

Pentecost 2021

Acts 2:1-21

Introduction

One of the products of the Protestant Reformation was a reforming of the church calendar. While the vast majority of the Roman Catholic feast days and days for the saints were abolished, some of the Reformed churches retained what became known as the five evangelical feast days. These were feast days to particularly mark events surrounding the life of King Jesus: Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost. The focus of our calendar certainly ought to be the weekly celebration of the resurrection and reign of Jesus on the Lord's Day. A particular notice and celebration of these other days, though, when done with care, adds to our understanding and celebration of the life and reign of our King.

Firstfruits and Harvest

Pentecost is a promise of more to come. It was one of the feasts prescribed by God in the Jewish calendar. It was a harvest feast (also known as the Feast of Weeks) which followed seven weeks or fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits (Lev. 23), the first day of the week after Passover. And it was one of the three festivals for which the Jewish males were summoned to come to the Temple (Ex. 34:23). Paul says that Jesus in His resurrection was the firstfruits of the those that sleep (1 Cor. 15:20). Fifty days after His resurrection, the first harvest of the gospel was gathered in as the church was born (Acts 2). God had promised Abraham that through His Seed the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). At the birth of the church, Jews from all over the known world had gathered to Jerusalem and were saved. This was a first taste of the extent of the spread of the gospel. Jesus had said to disciple all the nations, and Pentecost indicated that by the power of the Spirit, the church's mission would be accomplished.

New Covenant

Pentecost is also about the new covenant in Jesus Christ. There was a Jewish tradition (in *The Book of Jubilees*, likely dating from the 2nd century BC) that suggests Noah first celebrated the Feast of Weeks in remembrance of the covenant that God made with him to never again destroy the earth with a flood (Gen. 8:21). The festival was also tied to the giving of the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai after the first Passover. At Sinai, the Israelites soon betrayed their Deliverer by worshipping the golden calf, and because of this 3000 of them were killed (Ex. 32). And they did this over and over again.

God had promised to make a new covenant with His people, a covenant in which He would write His law on their hearts (Jer. 31:31-34). God's law was good, but it could not produce righteousness. It described the way of life (Ps. 1, Ps. 19, Ps. 119), but it did not grant life, did not make hearts alive. And so God sent His Son to die for us. We die with Him in baptism and are raised to new life in Him (Rom. 6). God sent His Spirit to enliven those to whom He gives life in Christ. And when this began at Pentecost, 3000 people were added to the original followers. God would not destroy the earth with a flood because of sin, but He has and is and will overwhelm the earth with the flood of His Spirit and His grace such that the

knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14).

Judgment and Blessing

With all of that in mind, it is also important to note the aspect of judgment that is clear at Pentecost in Acts. While it marks the beginning of the church, the new creation and covenant in Christ, it also marks the beginning of the end for the Judaic system. When the people marvel that the disciples were “speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God,” Peter specifically says that this was in fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy about the pouring out of the Spirit (Acts 2:11ff, Joel 2:28-32). The section that Peter quotes announces the coming of the day of the Lord with language used by the prophets (and echoed by Jesus in Matt. 24) to indicate the demise of a kingdom (cosmic disaster, e.g., Is. 13:10). The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost was a blessing to those who would believe, but it was a sign of the impending judgment on unbelieving Israel (cf. 1 Cor. 14:20-22). Israel had joined with the nations that raged against the anointed one (Acts 4:25-28), and so the Son would soon dash it to pieces (Ps. 2).

At the same time, this sign of judgment upon those who rejected Christ was also a sign of great blessing for those who believed in Him. At the Tower of Babel, God had used a diversity of tongues to divide nations who united against Him before (Gen. 11). At Pentecost, the divided tongues were used to unify people from many nations into one body in Christ, which again was a picture of much more to come.

Conclusion

So why celebrate Pentecost? Jesus has defeated sin and death as the once-for-all sacrifice and the firstfruits of the resurrection. There no longer is a sacrifice for sin apart from Christ. Pentecost was the beginning of the end for the old Temple system. And Pentecost was also the signal, the whistle-blow, the trumpet sound that the end would come for all of Christ’s enemies. They will either repent and believe and thus receive the Holy Spirit, or they will refuse and perish. When Jesus rose from the dead, it was game over. When He sent His Spirit, it was proof and assurance that His victory is our victory, our promised victory over sin and the church’s promised victory over the world. The nations will stream to worship the King, and the Lord will receive a great harvest. Pentecost was the first glimmer of it.

But also, remembering Pentecost is another opportunity and angle from which to remember the simple gospel. How can you be saved? You are a sinner, you have offended the most holy God, and nothing you can do will erase that or make up for it. How can you be saved? Peter and Joel are clear: Call on the name of the Lord Jesus. Repent of your sin and believe. In doing so, you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and He is the guarantee of your salvation (Eph. 1:13-14).