

THE DAY OF TRANSFORMATION

By Rev. Will Nelken

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A Glimpse of History

The Feast of Pentecost was first known as the Feast of Weeks, a harvest festival among the Jews. It was called the Feast of Weeks because it was counted by weeks (seven weeks) from the Passover. (The name Pentecost comes from the Greek word for fifty, because the day after seven weeks was completed was the fiftieth day since Passover.

In ancient Jewish history, the Passover was the day of Israel's deliverance from slavery to the Egyptian nation. Fifty days later, the Israelites were across the Red Sea, encamped at the base of Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Ten Commandments and first gave the Law of God to the people. They celebrated these two events every year thereafter, to remember the two great gifts of God: their liberation and their identification as God's people.

History Transformed

Both of these celebrations were transformed by Jesus Christ, and today, we celebrate them with a new perspective.

Instead of Passover, we celebrate Good Friday and Easter—when Jesus died on the cross and arose from the grave three days later—the occasion of our deliverance and liberation from slavery-to-sin.

And instead of the giving of the Law of God, we celebrate the giving of the Spirit of God on Pentecost.

These transformations are significant in their impact.

Passover represented the deliverance by the power of God of a single people group from four centuries of enslavement to another people group. Yet, sadly, the Jewish people became subject to other people groups repeatedly throughout their history. God's mighty deliverance through Moses was only temporary.

Good Friday and Easter represent the deliverance by the power of God of the whole world—every tribe and tongue and nation (every people group)—from perpetual bondage to sin. This was accomplished by the sacrificial death of Jesus, God's Son—the Righteous One in substitution for the unrighteous billions. And for everyone who receives this gift from God by faith, the deliverance is everlasting.

Consider the combined testimony of these verses of Scripture:

Hebrews 7:27

²⁷ Unlike those [Jewish] high priests, [Jesus] does not need to offer sacrifices every day. They did this for their own sins first and then for the sins of the people. But Jesus did this once for all when he offered himself as the sacrifice for the people's sins.

Hebrews 9:26

²⁶ But now, once for all time, [Jesus] has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice.

Hebrews 10:10

¹⁰ For God's will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time.

1 Peter 3:18

¹⁸ Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.

Romans 6:10-11

¹⁰ When [Jesus] died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. ¹¹ So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.

Hallelujah! The New Covenant is definitely a *better* covenant.

As Jesus and His disciples shared their last supper together, *"He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'*

"After supper he took another cup of wine and said, 'This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.'"

What had been the bread of the Jews' toil and suffering at the hands of their slavemasters, became the bread of sacrifice, the body Jesus given for us in death—the ransom for our souls.

And what had been a cup of anticipation, awaiting the coming of Messiah, became the cup of an everlasting covenant between God and humankind, sealed by the blood of Jesus—grace and favor to all who receive Him.

Life and Peace

Similarly, the Day of Pentecost became the symbol of the greatest transition in human history: the exchange of the Spirit of God for the Law of Moses. The Law brought defeat and condemnation, but the Spirit brings life and peace.

Romans 6:14

¹⁴ Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace.

Romans 7:6

⁶ But now we have been released from the law, for we died to it (when we embraced Jesus as our Substitute) and are no longer captive to its power. Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit.

This life in the Spirit is the life that every Christian is called to. It is a miraculous life—in its origin and in its outcome.

For its origin was defined by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, His ascension back to the Father in Heaven, and the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit that was first received by the disciples on the Day of Pentecost described in Acts 2:1-4.

¹ On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. ² Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. ³ Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. ⁴ And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

Miraculous Things

If you wonder about the miraculous elements of these events—resurrection, ascension, sound of a windstorm, flames of fire, speaking in various languages—you should. They're designed to create wonder. Wonder is what leads us toward God.

If you struggle because you just can't figure these things out, good! They can't be "figured out" like many other things can, because they are miracles.

A miracle is an act of God that contrasts with or overrides natural law. Of course, some other things are commonly regarded as miracles, not because they are unusual, but because their processes are so exquisite as to elicit wonder and take our breath away—like the conception and gestation and birth of a child.

