

God in Man

by J. Sidlow Baxter

The abiding meaning of Pentecost is the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit, which brings new life and fellowship with God to believers.

Duration: 39:09

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1, Matthew 3:16-17, Luke 24:49, John 3:5, Acts 2:1-4, Romans 8:9, Galatians 3:13-14

Topics: "Indwelling"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of listening to the word of God. He highlights how God has communicated with humanity through prophets and ultimately sent his own son, Jesus, to deliver us from the curse of the law. The preacher then discusses the four things that happen when someone is filled with the Holy Spirit: a new consciousness of Christ, a new Christ-likeness of character, a new communicativeness of Christ, and a new look and disposition towards others. He shares a personal anecdote about his mother's devotion to prayer and concludes with a prayer for God's guidance and filling of the spirit. The sermon is based on Acts 2:1-4, which describes the day of Pentecost when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in tongues.

Transcript

About whom we are to think and speak. Do thou direct, control, suggest, we pray, all we design or do or say. Guard the first springs of our thought and will, and with thyself our spirits filled.

In the precious name of Jesus. Amen. And now will you kindly turn with me to the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 2, from which let me read just the opening verses as a platform from which I shall dive into my subject.

The Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 2. And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

And they were all filled, filled with the Holy Spirit. And they began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. That's all I think we need to read as a beginning.

Mr. Chairman and fellow believers, if I were giving a title to this introductory message this morning, I think it would have to be, what is the abiding meaning of Pentecost? It is generally agreed that organized Christianity on this planet originated some two thousand years ago at that historic Dev Pentecost which is graphically recorded for us in the second chapter of the Acts. Therefore, no question can be more pertinent or continuously important than to ask, what is the abiding meaning of Pentecost for today? What is its continuing meaning for the Church collectively? What is its abiding meaning for our local churches individually? And what is its intended meaning today for each of us as Christian believers? What is the abiding meaning of Pentecost? Well now, preliminarily I think it is important to get some things clear in our mind concerning the beginning of our Christian era. When the first preachers of the gospel made their way around the Roman world of two thousand years ago, they were not able to sow the seed of Christian truth on virgin soil.

The ground was already full of other growths. The human mind of that far gone era was the very opposite of a religious vacuum. Everywhere that the first heroes of Calvary made their way, they found men's minds full of religious and philosophical ideas.

And the so-called mystery religions of antiquity, so-called because of their clandestine rites of initiation and participation, those long-ago mystery cults as they're called, had pretty well spread into all parts of the Roman Empire. Some of those man-concocted systems of belief in their doctrines of the Taurobolium, or bloodbath, bore remarkable resemblances to the new Christian message of redemption through the blood of God's incarnate Son. And in not a few other particulars, they shared striking similarities to the new message of the gospel.

Of course, they did not have the historical certainty, or the evidential validity, or the ethical transcendency, or the spiritual purity, or the experiential reality, or the divine authority, will you remember all that, which we have in the Christian faith. But nonetheless, the similarities between them and the new message of Christianity were quite observable. I think we should not fear to admit that.

On the contrary, I think we should gratefully seize upon it. For if we have heaven-anointed perception, I think we may see in it a sovereign divine providence gradually preparing men's minds, not only through supernaturally inspired Hebrew prophets, but in a lesser way through groping heathen mystics, gradually preparing men's minds for the wonderful day when the true gospel of salvation through God's eternal Son should break upon the ears of mankind. Albeit, whatever the similarities may have been between those old-time religious systems and the new message of Christianity, there was one feature about the new message of the gospel which immediately, and fundamentally, and forevermore separated between it and all other faiths.

Do you know what that peculiarly distinguishing feature was? Do you? It was the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Yes, indeed. The Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

That was something historically unprecedented. That was something hitherto never dreamed of. That was something theologically all-eclipsing.

That was something dynamically unique. The Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit. And, in brief, what is the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit? It is precisely this.

That the very life of God, the architect of the universe, having become personally embodied and historically revealed in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, that life now becomes regenerately

communicated to all those human beings who, by simple but vital faith in Christ, become saved. Even more crisply, it is this. The very life of God, manifested in Jesus Christ, and now savingly imparted to all believers.

The Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit. And I say again, that was the thing which at the beginning of the Christian era, vitally and infinitely differentiated between Christianity and all other faiths. It means, immediately, Christianity is not simply a creed, or a code, or a cult, or a philosophy, or a psychology, or a way of behavior, or a school of thought, or a system of ethics, or an ideology, or even a religion.

