

# Pentecost and the Establishment of the New Covenant

James Smyda

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In yesterday's sermon I started off by posing a question, and I asked what major biblical events do you most often associate with the Feast of Pentecost. I think most Church members would have two common answers: The giving of the law and the giving of the Holy Spirit. As we talked about yesterday, both of these events are certainly correlated with Pentecost, they definitely both have a strong connection with it, but both of these events are really just trees, you might say, in a larger forest.

Sometimes what we can do is focus so much on the trees that we really lose sight of the big picture and the full context into which they both fit. While the giving of the law and the giving of the Holy Spirit are very important—fundamental events whose significance we certainly shouldn't minimize—if we just focus on them and not the greater context in which they happen, we can kind of miss the big picture. Both of them happened in the context of establishing the Old and the New Covenants, the monumental events that really bring into focus the entire narrative of the Bible.

If you look at the Old Testament from the point of Exodus forward, what dominates the narrative of the Bible? It's God's relationship with Israel, and other nations come into the picture as they interact with Israel. In the New Testament it's kind of the same thing; it's God's relationship with the Church and then that's the entire focus of the New Testament. You can see the establishing of these two covenants are really the monumental events here. The giving of the law and the giving of the Holy Spirit, while very important, are really just fundamental pieces of establishing these covenants. Yesterday we centered our focus on the establishment of the Old Covenant. As you might guess, today our focus is going to be on the establishment of the New Covenant. If you would like a title for the sermon it's:

## Pentecost and the Establishment of the New Covenant

Today, our focus is going to be more on the New Covenant. Yesterday, we started off doing a good bit of detective work, establishing a connection between the Mount Sinai story, in Exodus 19-24, with the Feast of Pentecost, the reason being there's nothing stated in those chapters that ever tells us that Pentecost is directly involved in that. You have to do a little detective work and put together a calendar to establish that there is a solid connection to prove those events took place around Pentecost. Whereas in the New Covenant, that part really isn't a challenge. As we're going to see later when we go to the book of Acts (chapter 2, verse 1) it will directly tell us all this is happening on Pentecost; we don't have to guess or do any extra work, it's just directly stated. What we do need is to step back and establish, you might say, the greater context of the Holy

Spirit being given. As we're going to see here later as we read through Acts 2, the whole chapter focuses on the giving of the Holy Spirit, and Peter's sermon focuses almost exclusively on the need to accept Jesus Christ as a sacrifice: You need to repent of your sins, accept Christ as the Savior, and be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit—that's the whole focus of the chapter. First we need to see how this fits into a bigger picture of the establishing of the New Covenant.

Let's turn over to Jeremiah 31, because what I want you to see is when Jeremiah was prophesying of the day when the Holy Spirit would be made available to mankind, notice the entire context: it will be done through the establishment of the New Covenant, and the giving of the Holy Spirit is a piece of this puzzle of establishing this New Covenant with mankind. This is really the forest, you might say, in which the giving of the Holy Spirit is one of the important trees. In Jeremiah 31:31,

**Jeremiah 31:31** *"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. (NKJV)*

Notice there the whole context is establishing a New Covenant.

*32) not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. (NKJV)*

I mentioned yesterday when we were going through Exodus 24 that the Old Covenant was a marriage covenant; the Bible speaks of God as the husband and Israel as the wife—that wasn't specifically stated there in Exodus 24 but you do see that throughout the Bible. This is one of those cases where He's saying, I was a husband to you—I was your husband, you were my wife, because that Old Covenant relationship was a marriage covenant. Now in verse 33.

*33) But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (NKJV)*

That's a reference to giving the Holy Spirit. Let's follow up with the next verse, in verse 34.

*34) No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (NKJV)*

Notice again, He says in the establishing of this New Covenant, He's going to write His law on their minds and in their hearts. What this is referring to is giving the Holy Spirit because this is one of the things the Holy Spirit does for us. Notice there are two interesting things here about this New Covenant because we're going to see in a

moment it refers to this being a covenant with better promises. Two of those components are not only the giving of the Holy Spirit but the forgiving of sins. He says, their iniquities I will remember no more, I will forgive their sins, because these are another important part of the New Covenant. Let's turn over to Hebrews 8 and we'll see a section of scripture that almost verbatim quotes what we just read here.

**Hebrews 8:6** *But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. (NKJV)*

Notice he's referring to the New Covenant and saying it's better because it's a better deal; it has more to offer, it has better promises. Let's notice in reading the rest of this what those better promises are. A lot of what we're about to read is almost a verbatim quote of what we read in Jeremiah 31.