Don't let the signs and wonders of Pentecost keep you away from the reality of the Spirit's empowerment. Don't let "speaking in tongues" or other seemingly strange miracles prevent you from embracing all that God has for you through the life of the Spirit.

Open your heart and mind to wonder at the wonderful acts of God.

Divine Initiation

It is evident that the events of Pentecost were the initiation of the Church that Jesus is building. He said (Matthew 16:18), *"I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it."*

He specifically instructed His disciples not to begin their mission until they had been empowered by the Father with the Holy Spirit: *"Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 1:4-5).

This baptism with the Spirit is still the point of initial empowerment for all Christians who take seriously the mandate to *"go and make people from all nations into disciples"* (Matthew 28:19; CJB).

How could we hope to generate a work of God in other people without allowing the power of God to work in us?

God's Gift To Us

Like every work of God which Jesus Christ has brought to us, this is a gift—it cannot be earned or deserved. If you feel like you don't deserve it—well, you don't, but that's okay, because you can't. It is a gift. Freely given, and freely received.

But the question is, *have you received the gift of the Spirit's empowerment?*

It was a question the disciples of Jesus learned to ask: *"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"* (Acts 19:2). For in their day, as in ours, many put their trust in Christ as Savior, without recognizing the need for the Spirit's empowerment in their lives.

Spiritual Powerlessness

And what is the result of this "powerless" Christianity? Common things, like confusion, frustration, irritation, and impatience. These annoying feelings are typically the result of natural expectations that are the result of our trust in natural law. Let me explain.

We could define “natural law” as the way things usually work. Gravity is a natural law, that once was thought invincible. Leonardo da Vinci imagined creating bird-like wings for humans that could help them fly. Wilbur and Orville Wright actually built much larger, static wings (in the form of an airplane) that did the trick. Today, you can watch videos of daredevils who soar through mountain passes with nothing but a fabric wingsuit to catch the wind.

But human engineering and technology still cannot (nor will ever) duplicate the ascension of Jesus into Heaven. That was a miracle.

We discover natural laws through scientific experimentation. Then, we may learn to harness and use natural laws to our advantage—that is what we call technology. But we are still dependent on natural laws.

And when natural “laws” don’t work as expected—occasionally through miracles, but more often through human failure—we become frustrated, or confused.

When technology encounters a glitch, or breaks down altogether, we are irritated.

When people don’t follow the rules, we get upset.

Do you see how our lives are built around rules (laws)? We are dependent on them. That’s not a bad thing—it’s what keeps societies functioning. Anarchy and chaos break down society.

We are dependent on laws of all kinds. Some are written, many are not. Some are taught, others are unspoken. Some are universal, some are national, some are cultural—perhaps only within our own family.

Without the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, the breakdown of natural laws produces confusion, frustration, irritation, and impatience. When things don’t go the way we expect or hope, we become upset, perhaps even paralyzed.

Fresh Eyes

But the Holy Spirit gives us another way of seeing life, a new outlook, a higher perspective. He builds in us a strong hope in God—either to come through in the moment and break the log-jam, or to come through in the end, and turn the situation into something fruitful.

Romans 8:28

²⁸ And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

Ephesians 3:20-21

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

The baptism with the Holy Spirit is about far more than speaking in tongues. It is the gateway to a consistently Spirit-filled and Spirit-led life—a life of wonder, joy, and miracles.

Have you received the gift of the Spirit's empowerment? Have you received the baptism with the Holy Spirit?

If you would answer, "no," or are uncertain, this Pentecost Sunday is your day!

Today is your day of empowerment from Heaven!

Open your heart in worship to the Lord Jesus Christ and ask Him to baptize you with the Holy Spirit. By faith, begin to thank and praise Him for His wonderful gift.

As the Spirit gently prompts you to speak in a heavenly language (not in your head, but deep in your heart), just go ahead and speak. Though the words are unintelligible to you, they are meaningful to God, for they express high praise. So, give yourself to their expression, as long as and as often as the Spirit prompts you.

Thus begins a life of wonder!