

Acts Chapter 2 – The Day of Pentecost

Our New Testament reading for today brings us to consider the events which took place on the day of Pentecost, following the ascension of Messiah. These events are preserved for our learning, and their importance is that they laid the foundation for the Apostolic preaching work, where the Gospel would be preached in “Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts 1:8). We shall therefore consider this chapter in detail, to see what principles of exhortation and encouragement we can find there - and in so doing, we shall see that there is a solid Old Testament background into which these events are placed.

A REVERSAL OF BABEL

The chapter begins by describing how the disciples were “with one accord in one place” (Acts 1:1). Being united in spirit and intent, the events which followed demonstrated both a Divine approval of the work that was set before them, and provided a powerful witness to their preaching. The bestowal of the Holy Spirit was the means whereby God was “bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to his own Will” (Heb. 2:4). In order for the preaching to take place in the “uttermost parts of the earth”, the language barrier had to be overcome, and the provision of the Gift of Tongues met that need.

Genesis chapter 11 describes how that following the catastrophic Flood, men were similarly united with one accord in one place, being of “one language, and of one speech” (Gen. 11:1). They purposed to erect a giant tower to make a Name for themselves, “lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:4), and evidently also to provide a way of escape, should there be another flood upon the earth. Accordingly, the language was confounded (vs 7) “that they may not understand one another’s speech,” and that which they feared came upon them, and they were scattered “abroad upon the face of all the earth” (Gen. 11:9).

With the preaching of the Apostles, however, this situation had to be reversed. The disciples were to be scattered throughout the Roman world (Acts 8:1) in order to preach the Gospel, and proclaim not their own Name, but that of Messiah as being the only Name under heaven whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12). The language barrier had to be overcome, and so it was that the Gift of Tongues met that need, and the Apostles were able to go to other countries, and speak their language of other peoples.

In fact, this preaching in all languages was foreshadowed in Psalm 19: “... 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. 19:3-4). Romans 10:18 specifically cites this Psalm, and applies it to the preaching of the Apostles. We see then, that there is an Old Testament background to the preaching work of the disciples of Christ.

Following the bestowal of the Gift of Tongues, the Apostle Peter continued to appeal to the Old Testament prophets in order to validate and authenticate what was taking place at that time:

“This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: 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 on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy: 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, citing Joel 2:28-32).

This prophecy of Joel had a fulfilment in the work of the Apostles, and the setting forth of the Name of the Lord as the means of salvation from death. The Prophecy states that “whosoever” shall call upon the Name shall be saved – and this word demonstrates how that salvation would come to Jew and Gentile alike. Similarly the Apostle John records the words of the Lord:

“... For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever** believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life ...” (Jno. 3:16).

The offer of salvation is extended to all men and women who receive the doctrine as taught by Messiah and his Apostles, for in Him “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

However, when we consider the response of mankind generally to the Gospel message, we see that the majority reject both it, and the Lord who preached it. The Spirit Outpouring enabled the preaching to ultimately go out into all the world: yet most hearers spurned and rejected the message, and persecuted the preachers of it. So the pattern in Joel, cited above, is of the Spirit Bestowal being followed by the judgments of blood, fire, and vapour of smoke. The same pattern is seen in Proverbs chapter 1, and those who rejected the call of Wisdom:

“... turn ye at my reproof: **behold, I will pour out my Spirit** unto you, I will make known my words unto you ... but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I will also 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 come upon you ...” (Prov. 1:23 – 27).

We neglect the call of Wisdom at our peril: nothing but destruction awaits those who do not pay attention to her words.

THE DETERMINATE COUNSEL OF GOD

Returning to the aspect of salvation through the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostle demonstrates how that all that befell him was all brought about by the purpose of the Almighty:

“Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it” (Acts 2:23-24).

Again, this echoes the Old Testament Scripture:

“... Yet it pleased Yahweh to bruise him...” (Isa. 53:10).

It was not that Yahweh took pleasure in the suffering of His Only Begotten Son; rather it was that through that suffering a multitude could be saved from the law of sin and death. It is in the Divine Purpose that sin must be condemned through death, and so it was in the crucifixion of His Son, in whom He “condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3). Sin was condemned, and Yahweh was declared to be righteous as His Son restored that which he had not taken away (Psa. 69:4), thus laying a foundation upon which his house could be saved.

