



Gifts of the Spirit

#2 Pentecost

Acts 2:1-18

Courage Church, Detroit, MI.

Sunday February 11, 2018

scriptures: Acts 2:1-8, Exodus 34:28, Exodus 19:16-20 , Exodus 20:18-21, Acts 10:34, Exodus 3:3, Hebrews 12:18-29

We are continuing through our series on the Gifts of the Spirit. and today is going to be quite a bit different than a lot of the other weeks... I personally think that this is a very special subject.

and my hope is that this morning we can lay a solid foundation for you so that next week we can really explain the Gift of Tongues and the interpretation of tongues, and the concept of tongues as in your “prayer” language... today will be part one of diving into that but next week will be a lot more “we *can* do this, we *can't* do this” type of message. Today will be more about where it all comes from, and will be an important building block for where we go next week.

The subject of today’s Message will be Pentecost. We will begin getting into tongues, but more than anything I want today to set us up for next week which will be focused on tongues and its proper place in the body of Christ.

Typically in modern Christian Culture, Pentecost Sunday comes 7 weeks after Easter Sunday... which would have put us in May... thats usually when churches, based on the calendar year, try and talk about Pentecost...

but obviously for us, we do series in large chunks at a time, and we will be in another series following Easter, and this is as good of a time as any to talk about something as important as this... because the truth is... The Holy Spirit wants to fill your life and empower you for ministry just as much in the winter as he does in the Spring...

and especially right now, its February, its probably the biggest “lull” we get each year, it can be so very easy to really go through every day, and no matter what you may accomplish in any given day, you may still end that day feeling empty... feeling drained. Needing an infilling... and what we know from the words of Jesus and the experiences we read about regarding the Holy Spirit, is that Pentecost is available to you any time now... it doesn't matter if its Easter Sunday or Pentecost Sunday or Fat Tuesday or even Valentines Day.

The Spirit of the living God wants to clothe you in His power and might and give you everything that you need to be an agent for change in our broken world. So lets look at this passage, which is very well known yet highly avoided by many churches, because what takes place is not explainable.

it is not manageable.

but it is what it says, so lets read it.

Acts 2:1-8

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And **divided tongues** as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And **they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.**

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from *every nation* under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.

I am going to share something with you that may actually come as a surprise to some of you, and if so, that is okay.

But “Pentecost” does NOT come from Acts 2 referring to the Holy Spirit falling on the Jesus followers, and the Holy Spirit coming and fire resting on all their heads, and everyone started speaking in tongues...

Most people think it does, In fact, I googled it... “what is the definition of Pentecost” just to see what it would say and this is the first thing that google said: “the Christian festival celebrating the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples of Jesus after his Ascension, held on the seventh Sunday after Easter.” -

That of course refers to the instance we just read about, in Acts 2.

but there there is a second definition that most Christians just ignore: the Jewish festival of Shavuoth. (Shah·vu·oth)

and its listed as if these two things have nothing to do with each other... like for Christians it is the celebration of the descent of the Holy Spirit, and for Jewish people it is Shavuoth (Shah·vu·oth)... and since we are Christians, we think right away: Acts 2 and the upper room... and as great of a moment as that was, the only reason that this is a problem, is because so many people have built a foundational view of Pentecost without actually looking at the Foundation of Pentecost.

But the first line of Acts 2 is far more important than we often recognize... it says this: “When the day of Pentecost arrived”

It doesn't say: the things about to be recorded is why we will one day call this day Pentecost.

No... THOSE THINGS HAPPENED ON PENTECOST. It was an actual day that the everyone, like every other year before that, was gathering to celebrate.

Pentecost was a day that was celebrated for thousands of years by the Jewish people, long before we get to that amazing, culminating moment in Acts 2 where some reaffirming and some *redefining* seems to take place.

So this is what we are going to do today... we are going to talk about three things, somewhat interconnected... we will talk about the FIRST Pentecost... and we are going to talk about the Celebration of Pentecost, also known as the Feast of weeks... and we will also bounce back and forth between those things, while looking at THE MOST FAMOUS Pentecost... the one we just read about, and the significance of that moment, to our lives right now.

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So Acts 2 says at “when the day of Pentecost arrived...”

This gathering would take every year as the Spring turned to summer, so the weather was amazing and because of this, a lot of people traveled for it... even more than for the earlier festivals and celebrations in the year. Which is a significant detail because when we read Acts 2, we see that there were people from ALL over represented in this room... well, they had traveled there, for this festival.

