



Sabbath Service
Saturday, May 5, 2007
“Pentecost—Part 1”



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CALL TO WORSHIP

Because God loves me, I keep God's commandments.

I seek to love even those I call enemy.

I seek to free those who are oppressed.

I seek to comfort those who mourn.

I seek to feed those who hunger.

Because God loves me, I keep God's commandments.

Praise and Worship

WORDS OF PRAISE

Blessings and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.

INVITATION

I praise you, God of all nations, ruler of all creation. Your goodness reaches far beyond my experience, and your grace moves me to hope beyond my highest dreams. Meet me here to overcome the limitations I too easily accept and the deep night that paralyzes my soul. Let your light shine in me, that I may be empowered to bear witness to you and your good news. In the name of your glorious son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

OPENING HYMN #29

"I Need Thee Every Hour"

Annie S. Hawks, 1872

Refrain, Robert Lowry, 1872

Robert Lowry, 1872

I need Thee ev'ry hour, Most gracious Lord;
No tender voice like Thine Can peace afford.
I need Thee, O I need Thee; Ev'ry hour I need Thee!
O bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee.

I need Thee ev'ry hour, Stay Thou near by;
Temptations lose their pow'r When Thou art nigh.
I need Thee, O I need Thee; Ev'ry hour I need Thee!
O bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee.

I need Thee ev'ry hour, In joy or pain;
Come quickly and abide, Or life is vain.
I need Thee, O I need Thee; Ev'ry hour I need Thee!
O bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee.

I need Thee ev'ry hour, Teach me Thy will;
Thy promises so rich In me fulfill.
I need Thee, O I need Thee; Ev'ry hour I need Thee!
O bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee.

I need Thee ev'ry hour, Most Holy One;
O make me Thine indeed, Thou blessed Son.
I need Thee, O I need Thee; Ev'ry hour I need Thee!
O bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee.

WORDS OF CONFESSION

Too often my heart is cold and without gratitude.
Too often my hands are passive and unwilling to carry out acts of mercy.
Too often my lips are closed tightly, unwilling to speak words of love.
Too often I am indeed separated and alienated from my better self, separated
and alienated from God.
Let me confess my separation and alienation.
Let me offer up words in prayer and confession:

Eternal God, from the beginning you have called your children into communion with
you. Yet, I confess, like all the rest, I have turned to my own way and refused your love
and grace. Restore me to the joy of knowing you and of recognizing your reign in me,
through Jesus Christ, bringer of your good news. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

God says to us: You are my chosen ones. I love you. I'm proud of you. Stand firm in
your renewed commitment. Know that I have forgiven you; I call you by name; you are
mine. I have entered into covenant with you and will stand by you in all times and all
places. Dare to live fully the life to which I have called you. Amen.

READING FROM THE PSALMS

Psalms 148 (NIV) —

Praise the LORD.

Praise the LORD from the heavens,
praise him in the heights above.

- (2) Praise him, all his angels,
praise him, all his heavenly hosts.
- (3) Praise him, sun and moon,
praise him, all you shining stars.
- (4) Praise him, you highest heavens
and you waters above the skies.
- (5) Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for he commanded and they were created.
- (6) He set them in place for ever and ever;
he gave a decree that will never pass away.
- (7) Praise the LORD from the earth,

- you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,
 (8) lightning and hail, snow and clouds,
 stormy winds that do his bidding,
 (9) you mountains and all hills,
 fruit trees and all cedars,
 (10) wild animals and all cattle,
 small creatures and flying birds,
 (11) kings of the earth and all nations,
 you princes and all rulers on earth,
 (12) young men and maidens,
 old men and children.
 (13) Let them praise the name of the LORD,
 for his name alone is exalted;
 his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.
 (14) He has raised up for his people a horn,
 the praise of all his saints,
 of Israel, the people close to his heart.
 Praise the LORD.

REFLECTION ON THE PSALM

The last five psalms (146-150) are hymns of praise. They summarize much of the message of the Psalms: Trust God, not mortals; God is a God of justice for the oppressed; God acts through creation; God also acts in history to deliver His people; praise God.

