

Messenger and Visitor

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THE MEANING OF PENTECOST.

The great address of Peter recorded in the second chapter of Acts was an answer to the amazement and perplexity of the multitude who saw and heard the manifestations which accompanied the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. These people were astonished beyond measure, because they could not see or imagine any reasonable cause for so marvellous effects. It was to them like a thunder-bolt out of a clear sky. Were these men intoxicated with wine? That must have seemed to themselves a ridiculously inadequate explanation of the fact that they were hearing these uneducated Galileans speak in almost all the languages of the civilized world, but it was the best they could suggest. Then Peter stood up with the eleven to explain the mystery. This marvellous thing that had come to pass, Peter assured the multitude, was not without sufficient cause. This speech was not the babbling of drunken men. It was nothing less than the mighty power of God. This day and its events had their explanation in the eternal Divine purpose. They had been foretold by prophets and made possible by the coming of the Messiah, for He whom Israel had so earnestly looked for had come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and the people and their rulers, in stupid, wicked ignorance, had crucified their King. Yet was this same Jesus, both Lord and Christ, for God had raised Him from the dead and exalted Him at His own right hand. Of His resurrection Peter and his fellow apostles were witnesses. They had seen Him alive many times after His passion, they had beheld Him ascend to heaven. He was now exalted at the right hand of God and He it was who had poured forth this which they saw and heard; and Peter showed how all this was supported by the Scriptures. The words of the apostle, uttered under the mighty inspiration of the Spirit and with the most intense conviction of their truth, came home with tremendous effect to the hearts of the multitude, and they who had been disposed to mock began now to cry out under conviction and say "Brethren, what must we do?"

It stands prominently in connection with this scripture that one grand purpose and result of the coming of Christ was to enlarge the scope and the power of prophecy. That is the same as saying that the coming of Jesus prepared the way for the coming or rather for the manifestation in fuller, freer measure of the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit had indeed been in the world from the beginning. The spirit of prophecy had long been known in Israel. But its manifestations had been comparatively rare. Here and there the Spirit had touched a man or a woman, imparting a divine illumination and making the tongue eloquent to declare the Word of the Lord. But it was a comparatively few only who had been able to receive this power. The prophets themselves had looked forward to a larger participation of the people in the Divine gift. Joel especially had been

moved to prophesy of a time gloriously distinguished in spiritual power from any that had been, a time when God should pour out His spirit on all flesh; when no longer one here and one there only should speak in the name of the Lord, but when the sons and daughters of the people should share in the divine gift; when the old men should see visions and the young men should dream dreams, and even upon the bond-servants and the bond-maidens the Spirit should be poured forth and they should prophesy. This signified something far in advance of what Joel or anyone before the day of Pentecost had seen. The Divine Spirit, as we have said, was in the world from the beginning, just as the electricity which carries our messages round the world, lights our cities, moves our cars along the streets and accomplishes so many important things in these days was in the world from the first, but it is only in these latter days, since men have learned to provide the necessary conditions for the communication of this mighty and mysterious force, that its potency to promote human interests has been realized. The Spirit was in the world. But spirit needs organism in order to operation, and until Pentecost there had been no people so prepared for the Lord that the Spirit could find in them the necessary conditions of general manifestation. In order that the church or religious assembly—and each individual member of it in his or her measure—should be an organism for the Spirit, it was necessary that the church should know Christ not only as a promise of God but as a promise realized in Jesus of Nazareth, and not only as the crucified Jesus, but as the risen and ascended Lord. This was the grand necessary condition of the fuller manifestations of the Kingdom of God. The prophets of Israel were far above the rest of people in regard to spiritual illumination and power. Like lofty mountain tops they had caught and reflected the coming of the Son. But great as was their stature, the least of that company of one hundred and twenty in the Upper Chamber was better instructed in the mysteries of the Kingdom than the greatest of the prophets. In that humble company there was found the nucleus of a people made ready for the Lord, and with glad haste, as on the wings of a rushing mighty wind, the Spirit came to dwell in and energize the body of Christ. Then ALL FLESH began to feel the power of that gracious spirit, sons and daughters began to prophesy, young men to see visions, old men to dream dreams,—such visions, such dreams as men had never seen or dreamed before—then servants, and hand-maidens stood up beside their masters in the flesh and prophesied in the Spirit. Then the multitude heard and came together and were confounded at what they saw and heard. Some mocked; but at the preaching of the truth they were converted. Pricked to the heart they cried, "What must we do?" They were obedient to the truth declared; they repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ; and thus they were united to that Spirit-filled, prophesying company. They entered with great joy into that holy fellowship, their hearts purified from uncleanness, from vain ambitions, hatred and jealousies, were filled with love to God and men and they moved forward a glad, spiritual host, mighty in the strength of the Divine Spirit and ascended Christ.