The Feast of Weeks.

But what were they celebrating?

the FIRST Pentecost

Pentecost is a celebration of the moment in Exodus 19 and 20, when Moses goes up to Mount Sinai... and comes down with the Ten Commandments. Which you may hear that, and say... OKAY, why would they want to celebrate that? why gather, for that? But in Jewish Culture, though there were many significant feasts, there were three that were the most important, and this was one of the three. If you lived within 20 miles of Jerusalem you legally HAD to attend these three, but others from everywhere would come for it...

another of those three was “Passover” (1)

the word Pentecost means the “the 50th” - it comes from the number 5, as in a “pentagon” and it actually originally referred to the day that fell 50 days after passover...

and real quick, passover is the Jewish Holiday that remembers God freeing the Israelites from Egypt, but most importantly of the fact that he SPARED the Children of Israel when he told them to put blood on their door posts, and he “passed over” their homes on that fateful night in Egypt where the first born sons of every house was killed. It was the tenth and final plague and the last straw before Pharaoh finally told Moses to take all of Israel with him and to leave Egypt immediately.

When a Jewish person reads the ten commandments, they read the first commandment as “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” - The most important thing for them to remember was that one thing... God brought us out. And that was why they celebrated passover. To Remember.

So 50 days after that, Israel found themselves at the foot of Mt. Sinai, and Moses goes up and has an encounter with God, and then he comes back down with a what we now know as “the Ten Commandments” -

and in order to fully understand Pentecost, YOU HAVE TO FIRST UNDERSTAND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. Which I will try and sum up for you briefly. We spent 8 weeks walking through this concept a couple years ago, so you can go back and watch that if you want to understand this better.

But most people today consider the Ten Commandments to be bondage. We consider it something that was given as a way to keep us in line...

BUT shifting that perspective is the first step to understand what God has been up to throughout history, which obviously took an amazing form in the Upper Room with what we just read in Acts 2.

The words we translate as “ten commandments” literally is translated as “the ten words” - and the what the Hebrew people considered it was a “ten word Ketubah” between them and God...

a Ketubah is a marriage contract... Dawn and I used to film weddings, and when they were Jewish weddings, one of the most significant moments was the signing of the Ketubah. It is the terms of their marriage, written on this ENORMOUS piece of paper. Its very stressful to try and film, I remember one wedding someone came running and grabbed us like “YOU ARE MISSING THE KETUBAH” because it isn’t DURING the ceremony... and so then we rushed to this room where they were signing it and the lighting was horrible and we didn’t have much time to adjust the cameras properly... and we got it, but it wasn’t great... and that matters to them... because signing this document is one of the most significant things about Jewish marriages.

and this is the way that they view this moment at Mt. Sinai... it was God proposing to his people... inviting them into a relationship with HIM, and the things that we view as “COMMANDMENTS” are really just the terms of their marriage, THE KETUBAH... things that anybody in any covenant relationship with another person would understand. “you shall have no gods before me, and you shall not have idols” - Obviously, God says, I have to be your one and only... “remember the sabbath” - every single week, there needs to be one day Israel, where you don’t go to work, and it is JUST YOU AND ME.

and they were all LIFE... we read “remember the sabbath” as bondage, but for people who had just spent 430 years being slaves 7 days a week, 365 days a year... the thought now would be “WHAT! We get a day off!!! This is amazing!”

It was not a command, it was a covenant... look ahead to Exodus 34:28, it says “the Lord said to Moses, “Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.” (the ten words)

and if you think about all the times in the Old Testament where it says that Israel was UNFAITHFUL to God, and yet God each and every time recklessly pursues them and draws them back to Him...

you begin to see... “wow, God just wants a relationship with these people.”

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okay, so with that understanding OF the ten commandments, I want to read to you the moments in Exodus that the Hebrew people considered to be “the proposal”

In fact, the second chapter of Jeremiah shows that it was at Mt. Sinai that God proposed to his bride, and how his bride then followed Him into the wilderness. Before Mt. Sinai, they were never described that way. But I want us to look at what happened in this account...

We will start in Exodus 19, then pick up again around the second half of chapter 20...

