholic Church of Jesus Christ.

Pentecost, in the economy of God, was the occasion of the outpouring of the Spirit, in answer to the completed work of the Christ, in order that the purpose of God might be realized in the character of men.

Pentecost, in the case of the disciple, was the change from being merely a follower, a learner, into that of living union with the living Christ.

Pentecost, in the case of the world, was the advent in the world of a new Temple consisting of living men, women, and children indwelt by the Spirit of God, for purposes of praise, and prayer, and prophecy.

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