

Sermon for Sunday, June 6, 1976, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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"PENTECOST FOR PRESBYTERIANS"

Acts 1:1-8; 2:1-4

Text: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you..."

--Acts 1:8

Today is Pentecost Sunday. Would it surprise you if I said that Pentecost is just as important as Christmas? We don't think of it that way, do we? Yet without Pentecost, Christmas and Calvary and Easter would not mean very much. Let me tell you why. Jesus is God's objective act in human history. When the Bible talks about Jesus it does so in concrete, specific time-place terms. It says, "Now when Jesus (a real person) was born in Bethlehem (a real city) of Judea (a real country) in the days of Herod the king (a real time)." This is God acting in real history in a real, objective way. This means that God takes you and me seriously. We are real people living in a real world and we have a real problem--that problem is sin. And because God takes us seriously, he takes our sin seriously, too. What we do, how we live, the ways we act are important to God. And when our doing and living and acting are contrary to his will for us, he takes the consequence of that very, very seriously. If you ever wondered if the things you do matter, I can assure you they matter to God. If you ever doubt it, all you have to do is look at Bethlehem and the manger to see that your actions are important enough to God that he sent his own son to do something about our sin.

So, Jesus is God's objective act. God sent his own son into our real world in a real objective way to die--to pay the penalty--for your sins and mine. Thus, the birth of Jesus, his life, his crucifixion, his resurrection are all God's objective act to give us an answer to the human dilemma of sin. Now something has really been done about the penalty of sin. God can point to an objective act in human history when somebody took our place, died our death. And God can say to us, "If you will accept what my son has done for you, you are forgiven of your sins, your fellowship with me is restored."

But that's where the problem comes in. How can some objective event "out there" become real for me? Take, for example, the cross of Jesus. Here is an objective fact that occurs. There Jesus died for my sins so that I could be forgiven. But knowing that--and even believing that--doesn't make me any different inside. I know many people--and I'm sure you do too--who believe as an objective fact in Jesus, they admit he is the son of God, they believe he died for the sins of the world. Yet, it doesn't change anything in their lives.

Well, that's where Pentecost comes in. Just as God objectively sent his Son, God subjectively sends his Holy Spirit to live in the hearts of people like you and me. So, where Christmas was God's objective act, Pentecost is God's subjective act. Pentecost is the birthday of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost is the day when God sent his Holy Spirit in a way he had never come before. Pentecost is the day when God reached down to touch your heart and mine and gave us power to live a new life.

As a Christian you are to believe something--you are to believe all about Jesus, God's objective act. And that's what Christmas is about. But as a Christian you are to receive something--you are to receive God's power in your heart to help you live out your new life, to live out your forgiveness. That's what Pentecost is all about. So, to be a Christian you are to believe and receive. That means there are two questions a person who wants to be a Christian should ask himself. Those questions are, "Do I believe in Jesus?" and "Did I receive the Holy Spirit?"

Isn't that what Peter said in his sermon to the people of Jerusalem on Pentecost? As he preached about Jesus, the Bible tells us the people were cut to the heart and they said to Peter, "What shall we do?" And Peter told them to do two things. He put it this way, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (that is, believe); and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38) There it is! Believe and receive.

Do you believe in Jesus, God's objective act for your salvation? If so, then may I ask, have you also received the gift of the Holy Spirit? If you have, you should be able to know it. You should be able to know it because you will experience a power at work in your heart and life. Isn't that what Jesus said? When St. Luke records the last time that the disciples are with Jesus, this is what Jesus says to them, "And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high." (St. Luke 24:49) Then, again, in Acts, as Jesus is once again described as being with his disciples for the last time, he tells them, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you..." Are you aware of God's power in your heart? Are you able to live a better life, be a better person, since you believed in Jesus because you have also received the Holy Spirit?

Now, that is not an idle question. You see, the Bible tells us that a person can believe in Jesus and still not receive the power of the Holy Spirit. Let me give you several illustrations from the Bible. In the 8th chapter of Acts, we are told how Phillip preached to the city of Samaria and the people believed. We read, "But when they believed Phillip, as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." (Acts 8:12) So, the Bible says the Samaritans believed. However, as we read on down the page we discover that Peter and John came down from Jerusalem and then we come to this, "(they) prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit." (Acts 8:15-17) Another example is St. Paul himself. On the road to Damascus, St. Paul met Jesus and believed in him. The rest of his life St. Paul told how Jesus met him on the road that day and we still speak of his Damascus Road experience. Yet, it was not until three days later that God sent a man named Ananias to Paul. He said to Paul, "the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight and now (now, notice this!) be filled with the Holy Spirit." So, we see that a person can believe in Jesus as his savior and still not have received the Holy Spirit. As a matter of fact, St. Paul once ran into some disciples of Jesus and he asked them a question. He said, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" and when they replied that they had not, the Bible tells us "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came upon them..." (Acts 19)

