

## **"THE SPIRIT THAT TRANSFORMS" (Five Pentecost Studies)**

### INTRODUCTION

The event of Pentecost is *wrongly* viewed by many Christians as an appearance of the Holy Spirit for the first time. The gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is **a manifestation of the God-head who has *always* been.**

This *breath* or *spirit* of God was there from the beginning, at the creation, and in the formation of God's people. He possessed and spoke through the Prophets and was the *Breath* Jesus breathed upon His disciples (Jn 20:22). It was the work of the Holy Spirit that opened the eyes of the Emmaus road Disciples to recognise Jesus. It was the Holy Spirit working in their hearts as they listened to Jesus expounding the Scriptures. Their own testimony was "*Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us.*" (Luke 24:32) It is the testimony of Christian experience that the Holy Spirit awakens the sleeping soul and opens our understanding to see, perceive and begin to embrace the Christ.

*Pentecost did not bring a different or new or unknown Holy Spirit.* The difference was that Pentecost was an **outpouring of the same Holy Spirit**, but, as Joel had prophesied, it was an outpouring in a measure that had never been experienced before!



### **What did the Holy Spirit transform?**

To answer this question we journey through the following Scriptures:-

**Joel Chapters 1 and 2,  
Luke chapter 24 and  
Acts chapters 1 and 2.**

May you be blessed through the power of the Scripture record.

*Paul Bester*

## *Transformed from Promise to Pentecost*

The book of Joel contains only 73 verses, but is the most powerful, prophetic parallel to the event of Pentecost in the whole Bible. The Prophecy of Joel came true at Pentecost.

The pattern of Joel is as follows:

Like an invasion of locusts bringing drought and devastation, so the land has been possessed and the people subjugated by another power. The nation is in grief and all joy has gone out of the worship of Almighty God. They are mocked by the captors who say that God has abandoned them. But in spite of this hopelessness, God calls them back to Himself .

*Don't rip your clothes to show your sorrow. Instead, turn back to me with broken hearts. I am merciful, kind, and caring. (Joel 2:13).*

As the land will be restored so will the spirit and faithfulness of the people be restored. When that day comes, God will pour out His Spirit on all people.

*On that day, I will give my Spirit to everyone. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will have dreams, and your young men will see visions. In those days I will even give my Spirit to my servants, both men and women. (Joel 2:28). And:  
Then the LORD will save everyone who faithfully worships him. (calls on His Name)(Joel 2:32).*

When Peter, filled with this Pentecost outpouring of the Holy Spirit, stands up in the streets to address the crowd, he speaks to people under the yoke of Roman rule. The identities of the nations were secondary to the identity of their Roman masters. In Acts chapter 2, Peter begins his sermon by quoting the Prophet Joel. He tells them that this amazing spectacle of spirit-filled people in the street was the fulfilment of a Promise made by God. The day of that Promise had arrived!

We are also directly connected to those Spirit-filled disciples. Jesus prayed for us as “...those who will believe in me through their message...”(John17:20) We who have come after the disciples and follow Jesus because of their witness, can know that **Pentecost is also God’s Promise to us.**

Remember how Jesus reinforces the same promise when he says,

*“I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”( Luke 24:49), and in Acts 1:4,5: “On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit’.”*

If the promise is ours, then the condition for receiving the promise must also apply to us. We need to wait upon God and we need to **call upon His Name**. In other words, this promise, this infilling of the Spirit, this pouring out of forgiving Love, this empowerment and this Pentecost, is **in God’s hands, God’s moment**(day), and **by God’s Grace**. It is sheer gift! You cannot create one iota of this event! All we can do is to fall on our knees and receive the promise. But this does not mean that Christians constantly live in a land of promise. No! The promise becomes fulfilled when you welcome the Spirit of God into your daily life.

When God’s Promise becomes your Pentecost, the locusts no longer have power over you. You are under His sovereign rule! The Holy Spirit destroys all ungodly powers that seek to destroy your identity and your spirit. And if you ever think that it’s too late for God’s restoring Love in your life, then hear this last word from the prophet Joel 2:25

***“And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten...”***

***In the name of Jesus...I pray for Your Promise Lord;  
Your restoring Promise;  
Your healing Promise  
And Your generously outpoured Promise.***



***O Holy Spirit, come.  
I am the Tent of Your Presence.***



## ***Transformed from Fear to Joy***

Did you know that there is a **mini Pentecost** at the end of John's Gospel? It occurs in the first appearance of our resurrected Jesus to his disciple band. Let's hear St John's record in Chapter 20, verses 19-22.

