



The Paradox of Pentecost

Ac 1:4-5

4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. 5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

Ac 2:1-5

2:1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

Ac 20:16 (The Message translation – the Bible in contemporary language)

16 Paul had decided to bypass Ephesus so that he wouldn't be held up in Asia province. He was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem in time for the Feast of Pentecost, if at all possible.

Ac 20:22-24

22 "But there is another urgency before me now. I feel compelled to go to Jerusalem. I'm completely in the dark about what will happen when I get there. 23 I do know that it won't be any picnic, for the Holy Spirit has let me know repeatedly and clearly that there are hard times and imprisonment ahead. 24 But that matters little. What matters most to me is to finish what God started: the job the Master Jesus gave me of letting everyone I meet know all about this incredibly extravagant generosity of God.

Charles Dickens began his book, "A Tale of Two Cities", with these words:

"IT WAS the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair,"...

Mr. Dickens penned those words in regards to the year 1775; they express how he felt about that particular time. It seems, however, that every generation, before and since, testifies to the truth of those statements. The best of times and the worst of times run concurrently. Wisdom and foolishness are often displayed at the same time. Belief and unbelief are expressed in the same setting. Light shines forth and darkness reigns at the same time. Hope and despair walk alongside each other.

We live in a time of unprecedented revival in which God is generously pouring out his blessed Holy Spirit upon people around the world; yet, at the same time, many are falling away; they are completely forsaking apostolic truth and turning the grace of God into a license to sin.

Daniel prophesied of an hour when the saints would be worn out through oppression and persecution by God's arch-enemy: *"he shall wear out the saints of the most high."* If that were all the Bible said about the matter, we would probably despair and be most miserable. But another passage in Daniel speaks of the same time period with these words, *"but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits."*

With which category of saints are you going to cast your lot?

Pentecost is wonderful; it is thrilling to be in the felt presence of the living Lord of glory and to have his Spirit sweep over our souls in waves of glory as it happened in the second chapter of the book of Acts. There is a powerful, life-transforming force that accompanies the baptism of the Holy Ghost. On several other occasions, the Spirit has fallen like rain upon people as recorded in the book of Acts, the inspired historical record of that day.

I'm sure all of us recognize the importance of spiritual gifts they saw in operation, and we yearn for more of the signs, wonders and miracles that took place in the early church. All of that is part of Pentecost, but there is another aspect of Pentecost that we need to be aware of, lest we grow weary in well-doing for lack of seeing a continual succession of the supernatural acts of God.

Some of you may not realize that the miraculous events in Acts did not take place in rapid succession; they happened over a long period of time. What I want to point out for the next little while is that the apostolic era was not all the best of times; it was also the worst of times. Let's take a quick survey of this history of the church, chapter by chapter. I think we will soon see that Acts reflects, not only the best of times, but the worst of times as well.

1 – election to replace an apostate apostle

2 - 120 accused of being drunk

3 - “you killed the Prince of life”

4 – there was a laying on of hands service (religious leaders laid hands on a couple Jesus' name preachers & threw them in jail & threatened them to do a lot worse than that)

5 – Ananias & Saphira both lied to the HG and were slain – not IN the Spirit, but BY the Spirit, bringing great fear on all the church. In this same chapter, Peter & John were cast into prison and beaten severely.

6 – rumblings of discontent/ complaints of discrimination. Sure, Stephen does great signs & wonders, but he is arrested & false charges are brought against him.

7 – men gnash on him with their teeth & stone him to death while he is preaching

8 – persecution hits the church severely; many are cast into prison

9 – Saul is converted, baptized & filled with Holy Ghost, but wicked men lay wait & plot to kill him for preaching the gospel.

10 – God has to go to great lengths to convince Peter to preach to non-Jewish people.

11 – Peter is criticized for going into the house of a Gentile & eating with them.

12 – James is killed & Peter is imprisoned

13 – Paul is slandered and spoken against. Paul & Barnabas are expelled from the city.

Ac 14:1-2 a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.

Ac 15:39 there is such a sharp contention between Paul & Barnabas, that they departed asunder one from the other:

Ac 16:22-24 In Philippi, the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison where the jailer made their feet fast in the stocks.

Ac 17:18 Paul is called a babbler & a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

Ac 18:5-6 Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. As a result, he was opposed and blasphemed.

Ac 19:9 Many were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude,

Ac 20:9 as Paul was long preaching, a certain man sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was

taken up dead.

Ac 21:30-31 And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. And they went about to kill him.

Ac 22:22-24 And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging;

Ac 23:12 Certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

Ac 24:5-6 we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: Who also hath gone about to profane the temple

Ac 25:7 the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul,

Ac 26:24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

Ac 27:43-44 Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship.

Ac 28:3 And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

As we can readily see, "IT WAS the best of times, it was the worst of times." The way God operates was, and still is, paradoxical.

The same is true in the gospel account of the life of Christ. All that he said and did was a prelude to Pentecost. Jesus knew it was on the horizon; he was very conscious that there would be a glorious church. He was also aware that the formation of his church would entail not only good things, but bad things.

Let's take the book of Matthew for an example.

1 – the events surrounding Jesus conception by Mary was a cause for great concern at first by Joseph, her husband

2 – Herod seeks the baby out to have him killed

3 - Jesus is introduced by a man who looks wild. Had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

4 – Jesus spends 40 days with the devil

5 – Jesus predicts that his followers will be reviled, spoken evil of, & persecuted

6:34 sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof

7:15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

8 – a man is cleansed of leprosy; Peter's mother-in-law is healed. Jesus gets into a boat with his disciples and as they are crossing the sea a great storm arises. Where is Jesus? He's sound asleep down in the hold.

"It was the worst of times; it was the best of times."

9 – relatives of Jairus' dead daughter laughed Jesus to scorn for saying the girl was only sleeping

10 – great power given to the 12... Verse 22 -"ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake."

11:20-24 Jesus soundly rebukes and chews out the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida & Capernaum for not repenting.

12:22-24 **Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that**

the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

13 – unbelief was so strong in Nazareth that Jesus could not do many mighty works, *but it didn't stop Him; He knew Pentecost was coming!*

14 – Peter steps out of the boat in the midst of a raging storm at sea while the waves are crashing and starts to sink just as he begins walking on the water. Instead of commending Peter for his courage & obedience, Jesus says in verse 31, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

15:14-16 Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?

16:16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Verses 22-23 - Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me:

17:4-5 Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake...

18:19-21 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. **Then** came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

19:9-10 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.

20:20-21 Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.

21:12-13 And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

To the disciples & to others who looked on, it may have seemed hopeless that there would ever be a Pentecost, but it was going to happen!

22:17-18 What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?

23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

24:1-2 And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

25:34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: *Then, in the next breath, he utters this paradoxical statement:*

unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

26:7-9 There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.

To the natural man, it seemed like a hopeless case to ever have a decent church using such raw material. It was the worst of times; but there would be a church!!

26:20-21 Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. 40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? 56 Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.

27:21-23 The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.

28:16-17 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.

We can't rightly judge the way things are going to turn out by what is happening at any particular time!

It didn't look like to the Israelites that they would ever be delivered from Pharaoh and from their harsh taskmasters in Egypt...

Ex 6:1

Then the LORD said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land.

Ex 6:6-8

Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD

I want you to get the big picture – God's perspective – heaven's point of view!

It may not look like much good is happening at the moment, but hold on, child of faith!

In the time of **Esther**, the situation looked hopeless...

“deliverance will come – but will you be a part of it?”

The windows of heaven will be flung open, but will you receive God's best?

We live in the best of times; we live in the worst of times. It is the paradox of Pentecost!