**THE BEGINNING OF THE LAST DAYS**

April 22, 2018

Acts 2:1-21

Key Verse 2:17 “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.”

Today’s passage is about the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost after the ascension of Christ (1-13). The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was a new beginning, the age of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives birth to the church, the body of Christ. It is the beginning of the last days. What were the effects of the Holy Spirit on the apostles and all people? After the coming of the Holy Spirit, the apostles became mighty witnesses of the death and resurrection of Jesus before the crowd (14-41). After this event, the Holy Spirit came to dwell on all people who repented of their sins and accepted Jesus as their Lord. The Holy Spirit began to work with all believers. The coming of the Holy Spirit inaugurated the Messianic age. It is the time of grace. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. I pray that the Holy Spirit may enable us to declare the wonders of God with power and to see God’s vision.

Look at verse 1. “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.” It had been ten days since Jesus’ ascension. The day of Pentecost was the fiftieth day after the Passover and the Pentecost means fifties in Greek. After his resurrection, Jesus spent 40 days with his disciples and ascended to heaven and the apostles spent the next 10 days in united prayer and intensive Bible studies. Then at the fiftieth day from the Passover, God poured out his Holy Spirit. The day of Pentecost was celebrated according to Moses’ law by the special service of offering the first fruits of the wheat harvest. This was one of the three annual festivals at which all of the male Jews were required to be present. It also celebrated the memorial of the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai. The Jews received the law at Pentecost but the Christians received the promised Holy Spirit. It was the inaugural day of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Look at verse 3. “They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.” Though the Holy Spirit is one, he was given to each of the apostles individually. He came to them as tongues of fire. His manifestation as tongues of fire has deep meaning. The tongue is the instrument of speech. Fire represents the holiness of God. Jesus had said that they would be baptized by the Holy Spirit (Ac 1:5). The Holy Spirit baptizes with holy fire (Lk 3:16) that cleanses and purifies the inner man from all sin and iniquity. He would especially sanctify their hearts and tongues. The Holy Spirit would help them speak the truth about the holy God. This reminds us of the prophet Isaiah. When Isaiah met the Holy God personally, he realized that he was a man of unclean lips who spoke unbelieving words. He knew he deserved God’s punishment. Then an angel took a live coal from the holy fire and touched his lips (Isa 6:7). His lips were cleansed and his sin atoned for. He became a powerful servant of God. We suffer a lot due to our lingering sin problem in our hearts, such as unbelief and despair and sinful desires. But when the Holy Spirit comes upon us as tongues of fire, he burns away our impurities and gives us a new heart. We are born again into the kingdom of God.

The Holy Spirit’s coming was to inaugurate the birth of the church. The coming of the Holy Spirit was to bring the believers together and establish the church in which he takes up residence. The church was born on the day of Pentecost, and it is given its birth by the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, believers were placed into the church, into the body of Christ. Also the unity that Jesus prayed for was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Recall Jesus’ prayer in John 17:21, “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.” The prayer is answered. We are one. We might not all act like it, but we are one. We are one because we have all been immersed in the Holy Spirit and completely indwelled in the Holy Spirit so we share a common life as one body, one living organism with shared life. All believers baptized into one body constitute the one body of Christ. We have all been made to drink of the same spirit. We are in union with him. If you are joined to the Lord and I am joined to the Lord, then we are one with each other.

Look at verse 4. “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” Each of the apostles was filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came to live in them as his dwelling place. The Holy Spirit has been working since the beginning of creation. The Holy Spirit came even on Saul to do mighty things. What is different today is that the Holy Spirit came to dwell in us. Because Jesus was sacrificed for our sins, we have been made holy in God’s sight and the Holy God can dwell in us. When we believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes and dwell in us. We will never forfeit the presence of the Holy Spirit because he himself is the guarantee of our future inheritance. The Holy Spirit is our life. We will never lose the Holy Spirit. So we are more blessed than David, who prayed, “Do not take your Holy Spirit from me.” (Ps 51:11) His prayer does not apply to us. But the Bible does say in Ephesians 5:18, “Be filled with the Spirit.” What does that mean? It simply means; let the presence of the Holy Spirit dominate you. To be filled with the spirit is to be under his total control, and that means to be obedient to his will as revealed in his Word. It is a feeling that empowers. In order to be filled with the Spirit, we need to submit to the Spirit and live a life of obedience to him.

What kind of power did the apostles need right away? The Holy Spirit’s primary purpose was to enable the apostles to preach the gospel to men in a way that they could understand. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, he enabled the apostles to speak in other languages to peoples of all nations. It teaches us that God wanted to communicate with peoples of other nations immediately. They did not have time to learn a new language. To master the basics of a foreign language requires at least 6 months of diligent study. But the Holy Spirit enabled them to speak foreign languages freely so that all listeners in the crowd could understand them well. In this country, even though we speak the same language, we have hard time in communicating with students. It is as though we speak different languages. We need the Holy Spirit to share the gospel in a way that they can understand. Once M. Jeremiah Lee shared with his senior colleague about his agony of teaching Korean to his children so that he can communicate with them when they become teenagers. Then the senior professor said, “You will have communication problem not because of language but because of generation gap.” May God help us to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that we can declare the wonders of God to U of T students in a way that they can understand.