First of all, Exodus 19:11-14 says this:

be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, ‘Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.’ When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.” So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people; and they washed their garments.

and this is crucial. Because the first time, God tells the people the dangers of the Mountain... He tells them “BE READY, something amazing is going to happen... but these are the limits... stay at the foot of the mountain, and get ready for something amazing.

But God is powerful... He Spirit is already at work, AND IT IS POWERFUL.

Then it goes on, in verse 16 to say:

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. **Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire.** The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

So Moses goes up...

and just like in Acts, the Lord descends on the mountain, IN FIRE, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.

Now I am going to share something with you that is written in ancient commentaries, and contains details that are not specified in the Exodus recording of it... and I will share it with you, share with you its significance, understanding that these documents help us understand the way that a Hebrew person would have read this passage and what they would have understood to have happened at Mt. Sinai that day, whether we believe it or not... Because knowing how they viewed these stories that are ABOUT THEM, matters to our understanding of Pentecost, one of their most significant holidays.

There is something called "The Mishah... it in a nutshell, is an ancient Jewish commentary on the Torah documenting the way that the Rabbi's taught these events... and this is something that they say about this moment, and it is absolutely fascinating. The early Jewish commentators noted first of all that the Israelites didn't HEAR thunder... they actually SAW THUNDER. The literal on Exodus is written that way, "they saw thunderings and lightning." and of course you know, you can't SEE thunderings, so that alone is fascinating..

The Mishnah describes actual waveforms that the people saw, and it said that what they saw was LANGUAGES... languages coming from Heaven out into the world... and the people actually reported HEARING the voice of God speaking in 70 different languages... which were all of the known languages at that time...

and the understanding was that of these languages were going out far beyond just these Hebrew people sitting at the bottom of the mountain... but actually going out, to everyone.

and the big idea is that this was God's way of proposing to Israel on the mountain... yet at the same time declaring His unending love for all of humanity in every language known to man. Proposing to everyone. Offering an invitation to the entire world, IN THEIR LANGUAGE.

And if you study the word that we use for "tongues" (*glōsso*)- which freaks people out... a more accurate translation is the word "languages" - and we will really get into this next week, but this, when used properly, is actually ONE OF the most powerful gifts imaginable. There are not many things in this world that connect people together more than language does.

For example, if you are in South America visiting, and you can't figure out directions, and everyone you are talking to can't understand you... then you finally meet someone who speaks English... who speaks your language, you are going to be stoked... because there is now a connection that you have with someone, and it will help you get where you want to go.

Well what happened in Acts 2 was, there were different languages... but it was the same message... and suddenly, everybody was being told of how great God is in their native languages by people who DON'T TYPICALLY SPEAK THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGES... and what was it doing? It was uniting people in a way that nothing before that had ever united them... and it took them further in the Lord than anything previously had...

It was showing them that Jew or Gentile, no matter where you are from... the same access to God is available to you... the same Jesus died FOR ALL OF YOU... and you all should be praising him.

And it killed partiality... because it wasn't one language... it was many. It wasn't one race of people, it was ALL. The Bible says that ALL OF THEM began to speak. Not just one of them.

and just like at Mt. Sinai... they knew what message they were hearing... they knew God's intention WITH THEM... but it is said that they also heard languages going out far beyond them... because the same message of love that was given TO THEM, IS FOR EVERYBODY...

God loves you... and has redeemed you... and wants to marry you... and wants you to turn your heart away from evil, and toward him.

from Sinai to the Upper Room... God has broken through, His Love has broken through, and His Spirit has broken through.

but most of us are so resistant to it, that we would rather learn about God than have divine experiences with Him that we can't explain away... That is why an entire theology exists that says that what happened in Acts 2 was a one time experience, and that God doesn't visit people like that anymore...

Why on earth would God not do that anymore? There is no Biblical Basis for that at all. We just want to keep God manageable, and it's easier to stay away from the unknown... but the Bible says that God is no respecter of persons... what he did for one he will do for anyone who seeks him...

yet so many of us are totally content NOT having the experiences, and just watching other people have it... and just reading about it... No legitimate Bible scholar in history will tell you that what is recorded in Acts DIDN'T happen... yet a good amount of them are content studying it, but not pursuing that same infilling that they received.

and the fact is, that is human nature. It is the exact same thing that happened at Sinai... lets pick back up there.