That is the story of Pentecost; and that story has been expanding in sequel after sequel all through the Christian centuries. The conclusion is not yet; there are greater things to follow. There is great need that the church of Christ should in these days rise to the dignity and power of her high calling. If every band of professed worshippers that meets to-day in the name of Christ were so clothed and energized with that spirit of prophecy which inspired that company of one hundred and twenty in the upper chamber in Jerusalem, how would the voice of the church of Christ be lifted up with strength and what a resistless spiritual host the people of God would be! And is it not certain that before the world shall be conquered for Christ there must be a realization of that first promise and potency of Christianity? Many devout and faithful souls are looking prayerfully and expectantly toward God for a baptism or Pentecostal power. Let every Christian heart join in the prayer.

REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED.

The preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost, as all preaching to the unsaved should do, aimed at the conversion of his hearers. The apostle's aim was true. His arrows did not fall short. His hearers were pricked to the heart and cried—Brethren, what shall we do? The question was born out of deep distress, for these people, now that their eyes were opened, perceived that they and their rulers had done a terrible thing, they had rejected and crucified the Lord's Anointed who was to have been their king and deliverer, the one hope of Israel. That is the cry which every soul convicted of its sin utters. Out of the profoundest depths of its experience, when its iniquity is laid bare, the cry goes forth. It is a most momentous question. Let us rejoice that there is an answer. It was to solve this problem of sin that Jesus Christ came into the world. And the answer, now that Christ has come, is very simple. It is not in "a voice no man can understand." See in how few and simple words Peter puts it—"Repent ye and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." This is Christianity's perpetual answer to the sinful souls which cry "What shall we do?" It is an easy message, easy to understand, easy, with God's help, to obey. Repentance is the first grand essential—and that to a convicted sinner should not be hard. Repentance, we need not say, does not mean doing penance—climbing stone steps on bare knees, a hair shirt, flagellations, etc. Christ does not ask the sinner for these things, and His apostle does not command them. Repentance, as the Greek word signifies, is a change of mind. For those who have seen their sins, there is but one thing to do with them or about them, and that is to renounce them, by the help of God, forever. That is the first thing to do, the first duty that confronts the sinner. Until he is willing to take his first step, there can be no second step with Christ, but, having taken this step at His command, he may go in his Lord's fellowship all the way.

The first step being repentance, the second is baptism, the symbolic sign that the penitent renounces his sins and gives himself in fullest fellowship to Christ. Repentance is first, then baptism. The soul that has not repented has nothing to do with baptism, which is a symbol of the putting away of its sins, of its full surrender to Christ and of renewed life in Him. Let no one say, therefore, that baptism is not important. It is most significant as the believer's public profession of his separation from sin and of union with Christ. Let no one say that the manner of the application of water in baptism is not important. Is it not a serious thing to ignore a divinely ordained symbol? If Christ desired that His followers should be buried in baptism with Himself should not each believer gladly comply with that desire.

In that glance at the life of the first community which Luke gives at the close of the chapter we see how the holy, joyous fellowship which each believer had with his Lord through the Spirit nourished an intimate, generous and happy fellowship in the Christian community. All that believed were together and had all things common. As Dr. McLaren has said: "The ideal of human life was realized, though but for a moment and on a small scale. It was inevitable that divergencies should arise, but it was not inevitable that the church should depart so far from the brief brightness of its dawn. Still the sweet, concordant brotherhood of these morning hours witnesses what Christian love can do, and prophecies what shall yet be and shall not pass."

MR. MOODY IN BOSTON.

The series of evangelistic services in Boston under the leadership of Mr. Moody, which had been expected with interest for some time, opened very encouragingly on Monday, January 4th, and, so far as we can gather from the reports given by the papers, they have been continued during the week with great interest. Tremont Temple is the place of meeting, and the services are held in the mornings and afternoons only. Mr. Moody's purpose in these meetings, as in those recently held in New York

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