

Holy Spirit and the Crisis of Pentecost - Part 6

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Holy Spirit brings a new and mighty registration of God upon the world, making God personally, actually, directly, and immediately present.

Duration: 53:51

Scripture: Genesis 1:3, Matthew 28:19, Acts 8:29-30, Acts 8:35, Acts 8:37

Topics: "Pentecost"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus, a highly educated and influential religious leader. Jesus emphasizes the need for being born again as the starting point for understanding heavenly things. The speaker highlights the clash between the forces of evil and the church, but reassures believers that God ultimately has control over the situation. The sermon also touches on the separation of heaven and earth and the expansion of God's work throughout the world.

Transcript

The crisis of Pentecost and the significance of the Holy Spirit. We are much too far advanced now, much too much ground to do anything adequate in the sense of review and synopsis, but for the sake of our friends who have joined us now for the first time, I will as quickly as possible indicate where we are today. Not going back further than this morning.

Today we are seeing that what the book which goes by the name of Genesis in the Old Testament is to the material creation. As the book of beginnings and a multiplicity of beginnings, the book of Acts in the New Testament is to the new creation in Christ Jesus. In the former, spiritual principles are wrapped up in natural ways and means.

In the latter, those principles are brought out nakedly. Here we have the spiritual principles of all God's works and God's purpose laid bare. The new creation follows along the line of the old in principle from step to step, stage to stage.

And this morning we considered three of those movements in the old as illustrating and representing those in the new creation in Christ. We began with the first words, in the beginning God. And we spent some time with that in the book of the Acts.

That the book of the Acts is a new intervention of God in the history of this world. And what we have there is the encounter with God, not just in material things, symbols and representations and figures, but in direct spiritual reality in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our emphasis in that connection was laid upon this, that the coming of the Holy Spirit, the presence of the Holy Spirit, the advent of the Holy Spirit, the meaning of Pentecost is to bring a new and mighty registration of God upon this world.

And that that is not only a statement of truth, it is a test of life. A test of whether we individually and collectively, both locally and universally, are really living in the good of the advent of the Holy Spirit. Is the impact, the registration, the effect, the influence, the sense that God is present.

God is here. God is with us. So it was in this second Genesis, men thought they were dealing with men.

So they threw them into prison. They martyred them. They persecuted them.

They thought they were dealing with a new movement, religion, system and cult. They treated it as such. And then they encountered God.

And found, as Gamaliel said, that they were not fighting men, and not fighting a system of truth. They were fighting against God. The very first significance, then, of the new creation in Christ is, God is here, not in forms, not just in instrumentalities as of the Old Testament, but is here personally, actually, directly, immediately.

God is here. And we have to reckon with God. But we also have to enjoy God.

It works both ways. That is the first thing in both creations. The beginning, God.

The second thing we noted and dwelt upon was the brooding Spirit. The Spirit of God brooded upon the face of the water. We pointed out that it was not just an abstract, indefinite brooding.

It was in purpose, in anticipation, in what we might call attention, that something had got to happen. Something must be done with this situation. This is not what God intended.

This state of things is contrary to the mind of God. And the Spirit is there in that mood, brooding, hovering over something that can never satisfy God. We come to the book of the Acts.

We have a period, may seem a brief one, ten days. The end of the forty, when, it's a kind of parenthesis, the atmosphere is full of expectation. Something is going to happen.

Something must happen. We are tarrying for it to happen. Not just being told that something would happen, then going for a walk, waiting for it to happen, but tense, concentrated.

Spirit is brooding. Going to be something. We spent quite a time with that, in what it meant.

And then we went on to the third thing. The divine feared, and God said, let light be. And there was light.

And coming over to the book of the Acts, we saw how with the day of Pentecost and the advent of the Holy Spirit, the darkness, the darkness even over the minds of those present. For indeed they had been fumbling in the dark, in the mystery, in the perplexity, wondering what all this meant, this crucifixion and death and resurrection. It was all so strange.

It needed an explanation, a mighty explanation. It needed to come into the real meaning of it all. And there they were.

And the Spirit came, and immediately, the first thing that happened was that the Bible flew open with new light. Peter, standing up with the eleven, took up his Bible. It was a new book.