Psalm 148 calls on the creation to praise God. First, the heavens are invited to praise God's "name" (God's essential character and purpose as revealed in His creative actions). Then, the earth (the world of nature) is invited to praise God, followed by praise from humankind. In inviting humanity to praise God, the psalmist emphasizes that even those whom people consider sovereign (kings, princes, rulers) are to recognize God's ultimate sovereignty. The psalm concludes by noting that God's divine purpose is being fulfilled specifically through God's people. God has "raised up a horn" (protected or strengthened) the people, who are summoned to offer their praises to God.

The list of beings, objects, and elements on earth that are to praise God is reminiscent of the story of God creating earth and giving humanity "dominion" over it (Gen. 1). But this psalm challenges us to understand dominion not only as "stewards of" creation but also as "partners with" creation. Francis of Assisi, who called the sun, wind, and fire his brother, the moon and waters his sister, and the earth his mother, understood that we are called to exercise dominion in a God-ordained way—as a servant and partner!

HYMN #61

"Great is Thy Faithfulness"

*Thomas O. Chisholm
 William M. Runyan*

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
 There is no shadow of turning with Thee.
 Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;

As Thou hast been Thou forever will be.
Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.
Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth.
Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide.
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.
Blessings, all mine, with ten thousand beside.
Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

INVITATION TO PRAYER

God is Spirit, and those who worship God
must worship in spirit and in truth. Let us pray ...

MOMENTS OF SILENCE

SILENT PERSONAL PRAYER

Lessons from Scripture

WORDS OF DEDICATION

Listen to the words of the scriptures: the mercy and the love of God are endless; God's wrath is slow, and God's love is eternal.

SEEDS FOR REFLECTION

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep." (John 10:14-15, NIV).

"My sheep listen to my voice: I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one." (John 10:27-30, NIV).

“I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10:7-11, NIV).

Contrary to popular opinion, sheep are in fact quite intelligent. They have poor eyesight, but an excellent sense of hearing. Jesus said his sheep hear his voice and follow him. Sheep cannot be pushed, but must be led.

A story is told of two shepherds on a mountain plain. The sheep from both shepherds were grazing together. As the sun began to set, the shepherds decided it was time to descend down the dangerous slopes to their own homes. Down the narrow path the shepherds traveled with their sheep, still mixed together, falling in behind them in single file. When it came time to part ways at the fork in the path, the shepherds bid farewell. It was now too dark for anyone to see clearly. As the shepherds continued down their respective paths, they kept talking and the sheep kept listening for their shepherd’s voice. Those who belonged to the shepherd who turned right, turned right and those who belonged to the shepherd who turned left, turned left. When the shepherds arrived at their destinations, they looked back and counted their sheep. Neither shepherd had sheep from the other’s flock. So intimate is their recognition of the voice of their shepherd, that even when the sheep in front of them belonged to the other shepherd, they were not confused when it came time to choose the right path.

If only we would listen to the voice of our shepherd and follow only him. Are sheep smarter than we? Not so! Read the entire tenth chapter of John and take to heart all that Jesus says. He came to show the way. He came to show us God. It is only through following him that we can reach our calling and lay claim to our inheritance.

VOICES IN TIME

Words from past or present men and women of God.

“All naturally desire knowledge, but what good is knowledge without the fear of God? Surely humble peasants who serve God are better than proud philosophers who strive to understand the ways of the universe and neglect their own souls. If you know yourself well you will become lowly in your own sight and not delight in the praises of others. If I understood all things in the world and had not love, what help would that be to me in the sight of God who will judge the things that I do?” — *Thomas à Kempis*

FIRST SCRIPTURE READING: Read Acts 11:1-18

In Acts 10-11, Luke introduces Cornelius as a pious Gentile centurion who had a vision from God telling him to send for Peter who could offer a message that would save him and his whole household.

Call No One Profane

Peter was also having a vision. A large sheet full of all kinds of creatures, reptiles, and birds was lowered from heaven. A voice said, “Eat;” but Peter said to the Lord that he had never eaten anything that was “profane or unclean.” The voice persisted, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane” (Acts 10:14-16). As Peter puzzled over this vision, Cornelius’ messengers arrived. Peter went to see Cornelius and his family and close friends. Peter related to Cornelius that, while Jewish law forbade him from

associating with Gentiles, he had just received a new insight from God that such distinctions were changing (10:28).

