

Pentecost: The Celebration of Assurance – Eph 1:11-23

Introduction – Pentecost gets its name from the Greek “fifty days” in Lev 23:16, where the Feast of Weeks (also called the Feast of Harvest when the firstfruits were brought in, Ex 23:16) was to be celebrated by all the covenant people of God. It was always celebrated fifty days after the Sabbath following Passover, and so it was an eighth-day celebration. It included a peace offering that all the people took part in, a feast with God. While Passover was a remembrance of the affliction of Egypt (unleavened), Pentecost was a remembrance of the spread of the blessing of God upon the land for His people (leavened). And on a particular Pentecost Sunday, 7 weeks after the Resurrection and 10 days after the Ascension of Jesus Christ, the Triune God celebrated the firstfruits of the Harvest of the Nations (Acts 2, esp. v1, 5, 41, 46-47).

An Inheritance (Eph 1:11-12) – Paul, writing to a church of Jews and Gentiles, tells them that “*we have obtained an inheritance.*” The inheritance God had promised to Abraham was Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey. Christians often think that this inheritance now is heaven, but God intended “*that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him*” (v10). Elsewhere, he says, “*God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself*” (2 Cor 5:19). The Ephesian church is that gathering, that reconciling, and that inheritance in Christ and they share with Him in that inheritance. They (and we) are to see themselves as part of God’s predestined story.

A Deposit of that Inheritance (Eph 1:13-14) – Jew and Gentile alike join in this inheritance in the same way: hearing the word of truth, having faith, and being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. And so, this is all the work of God (Eph 2:8-9). But what has He done? Sealing us with His Spirit guarantees our salvation in Christ. That same Spirit is also a “first installment” or first-harvest of the promised inheritance for Christ and for His church.

From Jerusalem to Ephesus – From just the few short years of the rebirth of the church at Pentecost in Acts to the time Paul writes to the Ephesian church, the promise of the World Harvest was spreading. Ephesus is that inheritance and Ephesus-to-the-world is their inheritance (Matt 5:5). The initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit to all the nations was spreading, just as God promised. As a redeemed church, Ephesus was to be a sign to the rest of the world that this glorious future is on the way. So too is the church today.

Abiding in that Assurance; Abiding as that Assurance (Eph 1:15-23) – The Feast of Weeks was a time to physically come before the Lord with the firstfruits of your harvest, acknowledging with great thanksgiving that it had all come from Him (notice Paul’s words in Eph 1:15-16). It was a time to trust Him in a festival for future harvests to come, which is why it included freewill offerings (Deut 16:10). Now, in the Pentecost of the New Humanity, we see that we are that harvest and we are to abide in that assurance *while actually being that assurance* (because the Holy Spirit abides in us) to one another and to the world. This is the theme of Paul’s prayer in 1:16-23.

“The Exceeding Greatness of His Power Towards Us Who Believe” – “*It is well known that it has ever been a cause of ruin to men that being not content with Christ, they have had a hankering to wander beyond the simple doctrine of the gospel*” – Calvin. The first chapter of Ephesians is one of the most succinct and dense presentations of the gospel. If you find the gospel nothing more than “the same old story” in a boring sort of way, you are missing the point of Pentecost and your own salvation. And the Spirit of God has been given to us as the cure for this. The Spirit points us back to Christ and glorifies His teachings, testifying to their truth (John 16:12-15). The Spirit causes us to cry out to the Father (Rom 8:14-17), even when we suffer, for He groans with us (Rom 8:26), longing with us for the full payment, the full inheritance, the glorious resurrection of our bodies and the consummation of all of creation. And it is the Holy Spirit, as we walk in Him, Who bears the fruit in us by which we gladly obey our Lord (Gal 5:16, 22-25).

“The Riches of the Glory of His Inheritance in the Saints” – Much of these riches have not yet been manifested. The Spirit is still at work in you in the work of your sanctification. But He is there and so you see Jesus high and lifted up, your sins are forgiven, and you are being changed from glory to glory. As Paul says elsewhere, “*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things*” (Rom 8:32)? This is gospel-assurance. Likewise, the fullness of the Gentiles has not yet been manifested, but the celebration of Pentecost reminds us of the promised inheritance made to the Son by the Father: “*Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance*” (Psalm 2). This is gospel-assurance.