

The Continuing Work of Christ 01 Messages From the Acts

by Robert Constable

The sermon explores the transformative impact of Pentecost on the disciples and the ongoing work of Christ through the Holy Spirit in the church today.

Duration: 46:00

Scripture: Joel 2:28-29, Zechariah 14:7, Matthew 6:33, John 3:19-20, John 16:7-8, Acts 1:9-11, Acts 2:1-4

Topics: "Book Of Acts"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of the Holy Spirit and the role it played in the early church. The disciples were instructed by Jesus to wait in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high, which would come in the form of the Holy Spirit. The speaker emphasizes that without the Holy Spirit, the disciples would have been unable to carry the message of God forward and the church would not have thrived. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost marked a new departure in the relationship between God and man, bringing about new facts about Christ and the church.

Transcript

And yesterday morning we were occupied with the things that made him attractive, made him such a wonderful savior, made people want to stand around and listen to him, see what he was going to do or say next. And that was before his resurrection, before his death. And then last evening we spent some time on the road to Emmaus following the resurrection and before the ascension.

And this morning we were in that part of the book of Acts that tells of his vanishing. Not his going away, his vanishing, his ascension to heaven. But heaven isn't very far away.

He vanished. And we remarked at the close of meeting this morning that one of the things that characterized the disciples that he left was the fact that they expected he might reappear at any moment. And of course, he might reappear at any moment.

Just as he vanished away, he is going to reappear again. Now, the book of Acts is a record of those things, a miscellaneous record, as it were, of those things which Jesus both began to do and to teach after his resurrection and his ascension. Now, there is a very, very popular book, and you may all have read this book, In His Steps by Sheldon.

It is one of the best-selling books in publishing history in the United States. I expect you've all read it. And this book is based upon the idea of what things would be like if everybody did what Jesus would do in any particular circumstance.

You know, you're going to start out the day. You say, well, how would Jesus live this day? And you try to live the day the way you think that Jesus would do it. It's a very interesting story.

But, you know, that's not the point at all. That book misses the whole point. The point is that since the Lord Jesus has gone to heaven, he has shared his life with men so that it is not what Jesus would do, it's what Jesus is doing.

That's what we're interested in in our study of the book of Acts. The continuing work of the Lord Jesus by his Spirit through his disciples. And I am selecting incidents from among the incidents in the book of Acts that, shall I trust, show us something of the movement of the purpose of God as it moves on to fulfillment.

Now, the book of Acts, as we noticed this morning, is but a fragment. You have to have the Gospels to make the book of Acts mean anything to you at all because it's anchored back in the Gospels. And it ends with the Apostle Paul in jail, or in prison anyway, in Rome.

And you might say this isn't a very promising forward movement of the purposes of God. They start out so well in the beginning of the book of Acts and the principal protagonist of Christianity is in jail by the end of the book. How are we making progress there? And as we pointed out this morning, the book of Acts is a fragment.

There's another book that follows. And that book tells of an established throne and he that sits upon the throne bringing into fulfillment and completion all the purposes of God. So the book of Acts is just a little bridge, a fragment of history with a lot of selected incidents for your consideration and mine so that we may learn the principles and the perils that are involved in the program God carries forward for men and women, for people.

Because God's program is a people's program. And since we're past this morning, we will not see Jesus anymore in the flesh. But we're going to see his disciples some more.

We're going to see them again and again and again. But we're not going to see the same disciples that are talked about in the gospel. We're not going to see the same people that we see in the beginning of the book of Acts.

Well, they're the same all right. They go by the same names. They've got the same dispositions, the same temperaments and all.

But they are different because they have been changed. And they've been changed by what we're going to consider this evening as we pick out an incident out of the book of Acts that is the greatest single incident that ever happened to men in human history. Chapter 2. Chapter 2 of the book of Acts.

Now before we get into chapter 2 and we start our reading, you'll be looking for it, we remember that the disciples were gathered together with one accord in a big room. They were steadfast in prayer. They were happy in their comradeship.

They were constant in their loyalty to the Lord Jesus. And this sounds great. This sounds like it would be a good assembly.

This sounds like about all you'd need for a group of the disciples of the Lord Jesus to have them of one accord, of one mind, steadfast in prayer, happy in their comradeship and constant in their loyalty. But we noticed this morning that the missing thing was that while they were gathered together that way, if that is where it had ended, they'd have been a select little club and 20 years later it would have been dead because they could not witness. They could do nothing to carry this forward.