No. Before all else, Christianity is a life. A life which, if a man possess it not, he is dead while he lives.

But which, if a man possess it, he lives the life of the ages, even though the mortal body may be discarded. Christianity is not simply a superior ethic. It is a soul-saving, life-transforming experience of God in Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Now, Mr. Chairman and beloved fellow Christians, I have a feeling there is new need today for a re-accentuating of that primary fact. Christianity is not simply an external ethic. It is an internal and dynamic and transforming experience.

You see, dear friends, that is the whole weight of emphasis in the New Testament. What was the subject uppermost in our adorable Master's mind just prior to his going to Gethsemane and Gabbatha and Golgotha? The later chapters of John tell us. Just before he went to his passion and death, the uppermost subject in his mind was the soon coming of the Paraclete.

Another Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, that he may abide with you forever. And if that was the last concern in his mind prior to his Calvary suffering, what was the first message on his lips after his resurrection? John chapter 20, verse 22 tells us. He suddenly appeared to the disciples in that closed and locked and shuttered room, and he breathed on them and said to them, Receive ye the Holy Pneuma, the breath, the Holy Spirit.

And if that was his last thought before his crucifixion, and his first word after his resurrection, what was his parting word before his ascension? It was this. Ye shall receive power after the Holy Spirit is come upon you. Ye shall be endued with power from on high, not many days hence.

And if that was his parting word before he visibly left the earth, what was his first ministry in heaven when he began his mediatorial intercessions for his yonderers? Peter tells us in his Pentecostal sermon, He being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promised Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which ye now see and hear. And if that was the first great communication of our Ascended Lord to his people here on earth, what was the first promise that Christianity ever made to men when it came out onto the platform of historical publicity? Peter tells us, Wherefore repent and be baptized every one of you into the name of Jesus for the remission of your sins. And ye shall receive, mark it well, this is the first promise Christianity ever made, ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit for the promises unto you and to your children, and to them that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call.

And if that was the first promise Christianity ever made to mankind, what was the first test question in apostolic days to ascertain whether a person was or was not a true Christian believer? I turn to the nineteenth chapter of the Acts and I find Paul making his first contact with Ephesus, and he is greeted there by twelve professing Christian disciples, and Paul is about to fall upon their necks with an

affectionate apostolic kiss of blessing when he becomes disturbingly conscious of an invisible but unmistakable barrier between them and him. There was something wrong with those men, either they had spiritual measles or nervous debility of the prayer life or some other malady, he wasn't quite sure, and he wanted to find out what the trouble was. So what did he ask them? He said, my dear brethren, do you believe in the triunity of the Godhead? He didn't ask them any such thing.

Before there was any kind of catechizing of that sort, he said this, my brothers, when you believed, did you receive the Holy Spirit? That was the decisive question. Well now there you have it, these are the clear New Testament data, this wonderful Holy Spirit and the new light communicated by him, that was the thought uppermost in our Lord's mind before he went to the cross, the first great word on his lips when he rose from the grave, that was his parting promise before his ascension, that was his first ministry in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf, that was the first promise Christianity ever made when it came out into historical openness, and that was the first test question in apostolic times to determine whether a person was or was not a Christian believer. Have you the Holy Spirit? Do you know the new birth? Have you got the new life? I'm saying, friends, all that is needing strong new emphasis today.

Don't you think so? Say yes or out you go. Now, dear friends, if that was the great differentiation at the beginning of the Anno Domini era, so it is today. It is this wonderful doctrine of the Holy Spirit which vitally, fundamentally, dynamically and characteristically divides Christianity from Hinduism, from Buddhism, from Confucianism, from Shintoism, from Mohammedanism.

Not one of these religious systems, however ancient, however elaborate, however attractive they may seem, not one of them can communicate new moral and spiritual life. In some of their aspects, some of them may fascinate, but not one of them can regenerate. Their philosophies may float among the clouds, but they leave fallen man in the gutter.

Communism, morally and spiritually, is a dead letter. Communism may damnably disturb the brain and excite the nervous system, but Communism never yet saved one alcoholic from his drunkenness. Communism never yet saved one moral leper from his sin disease.

