

PENTECOST ... the miracle that staggered a world  
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(ACTS 2)

Pentecost changed the world; without it, the Church would have been another sect destined to disappear within a few months. The Saviour expressed superlative truth when He said, "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you. . . ." (John 16:7.) Even now as in retrospect we review the whole proceeding, it seems utterly fantastic that unlearned and inexperienced men should attempt to overthrow the teaching of centuries; to challenge heathen strongholds, and then to evangelize a world with the astounding news that a Carpenter nailed to a cross had been the Son of the Living God. Not one member of the original twelve had been trained in theology; not one was a polished speaker. They were rough, blunt men drawn from ordinary walks of life; but Pentecost transformed midgets into giants!

#### Power to Perceive

Just before the Lord ascended to heaven, He said to the disciples, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me. . . ." The scope of this promise is far wider than one would at first imagine. During the Lord's ministry, the disciples thought only of an earthly kingdom, and all their preaching expressed self-desire. The writings of the prophets were never fully understood; some of the most outstanding utterances were treated as commonplace. Pentecost changed the entire outlook of these men. Ancient parchments came alive within their minds; the Lamb of God was recognized as the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world; the Old Testament sacrifices were seen as types and shadows of the Gospel revelation. Their amazement gave place to wonder, and a new perception inspired their oft-repeated utterance, "Thus was it fulfilled which was written by the prophets" (see John 16:13).

#### Power to Prevail

Actions speak louder than words. it was obvious that if these fishermen were to succeed in their tremendous task, they needed more than intellectual illumination. Simon Peter possessed a volcanic soul! He could be a flaming fury, or a dormant despondent. Within these men lived their greatest enemies. It was possible to denounce the evil of passion and at the same time to be a victim of a vile temper. It was possible to pronounce a curse on adultery and yet to harbor secretly lustful thoughts. No man should ever preach beyond his experience. The disciples needed power to trample under foot the very evils by which they themselves had been overcome; and if Simon Peter, so recently scared by a maiden, were to stand unafraid before an immense crowd of potential murderers, then he needed a new dynamic to banish completely his former timidity. Pentecost supplied that essential. The coming of the Holy Spirit made it possible for the power of God to be known in human weakness. God through the Holy Spirit did for man what self-effort could never do.

#### Power to Preach

". . . and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Pentecost changed a hesitant, half-hearted company of believers into a machine capable of making hell

PENTECOST ... the miracle that staggered a world tremble. Probably Simon Peter preached many hundreds of times during those memorable tours when in company with another disciple he had gone forth to announce the nearness of the kingdom. Yet, in spite of all his sincere efforts, there is no record that he ever won a soul for his Master. Undoubtedly he tried hard; of course he put his best into all his efforts, but success in soul-winning seemed utterly elusive. His hearers seemed to be clothed in impenetrable indifference. Then, without any unique preparation, this same preacher saw three thousand souls yielding to Christ in one service. Even Peter was surely astounded. No one could claim that his effort represented perfection in preaching. There was nothing particularly attractive about his phraseology. The secret lay not in Peter's artistry, but in the unmistakable power which turned every sentence into an arrow reaching human hearts. Without Pentecost the disciples would have been just another band of workers who after a few short years of ministry would have retired to some obscure parish in the country! Instead, they became living flames! Their preaching kindled a bush fire which swept across continents. Pentecost changed the world; and another Pentecost could do it again.

He had New Blood in his Veins!

I shall never forget the first time I saw a game of American football; it seemed the craziest spectacle I had ever witnessed. I was completely bewildered, and so were my friends who failed to appreciate my caustic comments. When the players appeared they looked like the shock troops of a crack regiment; highly trained commandos anxious to annihilate the opposition. Each man had a helmet, and shoulders padded to withstand the fury of charging tanks! When the ban was set in motion, the fellows charged like bulls; and about every fifteen seconds the game was interrupted to permit the forwards to retire to a committee meeting a few yards up the field. It was the queerest sight I had ever seen in any sporting engagement; but when I turned to observe the crowd, they all seemed in perfect agreement with the committee business. When I asked why the players were constantly going into a huddle like a lot of old women, I was informed that this was an essential part of football technique. During the moments of isolated huddle, the captain or chief conspirator confided to his companions in crime what the next move should be. To me it was all so strange, and I confess that even now I have not the least idea what it was all about. Yet I shall always be glad that I saw such games, for with them came the delightful story of a very small football enthusiast.

Each evening, alongside the football field of an American university, a small boy excitedly watched the players practicing. Constantly he followed the play up and down the touchline, and his chatter amused the fellows. They all knew him, and appreciated the fact that he idolized the star quarterback. It became a nightly occurrence for the child to describe all he had seen at the playing field, and to add, "Dad, when I get big, I'm going to be a quarter-back just like Bill Jones." Then came the evening when the youthful enthusiast did not appear at the practice game, and the players wondered what had detained him. When they heard that the boy had been rushed to hospital, and that an urgent blood transfusion was necessary to save his life, all volunteered to give blood. Among them was found one man with the correct blood group, and his willingness to help saved the child's life. Some

PENTECOST ... the miracle that staggered a world time later, when the lad had recovered sufficiently to be taken home, his father tried to cheer him by saying, " It won't be long now before you can see the fellows practising, and learn how to become the greatest quarter-back in the country." He was astounded when his son replied, " Dad, I can't be a quarter-back. I have the blood of a tackle in me now, and I will have to be the greatest tackle in the country."

This delightful story perfectly illustrates the amazing exploits of the early Church. Probably the disciples had ideas and ambitions of their own, yet after Pentecost all these became subordinate to a tremendous desire. They realized that the life of Another had come into their beings; that the greatest transfusion possible had saved them from the dangers of sin. The Holy Spirit had filled them with the life of Christ, and as a direct result of this miracle, all their personal plans were changed. As they went out to the great playing fields of experience, their one desire was to emulate the example of Him whose life they had received. When they succeeded gloriously the citizens of Antioch recognized the achievement, and from that moment the disciples were called Christians.

#### Free Air

The sign "Free Air" is always a welcome sight to the motorist whose tyres are flat. Only those unfortunate drivers who have had punctures far from a garage know the drudgery of pumping by hand. The continuous up and down movements on the handle of a pump, the increasing ache in that part of the back where it hurts, the lingering feeling that the desired pressure will never be reached—these are among the lesser joys of motoring. Yet the offer of free air brings sparkle to weary eyes, relief to aching backs; and a drudgery becomes delight as limitless supplies pour into a deflated tyre.

Christian service can also become a heartache, a discouraging experience, when the innumerable ups and downs of daily events seem to be getting us nowhere. We are told that God has limitless supplies of mighty power, but the problem remains how we may connect our weakness with His might. It is cheering to know that " God's Service Stations " are everywhere; no traveller need be stranded far from a source of help. A sense of weakness, a bended knee, a sincere petition, an absolute reliance upon the Divine Spirit—these connect us to unfailing resources of power. Yet we must remember that even free air may be hindered by dirty, sticking valves. Let us be sure that our contacts with Him are clean and unresisting, and through the power of a personal Pentecost we shall laugh at impossibilities.

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