And so the Lord Jesus had said to them, You just wait in Jerusalem. You don't try to do anything until you are endued with power from on high in the gift of the Holy Spirit which I will send. And so they are waiting in Jerusalem, incomplete, unable to do anything for God.

Although there are a lot of nice things you could say about them. Now let's read in 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 with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. This is as far as we need to go. We have read one of the most, probably the most remarkable thing that ever happened to men.

It doesn't take long to tell it. It's a wonderful, wonderful story. When the day of Pentecost was fully come, that was the time.

They, that is the disciples, about 120 of them, that had been living together and sharing the things they had in common. And where the room was, we don't know and it doesn't matter. Some think this was a room in the temple.

And this could be substantiated at least to the satisfaction of some people. But others don't believe so. They think it was an upper room where the disciples lived.

That doesn't matter. It doesn't matter where it was. But in the process of this event, there were two symbols given.

Two symbols given. Now, one of the things we must be careful of here is not to think that this wind was the Holy Spirit. In fact, there was no wind.

There was a sound as of a mighty rushing wind. There was a sound so they could hear. There were cloven tongues of fire so they could see, and the fire was not the Holy Spirit.

The fire was the symbol of the Holy Spirit. So they had an audio-visual symbol given to them of the reality which was the Holy Spirit which was given to them. Two symbols, one fact, and many tongues.

It says they speak with many tongues as an evidence of the fact that they had been given the Holy Spirit of God. And with that giving, a new day dawned in human history. God began something new in his work with men.

A new day dawned. This is the day we made reference to last evening, I think it was. The day about which Zechariah speaks.

The day about which Joel sings as he looks down the corridor of a century. The day that constituted the quest of Israel. The day toward which men longed and looked for millennia.

The day that God had promised had come. It had been looked for. It had been waited for.

It had been hoped for. There were types. There were shadows.

There were gleams of light. There were songs of hope in the Old Testament. There was expectation upon expectation, but until this moment, there was no realization.

It was at this point that the hopes of men reached realization when the Spirit of God was poured out upon men. And this constituted a new departure in the relationship that obtains between God and man. Now, one thing we want to be clear on, and that is that this new thing was not made necessary by the failures of the past.

We can sometimes, you know, we've gone through studies of the Word of God and we have been impressed by the fact that there seems to be declension all the time. Every dispensation, if that's not a bad word here, begins with so much hope and expectation, and then it seems to run out of power somehow, and there's more disappointment. And then they start up fresh again, and they run a while, and then sag.

And this has been the history of man in his relationship with God from the beginning. But that is not why this was made necessary. I mean, God was not, as it were, backed into a corner, and if he was going to do anything for men, he had to do something else than he'd done before.

Not in that sense. The failure of the past didn't make it necessary, but the accomplishments of the past did make it necessary and did make it possible. We read of the Lord Jesus that when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son made of a woman, born of a woman, made under the law.

When the fullness of the time was come, that could be said about this circumstance just as well as it could be said about the coming of the Lord Jesus. It happened at precisely the right time in human history. Everything in the Old Testament, everything in the Gospels, everything that goes before this that is preparatory to it, leads up to this wonderful event.

And I might observe that everything that's accomplished since goes back to this event. Now, there's two matters of importance that I would like for us to follow as we consider this this evening. One has to do with the new facts that followed Pentecost.

So, the Spirit was given. Well, what followed that? What's the significance of that? Why do I say it was such a big thing? What are the new facts that followed Pentecost? And the other, that I want us to consider, has to do with the limitations of the Pentecostal age. Now, that's our age.

Because from the time of the giving of the Spirit until now, the relationship obtaining between God and men has remained constant. God began something at Pentecost that is in motion now. That's why the book of Acts is significant to you and me.

This isn't something that just happened in history. This has a continuing element in it that involves us very much. And so, it's important that we know what the limitations of this Pentecostal age are.

Because it's such a wonderful event, you might think there were no limitations. But there are. Now, I want us to consider the new facts insofar as they concern Christ, insofar as they concern the church, and insofar as they concern the world.

Because this event, this giving of the Spirit of God, affected these three areas. Now, for us to know which facts are new, we have to know which facts are old. So, we'll review the old facts, the things we already know about Christ, and what are they? Well, of course, the great fact about Christ is the incarnation, that he came into the world.

That is a great fact. It happened before Pentecost. Another great fact about Christ is his exodus.

And by his exodus, I mean his crucifixion, his resurrection, and his ascension. Take these three together and think of this as his exodus. The exodus he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem that he discussed with Moses and Elijah.