Acts 2, cited above, demonstrates that the Master was raised in body: “whom God raised up”. There are those who say that the Lord’s resurrected body was a different body to that which was crucified – such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses. But the Scriptures are clear, as the Apostle, quoting a Psalm of David, said, “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” (Acts 2:26-27).

Notice the expression used here: “my flesh shall rest hope” – it would have been no hope if the flesh would have instead been permitted to see corruption, or if it would not be restored to life again. The only hope that the flesh could have, would be to be raised up, and then granted immortality – and that is the hope of Messiah’s brethren, who trust in his power to save.

There are other points that come out from this quotation from Psalm 16. The Psalm states:

“ ... thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt **show me** the path of life: in thy presence is **fullness of joy**; at thy **right hand** there are **pleasures for ever more**” (Psa. 16:10-11).

Notice the language used here: “Fullness of Joy”, “Pleasures for ever more” at the Father’s “Right Hand”, which were “shown” to Messiah. This is picked up in the book of Hebrews, where these same principles are brought out again:

“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).

Here, it was because of the vision of Joy that was set before Messiah, that he was able to endure the suffering of the cross. But what was that vision of? The allusion to Psalm 16 provides the answer: it was the vision of being in his Father’s presence, particularly His Right Hand, where there are pleasures for evermore. What a glorious thing that would have been, for the Son of Man to actually enter into the presence of Yahweh, immortal, glorified and holy. That first time when he actually appeared in the presence of His Father; what a vision of joy that would have been for him!

BEING RAISED UP TO THE FATHER’S RIGHT HAND

The resurrection of Messiah, and the bestowal of immortality that he received provides a guarantee for our own salvation, should we abide in him. It declares that he was truly the Son of God, as the Apostle Paul expressed it, he was “**declared to be the Son of God** with power, according to the spirit of holiness, **by the resurrection from the dead**” (Rom. 1:4). The resurrection is one of the features that declared Jesus of Nazareth to be the powerful Son of God. It also provides an assurance that God will judge the world by him:

“ ... he 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 raising up of Messiah to the Right Hand of his Father is a powerful sign of the intent of God to judge the world in righteousness. In Messiah, sin was judged and condemned, and being raised up to glory, he is coming again to judge the sinful kingdoms of man’s corrupt rule.

In perfect harmony with all of this, the Apostle again quotes another Psalm to demonstrate that the position of the Son at the Right Hand of Yahweh is only until a particular point in time. Then, he will come again to the earth as a righteous judge having his enemies subdued under his feet:

“ ... David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, the Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, **until** I make thy foes thy footstool” (Acts 2:34, citing Psalm 110:1).

The Psalm continues to say:

“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).

"... the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against Yahweh, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (Psa. 2:2-3).

But their attempts to resist omnipotence will be futile:

"Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve Yahweh with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him" (Psa. 2:9-12).

The Lord then, shall rule in the midst of his enemies, and they will seek to rebel against the constraints placed upon them. The flesh is at enmity with the things of the Spirit of God, and the natural man will not take kindly to having his dominion taken away from him. But the strength of the Image of the kingdom of men, as seen by Nebuchadnezzar, shall be broken in pieces, as the Stone shall fall with destructive impact upon them.

There is another class described in Psalm 110: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power". These are those who serve the King not out of constraint, but willingly. Some of those who listened to Peter in Acts 2 were of this class:

"Then they that **gladly received** his word were baptised: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:41-42).

They willingly submitted themselves to the call of the Gospel message, and continued "steadfastly" in sound doctrine and fellowship. They broke bread, and prayed together. They rejoiced together for the wonderful things that were done for them with great joy and gladness.

We come therefore to break bread with each other in remembrance of the offering up of Jesus. We do so willingly, and with gladness of heart that we can rejoice that the Gospel has come to us in our own language. We desire to be joined together as one Body, seeking to glorify the Name of the One who has redeemed us by the shedding of his own blood. Let us therefore seek after heavenly things, heeding the voice of Wisdom, that we might be delivered from the wrath to come into the glorious inheritance of the Saints in Light.

Christopher Maddocks