Never seen before, he could never have behaved as he had behaved if he had seen the meaning of the cross, that by the foreknowledge and predeterminate counsel of God, all that had happened. Now he says it. He's got the inner side of the cross that he'd never seen, nor he could never have denied his Lord if he'd known and seen that.

So he takes up his Bible with Joel and with David, and in that wonderful discourse, he opens up the scriptures. As the Lord had opened them to the disciples, he is doing that now under the rays of this new light which had broken. God had said, let light be, and light was.

Well that carries very much more with it than we are now repeating. I'm only indicating the lines we've taken. Now this afternoon we'll go as far as we can with more of this.

Come to the fourth great fact. In this parallel movement, the fourth fact was the separation of heaven and earth. That was one of the first acts of God.

Heaven and earth had lost their distinctiveness. They were all mixed up in the chaos. You could not tell which was which.

Heaven had come down and enshrouded the earth. The earth had become beclouded. It's all there.

One indefinite mess. And the Lord said, we must separate these two things. We must clearly define these two realms.

And we must put each in its place. What belongs to heaven must be put there. What belongs to earth must be put there.

And there must be a firmament between. A dividing sphere or realm. Division between heaven and earth.

We come over to the book of the Acts and to the New Testament. May I just here say, by way of getting your minds clear on a matter, that the four Gospels which are bound into our volume of the New Testament before Acts were not written before Acts. The point is that we have a lot in the Gospels which is illustrative in the life of the Lord Jesus of the spiritual things in the book of the Acts.

Now you're going to see that, at least in one connection, in a moment. Here, then, with this movement, this act, this defining act of God, the door opens and there comes in all the teaching that we have in the New Testament on the difference between the heavenly and the earthly. If you like, between the natural and the spiritual mind.

And you, my dear friends, I'm quite sure, realize to some degree, a great, great deal of trouble for want of discrimination between those two things. Putting of those two things apart and into the place to which they belong and knowing what belongs to this realm and what belongs to that realm. There must be, in the ordaining and ordering and act of God, a firmament or an expanse between heaven and earth.

Until that is so, it's still confusion. It's still confusion. The inability to distinguish and to discriminate here is the cause of almost untold trouble and difficulty.

A great example is in the third chapter of the Gospel by John. A wonderful illustration of this very thing. Nicodemus.

Nicodemus. What was the final summing up by the Lord of his talk with Nicodemus? In what way did it all head up? What was the verdict? That the Lord passed finally upon Nicodemus. If I have told you earthly things and you've not understood, what if I should tell you heavenly? That is a summing up of everything.

Here is a man with a great deal of intelligence, a great deal of education, a great deal of influence in the earth, even religiously. A man who would know his Bible, the Old Testament, very thoroughly. A man who would be fully acquainted with all the movements of history, especially the history of his own people, Israel.

A man who is a representative of the fullest of what is earthly in a religious way. Humbling in the dark, wandering in the shadows, feeling out and groping for something like a blind man. Jesus in speaking to him about being born from above as the fundamental necessity for the beginning of understanding of heavenly things, says in effect, these are two realms and you've got them all mixed up.

You're all mixed up, all in a muddle. You're in the dark. Nicodemus, until there takes place something in you from heaven, a new birth, that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit, until that latter takes place, you will not have a glimpse or a glimmer of the meaning of heaven.

There's an example. There are, of course, many others. Many others.

When you come into the book of the Acts, you've got them. Case after case, of men who had inherited and been brought up in the fullness of the old order, and the old teaching, who are completely in the dark. The Ethiopian eunuch had been up to Jerusalem, to the temple, to the very headquarters of all that.

Being up, no doubt, as he quite evidently was, a seeker. A seeker. A man in quest of something.

Leaving Jerusalem and returning, having not found what he went for. Still a man in the dark. Spirit takes action.

That's the focal point. The spirit takes action. The Holy Spirit.

The spirit said unto Philip, go, join yourself to this charity. Now note what happens. The man was reading the prophecies of Isaiah, chapter 53.

He's got it. He's got the Bible. He's got, what you might call, the very heart of things, so far as the letter is concerned.

