

# 52 STORIES OF THE BIBLE

by

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# 41. Pentecost

## I. Introduction

The book of Acts begins where the gospels leave off after the resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples and other followers and we are told in I Corinthians 15 that at one time he actually appeared to over 500 people, and among other things Jesus told the disciples not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit that he had promised.

And in Acts chapter 1 starting at verse 8 we read about the ascension and Jesus says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. An event that we call the ascension, it was the way to signal to the disciples that the time of earthly appearances were done and it was time for them to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit and to get on with the work of the church.

So with that as preparation we look at Acts chapter two and the event that we call Pentecost. Pentecost is actually a great word that means "fiftieth" because this event happened 50 days after the Passover. It is actually at the end of a Jewish feast, a feast called the Feast of Weeks, and it is one of those feasts that a lot of Jews would make pilgrimages to Jerusalem. A time they would all get together from the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8) to come to their homeland, to Jerusalem, to celebrate this feast together. That's the context into which Pentecost fits.

## II. Fulfillment of Jesus' Promise

Beginning at Acts 2:1, "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 a 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 and other languages as the spirit gave them utterance.

### A. Old Testament

In the Old Testament with very rare exception, the Holy Spirit behaved in a different way. The Holy Spirit would come on isolated individuals for a temporary period of time. He would come to enable them to do a specific task and then when that task was done the Spirit would leave. The Spirit, for example, came on Gideon and he went to war. Or the Spirit came on Saul and he prophesied. That was how the Holy Spirit functioned for the most part in the Old Testament, but at the Pentecost you have the beginning of a new era where the Holy Spirit came down and resided on every follower of Jesus Christ and stayed permanently with that person.

### B. Three Signs of the Spirit

There are three signs that accompany this coming of the Spirit. The coming of the Spirit is an internal thing, you can't see it, and so God sends three signs, external validation that something special had happened. The first of those signs is the sound of wind. And

there was a mighty rushing wind that let them know that something was going on. If you read through the Old Testament at the theophanies, the different places where God appears, you often hear about a rushing wind accompanying the appearing of God. In John chapter 3 when Jesus talked to Nicodemus he compared the Spirit to the wind. It is actually the same word in Greek.

So a mighty rushing wind is one of those signs that people would have associated with the coming of God, but the second sign was the fire, and the fire came down and it divided into different tongues so to speak and it went and rested over the head of each person. Not just the 12, but all of the 120 that were gathered there.

And then the third sign was that they began to speak in tongues, and as we find later on specifically in verse 11 what was happening is that they were speaking in other human languages that they had not learned, and in fact verse 11 tells us what they were saying. What they were saying was that they all were praising God for his mighty works. And those were the signs that accompanied the giving of the Spirit in this new and this miraculous way.

### III. Reactions

#### A. Peoples' Amazement

Well evidently what happened this whole crowd of people left the house where they were and moved out into public, presumably to the temple, because what we start reading is all the peoples amazement at what's going on. People who were not part of a 120. In verse 5 we read "now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews devote 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." They were absolutely shocked that these hicks from the country were able to speak in all of these different languages, then Luke the author goes into great detail about how many languages these uneducated Galileans were speaking in. Verse 9: "And how is it that we hear each of us in own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians – we hear them telling in our own tongue, our own language, the mighty works of God."

No wonder, I would be amazed too if I were in their shoes and I saw that kind of miraculous outpouring. But it's interesting isn't it that whenever you have miracles you also have secular excuses. You have people that can look at a miracle and just give some silly excuse that makes no sense, but anything to avoid having to say that you're looking at the face of a miracle.

#### B. Secular Explanations

That's what we see going on in verses 12 and 13. "And all were amazed and perplexed saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine." Now think about that for a second. They are saying that all of these Galilean sailors are drunk. They are looking in the face of a miracle, and because they don't want to admit the obvious, they have to come up with something else so they say "Oh, they're just drunk". Wow, I didn't know alcohol had the ability to turn 120 people into instant linguists. And not only does alcohol give them the opportunity to speak in languages they've never learned, but it can make them say the same thing.

Alcohol can make all these people praise God in all these different languages. Man if that what alcohol can do bring it on! Just kidding. I mean I wouldn't have had to go to Germany to learn German. I could have just got drunk and read German. That would have been really cool. I wonder if my supervisor in graduate school would have accepted that. I don't think so. There are some people that can look in the face of an obvious miracle and they will say anything to avoid stating the obvious.

