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When the Day of Pentecost was Fulfilled

Acts 2

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Luke opens the second chapter of Acts writing, “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in the same place.” [Page 1081 in the pew Bibles]. “When the day of Pentecost had *come*—or some translations say *arrived*. The old King James is better: “When the day of Pentecost was *fully come*.” Or it might be even better to say, “When the day of Pentecost was *fulfilled*.” The Greek word can mean come or arrive, but it has a powerful sense of filling and fulfilment and I think that’s particularly important here. First, this is the day that the church was *filled full* of God’s presence and truly became his living temple, but second, it was also the day when the promises of God contained within this ancient festival were finally *fulfilled*. It’s about the fulfilment of God’s promises to his people.

You see, Pentecost was one of the great festivals God told his people to observe when he gave them the *torah*. It was a harvest festival, when the people would bring the firstfruits of their grain harvest as offerings to the Lord. But it was also a commemoration of the giving of *torah*. The Passover marked Israel’s deliverance from her slavery in Egypt and then fifty days later, Israel met the Lord at Mt. Sinai. There he gave her his law and established his covenant with her. You could say that Pentecost was the day that marked Israel’s formal creation as a nation—when the Lord had said, “I will be your God and you will be my people.” And every year, for over a thousand years, the people took their grain

offerings to the temple in Jerusalem, laid them before the Lord, and remembered who he was and who they were and they recalled his promises, while looking forward in hope to the day those promises would be *fulfilled*. So when Luke writes, “When the day of Pentecost was fulfilled,” we should hear something powerful in that. Just as Jesus fulfilled the Passover once and for all in his death and resurrection, God is going to fulfil the ancient festival of Pentecost once and for all.

Brothers and Sisters, this is important, because ever since John Wesley, there’s been a powerful tendency to see Pentecost more as a stage of personal spiritual growth than as the once-and-for-all fulfilment of God’s promise happening within the great story of God and his people. A hundred and twenty-five years ago, a group of Christians in Los Angeles had an unusual spiritual experience that needed an explanation. They explained it as an end-times renewal of “Pentecost” and the Pentecostal movement was born—a movement that taught—and in most places still today—teaches that while every Christian *ought* to experience Pentecost and be baptised into the Holy Spirit, it’s a second event, a second blessing that follows a person’s conversion and that many never receive—and those who never received it include virtually every believer between the First Century church and the birth of the Pentecostal movement in 1901. This highlights the danger of interpreting scripture in light of our experiences. Instead, we need to let the scriptures do the talking and understand our experiences in light of them.

Because just as every single man or woman who has been united to Jesus the Messiah by faith is a full recipient of the benefits of his fulfilment of the Passover, just so every single man or woman who has been united to Jesus the Messiah by faith is *also* a full recipient of the benefits of his fulfilment of Pentecost. The church—

the whole church, not just some part of it that began 125 years ago—is *pentecostal*. It takes a lifetime to learn to live into both of these realities, but to separate them or to say, as some have, that you have to earn baptism in the Spirit through the process of sanctification is to horribly misunderstand the scriptures and the story they tell. I have more to say about that, but let’s get straight into that story as Luke tells it and, especially, as Peter will explain it. So, again, this is Acts 2:

“When the day of Pentecost was fulfilled, they [that’s the disciples] were all together in the same place. [Probably, the upper room where they had eaten the Last Supper.] Suddenly there came from heaven a noise like the sound of a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then tongues, seemingly made of fire, appeared to them, moving apart and coming to rest on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other language as the Spirit gave them words to say.”

This is the fulfilment of God’s promises to come and dwell with his people. After generations upon generations, millennia upon millennia of sin separating humanity from God, this is God’s homecoming. Jesus’ death as a perfect sacrifice for sin washed his people clean, it purified them. It made them fit and prepared them to be God’s temple—the holy place where he will dwell. And now he’s sent his Spirit to take up his dwelling in this new temple.

