

The Fulfillment of the Promise.

by William Arthur

William Arthur's sermon explores the fulfillment of God's promise through the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, emphasizing unity and the transformative power of faith.

Scripture: Exodus 24:10, Psalm 72:18, Acts 1:4, Acts 2:1, Acts 2:17, Acts 2:41, Acts 10:44, 1 Corinthians 12:4, Hebrews 10:22

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Pentecost Event"

Description

William Arthur preaches about the significant events leading up to the day of Pentecost, drawing parallels between the Old Testament and the New Testament dispensations. He emphasizes the anticipation and faith of the disciples as they waited for the promised Holy Spirit, likening it to the time of Moses and the covenant with Israel. The sermon highlights the unity, patience, and expectation of the believers as they gathered in one accord, leading to the powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The symbol of the cloven tongues of fire represents the new dispensation of Christianity, emphasizing the power of speech and the universal message of salvation for all nations.

Transcript

There was a day when death had struck a woeful stroke, and raised a nation's wail. "There was a great cry in the land of Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead." That same day the Lord, by the sprinkling of a pure lamb's blood, averted death from the doors of Israel, and then led them away from yoke and taskmaster toward the goodly land. Fifty days afterwards they reached the Mount of God, where he manifested himself in the thunder of his power with flame and trumpet and a voice, whereat all the tribes did tremble. Then was the new dispensation formally inaugurated with the voice and the flame; its covenant sealed by sprinkling of blood, and its privileges opened to the sprinkled by the vision of glory, when the elders "saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness." (Exodus xxiv. 10.)

This time of note was come; the fifty days were elapsed from the time when the Lamb was slain, and captivity broken. Forty days he had been with them after his resurrection; the rest he had passed within the veil. And was it not possible that in saying, "Not many days," he pointed them forward to the day which commemorated the opening of the new dispensation of God to Israel by the hand of his servant Moses? Was it not probable that the glorious dispensation of his Son would be opened at this time? Unbelief would have long ago ceased to expect; but faith would probably renew its anticipations, and look to this day.

On the morning of the resurrection, some--the women--were early at the tomb; but the others were sauntering into the country, or here and there, with nothing to wait for, as they thought; yet partly expecting something to come to their ears. Even late in the day, when they did meet to hear what some had seen and heard, Thomas was away. Now, however, after ten days have elapsed, their patience is not exhausted. They do expect, and therefore will not cease to wait. They have no attention for anything else. The kingdom of God is at hand. Did he not say, "Not many days"? Ten are gone; and the conclusion is not that of servants too idle to wait: "Our Lord delayeth his coming; we may as well sit still. He will come in his own good time." That is not waiting; it is idling. They said in their believing hearts: "Ten days are gone; therefore the day of our Lord draweth nigh. This is the day of Pentecost; and as the fire appeared on Sinai, in the presence of our fathers, when God made his covenant by Moses, it may be that to-day he will seal his covenant by the hand of the Prophet whom Moses foresaw, baptizing us with fire, according to the word wherein he hath made his servants to hope."

No Thomas is absent now! Not one heart has failed! "They are all in one place." No discord or doubt have they permitted to arise. "They are all with one accord in one place." Nor are they slow or late. We are not told at what hour they met, but it must have been very early; for after they had received the baptism, and filled all Jerusalem with the noise of their new powers, Peter reminded the multitude, who came together, that it was only the third hour of the day--nine o'clock in the morning.

Early, then, on the second Lord's day after the ascension, is the entire company met, with one heart, to renew their oft-repeated prayer. We cannot go to the house where was that upper room, nor to the site where it stood. These points are left unnoticed, after the mode of Christianity, which is in nothing a religion of circumstances, in everything a religion of principles. We know not how long they had that morning urged their prayer, nor whose voice was then crying to Him who had promised, nor what word of the Master he was pleading, nor what feelings of closer expectation and more vivid faith were warming the breasts of the disciples. But "suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind." Not, mark you, a wind; no gale sweeping over the city struck the sides of the house, and rustled round it. But "from heaven" directly downward fell "a sound," without shape or step or movement to account for it--a sound as if a mighty wind were rushing, not along the ground, but straight from on high, like showers in a dead calm. Yet no wind stirred. As to motion, the air of the room was still as death; as to sound, it was awful as a hurricane.

Mysterious sound, whence comest thou? Is it the Lord again breathing upon them, but this time from his throne? Is it the wind of Ezekiel preparing to blow? Shaken by this supernatural sign, we may see each head bow low. Then, timidly turning upward, John sees Peter's head crowned with fire; Peter sees James crowned with fire; James sees Nathanael crowned with fire; Nathanael sees Mary crowned with fire; and round and round the fire sits "on each of them." The Lord has been mindful of his promise. The word of the Lord is tried. John was a faithful witness. Jesus was a faithful Redeemer. He is now glorified; for the Holy Ghost is given. Jesus "being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this."