*“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’*

*And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘**Receive the Holy Spirit**’.”*

There are few forces that can make one become as disempowered as fear. Fear can be such a powerful emotion that it can immobilise one. We describe deep fear with a strong word like *“petrified.”* It literally means “turned into stone.” Fear can stop us in our tracks and put life itself on hold. John tells us that the disciples were in such a place of fear. The words, “for fear of the Jews ...” meant that they had a mortal fear that they would be found, arrested and killed. Roman authority had allowed the execution of their leader, Jesus. That surely declared open season on hunting down his followers. Pilate had handed Jesus over to the mob and said, “Do what you will with him ...”

It was certain that he would not say anything less to the mob about the followers of Jesus! The hunt was on!

Running and hiding must be amongst the most soul destroying things we can experience. An early sign of running and hiding is withdrawal from others, avoiding their company and especially their conversation. Instead of asking “How are you?”, someone may just ask “*Where* are you?” That could be a very uncomfortable question because I would have to talk about my place of fear! But sometimes a fear can be so strong that it drives the human spirit into a pit with no apparent hope of climbing out.

But what if the Jews were not hunting them at all? Perhaps somebody in earshot of the disciples just said, “What if they’re looking for us too?” A wise German proverb says: *Fear makes the wolf bigger than he is.*

Whether or not the fear of the disciples was based on fact, or just their own assumptions, is quite irrelevant. The result was the same. They hid themselves. And the pit was deep!

It reminds me of the horrific accounts of children falling into wells and boreholes. One can only imagine the agonising terror and frantic helplessness of those who discover them. But then there are the stories of rescue. News reports followed the step by step courage of rescuers who bored shafts, worked racing against time and lowered themselves into the narrow shaft to pull out the little one. While the disciples were in that pit, Jesus joins them and reveals Himself to them. He breathes the Spirit on them. Their pit of despair becomes a place of transformation. They realise the awesome truth that this Jesus, who had entered the deepest of all pits, had in fact been delivered by Divine and miraculous Spirit Power. Their Fear turns to Joy. As he breathes the Holy Spirit upon them they have a foretaste of the fuller Pentecost to come. It is not the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit as on the day of Pentecost, but nevertheless it seals their realisation of the Resurrection. **Jesus, who had gone away, was back!**

That’s what we need to know inside the pit of fear. Fear makes us believe that God has gone, abandoned us, and that we are alone - absolutely alone!

**The transforming Good News is *Jesus is back.***

He lowers himself into our deepest pits and says,

***“Peace be with you...receive the Holy Spirit.”***

The wonderful thing about this passage is **how** Jesus gives them the Holy Spirit. St John records that “*He breathed on them*”. The Hebrew word for breath is the same word for Spirit. Jesus does what is recorded in the creation story. When God breathed into Adam, he became a living Spirit. Jesus breathes His Spirit into us. In that moment all fear is transformed into joy.

Is this the first taste of Pentecost that you need right now? Why not ask Him for it?

***Come Holy Spirit and so fill me with realising the Presence of Jesus,  
That my fears will be squeezed out of the windows of my soul  
And be replaced by Joy and more Joy.  
I pray this in Jesus’ Name. Amen.***



## ***The Crowd of Hatred transformed to The Community of Love***

When all the campaigning and voting is over, contending political parties in a stable democracy need to accept the decision of the majority. That's regarded as good democracy. The wish of the majority is regarded as right. When Jesus was arrested and brought to Pilate he was charged with *blasphemy*. But Pilate wasn't interested in the religious disputes of Sadducees and Pharisees and was about to dismiss the case. Then they changed the charge to one of *treason*. "He said he was a king..."

The majority is not always right. Crucifying Jesus was a majority decision and in this case the majority was wrong. Peter addresses his audience as if they were the same crowd who shouted "Crucify Him" on that fateful day. But the disaster was much deeper than simply the murder of an innocent. They had crucified their own Deliverer, the promised Hope and Messiah. Their sin was not that they deliberately did something they knew was *wrong*. Their sin was that they allowed the power of hatred to drive them, even though they believed they were right!

How can we possibly make such a deluded act right with God? History is filled with examples of crowds, movements, groups and even of nations, following voices of hatred, power-seeking and self-gratification. Legislation, humanitarian courts, counter-movements, monuments and Holocaust Museums cannot reverse such sins. We can only plead with children not to repeat the mistakes of the past. But such pleas are not new. The evidence of history is against us. We live in a world of inter-national and inter-tribal hatred.