Philip, by the Spirit, says, understandest thou what thou readest? That's the point. All the difference between reading the Bible and understanding what you're reading. In the light, the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Two different things. Two different worlds. You may read the Bible and be in one world, and then you may read it again and be in another world altogether.

The poor fellow in the dark says, how can I except somebody teach me? Taking up the same scripture, Philip preached unto him, Jesus. And the Holy Spirit shot in and created the space between. Put things where they belong.

Gave this wonderful revelation. Philip must have taken him a long way. Must have taken him a long way with Isaiah 53.

I doubt whether ever you have heard a sermon on believer's baptism preached on Isaiah 53. Philip evidently did that. For spontaneously, the man said, without any reference in the narrative to baptism, here is water.

What does it mean to be baptized? Philip had evidently instructed him that that one of Isaiah 53 had died for him and asked him. Representing him in death and in burial under the judgment of God must have taken him a long way. And the man evidently, although it's not said, must have said, oh I see, I see.

I've been all mixed up over this thing. I've been all in a fog over this. Now I see.

It's clear. Heavenly things have become real. The things of heaven.

Now we're clear to him. You see the point without my dwelling long upon it? The condition of Nicodemus, or this man, or any other, and perhaps a more outstanding example of this very thing was Saul of Tarsus. Any man, any man knew the earthly side of things.

Religious. He did. He did.

He's a man in the dark, isn't he? He afterward repeatedly said things which clearly indicated how he knew that until heaven broke in, he was a man in the dark. He said, it pleased God to reveal his son in me. It pleased God to reveal his son in me.

There's only another way of saying when God broke in, when Christ broke in, he put things in their right place and showed me that all that, all that was simply after all earthly knowledge. Religious it might be. It was all earthly knowledge.

It was simply my natural ability to handle and deal with the word of God and what a mess I made of it all. But now by cutting in between the natural and the spiritual and putting them in their place, what a tremendous difference it makes. One is lifeless, the other is living.

Now, what does this mean? Well, just this. That a mark of true spirituality, which is only a thing of a life governed by the Holy Spirit, is this ability to discriminate between things that are earthly and of man and things which are heavenly and of God. And having said that, dear friends, I have said a momentous thing, if I may say it.

A far more important thing than I fear you may recognize because it's just here that there is so much of the trouble. There is, listen, there is as big a difference here amongst Christians as there is between non-Christians and Christians. Christianity today is very largely divided between what is called liberals and conservatives, modernists and fundamentalists.

They claim that these two are poles asunder. Well, maybe. But what I'm saying is this, that there is just as big a difference between many evangelical or fundamentalist Christians and spiritual people.

Because you believe in the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the atoning death, the bodily resurrection, the coming again personally, the inspiration of the scriptures, so on, that does not make you a spiritual man or woman. You can have all that and be a most unspiritual person in life and in behavior. Yes, you may be, to use the term fundamentalist of the most rabid type, and still be an unsanctified and unspiritual man or woman.

There is a big, big gap even there between the earthly and the heavenly. And one of the things that makes for a spiritual person or characterizes a spiritual person is the ability to discriminate between the things that differ. That's a Pauline phrase, isn't it? The things that differ.

And his whole first letter to the Corinthians is based upon that. What chaos, what a mess occurring, what confusion, what contradiction, what ineffectiveness, what weakness, what shame. But the natural mind had come into the church and had taken hold of the things spiritual and brought them down there to that level.

The whole effort of the apostle is to bring the cross in, to cut clean between the natural mind and the spiritual mind. He says, he that is spiritual discerneth all things. Do you grasp this? Really, this is what happened on the day of Pentecost with these men.

They were very earthly up to that point, although very devoted religiously. But the Holy Spirit cleft away between soul and spirit, between the earthly and the heavenly, between the natural and the spiritual. And if you will take this as a key, you will find so much in your New Testament.

The Lord Jesus used the parabolic method because of this very thing. He said to his disciples, unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to the rest it is not given. Insight, discernment, understanding, discrimination, a faculty, Holy Spirit given to know really what is heavenly and what is not heavenly, what is earthly.

Today, Christianity is an awful mix up of the world with religious things, with Christian things. The two things have overshadowed one another. And most Christians don't know the difference.