7) *For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.*

8) *Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—*

9) *not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD.*

10) *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (NKJV)*

Notice again here we have the reference to the Holy Spirit being given as part of this covenant.

11) *None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.*

12) *For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."*

13) *In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. (NKJV)*

He says this New Covenant has better promises. Basically he is saying, God is making a better deal with them; this one offers better benefits with it. We can see at least two of those major benefits being mentioned here. One is the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit and mind of God, being offered to be able to be put inside human beings so they can learn to understand His Spiritual knowledge and behave more like Him. It also mentions the forgiveness of sin. The Old Covenant had animal sacrifices that symbolically pointed to the need for a Savior to come but they wouldn't atone for sin; you couldn't obtain salvation through them, they were physical rituals that were symbolic, that pointed to and taught the need for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as Savior. As I mentioned here

yesterday when we were talking about the Old Covenant, in the context of the law being given, I made the point that God didn't just give Israel His law so they could wander around in the wilderness for the rest of their existence just to have a little better society because they had these good laws. There was a much bigger purpose than that.

Yes, following these laws leads to a better society and to better relationships with each other, and it certainly does all of that, but there was a bigger purpose involved because He was going to take them to the Promised Land, and not just to have a good land to live in, the objective was to edify the rest of mankind—far more important than just receiving the law. The giving of the Holy Spirit in this New Covenant is the same way; the better promises weren't just about receiving God's Spirit so they could think more spiritually and behave better, the purpose was to help lead them to eternal life. If you'll turn over to Hebrews 9:15,

**Hebrews 9:15** *And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.* (NKJV)

The promise of this New Covenant is an opportunity to be born into the Kingdom of God—it's eternal life—to live forever as a God being with no physical problems at all. It's much more than just giving the Spirit so you can understand spiritual knowledge and you can behave and get along with each other. It certainly accomplishes that. God's Spirit does lead us into all truth, it does enable us to exhibit the fruits of the Spirit in our behavior, if we are utilizing that Spirit, but it's much more than that. It basically gives us the opportunity to be born into God's Kingdom to ultimately inherit salvation and to live forever. This is the better promise of the New Covenant. This is intimately tied to the Holy Spirit. You can see this if you turn over to John 4. We'll start in verse 5.

**John 4:5** *So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.*

6) *Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.*

7) *A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink."*

8) *For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.*

9) *Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.* (NKJV)

Before we go any farther, let me just pause here to make another point. Yesterday one of the things I mentioned was God made the Old Covenant with Israel and He gave them His laws for the ultimate objective of them being an edification to the rest of the world, to set an example to the nations around them, so those nations would see God's way of life as attractive and something they might want to follow too. Unfortunately what it turned into over time with Israel was not just this humbling responsibility, that we have to take on to help the rest of mankind, it became the pedestal upon which they

stood to look down upon the rest of the world, and the law often became the club with which they beat others over the head. It was basically their way of beating their chest and saying, we're the covenant people, we're special, we have the law. Which is true, they were the covenant people, they were God's chosen people and they had the law, but it wasn't the pedestal upon which they could stand and look down at everybody else, it was a humbling responsibility to be an example and an edification to others. They lost that big picture just focusing on the law. Continue in verse 10.

10) *Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."* (NKJV)

As we're going to see here later, the Holy Spirit is what He is referring to as living water.

11) *The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water?"* (NKJV)

She's looking at this practically, like, you don't have a bucket so how are you going to draw it out? Notice here in verse 12.

12) *Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?"*

13) *Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again,*

14) *but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."* (NKJV)

Notice what He's referring to here. We can conclusively prove from the Bible that when Christ refers to living water, He is referring to the Holy Spirit; we're going to see that a little later in John in just a minute. He's talking about this ultimately leading to everlasting life. That's one of the things that this imparts, is that opportunity to be born into the Kingdom of God and have eternal life to live forever as a God being. This is ultimately the better promise offered by the New Covenant.

Sometimes we think of the Holy Spirit as, yes, it leads us into all truth, it reveals God's spiritual knowledge to us and enables us to understand His word and understand how He thinks. It also enables us, if we are utilizing it, to exhibit the fruits of the Spirit in our behavior so we can behave and think more like God. But it's much bigger than just improving our physical lives in this life, on this earth; it's about giving us the opportunity to be born into the Kingdom of God to be a Spirit being. That's the better promise shown in this picture.

We have to look at the big context because it's more than just helping us think better, this New Covenant is about offering eternal life. Turn over to John 7. I made the

comment that we can prove from the Bible that when Christ refers to living water, He is referring to the Holy Spirit. We can prove it from John 7:37.

