

Lessons from Pentecost (Acts 2).

Acts chapter 2 describes a new stage in the preaching of the Gospel: for the first time, the Good News was simultaneously preached to folk of various nations and languages. Luke records that “There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, *out of every nation under heaven*” (Acts 2:5). Being “out of every nation”, there was a language barrier that needed to be overcome for the Gospel to be preached, understood and believed. The Apostles being gathered together, were given the Spirit Gift of Tongues, in order that all people would have the Gospel preached to them, whatever nationality they were of. This was foreshadowed in Psalm 19, where we read of the preaching of the Apostles (Rom. 10:18) that: “there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world ...” (Psa. 19:2-3). The “voice” of preaching then, went out through all the world, regardless of the language barrier, so that it could be said that the Gospel “was preached to every creature which is under heaven ...” (Col. 1:23).

In these things, we have a reversal of the situation of Babel, right back in the early days of human history. Following the deluge, we find that there was a single language, and men became united in an enterprise that was against the will of God, to the glorification of themselves:

“They said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; *and let us make us a name*, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:4).

So, men sought to make a name for themselves, in the construction of a city and a tower. But because their enterprise was against the will of the Almighty, their languages were diversified, so that they wouldn’t understand each other, and would be unable to coordinate the work:

“Yahweh said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language that they may not understand on another’s speech. So Yahweh scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city” (Gen. 11:6-8).

In Acts chapter 2, we find that the people were again gathered together being “all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). But this time, it was to the glory of Yahweh, and the honour of His Son. As the Proverb has it: “the name of Yahweh is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe” (Prov. 18:10). At Pentecost, the glory was given by the Apostles to the Name of Yahweh, not man. And the strong tower was the Ecclesial edifice, which is a refuge and place of safety to those who would enter it through faith. In that day, the language barrier which came into being in order to divide men, was overcome, and each man heard the Gospel being taught in his own native tongue.

THE PROPHECY OF JOEL

The events described in this chapter comprised “that which was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16). Joel spoke of the day when the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon men and women, who would prophesy, and speak the words of the Gospel to any who would hear:

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams ...and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that *whosoever* shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:17-21).

There are a number of points that present themselves in this citation from Joel. Firstly, the Spirit would be poured out with the consequence being that anyone from any nation would be able to hear the word preached: “*whosoever* shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved”. The “whosoever” here, is evidently any one from any nation that came into contact with the Gospel, and it logically follows that for this to take place, the language barrier would need to be overcome – hence the gift of tongues.

The other point that emerges from Joel, is that following the outpouring of the Spirit, there would come a terrible time of judgment: “I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke”. This took place in AD 70, when faithless Israel rejected the Gospel message, and the nation was scattered abroad throughout the earth. This was also spoken of in the book of Proverbs:

“... Turn you at my reproof: behold, *I will pour out my spirit unto you*, I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded ... I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; *When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you ...*” (Prov. 1:23-27).

The Gift of the Spirit then, provided the final opportunity for Israel to heed the words of wisdom, before the Day of Judgment came.

There are those who teach that man can view the things of the living God with impunity, and with no accountability. The idea is that unless a person is baptised, there will be no recompense for rejecting the precepts of the Almighty. But such is not in harmony with the Revealed Word, and the Apostolic teaching:

“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time, we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; *How shall we escape*, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him ...” (Heb. 2:1-3).

We must take heed from the example of Israel: we have received the calling of the Gospel in our own language (through translations, even if imperfect), and we have a duty and responsibility to obey it. If Israel who received the Law from Angels via Moses were punished for rejecting it, how much more then, shall we be punished for refusing the commandments that come through the Lord Jesus Christ?

THE DETERMINATE COUNSEL AND FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD

The things concerning the saving name of Jesus Christ forms half of the Gospel that the Apostles preached. So Peter proceeds to inform the people that what happened to Messiah was fore-ordained by the Father himself: “Him, being *delivered* by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain ...” (Acts 2:23).

Though Messiah was taken and slain “by wicked hands,” it was nevertheless in the purpose of God that it be so. Acts chapter 4 recounts the words of the apostles, that Jew and Gentile were gathered together “for to do whatsoever thy hand *and thy counsel determined* before to be done” (Acts 4:28). And again, Isaiah 53 tells us: “*yet it pleased Yahweh to bruise him*” (Isa. 53:10). It was not the case that Yahweh took delight in the terrible sufferings of His Son, but rather that through those sufferings, there would be made a hope of salvation for all who receive the calling of the Gospel. The end result was the desired objective, and it was ordained by God for it to be so. Indeed, the passage in Isaiah 53 records how Jesus himself would look to the end result, which made it all so worthwhile:

“When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Yahweh shall prosper in his hand. *He shall see of the*

travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities” (Isa. 53:10-11).

Indeed, in the Kingdom Age, we too shall be able to look back at the tribulation we suffered during our mortal pilgrimage, and see that it was all worthwhile, to prepare us for the glories to come.

