

Followers of the Way

Is a new Pentecost coming?

Philip Quenby, 25-05-23

Acts 2:1-24

Shortly before he died in 1947, the Pentecostal preacher and evangelist Smith Wigglesworth said this:

“During the next few decades there will be two distinct moves of the Holy Spirit across the church in Great Britain. The first move will affect every church that is open to receive it, and will be characterised by the restoration of the baptism and gifts of the Holy Spirit. The second move of the Holy Spirit will result in people leaving historic churches and planting new churches. In the duration of each of these moves, the people who are involved will say, 'This is a great revival.' But the Lord says, 'No, neither is the great revival, but both are steps towards it.' When the new church phase is on the wane, there will be evidence in the churches of something that has not been seen before: a coming together of those with an emphasis on the word and those with an emphasis on the Spirit. When the word and the Spirit come together, there will be the biggest move of the Holy Spirit that the nations, and indeed, the world have ever seen. It will mark the beginning of a revival that will eclipse anything that has been witnessed within these shores, even the Wesleyan and Welsh revivals of former years. The outpouring of God's Spirit will flow over from the United Kingdom to mainland Europe, and from there, will begin a missionary move to the ends of the earth.”

After more than seven decades, this prophecy is yet to be fulfilled. The questions I want to ask today are: what if now is the time? Is a new Pentecost just around the corner, and if it is, how should we be positioning ourselves to receive it and to respond to it?

You might ask what this has to do with a sermon series on lessons from the wilderness. The answer is: pretty much everything. It was from a wilderness place – at a low ebb, isolated, bewildered, uncertain, in hiding, in danger, and afraid – that “a group [of believers] numbering about a hundred and twenty” (Acts 1:15) who “all joined together constantly in prayer” (Acts 1:14) experienced the first Pentecost. From the world's perspective, the movement they were part of had been comprehensively defeated and dismantled by an unholy alliance of religious and secular authorities – the Roman governor Pilate, and Jewish High Priest Caiaphas, acting hand in glove with the Sanhedrin. But they were holding on to Jesus' promise spoken just before “he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight” (Acts 1:9) – an assurance that “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8). When

this great move of the Holy Spirit came, they realised it fulfilled a prophecy given by Joel hundreds of years earlier. In the great scheme of things, maybe a seventy-seven-years' wait for what Smith Wigglesworth prophesied does not seem so very long, after all.

Pentecost inaugurated a new era in God's dealings with humanity, just as the giving of the Law (Torah) to Moses on Mount Sinai had. In fact, Jewish tradition asserts the Law was given at Sinai on Shavuot (aka Feast of Weeks), that Feast of the LORD which falls fifty days after Passover, and which we call Pentecost. Whether we accept this, or not – it does not seem to have been part of mainstream Jewish thinking before the philosopher Maimonides suggested it in the 12th century AD – there are certainly parallels between the two, with similar signs and indicators of God's Presence and activity.

Both took place on a mountain – Sinai “the mountain of God” (Exodus 24:13), and Zion “the mountain of the LORD's temple” (Isaiah 2:3). Each involved a newly redeemed people – the Israelite nation born out of the Exodus, and the Church born out the events recorded in the early chapters of the book of Acts – receiving the gift of God to equip them for their ongoing walk of faith (the Torah in the former case, the Holy Spirit in the latter). Believers came from “many other people [groups]” (Exodus 12:38), representing “people from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5), being brought together to witness the sealing of a covenant between God and His people. The physical desert or wilderness surrounding Sinai mirrored the spiritual wasteland surrounding the small body of disciples who remained faithful and steadfast despite all that had taken place over the previous fifty days, with the Anointed One (Messiah) “cut off” (Daniel 9:26) through His crucifixion, as foretold by the prophet Daniel.

On both occasions, there was wind (“smoke billowed up” in Exodus 19:18, Acts 2:2), fire (Exodus 19:18, Acts 2:3), smoke (Exodus 19:18, Acts 2:19), earthquake (the mountain “trembled violently” in Exodus 19:18, and in Acts 4:31 “the place where [the disciples] were meeting was shaken”) and the sound of voices. (In Acts 2:4, people “began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them,” but it seems there may have been a parallel phenomenon on Sinai. The Hebrew word *kolot* which is translated as *thunder* in Exodus 20:18, can also mean *voices* or *languages*. Another Jewish tradition suggests many different languages were heard when the Torah was given.) God was present – “the LORD descended on [Mount Sinai] in fire” (Exodus 19:18) and the Holy Spirit appeared in “what seemed to be tongues of fire” (Acts 2:3). Torah means *teaching* or *instruction*, and Jesus says “the Holy Spirit ... will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14:26).

