

New Hope Sermon Pentecost 2017

Today we are celebrating a global birthday. It is Pentecost- the birthday of the church. In Acts 2 when “*God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven [in the Middle Eastern known world] had gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down with a violent wind and tongues of fire that rested on each of the disciples.* Acts 2:4 “*All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit*” and suddenly everything changed. “*They began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them,...declaring the wonders of God in the language of each pilgrim at the festival.*”



“*They began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them,...declaring the wonders of God in the language of each pilgrim at the festival.*” Amazed and perplexed, the pilgrims asked one another, *What does this mean?*”...Then Peter stood up with the Eleven and raised his voice and began to preach” (Acts 2:12, 14). The fisherman disciple, the one who had denied even knowing Christ at His crucifixion only 50 days earlier), gave a riveting sermon, quoting Old Testament Scripture about the Messiah Christ and explaining “*God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted at the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has*

poured out what you now see and hear...Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” And here’s where the birth of the church happened: “*When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said, Brothers, what shall we do? ‘Repent and be baptized,’ Peter replied...and about 3,000 accepted his message and were baptized*” (Acts 2:41).

Pentecost marks the birthday of the church and the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit to live in and empower all believers in Christ. It is the remarkable miracle of our faith – that God not only came down to earth in the incarnation, but then after Jesus died, rose and ascended to heaven, God came down to earth again in the form of the Holy Spirit. Why? To create a body of believers who would bear His name and the witness to that name throughout the world. And we are part of that body of believers.

John Piper has said: “The difference between Uncle Sam and Jesus Christ is that Uncle Sam won’t enlist you unless you are healthy and Jesus won’t enlist you unless you [acknowledge you] are sick. (By that he means you need to know you need a Savior and Lord and allow Jesus to be that Savior and Lord.)...The gospel is not a help ad. It is a help available ad. God is not looking for people to work for him but people who let him work mightily in and through them” (through the Holy Spirit) (John Piper, *Brothers, we are not Professionals*, p. 39).

But there are some basic principles of Spirit-directed Christianity we need to understand. It’s similar to the principles of riding a horse. When our middle granddaughter, Audrey, was in junior high school, she became a horse lover - just like her Grammie at her age. But there are 3 things she needed to know up front:

1. *When throwing your saddle over your horse’s back, do not let go. A body in motion tends to remain in motion (and so the saddle will end up on the ground on the other side of the horse)*
2. *Forgetting to tighten the girth before swinging into the saddle gives you a whole new perspective of your horse (from his belly as you flip under him)*
3. *Before using a crop to encourage your horse to move, be sure it is facing in the direction you want to go (GCFN 4/20/00).*

When faced with a life in the Spirit, we want to be sure we are headed in the direction God wants us to go in. We need to be saddled properly in connection to Christ and stay in the saddle to enjoy the ride. So today I want to focus on the importance of this miraculous life God gives us and the direction of that ride through obedience to the Holy Spirit.

I will frame the message around the three songs we sang in praise:

Holy Spirit

Sweep Through Me

And Holy Spirit Rain Down.

We began the service by inviting the presence and ministry of the Spirit among us. “*Holy Spirit, You are welcome here. Come flood this place and fill the atmosphere. Your glory, God, is what our hearts long for to be overcome by Your presence, Lord* (The Torwalts, Jesus Culture Music, 2011). When the Spirit is moving in our service, it doesn’t matter how many are here, there will be the God dynamic that will refresh us, convict us, empower us, and lead us in God’s truth. When God’s glory is here, we will have met God so we can be delivered from our self-centeredness and reveal Him to others.

But we need to choose to be continually connected to the Spirit. Let me give an illustration from preacher Tony Evans:

“If you have ever seen a fish out of water, you know that it just flops around, wiggling and jumping all over the place. If it’s out of water, it’s also out of where it’s supposed to be. The fish is trying to move but it can’t go anywhere because it’s not in the environment it was made to be in. So it flops and twists and flips, going absolutely nowhere. Why? Because it’s trying to be fishy in a non-water environment and it wasn’t created for that...All it’s doing is running out of breath. The fish will die because it is not in its home.