Moses comes down from the mountain with the Ketubah... with the Ten Binding Words between the Hebrew people and God... and the first half of chapter 20 Moses goes over what those words are... and then this

happens after he gets through the tenth commandment, about not coveting what is NOT yours... and will pick up in verse 18 of chapter 20: (18-21)

Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, **“You speak to us, and we will listen;** but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.” The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness **where God was.**

And this is why this is so significant.

They saw all of THAT... they WITNESSED all of that... and it happened, and it happened again... they saw thunder, they saw fire. They heard God’s glory being proclaimed in every language known to man at that time... and yet when they had the opportunity for all of that to fall on them... they had the opportunity to have that kind of an encounter with God, THEY WERE CONTENT TO JUST KEEP SENDING MOSES... they were content with MOSES experiencing the Spirit of God fill his life, AND THEN TELLING THEM ABOUT IT.

That was the first Pentecost... one guy experienced it, everyone else heard about it. Everyone else learned about it.

“Moses... you go up the mountain... let God speak to you... then you tell us.”

And now Israel celebrates this day... because it was a turning point... it was a moment that said, “from now on, we know that God is WITH US. we know we are walking with God. We are his bride... He is on our side... there is a new mountain, and God showed up there... and it changes everything.”

That is Pentecost.

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Now, for the skeptics who say “there is no way that that happened, they didn’t actually HEAR languages... that is fine to think... *I believe* they did hear them... but all that you need to know is what is historically documented by the Rabbi’s... because these are the things that the Hebrew people believed... these were the stories that they passed down to their children and their children’s children.

and the reason that this is so significant, is because when a Hebrew person would have heard about what happened on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2, they would have said “well yeah... of course God would reveal himself that way to his people... with fire, and with tongues, and a mighty rushing wind...

they would say: thats exactly how he proposed to us at Mt. Sinai.

They weren’t there... anyone who was there had been dead for the last several thousand years... but yet this story would have resonated... it was THEIR STORY.

OF COURSE THATS HOW HE CAME.

OF COURSE THERE WAS SMOKE. OF COURSE THERE WERE RUMBLES.

OF COURSE THERE WAS FIRE.

There is always fire.

Even the first time God revealed himself to Moses, how did he do it? With a fire in a burning bush.

A fire that covered a bush, but yet the bush was not burned... and Moses sees this, and he is scratching his head in wonder... because he had never seen anything like this.... he had never even HEARD of anything like this happening, and he says: “I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned”

Why isn’t it doing what normally happens when things burn?

Which was a foreshadowing... of the fact that God, the most powerful God... even though he is powerful enough to destroy anything, He can come inside of you, and fill you with the Holy Spirit, and it can fill you and empower you WITHOUT destroying you.

Can you even imagine what it would be like walking around with that kind of power in you? You wouldn't be afraid of anything... you would go anywhere...

In that room in Acts 2, fire rested on everyone, and yet it was not there to hurt them, it was there to fill them... to empower them. and we like to think that this was a one time experience, BUT JESUS SAID TO THEM... WAIT FOR THE SPIRIT... stay in the city until it comes... DON'T YOU DARE EVEN THINKING OF GOING INTO ALL THE WORLD, until you have the power to do so...

and if they couldn't go without the power, why do we think we can?

but we are freaked out about things like fire... because we don't want to get burned.

You all know Dawn and I have been through some interesting things involving fires... fire has the power to cleanse something, but if it consumes it destroys... fire as a reality is dangerous, its not safe... and I think there is significance that God in Acts gave them something so scary, so dangerous... so UNSAFE... as a sign that they were empowered to do something incredible.

Some of you may be familiar with that moment in the Chronicles of Narnia... they are on their way to meet Aslan (who represents God), and Susan finds out that Aslan is a lion... and she is surprised by this... and she says that she didn't realize that he was a lion, and she asks Mr. Beaver "is he safe?" and Mr. Beaver replied "Safe? Who said anything about safe? Of course He isn't safe...

But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

So many people are looking for a god who is safe... a religion that is comfortable, a church they can be a part of that makes them feel good about whatever it is they are doing, even when it is wrong, even when its lazy or passive...

but the church of Jesus Christ, when it operates according to the Bible... it isn't safe... it isn't neat... its messy. Its bold. it goes to the places others won't go... it tries things that others won't try... it sees the world for how broken it is yet how beautiful it was designed to be... and the object of its existence is making what lives in heaven, come alive here on earth.

its messy. sometimes it takes some sorting out, and often times it is going to take Courage. Courage to open our mouths and praise God with whatever flows out of our belly's...

