

PENTECOST PROMISES

READING: *Acts chapter 2 verses 1 - 21*

INTRODUCTION

Playing a waiting game is not something we all like to do. It seems that during the current situation there are queues everywhere, people waiting for their turn – at the shops, the pharmacy, supermarkets, post office, etc. It has often been joked about that the greatest British past-time is queuing. Some people are OK with it, others not so patient.

What about waiting for a promise to be fulfilled? Someone promises you something but it takes a while for that promise to be fulfilled. Again, some people are OK with it, others, not so patient. I suppose the promise that one day things will return to normal, whatever normal was, but with at least the freedom to go about our daily lives, seeing those we love and want to see is worth waiting for. One day, hopefully soon, but only when the time is right.

The Bible has a number of occasions when people had to wait. In recent weeks we looked at the story of Noah and his family, waiting to get off the ark and resume life on dry land. Very soon we will be looking at Joseph, waiting in prison in Egypt for release; the children of Israel waiting in slavery in Egypt for God's deliverance and then centuries awaiting God's deliverance again from Babylon. All of these were separate occasions, yet throughout their history, the Jews awaited the coming of God's anointed one, the Messiah, and come he did, but as he didn't quite fit their perception of Messiah, they missed it. That same Messiah, Jesus, before the end of his earthly life gave promises to his disciples, his followers. In *John chapter 14* we read of Jesus preparing his disciples for his departure from them, but with the promise of sending one in his place, who would be their Comforter, their Helper. A promise reiterated in *John chapter 16*. Then in *Acts chapter 1* we read where Jesus, before He ascends to Heaven, instructs the disciples to remain in Jerusalem and there they would receive power to be his witnesses throughout the whole earth. Forty days after his resurrection, the disciples waited before Jesus ascended into Heaven. Ten more days were to pass before Jesus' promise of power was to come. On that fiftieth day, the promise was fulfilled.

WHAT IS PENTECOST?

Pentecost was the 50th day after Passover and was a feast that had been observed by the Jews for more than 3000 years. The feast was referred to as the "Feast of Weeks" or the "Feast of Harvest". Many Jews regard Pentecost as the day Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, and they calculated it as being the 50th day after the Exodus, after the first Passover. On this day some 3000 years later, God poured out His Holy Spirit on the disciples, as Jesus had promised. Empowered with renewed spiritual power, *Acts chapter 2* outlines for us what happened and on this day there was another harvest, another harvest as people, Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem for the feasting, believed in the gospel message preached by Peter and we read that 3000 became believers in Jesus that day. In subsequent days, more and more came to that same faith and the Church was born. Over the years, and centuries, more and more have been added to their numbers, and we are part of that legacy.

But what about the promises which were fulfilled at Pentecost?

That day of Pentecost the Coming of the Holy Spirit was a fulfilment of God's plan and promise. A plan and promise that the LORD had spoken through the prophet Joel: ***"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out My Spirit."*** - *Joel chapter 2 verses 28-29.*

Jesus gave His disciples this same plan and promise. In **John chapters 14-17**, on his last evening with his disciples before his death, Jesus spends time talking with them about and praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit. He tells them that soon, when He is gone, He will send them the Helper, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who will fill them with truth, knowledge and revelation. The Holy Spirit will convict people of their sins and lead them to experiencing the spiritual new birth. The Holy Spirit will bring them to experience a oneness with God. Jesus tells them that the Holy Spirit will give them the power to do even greater things than they have seen him do. On that Pentecost all of God's promises came to pass - His Holy Spirit was poured out and God's promise of a new age for all creation began. But for Pentecost to happen the Bible tells us that Jesus disciples had to do their part. They first of all had to obey and listen to Jesus. Jesus told them to stay around Jerusalem and wait, and they didn't waste their time waiting – they prayed. Without prayer there is no power. Without prayer there is no presence. Without prayer there is really nothing. It was out of prayer that they experienced people coming to faith. Prayer is the key to the 2nd Pentecost promise - the promise of power;

The infilling power of the Holy Spirit

All the signs that we read about in **Acts chapter 2** speak to us about the majesty and power Holy Spirit - the wind, the fire and the languages - all symbols of the work that the Holy Spirit wants to do in our lives and through our lives.

- The image of the wind reminds us that the power of the Holy Spirit comes from outside of ourselves. We do not have power to transform ourselves. We can change our looks, our actions, but only God can change our hearts. This is one of the major differences between Christianity and other religions, which believe that there is at the core of every human being a special power that merely needs to be released. The whole reason Jesus came to earth, lived among us and died for us on Calvary was not to unleash some hidden godlike power. It was because we needed to be rescued, redeemed and restored into His Holy Image. Jesus died because we needed power to change.
- We needed to be purified and cleansed of our sins and that is why on Pentecost day we see the tongues of fire. Fire is something used throughout scripture to speak of purifying and cleansing. We need the fire of the Holy Spirit in our lives, a fire that will allow the Lord to continually refine us, to purify us so that we can become more like Jesus.
- God is not against us and this is seen in the miracle that each person that day was able to hear the message of the Gospel in their own language, spoken by those who had not learned those languages - a direct reversal of what happened in **Genesis 11** at the Tower of Babel, where the post-flood people thought they could build a way to heaven and in their own power to be on the same level as God. But God confused humanity's language so they could not understand one another and thwart their plans which would only lead to their destruction – something God had promised never to do again. But at Pentecost, through the power of the Holy Spirit, God enabled the disciples and others at Pentecost to understand one another no matter what language they were speaking. God was working within His disciples to speak a common language with a common theme - the lordship of Jesus, the message of salvation and an invitation to be the people that God still invites all of us to be - and that is God's 3rd Promise that we see here in on Pentecost Sunday.

New Life through the Holy Spirit!

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus was a demonstration of how much God longed to be reunited with his creation. The beginning of the story of Noah showed us how much it pained God to see how sin had destroyed that perfect relationship which had been in the Garden of Eden, before sin entered the world. After the flood, God promised never to destroy his creation again with a flood, but humanity continued to rebel against the love which God continually showed. He longed for that restored relationship and as **John 3 verse 16** reminds us that **God so loved the world that He gave His only son, that whosoever believes on Him, but should have everlasting life**” going on to say **“God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world, but that through Him the world might be saved.” (verse 17)**

Jesus himself told His disciples “I have come that you might have life, and have it in all its fulness.” Through His Holy Spirit the Lord seeks to rescue that original plan. As much as it is possible this side of everlasting life I believe that the LORD through His Holy Spirit wants us to enjoy. In our own strength, we cannot change, but with the promised power of the Holy Spirit, our Helper, we can enjoy the fulness of life. OK, so we all make mistakes and we will do things which could wreck that relationship with God, but God has given us His Holy Spirit to point out where we have gone wrong, and also provides us with the power to change as we confess our sins, trusting that “**He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness**” (1 John 1 verse 9).

The disciples were promised this Helper. They were promised this power. On the Day of Pentecost, they received both in the one outpouring of the Spirit in Jerusalem that day. Today, every day, we celebrate Jesus’ powerful Pentecost promises – that now have found fulfilment in our lives – the Holy Spirit – God’s gift of faith and divine peace – God’s gift of forgiveness.

*“For strength to always do what’s right,
For grace to conquer in the fight,
For power to walk the world in white
Send the fire today!”*

Amen