Look at verse 5. “Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.” These people had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. They feared God and wanted to honor God according to the teaching of the Bible. When the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, these people heard the sound. They knew something unusual was happening. They came to the place where the apostles were. They saw them and heard them speaking their own languages. When they heard Galilean hillbillies speaking in the native language of each respective country, they were utterly amazed. Look at verses 9-11. “Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappodicia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs---we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Parthia, Media and Elam were to the east. Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, and Pontus were to the north. Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Rome, Crete and Cyrene were to the west. Egypt and Arabia were to the south. These places encompassed Jerusalem. They represent the entire world of the time.

It is indeed meaningful that people from all the surrounding nations could hear the wonders of God in their own languages. Now these were Jews from all over the world. They learned to speak those languages because they lived in those places, but they have never heard praise to God in a Gentile language because when they went to the synagogue, all their services were conducted in Hebrew or in Aramaic. Never have they expressed praise to God, never have they recited the Old Testament in any other languages than Hebrew. Then they were hearing praise of God and God’s wonders, proclaimed to them by these Galileans in Gentile languages. This was shocking, absolutely shocking. It was a great expression of God’s love for mankind. In the past, if foreigners wanted to study the Bible, they had to know Hebrew. But now God was speaking through the apostles to peoples of all nations in their own languages, declaring the “wonders of God” to them (11). The “wonders of God” means the gospel of Jesus. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Now this word of God were declared in all kinds of languages. Today it is translated into 1100 languages. At Pentecost, God expressed his love for peoples of all nations. God must have longed for this day since the time at Babel when he confused men’s languages to scatter them (Ge 11:7). It was to keep them from uniting to do mischief. The strife that came from that division caused pain to God’s heart and to mankind as well. Moreover, God had been greatly misunderstood because he focused his redemptive work on the Jews. At last, God could say what he really wanted to say to all peoples of all nations, that he loved them, in their own native languages.

There was a wonderful work of God among the apostles. Still, some made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”(13) They thought that the apostles had an all-night drinking party. In the past Peter was silent when he was challenged to identify as Jesus’ disciple. He denied Jesus three times. But this time Peter stood up and then the Eleven stood up together with him. The Holy Spirit gave Peter brave heart to deliver the sermon of the Pentecost without any rehearsal. He said in verse 15, “These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.” Peter explained that this was the fulfillment of God’s prophesy through Joel. Verses 16-21 are a quotation from Joel 2:28-32. God promised that in the last days he would pour out his Spirit on all people. He does not pour out his Spirit on certain people; he pours out his Spirit on all people. The Holy Spirit was not given only to special people, but to all people, including sons and daughters, young men and old men. The Holy Spirit comes on all who repent and accept the gospel.

Joel was talking about the arrival of the Messiah. When the Messiah comes, the Holy Spirit will be poured out. When the Messiah comes, there will be evidence of his arrival, miraculous things. There will be visions, prophecies, dreams. There will be wonders in the sky, signs on the earth, blood, fire, billows of smoke. Sun will be turned to darkness, the moon to blood. And then the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come. It sweeps from the day of Pentecost to the second coming. How can Joel connect the coming of the Holy Spirit with the second coming? The answer is: In the Old Testament, the church age was a mystery. It was hidden. They saw the coming of Messiah, and with him the Spirit, and a flourishing of divine revelation, and then the final judgment. What they didn’t see was the interval of the church because that is a mystery. But when the Messiah came, the last days began. The last days are the Messianic days. We are in the last days. Since it is the last days, it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. It is the time of grace. The last days are characterized by gospel proclamation by calling sinners to repentance, and that is the ministry of the church. That is the mission of the church.

Look at verse 17b. “Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.” What a remarkable prophecy it is! The Holy Spirit enables sons and daughters to prophesy and young men to see visions and old men to dream dreams. When the Holy Spirit comes, young men see visions. This means God’s vision for them and for the whole world. Without the Holy Spirit, young men only think about girls and money, cars and sports. They are corrupt because they see bad things through the Internet. But when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, they realize that God made them to do great things. They can see how God wants to use them and can dedicate themselves to a holy life. The motto of the Student Volunteer Movement was “the evangelization of the world in this generation.” When we receive the Holy Spirit, we have God’s vision. Vision comes from God. Without vision man has no meaning in his life. When Dr. Joseph Chung went to Uganda as a silver missionary, I saw God’s vision of going as a silver missionary. I understood what the apostle Paul meant when he said that he wanted to go to Spain through Rome. North America and Europe are like Rome. Spain refers to underdeveloped countries like African nations. God sent many missionaries to North America and Europe. When they retire, they will receive good pension. Then they can go to underdeveloped countries as silver missionaries and become self-supporting missionaries in their old age. It is God’s amazing wisdom to use our old missionaries.

The last days began with the coming of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit will continue until the great and glorious day of the Lord (19,20). Look at verse 21. “And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Now is the time of grace. Now is the Messianic age, the last days. May God bless us to be filled with the Holy Spirit and become his witnesses to the end of the earth so that many will be saved.