Shavuot celebrated the end of the barley harvest and start of the wheat harvest. We can expect many similarities in how various crops will be harvested – some of the same equipment and techniques may be used – but also differences. So, unsurprisingly, there are distinctions between the events described in Exodus and Acts, alongside things they share. On Sinai, Israel experienced fire in a collective way, as something seen from afar, which they dared not approach: they “trembled with fear ... [and] stayed at a distance.”

(Exodus 20:18). Whereas, the fire that fell on the first Pentecost “came to rest on each of [the disciples].” (Acts 2:3). Individuals received power from on high, exactly as Joel had foreseen, as God fulfilled His promise to “pour out my Spirit on all people.” (Acts 2:17, Joel 2:28). At Sinai, Moses received “the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18), but at Pentecost God wrote His law on the tablets of human hearts, as Jeremiah had foretold: “I [God] will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts ... [and] they will all know me, from the least to the greatest.” ((Jeremiah 31:33-34). Whereas the Torah addressed outward behaviour and outward compliance with godly standards, the Holy Spirit brings inward transformation.

So much for the background. The issue is: what are we to do about it? One thing we should beware is of thinking like Elijah did, when he fled in fear from Jezebel and took refuge in a cave on Mount Horeb (Sinai). He was looking to past glories, expecting God to move in earthquake, wind, and fire as He had when Moses stood on that same mountain. Yet this time, “the LORD was not in the wind ... [and] was not in the earthquake ... [and] was not in the fire ... [but spoke through] a gentle whisper” (1 Kings 19:11-12). God most certainly wants us to have proper regard to the past and to learn the right lessons from it, though never to wallow in nostalgia. A misplaced, sentimental longing for what used to be can get in the way of new things God wants to bring us into. Something virtually guaranteed is, when Smith Wigglesworth’s prophecy is fulfilled, there will be much that surprises us about how God moves, and even about who He uses. Some things will be familiar, others totally unexpected.

Our job is not to second-guess what God will do, and how, but to prepare ourselves so we are ready when He calls. “When the day of Pentecost came” (Acts 2:1), ten days had passed since Jesus ascended into heaven. We have the benefit of hindsight. The disciples of those times, of course, did not. Jesus had told them, “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about ... in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 1:4-5). In truth, they could not be sure what sort of time frame “a few days” meant, because “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” (2 Peter 3:8). The writer of Hebrews wrote in the first century AD that “in just a very little while, ‘He who is coming will come and will not delay’” (Hebrews 10:37), and the apostle John several times used the word “soon” of events that were long in the future, and in some cases, have still not happened (Revelation 1:1, 2:16, 3:11, 11:14, 22:6, 22:7, 22:12, 22:20). Though the apostle Peter spoke of believers suffering only “a little while” (1 Peter 5:10), that must have felt like an age to the people going through it. We have waited over seventy years for Smith Wigglesworth’s prophecy to be fulfilled. Fulfilment could come tomorrow, next week, or still be some way off, but we should be watching and listening. After slaughtering the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:40), Elijah was able to tell Ahab “There is the sound of a heavy rain” (1 Kings 18:41), though there was not a cloud in the sky and he had to send his servant seven times before he returned to report “a cloud as small as a man’s hand ... rising from the sea.” (1 Kings 18:44).

Seeing what is happening to our country is like watching a slow-motion disaster movie. Just when we think things cannot possibly get worse, they do. We are heading at full pelt towards calamity because we have forsaken God. A terrible day of reckoning is coming, and cannot long be delayed. That will be a signal, for “When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it? Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.” (Amos 3:6-7). Well, we may have forsaken God, but He has not forsaken us. When the trumpet sounds in the city and disaster comes, its purpose will not be to destroy us, but to rescue us. Out of this will come the great move of God we have longed, waited, and prayed for over so long. To many, this will seem something that comes suddenly, just as on the first Pentecost, when “Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven” (Acts 2:2). Yet though the world may be taken by surprise, the people of God should not be. We should be preparing now for what is coming down the track at speed. Acts 2 tells us how we should go about it:

Togetherness is one of the keys for how we are to position ourselves in this season: “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place” (Acts 2:1). Our togetherness as the people of God, and the manifestation through us of the power of God at work, will act as a catalyst, causing “a crowd [to come] together” (Acts 2:6).