In South Africa we live under the myth of "the will of the collective is right". It was a collective that was capable of gross injustice such as legislated apartheid. It is a collective ignorance that is in danger of perpetuating corrupt governance through an obstinate blindness that chooses not to see the importance of moral standards for a new society.

The contamination is a shared social gene. No social policy is powerful enough to make the human race harmonious, let alone bonded and innocent. At best our ever-changing policies and legislations are sad evidence of a sick society trying to lift itself by its own breaking bootstraps.

It takes a different power to do the job. It takes a power that can change not only the individual but also the *collective* heart, the heart of the crowd. It takes a power that demands total allegiance to what is good and lovely and true. It takes a power that makes God forgive us, not just our sin as individuals, but also the sins of the collective.

Pentecost was, amongst many things, the outpouring of that forgiveness. It was an outpouring to wash (baptise) a heart, wash a nation and wash the world. Only God the Holy Spirit has the power to do such a washing. It is a washing that begins with the words, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).

In his first sermon (Acts 2:14-39) Peter describes Jesus as the promised Christ, the Messiah of Israel, as promised through the prophets and then he says to them, (v36) "Therefore let all Israel (the collective) be assured of this : God has made this Jesus, whom you (collectively) crucified, both Lord and Christ". When the people (the collective that crucified Him) heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other Apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied: "Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

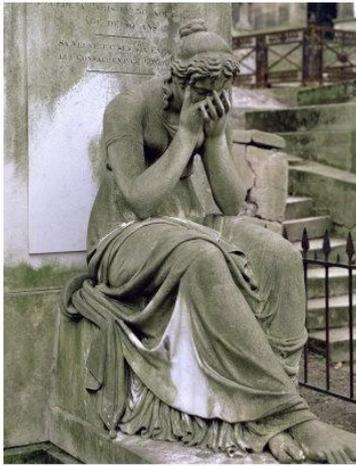
The gift of the Holy Spirit is a "washing" that transforms the heart and turns us away from all other voices to hears only the voice of the One who says,  
*"Son...daughter... your sins are forgiven."*

***Embracing God's forgiveness makes us one in God's Love.  
That's how the Church was born at Pentecost.  
Please pray your own prayer for a cleansing from Sin. Hold  
nothing back. Just let the Holy Spirit wash over your whole  
being.***

***But also pray for the washing of our nation. Ask the Spirit to  
cleanse our governance, our social structures, our foreign  
relations and our morals.***

***You are part of all social structures and your prayer will  
claim just a little more territory for God.***

***That territory is the alternative collective, which is the  
community of God's Love.***



## ***Transformed from Grief to Hope***

*“Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;  
my body also will live in **hope, because**  
**you will not abandon me to the grave...**”(Acts 2: 26,27)*

In this part of his Pentecost message, Peter tells his audience that David foresaw the resurrection. In the words of Psalm 16 David says, *Deliverance from the grave is deliverance from abandonment.*

If Death is the last word in our affairs then truly we have been abandoned. But this Gospel says that Death is not the last word. God has spoken after and beyond the veil of Death. That word is the word of **Hope**.

*Hope* in the New Testament is not a tenuous kind of trust that there may be “something more.” No, this *Hope* is a *Knowledge*. This *knowledge* is given by the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit’s work to reveal and implant in us the reality that Christ has conquered the grave. Death is not a lost word in our affairs.

It is at this point that many people want physical evidence. Yes, it is true that we don’t physically see the wounded hands and the wounded side of Jesus, but the Holy Spirit gives us the spiritual eyesight with which we can also see the risen Christ.

Jesus said to Thomas, *“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* John 20:29

In other words, it was true that for Thomas “seeing is believing”. But for us, Jesus is saying “**believing is seeing**”.

The disciples were locked in Grief after the crucifixion. It was their encounter with the resurrection that set them free. It was not logic or reason that told them what this Resurrection meant. It was the Holy Spirit who interpreted its meaning and opened their minds to the amazing life-changing truth that in Christ *Death had been conquered*.

We do not only experience grief through the loss of someone precious. We also grieve when we lose *something* precious, like home, occupation, community or familiar environment. We also mourn the loss of personal values, personal dignity, goodness, or if we feel we have wasted life and lost opportunities.