It’s also a moment of covenant renewal—again, fulfilling God’s promises to Israel. That’s why the imagery of Passover and Sinai are so important here. In his ascension, Jesus is like Moses going up the mountain and at Passover, like Moses returning with the law and God establishing a covenant with his people, this time God sends down his Spirit to establish a new covenant with this renewed Israel. And this time it’s not an

external law carved on stone tablets, but God's own Spirit indwelling, renewing, regenerating and writing his law of love on their very hearts. Hearts of stone made hearts of flesh.

And this fulfilment of God's promises, this covenant renewal, this new temple are all part of the answer to Jesus' prayer that it may be on earth as it is in heaven. In his ascension, Jesus took a bit of earth—our humanity—to heaven, and on Pentecost he sent to earth, to dwell with us, the Spirit—a bit of heaven. And that Spirit sent by Jesus, the new Adam, breathes the life of God into the new humanity. Brothers and Sisters, between the Old Testament imagery that God draws on in doing this amazing thing and the careful choice of words Luke uses to describe it, we ought to see a powerful image here of new creation.

And new creation doesn't exist simply for our sake. New creation began with Jesus and now it's come to his people, but it's not meant to stay with them. When he ascended, Jesus told his disciples that they would carry this good news throughout Judea and Samaria and eventually to the whole earth. Once empowered by his Spirit, their mission would be, not only to live out this new creation, but to go out with the announcement that Jesus is Lord and that world belongs to him. And right here we get a sense of that dominion as these one-hundred-twenty disciples begin to unexpectedly speak in other languages. Why? Look at verse 5:

“There were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem at that time. When they heard this noise they came together in a crowd. They were deeply puzzled, because every single one of them could hear them speaking in his own native language. They were astonished and amazed.”

Thanks to the Exile, Jews were spread out across the known world, but Pentecost was one of those feasts

where everyone returned to Jerusalem. So there's an international crowd in the city and this work of the Spirit gets their attention. Luke goes on in verse 7:

“These men who are doing the speaking are all Galileans, aren't they,” they said. “So how is it that each of us can hear them in our own mother tongues? There are Parthians here, and Medes, Elamites, and people who live in Mesopotamia, Judaea, Cappadocia...[The international list is a long one. Jews and proselytes (converts), from the known world.]...We can hear them telling us about the mighty works of God—in our own languages!”

Notice about this gift of tongues: It was a gift of known languages. The speech was intelligible. And it wasn't for any kind of spiritual benefit of the speakers. This was a miracle—a first work of the Spirit—to *announce what God was accomplishing (or fulfilling!) through Jesus and the Spirit and through this renewed Israel*—what we call “the church”. And Luke says they were all “astonished and perplexed.” “What does it all mean?” they were asking each other. But some sneered. “They're full of new wine,” they said. Then Peter got up, with the eleven. He spoke to them in a loud voice.”

None of the disciples was expecting this. They were expecting something. Jesus had told them to go back to Jerusalem and to wait. So they did. They waited and they prayed. Like I said last week, these were men steeped in the scriptures. Combine that with patience and prayer and understanding will come. And despite not expecting this exact situation, Peter immediately understands what's going on through the lens of the scriptures, of Israel's story, and of God's promises. And so—verse 14—Peter says to them, “Men of Judaea! All of you staying here in Jerusalem! There's something you have to know. Listen to what I'm saying. These people aren't drunk, as you imagine. It's only nine o'clock in

the morning! No, this is what the prophet Joel was talking about when he said, ‘In the last days, declares God, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy; your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams; Yes, even on slaves, men and women alike, will I pour out my Spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy. And I will give signs in the heavens above, and portents on earth beneath, blood and fire and clouds of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and glorious day. And then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”

Joel's prophecy was a prophecy of covenant renewal. Back at the beginning—sort of the first Pentecost, if it helps to think of it that way—before Israel entered the promised land, Moses reiterated the covenant to the people. If they would be the holy people the Lord had set them apart to be, if they would keep his law, if they would give him their allegiance and not worship other gods, he would dwell with them and bless them in the land. But if they refused to do these things, he would curse them and eventually exile them—because an unholy people cannot live in God's presence. And, of course, exile is precisely what happened. And even when the people of Judah returned from their exile in Babylon, even after they'd rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple, it still felt an awful like the exile wasn't really over. Judah was ruled by pagan gentiles. The Lord's presence had never returned to the temple. And so they hoped in the promises the Lord had made to one day renew his covenant. Through Isaiah, through Ezekiel, through Jeremiah, through Joel the Lord had promised. He would not let his people languish in exile forever. One day he would come and forgive their sins and their idolatry, one day he would come and fix their broken hearts, giving them hearts of flesh instead of hearts