MY FLESH SHALL REST IN HOPE

What makes the death of Christ efficacious for our salvation, is the fact of the Resurrection that followed. Hence, it is written that: “if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, *we shall be saved by his life*” (Rom. 5:10). So in Acts 2, Peter continues his discourse speaking of Jesus “Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he be holden of it” (Acts 2:24).

That which enabled our Master to overcome the suffering of crucifixion was the vision of joy that was ever prominent in his mind:

“let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who *for the joy that was set before him* endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1-2).

But what particularly was that joyous vision set before Messiah? Acts chapter 2 provides the answer: here, David describes the hope of our Lord:

“David speaketh concerning him, *I foresaw the Lord always before my face*, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved. *Therefore did my heart rejoice*, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; *thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance*” (Acts 2:25-28).

When we put these things together, we find that it was a vision of his Father’s glory that was a joyous picture in Messiah’s mind. He foresaw the Lord “always” before his face. The Psalm being cited here gives more detail: “thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; *at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore*” (Psa. 16:11). The joy that was set before our Lord therefore, was the vision of pleasures at his Father’s Right Hand. So Hebrews informs us that he obtained that which he sought after: “and is set down *at the Right Hand* of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). What a wonderful moment it must have been for Yahweh and His Son to meet together in person for the first time! What great rejoicing there must have been in heaven, upon Jesus’ arrival! But we also must have such a vision always before our face, that we will endure the tribulation that life brings. We must be able to view the promises with the certainty that those things which we long for, and seek first above all else, will at the last become a glorious reality that we might rejoice in the presence of our Lord throughout the ages to come.

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is a testimony that he was the Son of God in whom his Father was well pleased (See Rom. 1:4). But it is also the assurance of coming judgment: God “hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; *whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead*” (Acts 17:31).

The resurrection of our Master then, is the “assurance” given to all men that God will indeed judge the world. The certainty of coming judgment to the nations is as real as the promised judgment of Israel was. There will be a great shaking as the nations fall, when the haughtiness of man shall be brought down low, and His Name only being exalted in the earth. For those who strive to be faithful, there is nothing to fear, but only a longing for the wickedness of men to be swept away, that God’s Kingdom and Righteousness shall be imposed upon the ruins of the kingdoms of men.

Our Master shall continue to occupy his throne at his Father's Right hand until the appointed day for him to return to the earth. As David (cited by Peter) spake: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, **Until** I make thy foes thy footstool" (Acts 2:34, 35).

The passage being cited is the first verse of Psalm 110. The second verse continues:

"Yahweh shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion; rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power ..." (Psa. 110:2-3).

When Christ comes again, his people will be brought to humiliation before him. They shall look on him whom they have pierced and they shall mourn for him (Zech. 12:10). They shall accept him as their Messiah and deliverer, as he shall turn away ungodliness out of Jacob (Rom. 11:26). Thus prepared, they shall be willing in the day of his power, even though they were unwilling in the day of his mortal weakness. Then, it is testified, they will aid the judgment of nations, and the establishment of the kingdom. That will be the Day of Yahweh spoken of so often in the prophets, "when I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as a sword of a mighty man" (Zech. 9:13).

In that day, it will be said to regathered Israel:

"Thou art my battle axe and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms; and with thee will I break in pieces the chariot and his rider ..." (Jer. 51:20-21).

Being "willing", Israel, subject to their Messiah, shall be instrumental in the establishment of the kingdom – which is a restoration of the ancient polity of Israel, on a global scale.

WHAT SHALL WE DO?

Returning to Acts chapter 2, it is most instructive to examine the response of the people to the words of Peter, and the outpouring of the Spirit:

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, **what shall we do?**" (Acts 2:37).

This is the same response to that of Saul of Tarsus, later to become the Apostle Paul. When he was shown a heavenly vision, he prostrated himself before Messiah:

"and he trembling and astonished said, **Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?**" (Acts 9:6).

This must be our response to hearing the Word. Learning the facts and figures of Scripture is not an end in itself. The purpose of studying the Word is to learn what it is that our Lord would have us do in the various circumstances of our lives. The Word can strengthen us in a way that no writings of men can do. It is able to save our souls (Jas. 1:21), being the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). The system of principles called "the Truth" are not merely principles to be believed: they are the basis for godly living, and must be implemented in our daily lives, and dealings with men.

When we consider Acts Chapter 2, the principle lesson that we find, is that those who have received the Word, have a responsibility and duty to obey it. What is absolutely certain, irrespective of what we do, is that we shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ. What depends upon us, is whether in that day, we will be invited to partake of the rich glories of the kingdom age. There is no excuse: we have all received the Word written in our own language, through the various translations that have been made, and we are all responsible to act upon what we have heard. May we find grace in that day, having heeded the cry of wisdom and having ever before our minds, the vision of the Glory of Yahweh which shall fill the entire globe, as the waters cover the sea.

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