Have I said enough? Does that matter? You see, the great principle enunciated at the beginning in the material is here laid bare and enforced in the spiritual, in the dispensation of the spirit. Under the aegis of the spirit, the government of the spirit, there is always a clear distinction, discrimination and division between what is heavenly and what is earthly. And if you haven't got it in your life, you have no testimony.

You are mixed up with what is here as a Christian, you know quite well. There is no impact from your life upon your surroundings. You are neutralized as things were before God separated between heaven and earth.

Now that may be all very mysterious to some of you, especially the younger ones. But if you can't understand it and grasp it, don't just dismiss it as of no meaning. If you are going on in a life in the spirit, you will learn, the spirit will tell you in your own heart that here, that belongs to a realm to which you don't belong now, the child of God.

Leave it alone. Leave it alone. He will also say, look here, this is the thing that is to your good, to your profit.

This is where you should go, where you should be, what you should do for your spiritual well-being. He will be making the difference for you in your own heart. Oh, for lives and churches so governed by the spirit that there is no mixture and confusion and thereby neutralizing of real effectiveness.

Well, that's too long on one thing, isn't it? Let's come to the next. And I think probably I just have to mention this and pass on because I want to say much more about it probably in the evening. The next thing that comes in the order, the next thing that comes in the order, the all-governing fact, the placing of man in his position.

I will just mention it. You will recall that man was the crown and the center of everything in the creative intention of God. In the New Testament it's like that.

May I leave it for the time being so as not to spoil it for want of time because it is of such primary importance. While I go on to the next thing in this movement, we've got so far. Man is in his place.

The man in his place is the key to everything. Next, the adversary. Now, you see, it's very difficult not to stay with that other thing in the book of the Acts.

But it's perfectly clear that the man is in his place when you come into Acts. The man is in his place. The center and the key of everything is that.

We leave him there for the moment. Then, the adversary. The adversary, as his name implies, the adverse.

Adverse to all this of God. To God? To God. Adverse to light.

Adverse to order. The God of confusion. Adverse to everything.

And concentrating his adversity upon the man. Well, that's perfectly clear. The man is in his place.

The Holy Spirit comes and constitutes, in the beginning, this 120, a corporate expression of the man. Christ in corporate representation and expression. Paul puts it, one new man.

The next movement is against the man in heaven and the man here as represented in the corporate company. Move to destroy. Move to spoil.

The move to ruin the new creation as he did the old. And what a movement. The book of the Acts is, as you well know, just one long and very full account of the many-sided and malicious activities of the adversary.

It's almost fascinating to watch the servant, his movements, sometimes subtle, coming round as an angel of light, sometimes poisoning to strike with his venom. But there he is. Watch him.

Right up to this beautiful, beautiful point. And they continue steadfastly in the apostles' teaching, in fellowship, in breaking of bread, in prayers. The adversary says, I'll destroy that.

I'll ruin that. I'll spoil it. And Ananias and Sapphira become his tools.

We have a terrible story of breaking into that circle, that fellowship, that organic life of something calculated to disrupt and disintegrate, bringing death, death, death, striking of death right into the heart. And I'm not going to take you through the book. You know it.

But you think again. You see the adversary at work on this new creation, to bring it to ruin. He seems to stop at nothing.

All right. But what do we see? What do we see? You see, as we said, here is the encounter with God. Oh, thank God, dear friends, that in this dispensation, God has committed himself, involved himself, has come into his church to meet this force of evil.

And although the church will feel the blows, believers will know the pressure of this spiritual antagonism. The upshot of every onslaught, the upshot of every onslaught is that the Lord has the situation and the issue in his hands. I'm tempted to take up instances of it.

The book is full of it. Through that satanically energized and inspired Herod, Satan struck at the church, struck at a very, very vital point in the church when he struck at Peter. But heaven is interested in this.

And Herod and the one who inspires and energizes him has got to reckon with God. The issue is all the worse for Herod. But the book results into this.

God moves. Satan counter-moves. And God makes the final move every time.

That is because God is involved in this matter with his people. God has committed himself to his church. Pentecost means that.

The coming of the Spirit just means God has committed himself. God has come out. And God has in effect and in act said, this is my business.