Now, these were before Pentecost. These were old facts. These had to do with Jesus before Pentecost.

And, well, it's all summed up in John 16, 28. Let's turn to that. The Lord Jesus himself puts it very well there.

His words are better than anybody else's. John 16, 28. I came forth from the Father and am come into the world.

That's the incarnation. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father, and that's his exodus. Those are the two facts that we know about Christ prior to Pentecost.

They involve the mystery of his coming and his presence in human history. This is a great mystery. It is spoken of in one of the epistles as a mystery of godliness.

God was manifest in the flesh, believed on in the world, seen of angels, received up into glory. It involves the mystery of the cross beyond us, the victory of his resurrection, the glory of his ascension. All these things about the Lord Jesus constitute an exposition, a revealing of God to men.

These facts all had to do with the time before the giving of the Holy Spirit. This revelation was by incarnation, by coming into the world and going through the things he went through, he revealed God to men. And then, of course, redemption was wrought by his exodus, taking his death, his resurrection, and his ascension to be his exodus.

This is how he redeemed men. All right, that's before Pentecost. Now we come to Pentecost and the giving of the Holy Spirit and what becomes true of the Lord Jesus.

He is now in heaven. He has come back to visit men by the Spirit, and he has begun the administration of the redemption he wrought in his exodus in the lives of men. He's going to make it good in the lives of men.

It is not going to be simply an event in history. It's going to become a living reality in the lives of men and women. That's one of the new facts about the Lord Jesus that followed Pentecost.

It's going to be a working out of the changes that come into human life when they're brought into contact with God. And it's going to mean a multiplication of the revelation. Jesus came to reveal God, but he could

only reveal God in one place at one time while he was on earth.

He's going to multiply this, and he's going to reveal God around the world at the same time in the lives of men and women to whom he has given his Spirit. It's a multiplication of the thing that he did himself. That's a new fact.

That he's going no longer to be straightened by geography or by his physical being, but that now the new wonderful fact is that God is going to be revealed in a multiplied way through his people. Now, it is by the coming of the Spirit that the Lord Jesus made over to men the value of the cross and the virtue of the resurrection and the victory of his ascension. Now, what do I mean that he made these things over to men? What I mean is that it is now possible for men and women to say this, I am crucified with Christ.

Until the Holy Spirit came, nobody could say that in reality. He was crucified alone. But with the coming of the Holy Spirit into the human personality, there was such identification with himself that a man could now say, I am crucified with Christ.

And the crucified life in human experience became a reality. Tremendous thing. Oh, but that's not all, and thank God that's not all.

Some people get carried away with this crucified life business without going on to the rest of it. Yet he made over to men also the virtue of his resurrection. And men were able to live lives that they had never been able to live.

Now they had the power to live the life of God in human society. Never had that before. He made over to men the virtue of his resurrection.

And it can be said that we are to walk in newness of life. And he made over the glory of his ascension. Now it may be said of men that they set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth.

It was the giving of the Holy Spirit that accomplished these things in the lives of men and women. This has been going on ever since Pentecost. The enlarged opportunity for the life.

That's what Pentecost meant. No longer was he straightened. He was multiplied.

He is multiplied. And do you know where that life is to be seen today? It's to be seen in you. And it's to be seen in me.

It has been multiplied about fifty times in this room here at Park of the Palms tonight. And untold thousands and hundreds of thousands of times around the world tonight is enlarged opportunity through the giving of the Spirit of God. So Christ.

There are new facts about Christ that grew out of Pentecost. There are new facts about the church, too. But this is a little awkward to start talking about because, of course, there was no church before Pentecost.

So you say, well, all the facts are new. Well, that's true. But the church is made up of people.

And the word that we use, the word church, of course, comes from the old Greek idea of an ekklesia, which was an assembly of selected people in the community to do a specific piece of work in the Greek free cities. The free people, of course, half the people in those days were slaves. But the free people were

the selected, qualified people.

And they would belong. The free men in the town would belong to the town assembly. And they served in the town assembly for the welfare and the benefit of everybody else in the community.

That's the idea. That's what a church is. And that's what the Church of Jesus Christ is.

It is a group of selected, called-out people who have a specific thing to do for the welfare of others. But it's people. Now, the old facts about the people.

Well, at the Passover, for instance. The Passover was before Pentecost. The Lord Jesus was gathered with his disciples.

They were his friends, his comrades. They were his servants, too. He said, You call me Master and Lord and you do well for so I am.