Communism never yet raised one dead Lazarus and made him a new and transformed man. Communism is powerless to save the individual from the grip of spiritual death and moral leprosy. And if Communism can't save the individual, how on earth can Communism save the mass of mankind? There is only one who gives life, life that saves the soul and transforms the character, and that is our living, loving, glorious Lord Jesus.

And he does it by the communicated power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Pentecost. Brethren, let me say it again with emphasis, before all else, Christianity is a new life from God. Please say Amen.

Amen. Now, I suppose it's wise to put this little cautionary word in here. I know how easily a public man can be misunderstood.

I am quite alive to the importance of sound evangelical doctrine. And all of you who happen to know anything about me will know that by unequivocal public confession, I am a thoroughgoing evangelical. And I believe that the evangelical Christian faith is the only true Christian faith.

I am quite alive, therefore, to the importance of sound doctrine. I believe in the usefulness of a written creed as a concentrate and safeguard of Christian truth. I believe in the need for efficient organization in

our Christian churches and movements.

But what I am emphasizing is this. Even our most sound evangelical theology, apart from this vital experience of the Holy Spirit, is a mere planking symbol. Even our best-worded creed is simply the shibboleth of a decaying denomination.

And apart from this transforming experience of the Holy Spirit, our best-organized churches are simply valleys of respectable dry bones. The vital thing, the first thing in the Christian message, is this wonderful doctrine of the Holy Spirit, bringing to us through the atoning blood and resurrection of God's dear Son, this soul-saving, transforming new life. And I submit to you, therefore, that the first permanent meaning of Pentecost is a new life from God.

Don't you agree? But now, with a glance at the enemy and remembering our chairman's threatening word, we'll move to a second consideration. Pentecost means not only a new life from God, it means a new fellowship with God. And in this sense, Pentecost is the historical culmination of ages-long dispensational preparation.

Does that sound rather flabbergasting? Let me say it again to tantalize you. I say Pentecost means a new fellowship with God. And in that sense, it is the historical culmination of ages-long dispensational preparation.

In thought, travel quickly a way backward to the Garden of Eden, and look at that first human pair, Adam and his beautiful wife Eve, unsullied by the slightest moral taint, amid the blemishless loveliness of that pristine paradise, walking in cloudless fellowship with their benign Creator. What a delectable picture it conjures up to the mind, doesn't it? Please turn the cassette over now. Do not fast-wind it in either direction.

What a delectable picture it conjures up to the mind, doesn't it? Over that beautiful but short-lived Edenic dispensation, we may write, emphasizing the preposition, God with man. Ten thousand pities, that primal bliss was soon tragically interrupted and aborted. The hiss of the serpent broke in to the otherwise lovely harmony of that paradise, and the slime of the venomous reptile was smeared across that exquisite beauty.

But after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, did God utterly forsake his fallen friend, man? Thank heaven, no. There now commenced what theologians call the Theophanies, that is, a succession of divine self-revealings to the patriarchs, or first fathers of the human race. And over the patriarchal period, we may write, again emphasizing the preposition, God to men.

Then there followed the inception of the Israel Theocracy. God brought the twelve Hebrew tribes out of their prolonged servitude in Egypt. He cleaved away for them through the Red Sea, and some days later gathered them round the skirts of Mount Sinai, at which place and time He welded them into one homogeneous nation, the nation Israel.

And synchronizingly, He constituted Israel as a Theocracy, which, as you know, means a nation of which the king is none other than God Himself. And at the inception of the Israelite Theocracy, we find God saying to Moses, Moses, the elders have their tents and the people have their dwellings, and now I'm quoting, make me a tabernacle that I may dwell among my people. And through the Shekinah, in that threefold Hebrew tabernacle, God dwelt among His covenant people.

And over the theocratic era, we may write, again emphasizing the preposition, God among men. Then, as you know, there ensued the sorry story of Israel's ever-worsening infidelity. The covenant people answered high calling by low living, and eventually the idolatry, obscenity, perversity, and wickedness became such that God had to expel them from the covenanted inheritance.

But before the last desolating blow of judgment fell upon that disobedient people, God raised up a mighty succession of spokesmen known to us now as the Hebrew prophets. Never has there been a brighter galaxy of God-inspired men than those Hebrew prophets. They're still talking to the nations, if only the nations would listen.