**John 7:37** *On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.*

*38) He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."* (NKJV)

Notice verse 39.

*39) But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.* (NKJV)

What He is doing is He's foretelling the time in the White Throne judgment period that's pictured by the Last Great Day and its fulfillment, when all of mankind is offered the opportunity for salvation. It's very clearly explained to us that when He is referring to rivers of living water, He is referring to the Holy Spirit. So when He was talking to the woman at the well and saying, if you have this water, which can give you everlasting life, He is referring to giving His Spirit. So you have to realize this is the whole context when we look at Acts 2 of the giving of the Spirit; we have to put it in this particular context. That chapter focuses specifically on just the Holy Spirit coming and the need to be baptized.

I wanted to establish this background so that when we look at that, we realize, yes, these are fundamentally important events, but the context in which this is taking place is the establishment of the New Covenant. It's the covenant offering salvation and the chance to be a part of the Kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit is an important fundamental piece of that puzzle but sometimes if we just focus on the giving of the Holy Spirit we see it as the whole picture and that's not really the case; it's a fundamentally important part of the bigger picture of the New Covenant, which offers the chance to be in the Kingdom of God.

With that in mind let's turn over to Acts 2. Before we read through this story, I'd like to set the scene for the context here. As we talked about yesterday, with the establishment of the Old Covenant, there were two important days there. As the story clearly tells us, on one day you have the law being given and God speaking the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai—not only the Ten Commandments, He reiterates the Sabbath, He goes over the Holy Days, He covers a number of judgments and statutes He wants them to obey—all of this is laid out on day one, Moses writes all of this down in the book of the covenant, and then the next day we have the ratifying of the covenant. The next day is when they formally do the ceremony with the animal sacrifices, the blood is sprinkled upon them, they say all that the LORD has said, we will do, and as we saw from Hebrews 9 that was when they officially, legally ratified the Old Covenant and they are now in this marriage agreement with each other.

What's different about this story in Acts 2, is that the giving of the Holy Spirit and the making of the New Covenant happen on the same day—we don't have two days involved in this story. In fact, if you read through Acts 1 and 2, you'll see those chapters don't even make any important reference to events happening on the Sabbath just prior to Pentecost. Let's understand the context of why that would be the case. My point here is that there is a very different context with the people who are being involved in these two covenants when you compare Ancient Israel with the New Testament Church and what was taking place. What I mean by that is Ancient Israel was being brought out of slavery.

The generation that was brought out of Egypt and brought to Mount Sinai had lived their entire lives in harsh bondage so that is everything that they had understood. They were not free to do what they wanted to do. When you are in harsh slavery like that, your life is controlled by somebody else. They were also in a very idolatrous environment. That can easily be seen later in the book of Exodus when it mentions Moses is up on the mountain longer than they were expecting; one of these things that happens is they make a golden calf and they are worshipping it—they are going right back into idolatry just a short matter of time after they have made this covenant with God. You can see where their perspective was. This is why God needs to cover all the basic rules with them, of what's expected of them before He can make a covenant with them. One of the first things He does before they even get to Mount Sinai is He establishes the cycle of Manna. That wasn't just to feed them, that was to make it painfully obvious when the Sabbath was.

If food falls from the sky six days a week, and the seventh day it doesn't, that just becomes painfully obvious. As a friend of mine used to say, that's kind of stupid-proof—you can't be so stupid as to miss this. If one day a week food doesn't fall from the sky, that's the Sabbath. You can't really miss that one. So this is what God was doing. When He's taking these people out of this harsh environment and they don't have the foundation of His law, He's got to cover all these basics, so when they say, all that the LORD has said we will do, they understand what it is they are supposed to be doing and what they are agreeing to. So that's why it was important for Him to cover all of this before He turns around and tries to make a covenant with them, because they have to understand what they are agreeing to.

In the context of the New Covenant Church, we have a very different situation here. Initially when the Church first gets started, the audience is people from an Israelite and Jewish background. It's not a question for them when the Sabbath is, they know that already. They know there are laws of clean and unclean meats, they know about the Holy Days—they have these basic things already figured out because it's part of their culture. As we read yesterday, the Pharisees were the religious leaders at the time and while they were certainly off on all their traditions about the law, they understood tithing, they understood the Sabbath, they understood the Holy Days—a lot of these basic things were commonly known.