We must be ready to provide an **explanation** of what is going on. We are about to see a release of the supernatural that will cause the same kinds of reactions as it always does: people will be bewildered (Acts 2:6), “utterly amazed” (Acts 2:7), “amazed and perplexed” (Acts 2:12). Out of discomfort and disbelief, many will try to impose supposedly “rational” explanations on what they see and hear, and will “make fun of [believers]” (Acts 2:13). Like Peter, we must be able to refute the lies of the enemy (Acts 2:15), and to “explain this to [the people]” (Acts 2:14).

Explanation requires **context, both spiritual and factual**. Peter reminded the crowd of the prophecies of Joel (Acts 2:16-21), but went on to recount recent events, too (Acts 2:22-23). Although these were things “you yourselves know” (Acts 2:23), even though they were “God-fearing Jews” (Acts 2:5), they needed to have their meaning set in the framework of God’s activity, and their significance underlined.

We must **maintain focus**. Satan will try to get us to major on the minors, and minor on the majors. So, the crowd seized on the fact people were speaking in tongues, saying, “They have had too much wine!” (Acts 2:13). They ignored a much larger (and totally inexplicable) phenomenon – a sound so loud and widespread, it drew people from across Jerusalem to where the believers were (Acts 2:5-6).

We must **not pull our punches**. The Word of God contains hard sayings and uncomfortable teaching. It speaks of times when God “will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and glorious day of the LORD.” (Acts 2:19-20, Joel 2:30-31). It is not kindness to keep people in ignorance of such things,

but the very opposite. They deserve to know the full truth, so they can make a properly informed choice for God, or against Him.

We must **let go of our preconceptions** and allow God to work the way He wants. A season is coming in which “everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.” (Acts 2:21, Joel 2:32). That may not fit easily with some of the theology we have imbibed over the years. God has a “set purpose and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23), but He is also full of mercy and lovingkindness, “not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9, see also Ezekiel 33:11). We should beware mischaracterising God and causing people to stumble as a result.

We must **boldly proclaim the Gospel**, making clear its unique claims, and the centrality of the death and resurrection of Christ. As Peter said, though “wicked men put him to death by nailing him to the cross ... God raised him from the dead ... [and] it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.” (Acts 2:24). Hallelujah!

We need to **understand the purpose** behind the supernatural power that is about to be unleashed. Just as “Jesus of Nazareth was ... accredited by God to [Israel] by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among [them] through him” (Acts 2:22), so we will be similarly accredited – that is to say, we will be officially recognised as God’s people, authorised to act on His behalf. This accredited status is to be used for the performance of our Kingdom mandate, the same purpose as the one for which Jesus originally sent out His disciples, namely “to drive out all demons and to cure diseases ... to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.” (Luke 9:1, see also Matthew 10:8).

If we are to step into the fullness of what God has for us and our nation in the days ahead, we need **hearts ready to receive**. Long years of waiting and discouragement may have taken their toll, almost without our realising it, for “hope deferred makes the heart sick.” (Proverbs 13:12). If this is where we find ourselves, we should ask God to restore us, “renew a steadfast spirit within [us]” (Psalm 51:10), and grant that “a longing fulfilled [will be] a tree of life.” (Proverbs 13:12).

Hearts ready to receive must be accompanied by **wills ready to act**. We are to be “doers of the word, not hearers only, deceiving our own selves.” (James 1:22, KJV). May we be declarers of the wonders of God (Acts 2:11), bold proclaimers of His Word (Acts 2:15:21), and uncompromising disciples of the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:22-24).

Is a new Pentecost just around the corner? I believe it is, and God has gathered people to Britain from across the globe for this purpose, exactly as He ensured “God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5) were in Jerusalem for the self-same same purpose before the Holy Spirit fell on the first Pentecost – because, when the Spirit comes in power, many of those who have been brought here will return to their homelands, taking the Gospel of salvation with them. Believe it, live it, pray for it, work for it, expect it, long for it and prepare for it. And may He have all the glory. Amen.