A lot of Christians are flipping and flopping, trying to do better, but we are running out of breath and getting tired because we are not doing it in the right environment. The environment for living our Christian lives has to be the Spirit (Evans, *Ibid.*, pp.296-297).

This is the miracle of Pentecost – that God has provided for us His own heavenly environment that is the source of our life in Christ. Believers no longer have to try to please God through works – flipping and flopping around, if you will, but we can now thrive IN the Spirit. He has come to dwell in every believer and is the source of our life and our power and our grace and our strength and our joy and our very breath. This is the radical gospel message of Pentecost and it differentiates the Christian religion from all other religions and spiritualities. Believers in Jesus have God IN US. That is the transforming power and that is when and how eternal life starts for us. As Jesus said, “*This is eternal life that they know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*” Jn. 17:3 “Know” is a continual present-tense verb – not a future hope.

And begin our journey of transformation – to be made into the likeness of Jesus Christ – all by the power of the Spirit. The Spirit has the key role, but we have a necessary part to play. The part of obedience and staying connected to the Spirit’s promptings, empowerment and direction in our lives.

Holy Spirit, You are welcome here. Come flood this place and fill the atmosphere. Your glory, God, is what our hearts long for to be overcome by Your presence, Lord (the Torwalts, Jesus Culture Music, 2011).

The second song is *Sweep through me*. This song describes the role of the Spirit in our transformation. We have lots of debris from our daily sin and wrong choices and relationships. So it is the role of the Holy Spirit to convict us of that sin and sweep it away when we confess it so we are moving by God’s power in the direction of Spirit transformation.

The words to the song picture what it means to be moving according to the Spirit.

1. “*Teach my eyes to see your glory, teach my ears to hear your voice, teach my tongue to speak with kindness, teach my voice to sing your praise*

Refrain: *Sweep through me, Breath of God, fill me with your Spirit.*

Sweep through me, Breath of God, fill me with your Spirit.”

Going in God’s direction involves all our senses – our eyes and how we perceive reality and the glory of God, our ears and how we are attentive to his promptings, our tongue to speak words that build up, and our voice to sing praise to Him. None of that is automatic, so we need the continual gentle (or sometimes not so gentle) voice of the Spirit in our minds to guide us in these uses of our body. Can you think of a time when the Spirit has prompted you in one of these areas and it has led to your growth and serviceability in Him? Let me share two stories.

First, on Spirit-vision: “As our plane ascended out of San Antonio, it passed an enclave of mansions. These homes had to contain at least seven to ten thousand square feet of space, with immaculate lawns and gardens, large pools, and huge garages. But from two thousand feet in the air, it's amazing how small these homes looked. Another few thousand feet, and they became mere playhouses. And then it hit me: not a home on this planet looks big to heaven; no house looks huge to God. The things that swell our chests with pride look mighty puny from another perspective. ...And so I prayed, "Lord, help me to see this world with your eyes. **Otherwise I might value what you despise and despise what you value.**"

Most of us, however, don't win our spiritual sight in a moment; it comes or goes in fractional increments. By aligning ourselves with supernatural vision, we can keep ourselves from slipping away (Gary Thomas, *The Beautiful Fight*, Zondervan, 2007, pp. 59-60). Or, in the horse analogy, we keep ourselves in the saddle.

We need Spirit vision. But we also need to obey the voice or prompting of the Holy Spirit even when it doesn't make sense. Pastor Bill White tells this story: “One Friday night, while I lived in San Diego, I threw my guitar in the back of the car and headed out for some time alone with God. My destination was a quiet beach north of the city, but I never made it there. Instead, as I was northbound on a dark stretch of Interstate 5, I saw a solitary man beside the road waving a white rag. Immediately, two thoughts crossed my mind. The first seemed clear and calm, and I was sure it came from the Lord: *You need to stop for this man.* I wasn't sure where my second thought came from, but it was plenty loud: *You're crazy it's probably some gang attack waiting to happen!*