Also consider, prior to the events we're going to read here in Acts 2, we've had the ministry of John the Baptist who came before Jesus Christ—he had a major impact in this area. Then comes the ministry of Jesus Christ and the apostles, and this goes on for three and half years prior to when Christ dies, and then fifty days later after He fulfills the wave sheaf; we're now at Pentecost and all of this is happening, so you've had all of this context that has led up to this. When the Church initially started, you're dealing with a group of people from a Jewish background. That's why later in the book of Acts it becomes a controversial issue when Gentiles are coming into the Church—they're coming from a pagan background—what do we do with these people and do we require them to be circumcised? All of those issues start coming up, which tells you who you are dealing with; these are all people with a context of all the basics of God's law.

Sometimes people read over this story and think, it's amazing all these people heard one sermon and they all got baptized—just in one day they made this change. Well, that's not the case, because these people had a foundation in the basics of God's law. What they didn't have was the deeper understanding of the spiritual intent of the law, that you have to accept Jesus Christ as a Savior because no amount of obedience that you do is going to earn you salvation on your own; you've got to have the Savior. You've got to repent and be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit; this is the important piece of the puzzle that these people don't have.

That's why when you read through this story in Acts 2, realize that the whole focus of Peter's sermon is almost exclusively on the issue of the need for Christ as a Savior, and accepting that and being baptized, and that's all he's really talking about; that's the piece of the puzzle these people don't have. He's not starting off explaining Saturday is the Sabbath and you need to keep Saturday and not Sunday and you need to quit keeping pagan holidays and stop eating pork; he's not covering those issues because that's not an issue he has to overcome with these people.

So understand that context when you're reading this, and it also explains why we're primarily dealing with one day rather than two. Yesterday we talked about the fact that the law is given one day, and all of this is covered, and then the next day they make the covenant. What we're going to see here is, the giving of the Holy Spirit and the establishing of the New Covenant all happens on Pentecost; it all happens on one day. Again, a totally different context and need for what the people need to have covered with them. With that in mind, let's go to Acts 2:1. We'll notice in verse 1—we don't have to do any guesswork or any detective work whatsoever to attach Pentecost with these events because it just directly tells us that that is what is happening here.

**Acts 2:1** *When the Day of Pentecost had 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 the whole house where they were sitting.*

3) *Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.*



- 4) *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*
- 5) *And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. (NKJV)*

Notice it tells you these are people from every nation under heaven, but it also tells you that they were Jews. In other words, this is a Jewish group of people that we're dealing with here even though later in this chapter it's going to mention people from various different locations.

- 6) *And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language.*
- 7) *Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?"*
- 8) *And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?*
- 9) *Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,*
- 10) *Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,*
- 11) *Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God."*
- 12) *So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean?"*
- 13) *Others mocking said, "They are full of new wine." (NKJV)*

Notice there are miracles taking place because God is making a point of demonstrating to people that something miraculous is happening here. This is a totally new concept of the very Spirit of God being able to be placed within carnal human beings, and He's got to demonstrate that this is for real—these aren't just a bunch of crazy guys making claims—God is really working in this and a miracle is taking place here, similar to what we read yesterday with the Mount Sinai story, where God appeared as fire and a thundering voice. They've also got to know, as God even said to Moses, I'm going to speak this where they can all hear so they will believe you, so they don't just think that some crazy guy named Moses is making all of these wild claims; they got to see the fire from the top of the mountain and the thundering voice and realize, this God is for real. In fact, they even got scared with what they were witnessing; this got their attention.

God demonstrated His power that way so they couldn't later claim that some crazy guy named Moses made a lot of wild claims and we just got fooled by it; they actually saw enough that they knew there was something to this—they were all terrified by the thundering voice. Similarly here, we have miracles taking place that make it obvious that something important is happening here. Peter isn't just getting up and making wild claims. God is performing miracles to get everybody's attention and they'll take this seriously. Notice in verse 14, Peter's response to the claim that they're all drunk.

- 14) *But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words.*
- 15) *For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.*
- 16) *But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:*
- 17) *'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams.*
- 18) *And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy.*
- 19) *I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.*
- 20) *The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.*
- 21) *And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved.'*
- 22) *"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know ... (NKJV)*

Notice the comments he's making here. He's talking about Christ and saying, you guys saw this, you know who this is. He's talking to an Israelite audience, of people from a Jewish background, and he's not having to introduce this character named Jesus Christ as someone they've never even heard of. He's starting off saying, you know who this man is—you might not have accepted what He was fully about and who He was, but you know who I'm referring to because you saw these miracles.