What an amazing and wonderful word it is that proclaims that *even these deaths have been conquered*. One of the signs of recovery is that we begin living with a sense of purpose again, making plans and dreaming dreams for the future. There is Life beyond all deaths.

The Holy Spirit brings you to this knowledge. The Holy Spirit reveals to us that the presence of Jesus means that we are bound to Him Spirit to Spirit and where he is, he takes us with him. He is beyond all graves. Jesus has gone beyond death and you are going with Him.

Why not ask the Holy Spirit to be your companion and walk with you through and beyond any grief you may be carrying. Here is a prayer that expresses that need.

***Holy Spirit, Unlock the door of all my griefs.  
Some have been given to me; some I have given myself;  
some I have caused.  
Carry me through to that Hope in Jesus  
which He alone can give,  
until I hear you, Jesus say to me  
“You and I are together and I know where I am going”. Amen***





## ***Religion transformed into Relationship***

Brendy was one of those quiet unassuming good guys who never seemed to do anything wrong. Being a person of fixed routines he had a little ritual that he performed every Saturday morning. He would push his car out of the garage and proceed to clean it from bumper to bumper. Only when he was quite satisfied that every spot of offensive dirt was removed and the polishing was good enough, would he gently roll it back inside until next Saturday. His friendly but curious neighbour enquired why he never saw Brendy actually drive the car. He was astonished when Brendy told him that he never puts petrol in the tank let alone starts the car. Of course he wanted to know “why not?” Brendy answered, “if I put in petrol, I would have to drive the car somewhere and that would just wear it out!”

Like Brendy’s car, religion takes you nowhere. It has no fuel.

***God does not ask us to be religious. Instead, He asks us to have a relationship with him.*** That relationship is the petrol that fuels your soul. Relationship with God takes you *to* God. Without it you are going nowhere and will have no more than a self-polished potential that stays in the garage of ignorance, going nowhere.

Everyone in Peter’s Pentecost audience was religious. They were surrounded by religions. The Jews had fervently polished and preserved religious practices. They had developed a body of minor regulations, but without worshipping God in spirit and in truth. Jesus says this to the Samaritan woman in John 4:23 “A time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and Truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is Spirit and His worshippers must worship in Spirit and in Truth”. There was no petrol in Israel’s tank.

The Greeks and the Romans had plenty of religion but did not know the one true God. In Acts 17 St Paul addresses the **Greeks** of Athens with these words:-

*Acts 17:22-23 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.”*

The **Roman** world of the New Testament was filled with the worship of household and public gods. Even the later Caesars would declare themselves to be divine.

The world of the New Testament was a very religious world! But God was unknown.

In Jesus, God visits us to bring us back into relationship with Him.

Peter calls his audience to enter that relationship with these words,

*“Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” (Acts 2:38).*

**Repent** means to turn, and you can't turn away from something unless you turn towards something else. Turning to Christ means moving into a *relationship* with Him.

**To be baptised** is entry into a *covenant relationship*. You are His and He is your one and only God.

All this is in the **Name of Jesus**. Not just a *someone*; Not just an *anyone*; Not just some vague *higher power*; Not just something called *the light*; or *the path*; or *the force*. He has a name. **His name is Jesus!** He is your Saviour and the Saviour of the world. He doesn't want you to hear about Him or just read about Him or wonder about Him. He wants you to **know** Him and **belong** to Him. There is no substitute for a real relationship with Him.

The realisation about the Lord's call to this relationship is a relationship that is given to you by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit created that realisation in the hearts of Peter's Pentecost audience. The result was that on that day three thousand said yes to a relationship with Jesus Christ, their messiah.

**You and I can both be number 3001.**

Let's pray together....

*Lord Jesus, I believe that You are the saviour who died for my Sin and rose again as a sign of the eternal life You offer me. I turn away from all other allegiances and from powers that have ruled me. Please forgive me that I have denied you for so long. Forgive that I have avoided the real relationship with You. Wash me now with Your love which I do not deserve. I freely and completely hand over my life, my love and my will to You. You are my Lord and Saviour. You are my Jesus. Fill me now with Your Holy Spirit to God my soul; to fill me with grace and love; and to equip me with the gifts that will build your kingdom.*

*Jesus, I am praying in Your name, **Jesus...in Your Name, Jesus.** Amen.*

And now go and tell someone that  
the Holy Spirit transforms **religion into relationship**.  
And when they say, “Relationship? With whom?”, you answer,  
**“With my Jesus and your Jesus!”**