But I quickly pulled over, and I saw that the man had blood running down his face. He was waving at me and pointing to the shallow ravine off the shoulder. He kept saying, "You gotta help my friend! You gotta help my friend!" And then, before I could get anything else out of him, he passed out. That other voice in my head was screaming now: *There's a gang out there. They got this guy, and now they're going to get you.* But I put the man in my car, grabbed a flashlight, and headed over the embankment. As I descended into the bushes, I started to hear screaming from the distance. As the screaming amplified, I prayed and marched off into the bushes to locate the distress. There in the dry creek bed was a large pickup truck that had obviously rolled over. A young man was writhing in pain on the ground with one ankle pinned under the truck. He was desperate for any help he could find. As he gasped and gritted his teeth, I put a hand on his shoulder and said, "You're going to be all right. I'm a Christian! I will pray, and God will give me the strength to get this truck off of you." I don't think he cared who I was, as long as I freed him. He was more than willing to pray with me. After praying, I gave that truck the biggest push I've ever given in my life, but it didn't move an inch. Not even a tenth of an inch. I tried a few more times, meeting the same level of success. I went back to the road to find more help. I stood by the side of the road waving a white towel at the oncoming traffic. Although I couldn't see through their windshields, I sensed what they were thinking: *No way I'm going to stop. It's probably some gang attack waiting to happen!*

Finally, after what seemed like forever, that quiet, calm voice spoke to me again and pointed out what was right in front of my eyes the entire time: the emergency call box! I made one quick call, and in

minutes a team of firefighters was there bringing the rescue God had intended (*Bill White, Paramount, California*).

Obedying Spirit-prompting is part of moving in the direction God wants us to go.

That also involves our witness in the world through the Spirit. Verse 2:

“Teach my hands to work for others, teach my feet to stand for truth, teach my mind to seek your wisdom, teach my soul to know your peace.

Refrain: Sweep through me, Breath of God, fill me with your Spirit.

Sweep through me, Breath of God, fill me with your Spirit.” (Dana Mengel, Abingdon Press)

When the Spirit is able to teach our soul God’s peace – and that is a major adjustment and transformation for most of us in our daily walk, then we can receive God’s wisdom to work for others and stand for truth.

Corrie Ten Boom illustrated the need for obedience to the Spirit like this: “I have a glove here in my hand. The glove cannot do anything by itself, but when my hand is in it, it can do many things. True, it is not the glove, but my hand in the glove that acts. It is the Holy Spirit in us who is the hand, who does the job. We have to make room for the hand so that every finger is filled” (*Corrie Ten Boom in Each New Day, Christianity Today, Vol. 38*).

This filling requires both an outpouring of the Spirit upon us So the third song:

“Holy Spirit rain down, rain down. Oh Comforter and Friend, how we need Your touch again.

Holy Spirit rain down, rain down

Let Your power fall, let Your voice be heard, Come and change our hearts as we stand on Your Word, Holy Spirit rain down, rain down.

It is only the Spirit who can change our hearts as we wait on God’s word. We can’t do it.

Because:

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind can know what God has in store

So open up heaven, open it wide, over Your church and over our lives.

Holy Spirit rain down, rain down

Let Your power fall, let Your voice be heard, Come and change our hearts as we stand on Your Word, Holy Spirit rain down, rain down” (Russell Fragar, arr. By Dan Galbraith).

This is God’s passion for His church, beloved. This is God’s purpose for the normal Christian life and the normal church experience. This is God’s direction that makes sure we are heading in the right direction, fulfilling His global call.

As one application of these truths today, I want to take the words of these songs and turn them into **fervent intercessory prayer for our own lives, for our church, and for the global church** that is often struggling in many parts of the world – struggling against the sin of egotism and kingdom building by people in power, struggling with persecution and a ghetto complex, struggling with the strident voices of culture and family who are not Christian, struggling to live in the power of the resurrection.

In our community prayer today we will focus on these needs personally, nationally and globally.

Let me open this prayer time with the words of Daniel’s prayer of repentance for his own nation Israel.

I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.

4 *I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: “Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments,*

5 *We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws.*

6 *We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name... We are covered with shame, LORD, because we have sinned against you.*

9 10 *we have not obeyed the LORD our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets...*

15 *“Now, Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong.*

16 *Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from (America)... Our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors have made us and your people an object of scorn to all those around us.*

17 *“Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary.*

18 *Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of our world. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy.*

19 *Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.”*

Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 6/4/17