

May 30, 2020

Hello Brethren,

One thousand nine hundred and eighty-nine years ago this weekend the disciples of Jesus Christ were gathered in Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Pentecost. No doubt they had been through an emotional roller coaster! Convinced Jesus was the Messiah, and fully expecting Him to cast off the Roman overlords and restore Israel to prominence as the nation of God – they were shattered to see Him arrested, beaten, and then crucified like a common criminal.

And they knew everything about His arrest, trial and crucifixion was *illegal* by Roman law! It was all politically motivated as powerful men in the government and the religious community alike felt threatened by Him. What He taught, the confidence He inspired among the people and the powerful following they could see developing around Him threatened their position and power, so they worked “by hook or by crook” to have Him taken out of the picture. And He died.

And then just three days later – exactly as He had predicted – they saw Him again, very much alive! And for the next 40 days He appeared to them, teaching and encouraging them. It must have seemed surreal, and perhaps many times they pinched themselves to make sure this was real – and it was real!

About a week and half before Pentecost Christ told them to remain in Jerusalem, and wait for the promise of the Father, which He told them was to be the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). And then they saw Him rise up into the clouds and out of their sight.

It is estimated that the population of Jerusalem in Jesus’ day was about 25,000 people. But during the Holy Days it could swell to four or five times higher as devout Jews from around the country came to the Temple to keep the Feasts. There was always a festive atmosphere on Holy Days, as family and friends came together again, some not having seen one another since the last Holy Day!

As the disciples gathered for Pentecost in the now crowded city, I’m sure the excitement they felt was different from the general population. Whether or not they knew they would receive the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, I don’t know. But they knew it had to be soon, and what better time?

And so it was, with dramatic visual and auditory cues, God poured the Holy Spirit, the spirit power He used to create the worlds, directly on the disciples gathered together. We know of only a handful of individuals over the previous 4,000 years of human history who had been given the Holy Spirit. On this day in 31 AD it was given to more people than ever before – and the day was not yet done!

Peter was inspired to give his powerful sermon that day, and the crowds listened in awe, perhaps partly due to the physical manifestations of the Spirit, but clearly also because of the power of Peter’s message. I’ve often envied Peter on this point as I’ve labored, studied and prayed for inspiration in preparing a sermon– because it appears this sermon of his was entirely spontaneous and inspired in that moment! It would be so much easier and less stressful if God would inspire

every sermon of mine this way, but He doesn't. And I doubt Peter and the other Apostles were always so inspired, never needing to put work and effort into preparing their messages later on.

By the time we come to Acts 2:41 we find that 3,000 more people were baptized that same day. Talk about stellar growth – if there were 120 disciples gathered together initially, they grew by 2500% in one day! Never since has the Church seen such a dramatic rate of growth!

And so the spirit-led new covenant Church of God began. Over time the Apostles started spreading out from Jerusalem. And within 40 years they were thrust out because of persecution, spreading out across the vast expanses of the Roman Empire and beyond. Everywhere the people of God went they taught, by word, but even more by example. They didn't just give lip service to their faith, they lived it unapologetically, and it was noticed.

Years became decades, which morphed into centuries. Time went by and the world changed. The Roman Empire fell, and other brand new nations came into being, some of them flourishing in places that had been largely open and unsettled land on the other side of the planet.

The power and ferocity of war grew, political, social and economic norms changed to what would be entirely unrecognizable to a Jew of Christ's day. Knowledge began to increase faster and faster. Now approaching 2,000 years later it is growing at a frenetic pace – mirroring the frenetic pace of our lives!

However, one thing that has remained constant no matter the massive changes the centuries have seen is the Church of God. Historical records show there have been times when aspects of the Truth was lost, and it seems the Church was sometimes very small, very scattered and spiritually very weak. But never did the Church die. Never did the attempts of churches or governments spurred on by Satan manage to extinguish the Church of the living God. It has endured in an unbroken line from the day of Pentecost 31AD to our day today. And no matter how persecuted or scattered we may be in the future, we have the assurance that it will continue up until the day Jesus Christ does return to earth, stepping down on the top of the Mount of Olives!

That is the spiritual legacy you and I have been privileged to inherit. And it is proof positive that no purpose of God can be thwarted (Job 42:2). As we observe back-to-back Sabbaths this weekend, take a moment to reflect on the heritage of faith we have. One thousand nine hundred and eighty-nine years of faithful Christians provide for us “so great a cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) to inspire and encourage us. Our task now is to carry on!

It is a blessing beyond measure and above value to be a part of the Church of God today. And as we worship “remotely together” one more weekend, let's be sure to give thanks to our loving and steadfast Father in heaven for all He has done, is doing and will yet do to bring His plan for mankind to its powerful and ultimately wonderful conclusion!

Best regards,

Thomas L. Clark