

“Pentecost Priorities” (Acts 2)

Pentecost, May 11, 2008

The sound of a mighty, rushing wind. Disciples praying in the upper room. Tongues of fire. Inspired preaching. Three thousand converts. That was Pentecost! Man oh man, what a day! And what wouldn't we give to experience the same powerful movement of the Holy Spirit in our day, right here, right now?! We could use it, couldn't we? We could use it a lot! So is there any reason why we can't experience the same out-pouring of the Spirit?

Actually, there isn't. Not that we would experience exactly the same thing that happened on Pentecost. God doesn't just repeat Himself. He always finds a fresh way to work His wonders among us. But a massive outpouring of the Spirit into our lives and homes and church? Of course that is possible! God would like nothing better! So the question is not why we can't experience it but how we can. And the answer to that is two words: **Pentecost priorities**.

So what are “Pentecost priorities”? To see them more clearly, I think it would help to imagine their opposites, so to do that, let me ask you to imagine another scenario for the first Pentecost. Once again, we hear the sound of a mighty, rushing wind. Once again, we see the disciples...

Wait a minute! Where are the disciples? The upper room is empty! How can this be? Well, in this scenario it seems the disciples' priorities are just a little different. Peter and Andrew have gotten bored sitting around praying, so they've decided to go fishing. James and John have nothing better to do, so they've gone along, too. Meanwhile, the other James is off pouting because he wasn't invited. Thomas is at a “Doubters Anonymous” meeting. Philip is using the time to do repairs around the house. Bartholomew has gone searching for a more exciting group to join. Matthew has started working on his memoirs. Simon the Zealot is off at a political action rally. And Judas-not-Iscaiot? His kid's got a ball game, so of course that has to come first. So...just to be sure we've got this right: We hear the sound of a mighty, rushing wind. We see God ready to bless, ready to empower, ready to work wonders. But the disciples aren't there to receive it because they've let other priorities get in the way? Exactly! So what happens next? Nothing. No Pentecost priorities, no Pentecost. It's that simple.

Now, this scenario is just made up, of course. But when we compare it to what really happened the first Pentecost, it shows clearly what we need to experience the Holy Spirit's out-pouring into our lives. For think what the disciples' priorities really were. They put the Lord first, didn't they? Not their own plans, their own ideas, their own desires; they put the Lord first. As a result, they did what the Lord told them to do – stayed in the city until they were clothed with power from on high. They stayed there for quite some time, trusting the Lord to keep His promise, however long it might take. While they waited, they spent time in prayer – in fact, they “**constantly devoted themselves to prayer.**” And last but not least, they did all this together, supporting each other, encouraging each other so

that they would be ready for whatever, whenever, however God chose to move. Yes, these were the disciples' priorities – put the Lord first, obey Him, trust Him, keep close to Him in prayer, keep close to His people, too. These were the disciples' *Pentecost* priorities. And what a Pentecost we can experience in our lives when we make these priorities our own!

Of course, that doesn't just happen. These priorities need to be claimed and nurtured, don't they? Claimed and nurtured as early in life as possible. And this being Mother's Day, what better time to think about how to do this in our own families, our own homes? There is no greater gift you can give children than to raise them with Pentecost Priorities! It is a gift that blesses them here *and* hereafter! When children are raised to put the Lord first; to obey the Lord, trust the Lord, keep close to the Lord in prayer, and keep close to His people, too – there is no better foundation for life, and certainly none better for facing eternity! Come what may, children raised with "Pentecost Priorities" will always have grace sufficient for their challenges, power made perfect in their weakness, light to guide them in the darkness, peace such as the world cannot give. Children raised with "Pentecost Priorities" will know from personal experience what is **"the breadth and length and height and depth"** of the love of Christ. Most of all, children raised with "Pentecost Priorities" will always know how to tap into the power of the Spirit, who **"is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all" they "can ask or imagine!"** No, there isn't a greater gift a mother can give her children than to raise them with "Pentecost Priorities"!

Not that the children will automatically see this! Or society, for that matter. In fact, it seems that many modern parents have glommed onto the most ludicrous priorities imaginable – and it can be tempting for Christian parents to follow suit.

I mean, think what often passes for great parenting these days. A few years ago, I was at a graduation party, and thanks to alcohol flowing a little too freely, I got to hear several parents congratulating themselves on what a great job they had done raising their kids. It was interesting. One mother bragged that she had been to every one of her kids' ball games no matter what the cost or inconvenience. That was her proudest achievement. Others bragged about all the things they bought their children, all the advantages they made sure they had gotten, all the expensive trips they had taken over the years, and so forth. There were still others who bragged about the freedom in their home – how they tried not to saddle their kids with prudish ideas. And, of course, there was the one who made a point of bragging that they didn't push religion on their kids; they'd let them make up their own minds when they get older.