Peter was here exaggerating a bit. Jewish law did not prohibit all interaction with Gentiles; and, on a practical level, Galilee was essentially Gentile territory. As Jews had been exiled and fled persecution throughout the Greco-Roman world, no doubt they had extensive contact with Gentiles. But the point was still dramatic—a new day was dawning in which Jews and Gentiles would become one in a common faith and mission!

Preach an Inclusive Gospel

Peter then shared the good news with all who were gathered: God shows no partiality but accepts all in any place who honor Him and does what is right (keeps all of God's commandments). God sent Jesus to proclaim reconciliation to a limited audience—the people of Israel—but now, through Peter, God is saying that *all* who believe in Jesus and keep the commandments can be forgiven (10:34-43). While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on those who heard the word. This astounded the circumcised (Jewish) believers who had accompanied Peter. Peter concluded that they could no longer refuse to baptize Gentiles, since they could receive the Holy Spirit just as the apostles had at Pentecost.

Peter did an unheard of thing! He socialized with “unclean” or “profane” people (Gentiles). He ate with them. He baptized them in the name of Christ! The “circumcised believers” in Jerusalem (who had given sanctions for other Gentile contact; see 8:14) questioned Peter: Why did you do this? Peter explained and then reminded them of the promise that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (see Luke 3:16). Peter concluded that God had given to Gentiles the repentance that leads to life (11:18). The early church ultimately concluded (at the Council of Jerusalem, Act 15) that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised as Jews to become Christian, even though they needed to observe other laws — the laws of holiness.

The irony of this story is that today Christianity is a Gentile religion. The excluded minority has become a dominant majority. And the tragedy is that Christians often discriminate not only against Jews but also against the original commands and laws under which the church was originally founded. The lesson from this story has become lost in the apostasy of today's church which has followed the corruptions brought into the church by the Gentiles in the first three centuries of the Christian era.

Many today use this passage to say that the laws of “clean” and “unclean” meats have been done away. This is incorrect. The message is not about what we consume or put in our bodies, but is rather about our attitudes and how we view the peoples of the earth. We need to learn how to recognize those who are truly children of God as opposed to those who are children of Satan — and that distinction cannot be made by whether a person is a Jew, a Gentile, or any other racial or ethnic determination. It is determined by whether a person is obedient to God and his commandments or whether they have chosen to go their own way, following the commandments of men ... which, in virtually all cases, are the commandments of Satan. Here Cornelius was obedient to God, who sent Peter to show him the way to allow him and his household the opportunity to become “grafted into” the olive tree that is Israel.

BLESSING ON GOD'S WORD

Eternal God, in the reading of the scripture, may your word be heard; in the meditations of my heart, may your word be known; and in the faithfulness of my life, may your word be shown. Amen.

THE GOSPEL READING: Read *John 14:15-21*

Many times the gospel of John stresses the necessity of obedient performance. Just believing the right things about Jesus or savoring relational closeness to Jesus is not enough. If one is a disciple, he or she must be committed to living and acting as Jesus did — loving the sick, comforting the afflicted, preaching hope and rescue to those who are morally, materially, or spiritually broken. God wants performance, not just a profession of faith.

But it does not take very long before a follower of Jesus, having committed to a performance-oriented way of life, discovers that he or she is utterly inadequate for the task. The demands are too great, the challenges beyond inherent human capacity. Knowing this, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit who will serve as the courage or strength-giver. The Greek word *parakletos* means “one who stands beside to give aid and support.”

Of course, the Holy Spirit has always been active in creation, but before the arrival of Jesus on earth, the Holy Spirit came upon persons at God's discretion. When Jesus came the Holy Spirit was *with* people in the form of the man. But since Jesus departed this world in the flesh, the Holy Spirit now literally resides *in* persons who are obedient to the commands of God and live by faith in God's promises. Those without faith cannot and will not accept the spirit. On the other hand, those in whom the Holy Spirit resides are intimately connected with the Father, and by virtue of this connection are enabled to live a life of obedience and Christ-like service.

BLESSING ON GOD'S WORD

Eternal God, in the reading of the scripture, may your word be heard; in the meditations of my heart, may your word be known; and in the faithfulness of my life, may your word be shown. Amen.