So they were his servants. But you know, this relationship has changed altogether come Pentecost. Oh, they're still his friends.

They're still his servants. They're still his comrades and disciples. Sure.

Those relationships haven't been changed. They've been fulfilled. Before Pentecost, they were sentimentally one with him.

They were emotionally one with him. They shared his life in a sense, like you share the life of someone you love dearly, as a comrade, as a friend in the best sense. That's the way they shared his life before Pentecost.

And yet they were separate. They were distinct personalities. They were very close friends.

But that's about all. And then the Spirit came. Man, the new facts having to do with these friends are so simply overwhelming.

His actual life became their life so that it could be said, it is no longer I but Christ. And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. There is now a union that is a divine union.

And the life of the disciple and of the comrade and of the servant is the life of the Master. Not a separate thing. The same thing.

Well, what's the difference? I mean, how does this operate? Well, they're still disciples, sure. But they've got an altogether different vision than they had before. Why do they have a new vision? Why, because they see with His eyes, not their own eyes.

When they look at men now, they see men the way Jesus sees men. His friends now know that their suffering is His suffering, and His suffering is their suffering. His rejoicing is their rejoicing, and theirs is His, and the fight belongs to both of them because they're one.

And servants? Well, the servants aren't sent from Him anymore. It is He going, not Him sending them, but going Himself in them. Oh, man, this is a tremendous difference.

His going, His eyes, His voice, His love that is carried by the servants. Not a message from Him, but Himself. I hope you people, along with myself, are making application of this as I talk.

I'm talking about you because you are involved in Pentecost. We live in the Pentecostal age. We are the disciples, the servants, the friends of Jesus.

And His life is our life, and our life is His life. And this is what men are to see when they see you and me. They're to see Jesus.

They're to hear Jesus. That's what's involved in Pentecost. If that's not true, He hasn't multiplied Himself.

But He has multiplied Himself. I believe that in half an hour, these disciples knew more about the Lord Jesus than they'd known in all the years they'd walked with Him. Because now they felt the beat of His heart.

Now they saw through His eyes. Now they felt as He felt. Now they thought with His mind, let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

Oh, what a change, so far as the church is concerned. Instead of a nice collection of lovely people and loving friends, it is the multiplication of His own personality and His own life. Now there's some new facts that have to do with the world.

When Jesus came into the world, He was the unapprehended light, as John says. Light came into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. And they did not see the light, although it came into the world.

That was before Pentecost. And are you asking me is it any different since? You probably are. Let's check at John 16 again in verse 8. Well, we begin at the 7th verse, and I'll read this little section in here for you.

The Lord Jesus is talking about Pentecost. And He said, Nevertheless, I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away. It's better for you.

For if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you. But if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.

Of sin, because they believe not on me. Of righteousness, because I go to my Father and ye see me no more. Of judgment, because the Prince of this world is judged.

And so what is the new fact about the world that came at Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit? The world is to be convicted and to be reprov'd as it never was convicted and reprov'd before. What was there to convict the world before? Oh, there was the ethic and the life of Jesus Himself when He was here. But prior to that, what was to convict the world? But now that Jesus has come and has gone to His Father and has been rejected by the world, now what about the world? Jesus has multiplied Himself for the sake of the world.

He has multiplied the revelation of His grace and of His will to bless and of His power to save. Now what about the world? Now the world stands convicted. And we are in a very interesting stage in history, one of the places more psychiatrists around than you can shake a stick at.

I was reading in the magazine the other day that there's a building 50 stories high, I think it is, in New York City, and every office in it has a psychiatrist in it. You know, they really are multiplying these psychiatrists. You know what they're trying to do? By and large, they're trying to relieve people of their guilt complex.

They say people shouldn't feel this way. Something wrong with them. Well, there surely is something wrong with them.

But the Holy Spirit came to make people feel guilty. That was the purpose of His coming into the world so far as the world is concerned. To make people feel guilty.

To make them convicted of sin. Why? Because He just wanted to rub it in? No, indeed. Because who's going to call for salvation unless he knows he's lost? Unless a man knows he's guilty, he does not cry for pardon or for mercy.

And because God loves men, the Holy Spirit has come into the world and revealed the heart of God and the lives of His people to the world so that the world might be saved. How does He do this? Through the people, through the church. He convicts the world of sin and He reproves the world.

He keeps the pressure on the conscience. So there are these new facts. Now, there's not only a new conviction for the world, but there's a new constraint.

As the Lord Jesus has multiplied Himself in the world, in His people, what does this do? This reveals sin. You know how sin is revealed? By having it compared to the light. It is the light that shows up the sin.