As I said, it was interesting. And as I thought about this afterwards, my first reaction was to just laugh it off. How shallow! How materialistic! How pitiful! But the "pitiful" part got me to thinking further. Not just how pitiful it was for kids being raised with such priorities, but how pitiful for Christian parents trying to maintain "Pentecost priorities."

Because it is a struggle, isn't it? A struggle not getting suckered into the same way of thinking. A struggle not getting fooled into the same kinds of priorities. Unfortunately, some Christians do. In fact, the mom who bragged about being at every one of her kids' games professed to be a Christian. And as great as that may have sounded to her and her audience, I just happened to know the price that was paid for letting life revolve around sports. How spotty their church attendance was! How little her children knew about Christian beliefs and values! I had to wonder if her children really even knew Christ! And how much of a priority was *that* for her? So she went to all their ball games. So what? How was that some great virtue? Especially if it meant neglecting her kids' spiritual needs? But it's the sort of thing society applauds! "Wow! Look at her! She's made it to every one of her kids' games! Isn't she a great mom?!" And pity the Christian mother who sticks to her guns! The parent who says, "We will put God first. We will worship each week, not just when the game schedule permits. We will have family devotions...every night. And we will spend at least as much time teaching our kids about God as we spend teaching the rules of this or that game." Yes, pity the mother who sticks to Pentecost priorities! Pity the mother...

...But not her kids! For they are blessed with a mother worthy of the name! They are blessed with a mother who loves them enough to do what's really best for them regardless of whether society applauds it or not!

Also blessed, I might add, with a mother who stands in a long line of godly mothers who have made this world a better place by parenting with "Pentecost Priorities." Among them, take **St. Monica**. We don't know how many of Augustine's ball games she went to, if any, but what a woman of prayer she was! And what a difference her prayers made! Or take **Katie Luther**. We don't know how many birthday parties she organized or how well she kept up her kids' scrapbooks, but she made time to pray with her kids every day. And she made sure her kids knew how to pray. What a difference she made! Or take **Susanna Wesley**, mother of the Methodist reformer, John Wesley. Even when left on her own with eight young children, she took time out from all her work to talk with each one personally about their faith; she made sure each one truly knew the Lord. Small wonder she has been called the "Mother of Methodism!" She may not have bought her children the latest toys or dressed them in the fanciest clothes, but she provided them with a solid spiritual foundation, one that would sustain them in this life and the life to come. How blessed her children were! How blessed are all who have such Christian mothers – mothers who care enough to maintain "Pentecost Priorities!"

A more modern example is a mom named Cheryl Myers. Before I was ordained, I got to know her at my field-work church. Now just so you know, she was a mom who also made it to her kids' ball games, also planned the big birthday parties, also did the scrap-booking and P.T.A. and Scouts and all the rest – but she always kept her Christian priorities front and center. In fact, around the time her youngest was confirmed, she told me how one of her friends criticized her for

“pushing religion” on her kids. The friend thought kids should have the right to reject their parents’ religion if they wanted to. Cheryl’s response was classic! She told her friend, *“Kids have that right regardless, and if they choose to reject God, there’s nothing we can do. But I’ll tell you what: my kids are at least going to know what they’re rejecting. Forget this “expose them to religion” nonsense! They’re going to get the real thing. I’m going to make sure they know the Lord personally, and I’m going to show them, as best I can, how a faithful Christian lives. Then they can choose what they will.”* As far as I know, all her kids are still solid Christians – thanks to her Pentecost priorities!

How we need the same priorities in our homes today! How we need to put the Lord first; obeying Him, trusting Him, keeping close to Him in prayer, and keeping close to His people, too. Society may not applaud these priorities; it might even make life tougher in some ways. Our kids may not appreciate these priorities, either – at least, not at the time. But what a difference they can make – both in this life and the life to come! So when push comes to shove, think of yourself standing in eternity, hearing the Lord say, **“Well done, good and faithful servant!”** -- all because you put Him first! When the pressure is on, think of your children standing in eternity – all because you cared enough to raise them as children of God. And isn’t that ultimately what a mother is called to do? It’s no tragedy to miss a ball game or a concert or a Scout meeting. Your kid will survive. What would be tragic is slighting their spiritual upbringing. They deserve the very best! And because they do, the call on this Mother’s Day is the call to Pentecost priorities. In your home, put the Lord first; obeying Him, trusting Him, keeping close to Him in prayer, and keeping close to His people, too. In your home, stick to Pentecost priorities! Amen.