Many of you know Billy Gardner, had inoperable cancer the size of a grapefruit down into his midsection somewhere. They went in to operate it. They couldn't find it. There is 22 doctors on the tumor board, as it's called. They called them all in and said "There are the X-rays, you tell me where this cancer is I'm supposed to dig out." They couldn't find it. They were sitting there in the face of a miracle, and they know the body doesn't have the ability to remove a grapefruit sized cancer tumor in one day.

But I think the best illustration comes from two men named Frances Crick and James Watson. If you are familiar with these names these are the two scientist that won the Nobel Prize for their work on DNA in the double helix. And they really put to death the myth of the simple cell. When I was in high school and the whole evolutionary scheme, I was taught that the cell is extremely simple. Very basic and it's one of those building blocks of life that just evolved out of primordial scum.

Then Crick and these guys come along and they say in every single cell of the human body is wrapped a double helix of the DNA strands with millions of genetic codes. The cell is anything but simple, and it's irreducible. If you take any part out of it, it's dead. And a lot of this came from Crick and Watson's work in DNA. Basically what they proved is that evolution is impossible. Crick is put in print that the world does not contain the chemicals necessary to generate DNA. It's too complicated. End of evolution. And yet Crick is looking at this incredible miracle. Millions of genetic codes wrapped in every cell of our being. And instead of praising God, he writes a book and expounds the new theory called "panspermia". You've all heard of this. That the human race was seeded by aliens. But see Crick is an atheist and he knows scientifically that evolution is impossible, that DNA cannot be formed gradually, that the chemicals to create DNA don't even exist, but since there can't be a God, since there can't be anything miraculous, I guess aliens came and seeded the planet. No matter when and where you live, you will find people that look in the face of a miracle and say "Oh, they're just drunk".

### **C. Peter's Explanation**

Then Peter gets up and gives the explanation starting at verse 14, "He says no, they're not drunk, not even Galileans sailors get drunk by 9:00 in the morning." This is the fulfillment of prophecy that Joel, the Old Testament prophet, had prophesied about the coming day of the Lord. This would be a day in which God would pour out his spirit on all people, and all these people filled with God's spirit would prophesy. They would speak for God. And he is saying this is what you are hearing. Having given that explanation he then gets into the sermon beginning in verse 22. I'm going to teach you another good Greek word. It's a word that is used widely. It's used in commentaries. So it's a good word to know. It's the word Kerygma.

The Kerygma is simply used to describe the essential nature of New Testament preaching. What that means is that if you look through the sermons in Acts, and there are seven of them, that you will see that there is the same pattern, the same things are being discussed in all the sermons and those four basic points that are being discussed

are called the Kerygma. The four points of New Testament preaching are these: 1). Jesus lived, and sometimes they talk about the miracles that he performed or things like that, 2). that he died, and often in these sermons they point out that he died in fulfillment of prophesy, 3). that he was raised from the dead, and sometimes the sermons will emphasize that he is now exalted at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, and, in one way or another all these sermons end for a call for repentance.

Okay, those are the four elements of what we call the Kerygma. The four things that you will find define the preaching in the early church. Let's look at Peter's sermon and you can pick out those points. Starting at verse 22. "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know (there is point one), this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men (there is step two – that Jesus died). It's an interesting verse isn't it? That there is no excuse for their sin. They are fully responsible for what they did and yet even in the midst of human sin God is working sovereignly to accomplish his purposes.

And then he continues in verse 24: "God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it." Death simply could not keep Jesus down. (point three of the Kerygma). And Peter goes on and talks about how this is the fulfillment of prophesy and then in verse 33 writes "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father, the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

And he goes on and he talks a little more about this being the fulfillment of prophesy and then he concludes point three of the Kerygma in verse 36. "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." And I don't know if the people interrupted Peter or not, but he doesn't have to make the fourth point. They say in verse 37 "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles "Brothers, what shall we do?" They were scared. They were scared because they were convicted, that what they understood about Jesus was wrong, and that what they had done to Jesus was wrong and they say "what will we do?"

So Peter heads to the fourth part of the Kerygma and tells them "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, for the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off. Everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." Jesus lived a miraculous wonderful life. He died in fulfillment of prophesy. He was raised from the dead in fulfillment of prophesy and therefore as we come to grips with who he is, we are called to repent.