And as the Lord Jesus, by the Spirit, has multiplied Himself in the earth, He has multiplied the sense of sin, the obviousness of it amongst men. So the new constraint is a light in the darkness. And what characterized the life of the Lord Jesus on earth? That He gave Himself for others.

We said the other day He could not stay indoors when there was a need outside. We pointed out the fact that this is the very essence of the Incarnation. God could not leave men alone and let them be lost.

And this is the Spirit of the Lord Jesus manifested in His people. And this is why men are saved today. Because through His people, through His church, this new constraint is brought into being.

And the sacrifice of men and women for the sake of others brings them to the Savior. Well, you know this. The whole mission project is based on this.

Because men and women have been willing to give up everything and go out for the sake of the lost. The love of Christ constraining them that men are one to the Savior. Well, so much for the new facts.

Now, what about the limitations of the Pentecostal age as far as Christ and the church and the world are concerned? Well, so far as the resources are concerned, they're limitless. We're talking about Christ now and the limitations of the Pentecostal age. His resources are limitless.

He is not straightened anymore. There is a perfect revelation and there is plenteous redemption in Christ. But this has to do with His resources.

What about His body? That was the thing that limited Him before. Well, you know, He's still limited in His body. Because He has ordained to work through men and He cannot win the ultimate victory save through the perfecting of the church.

It's the only way that Christ can win the victory. And He is limited in this by you and me. He seeks to perfect us for the blessing of other men.

And this is the work of the Holy Spirit within us. He seeks to conform us to the image of the Lord Jesus and carry us forward in the program to the accomplishment of His purpose. What about the church? Well, its resources are limitless too.

Christ is the resource of the church and in Him we have everything. And in Him we can do all things. But again, the body is limited.

The church can't do everything at once. There is growth and development that is necessary. One person can't go to all the world.

It takes a lot of people to do this. And this isn't the church's fault. It's just inherent in the situation that as Christ has multiplied Himself in people it takes multiplication and multiplication to reach out to reach everybody.

And it's slow and it's sometimes agonizing. And in the process, sometimes we grieve the Spirit and in so doing we cripple the life. Sometimes we quench the Spirit and in so doing we stifle the service of the body of Christ.

Those are the limitations of this age. They have to do with you and me. What about the limitations of the world? Well, the limitations of the world so far as its resources are concerned, there are no limitations.

They turn to Christ. In Christ the world may have social well-being, political emancipation, and racial uplift. As men are brought into contact with God, a solution is found to the ills of mankind.

It's the only way. But that way it is done. What's the limitation for the world? Well, one of the limitations for the world is the church's failure.

Some people are not saved. They have no idea how to be. They do not even know there is a way to be.

And from what they've seen, they're not interested. All of these have to do with the failure of the church, which limits the world. And, of course, the world is greatly limited in its own resistance.

Light has come into the world, but men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil and they will not have this man to reign over them. The world is limited in its own resistance to the gospel. So there are new facts in the world today because of Pentecost, and you and I are involved in those new facts.

There are new limitations to the age in which we live, and these limitations are our limitations. There are no limitations in Christ, and yet we're here to carry forward the program of the Savior. And the pity of it is that we think Pentecost is past.

Do you think Pentecost is past? Do you think of Pentecost as a historical event, an episode in history? Is that all it is? Oh, you all say no. No, no. Do you believe there's any lessening of the resources today over the resources that were available at Pentecost? Or do you really believe that the same Spirit that came upon those 120 disciples in the upper room, that same Spirit can fill your personality tonight in such a way that all of the new facts become bright, shining things for the salvation of men? Do you believe that? That's the Word of God.

And that's why Pentecost, who is the greatest thing in the history of humankind, it drew us into fellowship with the life and the work of Almighty God. Is the world limited in us? Are men lost because we have failed to witness? Then Christ is limited in us. We do not have the fullness of His Spirit.

They were all filled with the Spirit of God. And you and I tonight, down here in Florida, in Park at the Pond, in this lovely place, gathered together in this sweet fellowship, each one of us and all of us together may know the fullness of the Spirit of God and go on to things beyond our thinking for His glory. Oh, that God would help us to believe that.

Oh, God, our God, what a God Thou art. Thou has shared Thyself with us. We are not only human.

Thou has given Thy life to us. Oh, fill us, fill us with Thy Spirit. And by Thy Spirit, Lord, help us to fill up the measure of the needs of men for Jesus' sake.

Amen.

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