And over the period of the prophets, we may write, again emphasizing the preposition, God through men. Then, in the fullness of the times, God sent forth His own Son, begotten of a woman, begotten under the law, that He might deliver us from the curse of the law. And over that nonsuch life, that immaculate manhood, from the Bethlehem manger to the Golgotha cross, and from the vacated sepulcher to the brow of Olivet, from which He returned to heaven, over that immaculate manhood, that glorious Jesus, we may write, again emphasizing the preposition, God as man.

Dear brothers and sisters, are you following? All down the avenue of the centuries, God has been seeking to come closer and still closer to the heart and the affections of man. The garden of Eden, God with man. The patriarchal period, God to men.

The theocratic period, God among men. The period of the prophets, God through men. The incarnation of God's eternal Son, God as man.

But even that is not close enough, God would come closer still. And so, toward the end of His earthly ministry, we find our Lord expounding to the wandering disciples the new doctrine of the soon coming Paraclete. I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever.

And He went on to tell them that He and the coming Comforter and the Heavenly Father were so wonderfully one that in having Him, the Paraclete, they would have the Father and the Son dwelling in them. He began to say things like this, At that day, when He comes to you, the Holy Spirit, at that day you shall know that I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and ye in me, and I in you. Here's another, If a man love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we, the Father and the Son.

Do you see with what perfect sense of propriety our Lord intimately connects Himself with God? Either He is God the Son, or else He is speaking blasphemy. He is here claiming utter equality with the Father, and the attribute of omnipresence. If a man love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we, the Father and I, we will make our abode within Him.

Do you see what I mean when I declare that Pentecost was the historical culmination of ages-long dispensational preparation? Eden, God with man. The patriarchs, God to men. The theocracy, God among men.

The prophets, God through men. And now the incarnation, God as man. And to crown it all, Pentecost, the Holy Spirit, God in man.

Oh, excuse me! Hallelujah! Yes. If we hadn't got so familiarized with the phraseology surrounding it all, we would be in perpetual amazement at it. It is the greatest doctrine one could ever preach on this planet.

Years ago now, when I was preaching in the silver city by the sea, commonly called Aberdeen. By the way, do you know, years and years ago, I had to take the tram car from the station to some street, the name of which I now forget. And when I offered the conductress a penny for the fare, she gave me a half penny back.

And I said to her, I was just a young man at the time, I said, well, bless your heart, this is the only place I've ever found with a half penny tram fare. And it's in Aberdeen of all places. And do you know what she said? She said, you needn't be surprised at that, if we didn't make it cheaper, nobody would travel.

Well, on the occasion to which I now refer, I was walking up Union Street, many of you perhaps know it. And on the wayside pulpit outside, a large Presbyterian church, I saw a verse which I never tried to remember, but will never be able to forget. It just said this, O gift of gift, O grace of grace, that God should come this end to make my heart his dwelling place and be my bosom friend.

Fellow believers, that's the meaning of Pentecost. The Father above us, the Savior beside us, the Spirit within us. But in having him within us, we have the Father and the Son as well.

A new fellowship with God. He can't possibly come closer than that. He's in us.

Half a minute, let me have a look. We're getting into the danger zone. But now, dear friends, I have time just to put the capstone on this, I think.

One, Pentecost means a new life from God. Two, Pentecost means a new fellowship with God. Crowningly, Pentecost means, or if you will forgive the purposed tautology, Pentecost is meant to mean a new filling by God.

I think of Ephesians 5, verse 18. Be filled with the seedless gift. And if we tried to bring out the idiomatic Greek there, we would have to translate it rather clumsily.

Be being filled. It refers not to some isolated post-conversion spiritual crisis, but to an ever-continuing replenishment from never-ending, always available resources. Be being filled.

Be continually replenished by this in-living, in-dwelling Holy Spirit. What a picture. I want to ask you this morning, dear Christian brother, sister, do you know much about the experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit? There's such a lot of discussion today about that matter.

I suppose we are a delightful commingling of denominations here at Philae. There are Methodists and Baptists and Anglicans and others, and I suppose there are some of you here who would call yourselves Pentecostalists. Now, I'm the last man who would ever want to make any remark which in any way would cause even a mild division in the fellowship here.

This platform is too precious for that. There is one thing, however, which I have a feeling, even if you're Pentecostalist, you'll be glad for me to say this morning, there are some groups, I do not say all, you're following me carefully, aren't you? There are some groups who dare to teach that unless you speak in tongues, you have not been filled with the Holy Spirit. With my Bible open before me, with deep respect and affection, but with much resolution, I say, that is error.