That's the Kerygma. And if our evangelistic services today would just follow this same pattern, and some do, but some don't, we would avoid much of the mess that's in the church today. I've heard evangelistic sermons where they say "aren't you sorry for your sins, aren't you sorry for your sins. God is going to condemn you. Aren't you sorry for your sins?" And some say "Yeah, I don't want to be condemned." If you respond to that, are you on your way to heaven? No. There is no salvation by sorrow. That's not a biblical concept.

The biblical concept is the presentation of who Jesus is, how he lived, how he died, the fact that he was raised from the dead, and once we know that we are called to repent of our sin, and our misunderstanding of who he was. For when they came to Peter and said, "What must we do?", they must have been scared. And notice the answer that

Peter gives, or I should say, notice the answer that the world often gives to this question.

#### **D. World's Answer**

One of the answers that the world has to the question is - well "be a good person, be sincere". Ever heard that? This answer denies the reality of sin, and if there is no sin there is no need to repent, and if there is no need to repent then there is no need for the cross, and if there is no need for the cross then God the Father lied to God the Son, because God the Son says "Is there any other way to accomplish this without me dying on the cross, but not my will, but yours be done." And God the Father's answer was "No. You must go through the cross. It's the only way to do something about sin." So when we hear the answer "Be a good person, be sincere in what you believe, whatever you believe", what they are doing is calling God the Father a liar. And yet I suspect if you go out to the proverbial street corner and stop the proverbial person and ask them why they think they are going to heaven, most of them will answer something like "I'll just be a good person. Be sincere". If you go to some of the more liberal churches that's what you will hear. "Be a good person, be sincere." And evidently if you go to the Crystal Cathedral and listen to Schuller, that's exactly what you're going to hear now too. I know that Robert Schuller has done a lot of good. My grandmother was blessed greatly by his ministry and was helped, but for many years people questioned whether Robert Schuller has a doctrine of sin. And evidently now that his autobiography is written, he doesn't.

Let me read you something. This comes out of Kent Hughes book "Set Apart: Calling a Worldly Church to a Godly Life". It's an incredibly good book and something we all need to read. But in here he is quoting an article from the Chicago Tribune, November 2, 2001. And this is what the Chicago Tribune writes. For decades Schuller said that he was a proponent of the kind of proselytizing that pushed Muslims to become Christians. Then he realized that asking people to change their faith was "utterly ridiculous".

This quote is from his autobiography. Schuller's first interaction with a Muslim group came four years ago when Mohammed had invited him to give the opening sermon at the Muslim-American Societies New Jersey convention and in 1999 he was asked by the grand mufti of Syria to preach in Damascus. "When I met the grand mufti I sensed the presence of God." He wrote in his autobiography. The two men he said focused on similarities, not differences. "The purpose of religion is not to say "I have all the answers and my job is to convert you. That road leads to the twin towers." And he's not talking about the movie. "That attitude is an invitation to extremist." Schuller said. After September 11, he said "The emphasis should move from proselytizing", missions and conversions, "to just trying to help everybody who has hurts and hopes." Evidently if you would go before Robert Schuller and say "What must I do to be saved?" he would say "Get along, be sincere. Don't push your beliefs on someone else." He said in writing that the Christian evangelistic and missions programs are responsible for the terrorist's attacks on 9/11.

There is a theological term of deep significance that explains that position. It's called rubbish. But it is one of the answers that is out there. "What must we do to be saved?" Well, just be a good person. There is no such thing as sin. But there's another answer too.

Another answer the world likes to give is “Well, if you want to do something then what you need to do is work really hard. You need to work hard to earn favor with God. That’s what you do about your sin.” And so I’m going to step on everyone’s toes here by the way, the Jehovah’s Witnesses say “Go do something, knock on the doors and many other things.” The Mormons say “Be married in the temple and do many other things”. The Muslims say “Pray a lot and do many other things.” The Hindus say “Well do a lot of good so that when you get reincarnated you’re reincarnated up the spiral instead of down the spiral”. There is even a pastor in Spokane who publicly said “Luther got it wrong. Salvation is not by grace through faith, salvation is something that you earn, and you have to work to be accepted by God.” You really don’t have to go very far if you’ve had some experiences like I have had in other Baptist churches. Not all Baptist churches. But I’ve been in Baptists churches that, not explicitly, but certainly implicitly teach that salvation is through the appearance of religiosity. That is how you are saved. You do certain things to look a certain way, and it’s interesting if you try to pin these people’s theology down they are really Roman Catholics in their view of baptism. Roman Catholicism teaches that baptism is what’s called a “means of grace”. That God is at work even without you knowing it because you’re a baby at the time, and he is changing you even though you are not cooperating in any sense. And I know of Baptists that treat baptism the same way. It doesn’t matter what you do just walk down the isle of the church, sign the roll book, get baptized and you’ve got your ‘Get Out of Hell Free’ card, and you can go out and live anyway you want, it doesn’t matter you’re on your way to heaven. And baptism becomes a ritual that you go through to earn favor with God so you can shake your baptismal certificate in God’s face and say “You gotta save me I got me an ‘I got dunked’ card.” That’s not taught here by the way.