of stone; breathing new life into dead, dry bones; pouring out his Spirit to make Israel new. And in that rushing wind, in the tongues of fire, as he and his friends suddenly found themselves speaking other languages Peter recognised the words God had spoken through Joel. This was the day. Through Jesus and the Spirit, the God of Israel was renewing his covenant, through Jesus and the Spirit he'd returned to dwell again with his people: men and women, young and old, slave and free. Judgement was coming soon on the unrepentant, but for those who called on the name of the Lord—on Jesus the Messiah—there was renewal. And so Peter announces Joel's promise to Israel: "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

And then he does something astounding. We're so used to hearing it that we might not even give it a thought, but Peter now takes this passage from Joel that was about the Lord, about Yahweh, about the God of Israel and he makes it about Jesus. Look at verse 22: "You men of Israel, listen to this. Jesus of Nazareth was a man marked out for you by God through the mighty works, signs, and portents which God performed through him right here among you, as you all know. He was handed over in accordance with God's determined purpose and foreknowledge—and you used people outside the law to nail him up and kill him. But God raised him from the dead! Death had its painful grip on him; but God released him from it, because it wasn't possible for him to be mastered by it. This you see, is how David speaks of him: "I set the Lord before me always; because he is at my right hand, I won't be shaken. So my heart was happy, and my tongue rejoiced, and my flesh, too, will rest in hope. *For you will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will you allow your holy One to see corruption.* You showed me the path of life; you filled me with gladness in your presence."

Peter's quoting from Psalm 16. What's that got to do with any of this. Well, he goes on: "Men and Brothers, I can surely speak freely to you about the patriarch David. He died and was buried and his tomb is here with us to this day. He was of course a prophet and he knew that God had sworn an oath to set one of his own physical offspring on his throne. He foresaw the Messiah's resurrection and spoke about him "not being left in Hades," and about his flesh "not seeing corruption." [So here's his point.] This is the Jesus we're talking about. God raised him from the dead and all of us here are witnesses to the fact. Now he's been exalted to God's right hand; and what you see and hear is the result of the fact that he is pouring out the Holy Spirit, which had been promised, and which he has received from the Father." So Peter's explaining to them that Jesus, in his resurrection, has fulfilled the messianic prophecy in Psalm 16 and what they're seeing happening in the wind, the tongues of fire, and the other languages is the evidence of Jesus' exaltation to his throne. And in the same way that Jesus' resurrection has fulfilled Psalm 16, his ascension is fulfilling Psalm 110.

Peter goes on in verse 34: "David, after all, did not ascend into the heavens. This is what he says: 'The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, until I place your enemies underneath your feet.' So the whole house of Israel must know this for a fact: God has made him Lord and Messiah, this Jesus, the one you crucified." Again, what they're seeing is the proof that God is vindicating the claims of Jesus to be Israel's Messiah. Jesus fulfilled God's promises when he rose from the dead, he fulfilled God's promises when he ascended into heaven, and now he's fulfilling God's promises in pouring out God's Spirit, now seen and heard in the wind, the flames, and the tongues. Again, God is renewing his covenant as he promised.

Luke goes on in verse 37: "When they heard this, they were cut to the heart. "Brothers," they said to Peter and the other apostles, "what shall we do?" "Repent!" replied Peter. "Be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah, so that your sins can be forgiven and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and for your children, and for everyone who is far away, as many as the Lord our God will call."

