

The Pentecost Sermon

The birth of an heir is usually a joyous and exciting occasion. The happiness that it brings, however, may be diminished if the birth was out of great pain and endangerment to the mother.

That is an inadequate illustration introducing the exciting events reported in Acts 2. What an earthshaking development is pictured as the gospel was proclaimed and Christ's kingdom on earth was inaugurated on the first Pentecost after Jesus' atonement. It has always been thrilling to review those happenings with listeners. However, there is something foreboding and threatening that overshadowed the joyous occasion..

As years have flown by, some different insights into the Pentecost sermon have enriched its meaning for me. I am honored if you let me share some of them here.

"Salvation is from the Jews," Jesus told the Samaritan woman (John 4:22). It was they who looked for the Messiah to restore their political/religious kingdom, reestablishing the throne of David. Affirming his primary mission to the Jews, Jesus told the Canaanite woman, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). Earlier, "These twelve Jesus sent out, charging them, 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And preach as you go, saying, **THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND**'" (Matt. 10:5-7). In harmony with this, the Pentecost sermon was to a truly Jewish audience concerning that kingdom. Peter's address was particularly to the Jews who had called for Jesus' death. The gospel was "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

"To them (the apostles) he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and **SPEAKING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD**" (Acts 1:3). Jesus instructed them to stay in Jerusalem until the power of the Holy Spirit would come upon them. In anticipation of that, they asked their burning question of expectancy, "Lord, will you at this time **RESTORE THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL?**" They were inquiring about the political/religious kingdom being restored. Jesus did not give a definite answer. He only told them to wait in Jerusalem.

They had to wait only ten days until the Spirit was sent to the amazement of "Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven." As a spokesman, Peter began his sermon by quoting Joel 2:28-32, a prophetic and apocalyptic passage so full of meaning: "...this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and you old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon into blood, **BEFORE THE DAY OF THE LORD COMES, THE GREAT AND MANIFEST DAY**. And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'" This prophecy by Joel which Peter quoted certainly gives meaning to the events and sermon of Pentecost.

Several exciting developments would identify the "last days." The Spirit would himself bear witness to the fulfillment of Joel's words and would choose and endow spokespersons without distinction of nationality, age, or gender. There would be dramatic upheaval described in cataclysmic terms. The day of the Lord, the great and manifest day, would come. Salvation would be given to those who would accept the authority of the Lord. We will observe that two aspects of salvation were offered – salvation from **SIN** and from **PHYSICAL DESTRUCTION** with the disobedient nation.

Peter's quoting this message from Joel should have revealed nothing new to his listeners, that is, if they were familiar with Jesus' Olivet Discourse given less than two months before. Concluding his pronouncement of woes against the scribes and Pharisees, he offers this dire prediction for those last days: "Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in

your synagogues and persecute from town to town, that upon **you** may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, **ALL** this will come upon **THIS** generation” (Matt. 23:34-36). Then, in deep emotion, he laments, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate.”

Continuing his record, Matthew tells that the disciples asked, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of **YOUR COMING** and of the **CLOSE OF THE AGE?**” Jesus did not speak of an end of this physical universe. His listeners could endure to *the end* that he was talking about. “But he who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come.” The gospel began to be preached on Pentecost and went to all nations in their lifetime (Matt. 24:29-31; Mark 13:10; Col. 1:23) before “the end”. Jesus emphasized that all this would be in the lifetime of some of his listeners (Matt. 24:34). In the next chapter (25), Jesus directs three judgment parables to the Jews who would give account at his coming.

All those things happened but the universe was still intact. Rather than this being an end of this material universe, it would be the ending of the covenant with Israel “imposed until the time of reformation” (Heb. 9:10). At the same time the new and different covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (to the Jew first and also to the Greek) was being implemented. The old covenant based on law regulated a political nation ruled by a religious system. The new covenant was personified by Christ himself. Through the offering of himself for all mankind, those who would submit to him would receive forgiveness of all sin, and they would become his spiritual kingdom. They would be ruled by his spiritual law, that is, his principal of loving action, written in their hearts.

The Jews generally, even including the disciples of Jesus, were looking for the restoration of the earthly kingdom with the throne of David reestablished. The Messiah, the anointed one, would be their deliverer from Roman rule. This mistaken concept prevailed even until Pentecost.

Peter dealt with this issue in a forthright manner. He declared that they had killed “by the hand of lawless men” him whom God had sent and attested. He was the very one God raised from death to sit on David’s throne. God had now made him both Lord and Christ (Messiah)! The evidences were overwhelming.

Being cut to the heart, they cried out in desperation, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter’s answer expressed the good news of the new covenant. By change of heart and submission to the new king implied by their baptism, they would be forgiven of their having rejected God’s son individually and receive the approving presence of the Holy Spirit whom they had seen manifested that day.

Peter’s sermon was not directed to the disciples of John for they had prepared for the approaching kingdom. His specific target was those who had rejected Christ and helped to bring about his death. Neither was Peter calling for repentance from prevalent personal sins like lying, stealing, drunkenness, adultery, hypocrisy, slander, and greed. The repentance he called for was a change of conviction about Jesus. Once they would submit to his spiritual direction, in their maturing process they would deal with all those specific unspiritual activities.

Those who accepted Christ that day were saved from their sins – a spiritual salvation. Yet there was another danger to their lives – the loss of their lives at the time of the physical destruction to be brought on their city and nation coming upon that generation. So Peter exhorted them at length, “**SAVE YOURSELVES FROM THIS CROOKED GENERATION.**” He was pleading that they not go down with the doomed ship. All of the exciting changes mentioned by Joel were not completed on Pentecost because the period of about forty years would be the “last days” of Joel’s prophecy. **THE DAY OF THE LORD, THE GREAT AND**

MANIFEST DAY was the time of the *parousia*, the coming of the Lord which would complete and fulfill all that Joel and Jesus had spoken. []