### **E. Evangelical Answer**

The world has a lot of answers to the questions of verse 37, be a good person, earn favor with God. But there is a third answer and it’s the biblical answer. And praise the Lord Peter was an evangelical, and Peter responds “You must repent and you must be baptized”. What Peter is saying is that you cannot move smoothly from the natural world to the spiritual world. That there is a disjunction that your previous life has to stop, and through the work of God something else is begun that it’s not this smooth transition of just learning to be a good person or knocking on a few doors.

When people ask me what I am and they want to try and label me, one of the labels that I am comfortable with is the label “evangelical”. The term has been around for 300 or 400 years and evangelicalism is taught the reality of sin and the need for the atonement, the need for Christ to have done something on the cross. Evangelicalism teaches individual repentance.

Evangelicalism teaches the necessity of God doing the work in your life, of changing you, of giving you rebirth. Evangelicalism has always emphasized the on-going needs of sanctification. That holiness always matters. Peter was an evangelical, and when he was asked “What must we do?”, he responded, “You must repent and you must be baptized”.

Let’s look at those two words. Repent. But repent of what? I don’t know how many times I have taught New Testament survey in college and seminary, and I always loved this particular lecture, and I would always kind of bait the students. Lead them down a dark path, and would get to this point and I would say “Repent of what?”. The hands

would always go up and say “well repent of sin”. And I would say “That’s interesting. I mean sin is kind of in Acts Chapter 2. In verse 38 “for the forgiveness of your sins”. Down in verse 40 he talks about saving yourself from this crooked generation. But I would ask them “Is that really the bulk of Peter’s sermon? Is that what he is primarily concerned about that we would somehow repent of our sins?” And the answer is “no”. As you look at this passage from verse 22 to 39, that while the idea of sin is present, that’s not the bulk of what Peter is talking about. What Peter is trying to get across is the question “Who is Jesus”. Who is Jesus? He was the man attested to you by many miracles by God. He was the man who died in accordance with prophesy. He was the person who was raised from the dead in accordance with prophesy. He is someone who now sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty waiting to judge the quick, the living and the dead, (if you know the creeds.)

This is the Jesus who calls you to repent of your misunderstanding of who he is. See the bulk of Peter’s sermon is not so much about sin as it is about the question “Who is Jesus?” And when Peter says you must repent, what he is saying primary, I believe, is that you must repent of your misunderstanding. That you thought Jesus was this and you killed him, and you must repent of your understanding of who Jesus is and repent of all the sin that flowed from that. You must change both how you think about him and then you must change how you behave.

That’s what repentance is. It’s not just, “Oh, I’m sorry about my sins”. Everyone who hears the gospel message must answer this one question. “Who is Jesus?” And the argument has been around since the second century A.D., most recently popularized as far as I know by C.S. Lewis, other people may have picked it up more recently, but as you ask the question “Who is Jesus?” there are only three answers: either Jesus was a liar, or he was a lunatic, and that’s what the Jews thought he was and killed him for it, or he was who he said he was. The son of God, the Lord, verse 36, in other words Master over all, and Christ the Messiah.

Those are the only three options available to answer the question “Who is Jesus?” There is no fourth option. There is no option of him being a good person. A good person does not say “I am the vine and you are the branches, unless you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.” Good people don’t say things like that. Good people don’t say “I and the Father are one”, good people don’t say, “I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.” No one says that salvation is by believing in “me”. Good people don’t do that. Either liars or lunatics, or Jesus Christ. And those are the only answers available to the question in verse 37.

“Who is Jesus and what must we do?” There just isn’t a place for the proclamation of the gospel that picks up the whole idea of sorrow and judgement and refuses to follow the biblical pattern, and the biblical pattern is that you share who Jesus is, that he lived, that he did miracles, he did wondrous things. Yes, he was a good person but he was more. He died in fulfillment of prophesy and yet he was raised from the dead because his death was to pay the penalty for my sins. He had no sins of his own to pay for and so death couldn’t keep him in the grave, and God the Father raised him and has exalted him at the right hand and he is going to be the judge. He will be the person who stands at the Book of Life and makes the judgements when you and I stand before him in judgement, and if you know that about Jesus, you will know that you must repent, you must change your mind, you must realize “I was wrong, I thought he was just a good person.” That can’t be.