Notice—this is important—even though, yes, it is individuals who do the repenting, one by one, what Peter is calling for is national repentance. Israel must repent—from sin, yes, but most of all from her rejection of Jesus as Messiah. That's why Peter puts so much weight on how all that's happened is proof of Jesus' messiahship. Jesus had warned over and over that if Israel would not repent, if Israel insisted on rejecting him as Messiah—and Jesus put this rejection in terms of idolatry—judgement would come on Israel and this time it would be permanent. The Romans would destroy Jerusalem and the temple and the people would be exiled, not for seventy years, not for 490 years, but forever. As an aside, Paul will pick up this same theme with the Athenians in 17:31. As salvation was for the Jew first and then for the gentiles, just so would God's judgement be. He would judge Israel for their idolatry and then come for the gentiles. So Peter urges his fellow Jews to repent of their idolatry, to put their faith in Jesus as Messiah, and they will become part of this renewed covenant community—this new temple in which God, through his Spirit, has come to dwell.

Luke says in verse 40 that Peter "carried on explaining things to them with many other words." No doubt walking them through more of Israel's story and more of Israel's scriptures to show them how Jesus and the Spirit have fulfilled them. "Let God rescue you," he was urging them, "from this wicked generation." Those who

welcomed his word were baptised. About three thousand lives were added to the community that day.

And, again, the result is new creation, lived out in this renewed community of men and women. Pentecost isn't just a personal exercise in spiritual growth any more than Jesus' death and resurrection were. It's about the formation of a new people of God that would be God's temple in the world. A temple made of people, transformed from the inside out, a temple that would—that still does—steward God's presence, God's wisdom, God's new creation for the sake of the world. Luke makes a point of contrasting it with the old Israel, trundling along blindly in unbelief, in idolatry, and heading straight into inevitable judgement and destruction. In contrast, this new Jesus-plus-Spirit people [verse 42] live out their baptism by "giving full attention to the teaching of the apostles and to the common life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Great awe fell on everyone and many remarkable deeds and signs were performed by the apostles." At the centre of their life together was this apostolic teaching that we see Peter giving: Teaching showing how Israel's scriptures, God's promises were being fulfilled in Jesus. Truly good news. And it drew them together as they shared meals—just as Jesus had done—including that last meal he'd shared with them, transposing the Passover meal, the covenant renewal meal of the people of God, transposing it around himself, his death, and his resurrection. And they prayed. And this transformed them. "All those who believe came together and held everything in common. They sold their possessions and belongings and divided them up to everyone in proportion to their various needs." No, they didn't become Marxists. Luke's point is that they became a *family*. They became what Israel was supposed to be. Not a people who did their own thing; not a people who grabbed and hoarded for themselves; not a people who

disengaged from community seven days a week, and then gathered with a group of religious acquaintances for a couple of hours one day a week. No, Jesus and the Spirit made them a family. Jesus and the Spirit made them a people of love, of grace, of abundance (even in their physical poverty), a family that witnessed the character of the Spirit and the goodness and abundance of God's new creation. And the people around them noticed: "Day by day they were they were all together attending the temple. They broke bread in their various houses and ate their food with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and standing in favour with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their numbers those who were being rescued."

Brothers and Sisters, our great desire should be that the church today—not just our congregation, but the whole church—should look just like this, simply on a much larger and global scale. We are no less a people of Jesus and the Spirit than those first Christians in Jerusalem were. We should be such a family where the scriptures are read and the mighty works of God—the fulfilment of his promise; the good news about Jesus, crucified, risen, and ascended—are not only believed, but lived out and proclaimed. A family where God's new creation generosity is actively lived out. A family that not only keeps this covenant renewal meal, but lives out its implications throughout the week. A family that clasps its hands together and prays that it might be on earth as it is in heaven, not just because Jesus told us to, but Brother and Sisters, because we are the people whose King shares our earthly nature and reigns in heaven; because we are the people who have been, ourselves, plunged into heavenly life by God's Spirit; and because we are people who are ourselves the fulfilment of God's promises and therefore a people of hope and witness of God's glory.

Let's pray: Faithful God who never fails to fulfil your promises, you have purified us with the blood of your Son and filled us with your Spirit to make us your temple; give us grace to be that temple, to be your new creation, to be the stewards of your presence and your gospel for the sake of the world; and in your faithfulness, cause our faithfulness to bear fruit for your kingdom. Through Jesus the Messiah, our Lord and our rescuer, we pray. Amen.