Give me chapter and verse. You can't. By the Spirit is given to one this gift, to another another gift, etc.

And we will not let those dear brethren get away with it when they want to tell us that unless you speak in tongues, you have not been filled. I have spent hours and days and weeks studying my Bible on that matter, and I've spent even more time on my knees talking to my dear Heavenly King about it. I speak with thoughtfulness and care.

Many of the mightiest ministries in the Church from apostolic days until now, ministries that have brought millions to Christ and brought hundreds of thousands of Christians into the promised land of sanctification, they've been ministries shot through with the power of the Holy Spirit. But there's been no speaking in tongues. I'm not in any naughty mood when I say this, and I'm not thinking of any charismatic group of any kind.

Believe me. But I'll tell you quite frankly, I've noticed that one of the first things that often happens when you get really filled with the Holy Spirit isn't that you speak in tongues, but that for the first time in your life you learn to hold the one tongue you've got. However, as I close, and I'll shut my Bible to let you know I'm finishing.

Mind you, I can open it again. Let me quickly mention this. Whatever else may or may not happen, there are always four things happen when we become really filled with the Holy Spirit.

One, there is a new consciousness of Christ. The first big business of the blessed Holy Spirit is to make Jesus luminous to the mind. Hereby, says John, hereby know we that God indwells us by His Spirit which He hath given to us.

And when you and I are under the complete monopoly of the Holy Spirit, and He has the undisputed control of our being, then He fills us. And as He fills us, He makes us radiantly conscious of Christ. Instead of Jesus being a mere periodic visitor to our awareness, He becomes at home in the mind.

And we are always conscious or subconscious of His indwelling. And it isn't long before we start singing lovely little ditties like this. Lord, Thou hast made Thyself to me a living bright reality, more present to my faith's vision keen than any outward object seen, more dear, more intimately nigh than in the closest human tie.

O brothers and sisters, to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to carry with you that luminous vision of Jesus in your heart and mind, that is very wonderful indeed. But second, not only is there a new consciousness of Christ, there is a new conception of prayer. Do some of you wonder why your prayer life seems vapid and unsatisfying, sometimes even frustrating? Well, listen to this.

Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Now there's the possibility. Why is there such a disappointing contrast between that ideal and your or my poverty-stricken actual? It's because we forget the gauge.

Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us. And if you look at the context, that power in verse 16 is the Holy Spirit strengthening us with strength in the inner man. And when you and I are filled with the Holy Spirit, prayer becomes mighty and thrilling.

Yes, it does. And thirdly, not only is there a new consciousness of Christ and a new conception of prayer, there is a new Christ-likeness of character. O brothers and sisters, the real test is not whether we speak in tongues or heal the sick or work marvels.

The greatest miracle the Holy Spirit ever works is to make an ugly character beautiful, to make a selfish heart generous, to make an embittered person forgiving and kindly and outgoing. And lastly, not only is there a new consciousness of Christ and a new conception of prayer and a new Christ-likeness of character, there is a new communicativeness of Christ wherever we go. The whole of us begins to speak for Him.

There is a new look in the eyes, a new likeness in the tread, a new kindliness of disposition, a new sympathy towards others, a new tone in the voice, a new and gentler touch upon other human lives. I can remember how my precious mother, before she used to go preaching, when I was just a little boy and she didn't think I was listening, she thought I was playing with my toys. Well, maybe I was, but I was watching my mother as she prayed.

And she used to get up sometimes, singing that hymn, Oh, to be nothing, nothing, simply to lie at thy feet, a broken and emptied vessel for my master's use made neat. Emptied that thou mayest fill me as forth to thy service I go. Emptied that so unhindered thy life through mine might flow.

Friends, we've scraped through just in time. Listen, brothers and sisters, listen. Isn't this your deepest and most wistful longing to be filled with the Spirit? Must not this be our prayer? And let's bow as we say it.

Break through my nature, mighty heavenly life. Clear every avenue of thought and brain. Flood my affections, purify my will.

Let nothing but thine own pure life remain. Thus wholly mastered and possessed by thee, forth from my life spontaneous and free, shall flow a stream of tenderness and grace. Loving because God's love lives through me.

Amen.

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