He must be who he said he is he must be, the Son of God, he must be Lord, he must be the Messiah. I am sorry for my misunderstanding and I am sorry for my sin. I am sorry

for the things I've done wrong. Jesus I am your follower, I am your disciple, I will believe you are who you say you are and I will follow where you lead me."

That's biblical evangelism and it doesn't matter whether it's from the pulpit or whether you're talking to your mom and dad, or whether you're talking to your neighbor, or whether you're talking to your co-worker, or whether you are out on the beaches in Florida or Southern California doing cold turkey witnessing. The issue is "Who is Jesus and what is there to repent of?"

Peter said two things, not only must we repent, but we must also be baptized. Baptism is not a magical cure for sin. It is not a means of grace. It is not a "Get out of Hell Free" card. I'll never forget a service I was at. I think I shared this with you awhile back about a neighbor of ours who was on cocaine and thought he could fly, and he couldn't. And at his funeral service the priest said well he was baptized as a baby so we know he is in heaven. What a horrible thing to say at a man's funeral. Baptism is not some magical cure for sin. It is simply and it is wonderfully the visible indication of an inward change of an inward reality.

Baptism is acting out the Kerygma. That as you are baptized you are stating something has to happen, things can't keep going as they are. Being nice and knocking on doors and doing religious things is only going to get me to hell, but rather "While I'm a sinner I am separated from God, and when I'm put under the waters of baptism I am dying with Christ, I'm dying to my old life, and I'm dying to the power of sin and the mastery that it has exerted over me", and as I come out of the baptismal waters I am acting out a commitment to live a new kind of life, that just as Christ was raised to a new kind of life, (Romans 6) so also I too am raised to newness of life, a new kind of life in which the mastery of sin has been broken and that holiness now always matters. And is in fact a possibility.

There is no more important question in all of life than this one question. Who is Jesus? What do we have to do? Because the answer to that question determines whether you spend eternity in hell or eternity in heaven. And if you are not a follower of Jesus Christ I would encourage you to not hide behind the smoke screen of intellectual questions. And if those of you who are followers of Jesus Christ are sharing Jesus with them and they start bringing up these intellectual questions, don't let them do it. Work around them, find a way to get them to answer the question "Who is Jesus?" Because the questions will come. You can't have witnessed much without having heard the questions. The first one will be "Who do you believe Jesus is?" and the first question that generally comes is "Well how can God let bad things happen to good people?" It's a smoke screen for the most part. And the answer is "There are no good people, we are all sinners. What do you think about Jesus?". "Well how can I believe in a God who sends people to hell because they haven't heard?" Jesus never sends anyone to hell for ignorance, He sends them to hell because they are sinners.

Good question. "What do you think about Jesus?" "Well, what about the crusades?" I heard a story about a pastor who was in one of these exchanges and about the 15th or 16th question the pastor said "If I answer this question will you become a Christian?" "No". Well then I'm not going to answer it because these questions are nothing but smoke screens. They're good questions. The Bible has the answers to them, but the answers to these questions will not condemn you to hell. And the answer to these questions will not bring you into internal bliss with Jesus and God the Father. The question of who is Jesus, who do you believe that Jesus is, and as you understand that and as you respond to it, there is eternal life.

At a funeral service a few months ago, we were done in the reception area afterwards and I was listening to the pastor share with a non-believer. It was marvelous to listen to. And he started by saying "Do you have any spiritual beliefs?" Kind of a very non-threatening kind of question. And they would talk and then he said "Well, that's interesting. Who do you think that Jesus is?" That's the question to ask. I asked an evangelist once, "Help me learn how to share my faith. How do you do it?" I wasn't looking for a technique I was just looking for something. And he told me an interesting thing. He said that every conversation has a turning point, and if you are praying about the opportunity to share Jesus those turning points in conversations come, and you can turn them to the Lord or you can let them go to football, or wherever else they are going to go. And my encouragement to myself and my encouragement to you is to pray for opportunities so that we are watching for these turning points in conversations and when we get to them we say "Do you have any spiritual beliefs? Who do you think Jesus is?" Because that is the question that determines heaven and hell.