On this Pentecost Sunday when we are celebrating the birthday of God's gift of the Holy Spirit, perhaps it would be appropriate for each of us to ask, "Did I receive the Holy Spirit when I believed?" If you feel that you are not as close to God as you ought to be, if you feel something is missing in your Christian experience, if you feel that there is no power in your life to truly live for Jesus, it may mean that you have not received the Holy Spirit in the power that Jesus promised. And power is what Jesus promised. That's what our text for this morning says, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you..." (Acts 1:8) So, if you feel you do not have that power in your life, let me suggest very briefly some guidelines for you in receiving the Holy Spirit. Now, let me emphasize that

these are simply guidelines. I wish there were some steps that I could lay out for you and say to you, "If you do steps one, two, three and four, you will receive the Holy Spirit." But God doesn't work that way. You can't get God into that kind of a mechanical box. As Jesus told Nicodemus, "the spirit blows where it will." Yet, as you seek to be filled with the power of God's Spirit, there are some guidelines that will be helpful.

First, you must yearn for God's Spirit. Now, there are a lot of things I want to desire or wish for. But to yearn is a different matter. About 12 years ago I came to a point in my ministry where I was spiritually dry. What I was doing did not seem to be very significant and I felt like a gob of ecclesiastical grease that just kept the church machinery going. Either something had to happen to my life spiritually or I planned to get out of the ministry. I began to yearn for more of God. I began to yearn for God's power to work in my life. I came to a place in my life where I said to God, "Lord, I desire you above all else. Everything I have and am I lay on the line for you, only give me spiritual power in my life." You see, I was yearning for God; I was yearning for that power the Bible promised me. And, do you know, there is a promise in the Bible! God says, "When you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you..." (Jer. 29:13, 14) So, the first guideline is to yearn for God's power in your life--so much so that you are ready to lay everything on the altar in order to receive it.

A second guideline is this: In a sense you must storm the gates of heaven. In the 11th chapter of St. Luke he tells us in the words of Jesus, "Ask and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you..." And then he goes on to add, "How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" But the Greek in those verbs--ask, seek, knock--are in the present imperative. And the words mean ask, and keep on asking; seek, and keep on seeking; knock, and keep on knocking. Do you want to receive the power of the Holy Spirit? Then storm the gates of heaven--ask, seek and keep on knocking until your spiritual knuckles are bloody.

A third guidepost I would point out to you is spiritual brokenness. Do you really want to get close to God? The truth is, you see, you really may not. And why? Because the closer you get to God, the more you see yourself as you are. The more you want to be like him the more you realize you are not. It is the person who is far from God who is self-satisfied, who is not very aware of his sin. But the closer a man gets to the light of God's face, the more he becomes aware of the darkness of his own soul. Do you want to be humiliated, broken, embarrassed? Then get close to God. Yet, it is not until we see ourselves as we really are, not until we know our own pitiful weakness, our own sinfulness, that we can be broken enough to give up our own righteousness--our own idea of goodness--and depend on Jesus only. Yes, you have to walk in brokenness.

A fourth guideline for receiving the power of the Holy Spirit is to get to know God's word. How well do you know the Bible? You see, the Bible is God's word to the world. There the heart and mind of God is made clear for us. Listen carefully to me! How can you expect to have more of God when you do not have as much of him as he has already given you? God has given us so much in the Bible. How can we hope to have more of him when we haven't taken advantage of what he has already given us of himself in the Bible? So, if you want to receive the Holy Spirit, first get to know God's word.



A final guideline I would give you is this: there is waiting on God. I can remember in my own life when I wanted God so much and I was so impatient that he didn't answer me right then. Sometimes, praying beside my bed at night, I would be so frustrated I would want to shake my fist at God. I didn't want to wait! I had forgotten the Psalmist who wrote, "My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning..." (130:6) But God has his own time and his own way and his own place. God's schedule may not be the one I want or like, but I must wait on Him. But this I promise you: if you wait on God, His time does come. For me it came one afternoon over 12 years ago. In my study a compulsion to pray drove me to my knees and as I knelt down, God filled me with His Holy Spirit in a wonderful and blessed way. There came into my heart and life something that had never been there before--an inner awareness of his presence, of his power. There is no adequate way to describe what happens in a person's life--a transaction occurs; a change is made; a power is given and life is dramatically changed. For me, the first glow of that inner gift has diminished, but the reality has never left me. Something has been done in my life that can never be undone and I praise God for it.

I have not arrived nor am I perfect. Far from it! Nor has life had less burdens or troubles or sorrows. If anything, it has had more. But there is an inner resource for meeting life that has never there before--it is the resource of God's power. There is a simple prayer that comes out of the South that expresses it very well, "Lord, I ain't what I oughta' be and, Lord, I ain't what I'm gonna' be, but I thank you, Lord, that I ain't what I used to be."

In the words of St. Paul, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" If not, then God has a gift for you. That's what Pentecost is all about.