**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**ACTS-006. THE ABIDING GIFT AND ITS TRANSITORY ACCOMPANIMENTS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1.* *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. 4. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. 5. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. 6. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. 7. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? 8. And how we hear every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? 9. Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, 10. Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes. 11. Cretes, and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. 12. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? 13. Others, mocking, said, These men are full of new wine.--."*

*Acts 2:1-13*

Only ten days elapsed between the Ascension and Pentecost. The attitude of the Church during that time should be carefully noted. They obeyed implicitly Christ's command to wait for the power from on high. The only act recorded is the election of Matthias to fill Judas's place, and it is at least questionable whether that was not a mistake, and shown to be such by Christ's subsequent choice of Paul as an Apostle. But, with the exception of that one flash of doubtful activity, prayer, supplication, patient waiting, and clinging together in harmonious expectancy, characterised the hundred and twenty brethren.

They must have been wrought to an intense pitch of anticipation, for they knew that their waiting was to be short, and they knew, at least partially, what they were to receive, namely, power from on high, or the promise of the Father. Probably, too, the great Feast, so near at hand, would appear to them a likely time for the fulfilment of the promise.

So, very early on that day of Pentecost, they betook themselves to their usual place of assembling, probably the large upper room, already hallowed to their memories; and in each heart the eager question would spring, Will it be to-day? It is as true now as it was then, that the spirits into whom the Holy Spirit breathes His power must keep themselves still, expectant, prayerful. Perpetual occupation may be more loss of time than devout waiting, with hands folded, because the heart is wide open to receive the power which will fit the hands for better work.

It was but the third hour of the day when Peter stood up to speak; it must have been little after dawn when the brethren came together. How long they had been assembled we do not know, but we cannot doubt how they had been occupied. Many a prayer had gone up through the morning air, and, no doubt, some voice was breathing the united desires, when a deep, strange sound was heard at a distance, and rapidly gained volume, and was heard to draw near. Like the roaring of a tempest hurrying towards them, it hushed human voices, and each man would feel, Surely now the Gift comes! Nearer and nearer it approached, and at last burst into the chamber where they sat silent and unmoving.

But if we look carefully at Luke's words, we see that what filled the house was not agitated air, or wind, but a sound as of wind. The language implies that there was no rush of atmosphere that lifted a hair on any cheek, or blew on any face, but only such a sound as is made by tempest. It suggested wind, but it was not wind. By that first symbolic preparation for the communication of the promised gift, the old symbolism which lies in the very word Spirit, and had been brought anew to the disciples' remembrance by Christ's words to Nicodemus, and by His breathing on them when He gave them an anticipatory and partial bestowment of the Spirit, is brought to view, with its associations of life-giving power and liberty. Thou hearest the sound thereof, could scarcely fail to be remembered by some in that chamber.

But it is not to be supposed that the audible symbol continued when the second preparatory one, addressed to the eye, appeared. As the former had been not wind, but like it, the latter was not fire, but as of fire. The language does not answer the question whether what was seen was a mass from which the tongues detached themselves, or whether only the separate tongues were visible as they moved overhead. But the final result was that it sat on each. The verb has no expressed subject, and fire cannot be the subject, for it is only introduced as a comparison. Probably, therefore, we are to understand a tongue as the unexpressed subject of the verb.

Clearly, the point of the symbol is the same as that presented in the Baptist's promise of a baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire. The Spirit was to be in them as a Spirit of burning, thawing natural coldness and melting hearts with a genial warmth, which should beget flaming enthusiasm, fervent love, burning zeal, and should work transformation into its own fiery substance. The rejoicing power, the quick energy, the consuming force, the assimilating action of fire, are all included in the symbol, and should all be possessed by Christ's disciples.

But were the tongue-like shapes of the flames significant too? It is doubtful, for, natural as is the supposition that they were, it is to be remembered that tongues of fire is a usual expression, and may mean nothing more than the flickering shoots of flame into which a fire necessarily parts.