Courage to step out of our world and into someone else's who needs us...

Courage to go up on the mountain ourselves, and have a first hand experience with God... and then come down clothed in his Spirit and walking in his power. and living a life of daily communion with the God of the Universe, who lives in you.

You see the difference between leaving safety as the world understands it... leaving comfort as the world understands it... and leaving it as Spirit filled believers understand it... is when we go into the hard places, we know that even though the whole world may be against us, God is for us... and if God is for us, then who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)

and the safest place that you can be is in the will of God, no matter how crazy it may seem. But you don't want to step out, until you are first empowered.

And I want to close with this.

Every year, even to this day, during the 50 day period between Passover and Pentecost, the Jews would, in absolute anticipation count down the days... because they always wanted to remember the connection between the two... To them, passover represented the day that God redeemed his

people from the oppression of the enemy... the physical oppression that they faced at the hand of Pharaoh.

but at Pentecost God redeemed his people from themselves. From their own wickedness, and idolatry. At Pentecost, God proposed to his people in the midst of their wickedness...

and so, on the "Feast of Pentecost" or "the feast of weeks..." to remember such an amazing act from such a great God, this is what would happen... This is actually really incredible.

The feast of Pentecost is the ONLY feast in Hebrew culture where leavened bread is used... as you read about all of the other feasts, you will find that they ALWAYS USE UNLEAVENED BREAD. in fact, one of the feasts was called "the feast of unleavened bread."

Because to them, leaven symbolized sin, it symbolized humanity, their nature, their hypocrisy and disobedience. it represented all the times that God told them to do one thing, and they did another... Even Jesus himself, in Matthew 16 talks about "the leaven of the Pharisees" referring to the hypocritical teachings of the religious leaders who preached but didn't practice... who cleaned the outside of the cup so that they would look good, but inwardly they are a mess...

Leaven always represented something that was not good, and so they would always leave it out of their feasts so as to remove anything that could get between them and God... But at this one feast, the feast that remembers that moment when God PROPOSES to his people... the moment when Moses returns down from that mountain with a marriage ketubah from God... they used leavened bread.

And what would happen was, the priest would cut open the top of the bread, and he would then pour oil into it, saying "thank you God, that you have joined your unleavened life with with OUR LEAVENED LIFE"

in other words, "thank you God, that even though we have sinned, and we continue to sin, and our lives don't look like they should... and even though we fall so incredibly short of perfection, YOU STILL PROPOSED TO US...

YOU STILL MARRIED US. YOU STILL JOINED YOUR PERFECT LIFE WITH OUR BROKEN LIVES, AND HAVE COVERED US IN YOUR PERFECTION.

Pentecost represents a new infilling... a new access point that we have, in which God meets us in all of the broken pieces that we may have found ourselves in today. and He does it because of nothing that we ourselves did to earn, he fills us with his power...

Remember, the word "*charisma*" means "a grace gift" - a gift that comes even on the most leavened of lives, and still will fill you up... Because God is good... and He wants good things for His children... and wants to empower you, and to fill you with his love, and with His Spirit.

At Mt. Sinai, God proposed to Israel, and the world... declaring His unending love for the people who are far from Him.

and in Acts 2, in languages that they didn't even know, they began to proclaim that Jesus is Lord to all the nations.

and that is Pentecost.
and its not just for Moses...

its not just for the disciples, or the rest of the people in the room that day when fire fell...

Pentecost is for you. The Spirit is for you. The mountain is for you...

Hebrews 12:18-29

For you have **not** come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn

who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

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We have not come to the mountain that can NOT be touched... we have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem... and the number of angels that are joining us at *this* festival can not even be numbered...

and because of Jesus... the one of whom the Holy Spirit speaks through us AND to us... our leavened lives have ONCE and FOR ALL been MADE PERFECT.

And now, in Christ... people of every nation, every language, male and female, young and old, rich and poor have access to the same Holy Spirit... pointing people to the same Jesus who has redeemed them all.. and just like Romans puts it: when we don't know how to pray... The Spirit will intercede for us with groanings too deep for words... declaring in whatever way necessary that:

Jesus Christ is the Lord of all the nations.

Jesus Christ is God.

and our God is a consuming fire.