Benediction

CLOSING CANTICLE

Blessed be the Sovereign God of Israel,
Who has looked favorably on the people and redeemed them.
God has raised up a mighty savior for us
In the house of God's servant David;
As God spoke through the mouth of the holy prophets from of old,
That we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.
Thus God has shown the mercy
Promised to our ancestors,
And has remembered the holy covenant,
The oath that He swore to our ancestor Abraham,
To grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,
Might serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.

CLOSING HYMN #92

“Lower Lights”

Philip P. Bliss, 1838-1876

Brightly beams our Father’s mercy from His lighthouse evermore,
But to us He gives the keeping of the lights along the shore.
Let the lower lights be burning! Send a gleam across the wave!
Some poor fainting, struggling seaman, you may rescue, you may save.

Dark the night of sin has settled, loud the angry billows roar;
Eager eyes are watching, longing, for the lights, along the shore.
Let the lower lights be burning! Send a gleam across the wave!
Some poor fainting, struggling seaman, you may rescue, you may save.

Trim your feeble lamp, my brother, some poor sailor tempest tossed,
Trying now to make the harbor, in the darkness may be lost.
Let the lower lights be burning! Send a gleam across the wave!
Some poor fainting, struggling seaman, you may rescue, you may save.

CLOSING WORDS

May the God of hope fill me with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit I may abound in hope. Amen.

THE LESSON FOR THE WEEK

Pentecost — Part 1

This week's study material is based on the New King James Version.

Pentecost is the third of God's annual Holy Days and the only one still being observed in the professing Christian world. But much of the meaning behind the day has been lost to the Catholic and Protestant world.

This Holy Day is known by several different names. It is called Pentecost in the New Testament from the Greek word *pentekoste*, meaning "fifty" or "fiftieth from Passover." The Greek word is derived from two Greek words: *pente* meaning "fifty" and *koste* meaning "to count"; literally meaning "count fifty."

In the Old Testament, Pentecost is called the Feast of Weeks (*Hag Shavout*), Feast of Harvest, or Day of Firstfruits. God originally established his Church in the wilderness when he brought the Israelites out of Egypt. It was called the congregation of Israel or the congregation in the wilderness (Acts 7:38; Lev. 8:3).

This was the physical type of the spiritual church God would later build through his son Jesus Christ. The Day of Pentecost in the New Testament is the day when God sent His Holy Spirit to fill the disciples of Christ and is marked in today's church as the birthday of the church — and that it is, but more profoundly than the professing Christians today realize. It is also the birthday of the covenant between God and ancient Israel when God gave his law to Moses.

Let's study it for ourselves. Look up each reference given in answer to the questions below. Some like to write out the verses completely, while others prefer writing out the answers in their own words. Use the method that works best for you, but more will be gained from the lesson if you work with pencil and paper rather than just by reading alone.

Pentecost in the New Testament

1. What did Jesus promise to his disciples the night before his death? (John 14:16)
2. What was the "helper" that Jesus promised? (John 14:26)
3. What is another name for this helper? (John 14:17)

COMMENT: The Holy Spirit had been with the disciples within the person of Jesus Christ. When he sent the disciples out to heal and cast out demons (Matt. 10:1), they did this work through the power of the Holy Spirit, but they did not have the Spirit dwelling within them. Christ gave them the use of the Spirit's power, even though they didn't understand. When it came time for Jesus to leave them, he promised to send the Holy Spirit to be within them as it had been within him. The word translated "helper" is from the Greek word *parakletos* which means "one who goes along side to help."

4. Did Jesus repeat this promise after he had been crucified? (Acts 1:8-9)

5. When did the disciples actually receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? On what day did it actually come? (Acts 2:1-4)

6. Read Acts 2:5-13. Why were Christ's disciples gathered together with all these "devout" Jews from all over the Roman Empire? (verse 1)

COMMENT: These Jews from all over the world were called "devout" men because they lived according to God's laws revealed in the Old Testament. At the time of this event they were not disciples of Christ, although before that day was done 3,000 would become converts (Acts 2:41). Remember, at the time of this event, to be called "devout" these men had to be devoted to observance of the laws of God as spelled out in the Old Testament as there was no New Testament written yet. They were gathered in Jerusalem from all over the nations of the world to keep the day of Pentecost. This day was observed long before the Holy Spirit came on that day in the first century. Pentecost was called the Feast of Firstfruits in the Old Testament and was observed by "devout" people since the days of Moses (Lev. 23:15-21).