But these two symbols are only symbols. The true fulfilment of the great promise follows. Mark the brief simplicity of the quiet words in which the greatest bestowment ever made on humanity, the beginning of an altogether new era, the equipment of the Church for her age-long conflict, is told. There was an actual impartation to men of a divine life, to dwell in them and actuate them; to bring all good to victory in them; to illuminate, sustain, direct, and elevate; to cleanse and quicken. The gift was complete. They were filled. No doubt they had much more to receive, and they received it, as their natures became, by faithful obedience to the indwelling Spirit, capable of more. But up to the measure of their then capacities they were filled; and, since their spirits were expansible, and the gift was infinite, they were in a position to grow steadily in possession of it, till they were filled with all the fulness of God.

Further, they were all filled,--not the Apostles only, but the whole hundred and twenty. Peter's quotation from Joel distinctly implies the universality of the gift, which the servants and handmaidens, the brethren and the women, now received. Herein is the true democracy of Christianity. There are still diversities of operations and degrees of possession, but all Christians have the Spirit. All they that believe on Him, and only they, have received it. Of old the light shone only on the highest peaks,--prophets, and kings, and psalmists; now the lowest depths of the valleys are flooded with it. Would that Christians generally believed more fully in, and set more store by, that great gift!

As symbols preceded, tokens followed. The essential fact of Pentecost is neither the sound and fire, nor the speaking with other tongues, but the communication of the Holy Spirit. The sign and result of that was the gift of utterance in various languages, not their own, nor learned by ordinary ways. No twisting of the narrative can weaken the plain meaning of it, that these unlearned Galileans spake in tongues which their users recognised to be their own. The significance of the fact will appear presently, but first note the attestation of it by the multitude.

Of course, the foreign-born Jews, who, from motives of piety, however mistaken, had come to dwell in Jerusalem, are said to have been from every nation under heaven, by an obvious and ordinary license. It is enough that, as the subsequent catalogue shows, they came from all corners of the then known world, though the extremes of territory mentioned cover but a small space on a terrestrial globe.

The sound of the rushing wind had been heard hurtling through the city in the early morning hours, and had served as guide to the spot. A curious crowd came hurrying to ascertain what this noise of tempest in a calm meant, and they were met by something more extraordinary still. Try to imagine the spectacle. As would appear from verse 33, the tongues of fire remained lambently glowing on each head (which ye see), and the whole hundred and twenty, thus strangely crowned, were pouring out rapturous praises, each in some strange tongue. When the astonished ears had become accustomed to the apparent tumult, every man in the crowd heard some one or more speaking in his own tongue, language, or dialect, and all were declaring the mighty works of God; that is, probably, the story of the crucified, ascended Jesus.

We need not dwell on subordinate questions, as to the number of languages represented there, or as to the catalogue in verses 9 and 10. But we would emphasise two thoughts. First, the natural result of being filled with God's Spirit is utterance of the great truths of Christ's Gospel. As surely as light radiates, as surely as any deep emotion demands expression, so certainly will a soul filled with the Spirit be forced to break into speech. If professing Christians have never known the impulse to tell of the Christ whom they have found, their religion must be very shallow and imperfect. If their spirits are full, they will overflow in speech.

Second, Pentecost is a prophecy of the universal proclamation of the Gospel, and of the universal praise which shall one day rise to Him that was slain. This company of brethren praising God in the tongues of the whole world represented the whole world which shall one day praise God in its various tongues (Bengel). Pentecost reversed Babel, not by bringing about a featureless monopoly, but by consecrating diversity, and showing that each language could be hallowed, and that each lent some new strain of music to the chorus.

It prophesied of the time when men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation should lift up their voices to Him who has purchased them unto God with His blood. It began a communication of the Spirit to all believers which is never to cease while the world stands. The mighty rushing sound has died into silence, the fiery tongues rest on no heads now, the miraculous results of the gifts of the Spirit have passed away also, but the gift remains, and the Spirit of God abides for ever with the Church of Christ.