This is my affair. Touch this, you touch me. Fight this, you fight me.

And who shall say, difficult as it may be viewing the whole, nevertheless who shall say that that initial, that original interference of Satan in the garden was not taken hold of by God to bring in something greater than ever would have been perhaps. And that something greater is grace. Grace.

Man had never fallen to Satan. Grace would never have been in the dictionary. I say it's difficult to say that in the light of all that grace means.

All that there is that demands grace, nevertheless, grace is the most wonderful thing that has ever been revealed. And it can only come by Satan's interference. It's a way of putting things.

But it's the key to so much in this book of the Acts. Suffering, yes, Satan made them suffer. But they learned marvelous heavenly lessons through their sufferings.

And they grew wonderfully spiritually through Satan's actions. The apostle who was one of those in this book, who was an outstanding instance himself of this very thing, could write later on, I would have you know, that the things which befell me had fallen out for the furtherance of the gospel. You consider the things that befell him, you can see Satan's hand very clearly at work for his undoing, for his destruction.

But they have fallen out for the furtherance of the gospel. All right, the Holy Spirit is in charge. Now, dear friends, with one brief word on one other thing, we'll leave it for this afternoon.

The next thing in this movement was the great fact of expansion. See, it's a movement. The next thing in the Genesis record is Satan has interfered and has done his evil work, but he has not defeated God's end.

A wonderful expansion is going to take place over the earth. The horizon presses back. You can see here far distances, things open up which are far beyond the limits of that garden and its wall or its hedge.

And out from that concentration of divine work, the whole earth will be filled, replenished, provided for. Fruit will expand, will increase and will grow, and to the end, severe. If it was, from one standpoint, a kind of breakdown, and from another, it was a breaking open.

When you come to the book of the Acts, you can see that so clearly in spiritual reality. Here is Jerusalem, and here is Satan's onslaught upon the disciples. In the killing of Stephen, it seems that his venom was most poisonous against Stephen.

Through those whom the Lord Jesus himself said were of their father, the devil. Here, of your father, the devil. He was a murderer.

Here he is. Through them, his children, showing his awful animosity, his spleen, his hatred, they gnashed upon him with their teeth, and stubbed their ears, and ran upon him. What a pit, devilish.

Yes, does it look like calamity, a tragedy, an end? Then they that were scattered abroad upon the death of Stephen went everywhere preaching the word. Jerusalem smashed, but Jerusalem scattered. It's just wonderful, it's almost romantic.

Even the apostles were putting limits upon things. Poor James had proposed his covenant of the Nazarite vow to hold things within certain limits. They had for themselves no intention of breaking down the wall of Israel.

The Holy Spirit had, and precipitated it, firstly by the very death of Stephen, scattered them all abroad. And then, through Peter himself, a way up to Caesarea, the house of Cornelius. Poor Peter was in the most embarrassed position over that.

But he said, who was I? Who was I? To resist the Holy Ghost? The Holy Spirit's got this matter in hand despite everything. Unto the ends of the earth, the Lord had said, not Jerusalem alone, not Samaria in addition, and not even all Judea, but unto the uttermost parts of the earth. The Lord had said that.

They were tardy, and Satan was opposed, but the Holy Spirit had got the matter in hand. And so it was. The book of Acts is divided into two main sections.

Up to chapter 12, it is the establishment of the church in Palestine, Jerusalem, and throughout. From chapter 12 on, it's the uttermost parts of the earth. Right to Rome.

This is the Acts of the Holy Spirit. Now, dear friends, you see the application, the implication, significance of the Holy Spirit. You can never be merely local, parochial, narrow, small in your view and vision and interest and concern if you're a man of the Spirit.

No less a range, a narrower horizon than the whole of that for which God appointed his Son as heir of all things. No less than that can be your concern if you're under the government of the Holy Spirit. And if you are really like that, if we are really like that, things will happen.

We'll not have to try and make them happen, organize to get them to happen. They will happen. The Lord has this thing in hand.

All that he needs is to have us in hand, and utterly in hand. We need not worry. All our problems, all our difficulties, everything giving us trouble will be solved when the Holy Spirit really has full charge of us and of everything.

The work will go on, and we will leave it there for the present.

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