The instant effect of the descent of the Spirit on the first Gentile converts in the house of Cornelius was that they began to "magnify God." The effect would be the same in this first case. That bosom has yet to learn what is the feeling of moral sublimity, which never has been suddenly heaved with an emotion of uncontrollable adoration to God and the Lamb--an emotion which, though no voice told whence it came, by its movement in the depths of the soul, farther down than ordinary feelings reach, did indicate somehow that the touch of the Creator was traceable in it. They only who have felt such unearthly joy need attempt

to conceive the outburst of that burning moment. Body, soul, and spirit, glowing with one celestial fire, would blend and pour out their powers in a rapturous "Glory be to God!" or "Blessed be the Lord God!" Modern believers--not those who never unite in simple and fervent supplications to the throne of grace, but those who meet and urge with long-repeated entreaty their requests to God--can recall times which help them to imagine what must have been the peal of praise that burst from the hearts of the hundred and twenty, when the baptism fell upon their souls; times when they and their friends have felt as if the place where they met was filled with the glory of the Lord.

One word as to the mode of this baptism. In this case we have the one perfectly clear account contained in Scripture of the mode wherein the baptizing element was applied to the person of the baptized. The element here is fire, the mode is shedding down--"hath shed forth this." "It sat upon each of them." Did baptism mean immersion, they would have been plunged into the fire, not the fire shed upon them. The only other case in which the mode of contact between the baptizing element and the baptized persons is indicated is this: "And were all baptized to Moses in the cloud and in the sea." They were not dipped in the cloud, but the cloud descended upon them; they were not plunged into the sea, but the sea sprinkled them as they passed. The Spirit signified by the water is never once promised under the idea of dipping. Such an expression as "I will immerse you in my Spirit," "I will plunge you in my Spirit," or "I will dip you in clean water," is unknown to the Scripture. But "I will pour out my Spirit upon you," "I will sprinkle clean water upon you," is language and thought familiar to all readers of the Bible. The word "dip," or "dipped," does not often occur in the New Testament; but when it does, the original is never "baptize," or "baptized."

The fire is not a shapeless flame. It is not Abram's lamp, nor the pillar of the desert, nor the coal of Isaiah, nor the infolding flame of Ezekiel. It is a tongue; yea, cloven tongues. On each brow glows a sheet of flame, parted into many tongues. Here was the symbol of the new dispensation. Christianity was to be a Tongue of Fire. It was a symbol of their "power"; the power whereby the new kingdom was to be built up; the power for which they had so long to tarry, and so eagerly to pray, when all other things were prepared; for which the whole arrangement for the world's conversion was commanded to stand still. The appearance of this one symbol was the signal that former ones had waxed old, and were ready to vanish away. Altar and cherubim, sacrifice and incense, ephod and breastplate, Urim and Thummim--their work was done. Even of the most sacred emblem of all, that which was the "pattern of things in the heavens," the ark itself, it had been foretold: "They shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord; neither shall it come to mind; neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall it be magnified any more." Of the temple itself the Master had said that not one stone should be left upon another.

All the emblems of the old dispensation were now forever suspended. In their room the Lord had appointed only two; and they chosen with a singular aptness at once to suggest ideas and to avoid image representation: the water, wherein the mind could see a symbol of the cleansing Spirit, but the eye no attempted likeness; the bread and wine, wherein the body and the blood are forcibly brought to mind, but no personal similitude set before the eye. These two only were the unartistic emblems which Christ had ordained for his Church. His was to be a religion of the understanding and the heart, wholly resting on the convictions and the principles, building nothing on sense, and permitting nothing to fancy.

In strict keeping with this spiritual stamp of Christianity was the symbol which, once for all, announced to the Church the advent of her conquering power; the power by which she was to stand before kings, to confound synagogues, to silence councils, to still mobs, to confront the learned, to illuminate the senseless, and to inflame the cold; the power by which, beginning at Jerusalem, where the name of Jesus was a byword, she was to proclaim his glory through all Judea, throughout Samaria, and throughout the

uttermost parts of the earth. The symbol is a tongue, the only instrument of the grandest war ever waged: a tongue--man's speech to his fellow-man; a message in human words to human faculties, from the understanding to the understanding, from the heart to the heart. A tongue of fire--man's voice, God's truth; man's speech, the Holy Spirit's inspiration; a human organ, a superhuman power. Not one tongue, but cloven tongues. As the speech of men is various, here we see the Creator taking to himself the language of every man's mother; so that in the very words wherein he heard her say, "I love thee," he might also hear the Father of all say, "I love thee."

How does that fire-symbol, shining on the brow of the primitive Church, rebuke that system which would force all men to worship God in one tongue, and that not a tongue of fire, but a dead tongue, wherein no man now on earth can hear his mother's tones! Cloven tongues sat on each of them; so that each had not only the fire-impulse to go and tell aloud the message of reconciliation, but also the fire-token that all mankind, of whatever nation, kindred, people, or tongue, were heirs alike of the gospel salvation, and of the word whereby that salvation is proclaimed.

Blessed be the hour when that tongue of fire descended from the Giver of speech into a cold world! Had it never come, my mother might have led me, when a child, to see slaughter for worship, and I should have taught my little ones that stones were gods. "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things! And blessed be his glorious name forever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen!"

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