7. Jesus had given his disciples an additional instruction concerning the promise of the Holy Spirit, after his crucifixion and before he ascended to heaven. What was it? (Luke 24:49)

COMMENT: Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the Spirit came. He didn't tell them when it would come or on what day. He just said to wait. Then, on a day when they would all be together in one place—because it was one of God's annual Holy Days—the Spirit descended on them. If the disciples had not obeyed Christ — if they had not been keeping the Day of Pentecost, or Firstfruits, as instructed by Mosaic law, they

would NOT have received the Holy Spirit. God gives his Spirit ONLY to those who obey him (Acts 5:32). These facts alone, and the timing of these events, makes a lie out of the Christian claim that all the laws of the Old Testament were done away when Christ died on Calvary. If that were true, then the Apostles would not have been there to receive the promised helper. The scriptures show that the Apostles and the new church kept all the laws of the Old Testament for the remainder of the Apostle's natural lives. The changes that are so apparent in today's church mostly took place between 100 and 400 A.D., a very long time after the death of Christ — too long of a period for any logically thinking person to claim that Jesus himself made the changes. We'll look into that more in additional studies in the future.

Christ the Wave Sheaf

Almighty God knows man is best reminded by what he repeats *year after year!* God established his Holy Days — memorials of the Plan of God — in conjunction with the two annual harvests. God uses the physical harvest seasons as a pattern of the two spiritual harvests.

In Palestine there are two annual harvest seasons. The first one is a small spring harvest following the winter rains. It begins on the day of the Wave-Sheaf offering, and ends at the Day of Pentecost. In the late summer and early autumn the second harvest season occurs. It follows the late spring or latter rains in Palestine and ends with the Feast of Ingathering, which is also called the Feast of Tabernacles. This fall harvest is the much greater harvest.

The Day of Pentecost pictures the very small early harvest.

The Days of Unleavened Bread occur about the *beginning of the small spring harvest* (Lev. 12:10-11). The shoots of grain, planted earlier, have grown to maturity. They are now fruit-bearing stalks—ready to be harvested.

This first harvest began in the following manner: On the first day of the week, following the weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread, a small handful of newly sickled stems and heads of barley was brought to the priest to be accepted by God. This was called the “Wave-Sheaf Offering,” or the “first of the firstfruits.”

1. What did God tell the congregation in the wilderness to do concerning the spring harvest? (Lev. 23:10-14)
2. What does the Wave Sheaf symbolize? (verse 10)
3. Who was the first of the first fruits of God's spiritual harvest? (1 Cor. 15:20-23)

COMMENT: Because Christ was a holy sacrifice, and was the first human being to be resurrected and ascend to the throne of God, he fulfilled the symbolism of the Wave-Sheaf offering — he was the first of the fruitfruits.

4. What do we learn about this event? Were his disciples permitted to touch him? (John 20:17)

COMMENT: The morning after he was resurrected, Jesus had to go before God the Father to be accepted, just as the High Priest in the Old Testament had to wave the sheaf of barley to be accepted by God before the spring harvest could begin. When Mary met Christ in the garden, she could not touch him because his sacrifice had not yet been accepted in heaven.

5. After Christ's sacrifice had been accepted by God the Father, could his disciples touch him? (Matt. 28:9, John 20:20, 27).

6. What day was it when Mary saw Christ in the garden? (John 20:19)

COMMENT: This was the day following the weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread. It was the *very same day that the Wave Sheaf was offered!* It was on this very day that Jesus Christ, the first of the firstfruits of God's spiritual harvest, was accepted as the Wave-Sheaf offering in heaven!

7. After Christ was accepted in heaven and returned to earth, what day was it when the disciples were permitted to touch him? (John 20:19)

COMMENT: Clearly, Christ went to heaven as the *first resurrected* Son of God—the first harvested product of God's Master Plan—and returned to his disciples *all in the same day!*

NEXT WEEK: **PENTECOST — Part 2**