- 23) *Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;*
- 24) *whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.*
- 25) *For David says concerning Him: 'I foresaw the LORD always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.*
- 26) *Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope.*
- 27) *For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.*
- 28) *You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.'*
- 29) *"Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.*
- 30) *Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne,*

31) *he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.*

32) *This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. (NKJV)*

He's saying, we are all witnesses; we know about this guy.

33) *Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.*

Notice the miracles here are making it clear that God is acting here, and these claims of the Holy Spirit—this is for real. That's why they are seeing all of these miracles, to get their attention.

34) *“For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand,*

35) *Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”*

36) *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ [Messiah, Anointed One].”*

37) *Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”*

38) *Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

39) *For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”*

40) *And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”*

41) *Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. (NKJV)*

We have the story here of the giving of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the New Covenant. As I mentioned, Peter's sermon really just focuses on the need to accept Jesus Christ—the need to have Jesus Christ as a Savior, to repent of your sins, to be baptized for that and to receive the Holy Spirit. He doesn't have to go back and establish the whole foundation of the Sabbath, the Holy Days, the basic Ten Commandments and all of these types of basic laws because he's talking to an audience who is already familiar with this. They've got a foundation for that. They probably don't understand the greater spiritual intent of it all, but he doesn't have to go back explaining the basics of the commandments to them, they already know that.

The piece of the puzzle that they don't have is the need for a Savior, the need to accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and to be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit. We see lots of miracles taking place to make sure they take for real these claims of the Holy Spirit. It even mentions with Jesus Christ, He was testified to you with lots of miracles. In other words, you saw all these miraculous things that He did, so you know He's not

just some regular human being. He couldn't have accomplished all of that if God hadn't been working with Him, so it makes it obvious that this individual was unique. As Peter is saying all this, notice we have about 3,000 people who are baptized that day. We don't just have the giving of the Holy Spirit, we have establishing of the New Covenant.

Yesterday, one of the things I emphasized was the fact that when a covenant was made, there was typically a formal ceremony that was done that involved a sacrifice, that involved the blood of a sacrifice, and it was also the ceremonial picturing of a death. As I explained yesterday, especially in the Old Testament, when a covenant was made, oftentimes there was an animal sacrifice that was made and they would literally not only sacrifice an animal, they would take the carcass and split it in half, head to toe, you might say, and lay out the halves of the carcass and then they would walk between the two halves. What this was about was the symbolic picturing of a death because what they were basically saying, to put it into modern terms today: Are you willing to stake your life on that? When you're making that statement, are you willing to bet your life on it? That's basically what they were doing with a covenant.

A covenant was much more serious than what we call a contract. With a contract, two people may enter into an agreement and they both sign on the dotted line, but typically the concept of staking their own life is not involved in the equation. If one doesn't fulfill one's end of the agreement, the other one might sue in court; there might be some legal proceedings and the one might get financially fined or things of that nature; typically it doesn't involve staking your life, whereas with covenants it did. The reason I'm pointing this out is, I've made the comment here with Acts 2 that there was also the making of a covenant here, but we didn't read anything about an animal sacrifice like we talked about yesterday. The key to understanding what that is about is understanding the symbolism of baptism. If you understand what's taking place there, those same components of symbolism, in making this covenant, exist in this story. They're just connected with the symbolism of baptism.

We have to understand with the New Covenant, the sacrifice that's involved here, because in the ratifying of the Old Covenant, it was an animal sacrifice that was involved there, and as we read yesterday, Moses sprinkled the blood upon the people and that was part of ratifying it. There is the blood of a sacrifice involved in the New Covenant and to understand that, let's turn over to Matthew 26. This is a familiar set of scriptures that you probably see covered every year at Passover. This is the section of scripture where Christ is establishing the symbols of the New Covenant Passover. In the Old Covenant Passover they would sacrifice a lamb and they would eat that lamb as part of the ceremony as they were commanded. Jesus Christ completely changes that when He establishes the New Covenant Passover. We read here how He explains what these symbols mean, and you can see very clearly that the blood of a sacrifice is involved in the New Covenant as well. Matthew 26:26.

**Matthew 26:26** *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."* (NKJV)

Notice the next two verses.

*27) Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.*

*28) For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. (NKJV)*

Notice He is saying that He is the sacrifice involved in ratifying this covenant. That's also one of the reasons why He is referred to as the Mediator of the New Covenant, because He is the sacrifice involved in this. Whenever we observe Passover every year, one of the things we refer to that as, is renewing our commitment that we made at baptism. A part of that, of going through that ceremony, is taking a little cup of wine and, as it's explained just like when reading this scripture, it's like Christ saying, drink this, this is My blood of the New Covenant. That's basically the equivalent of what we saw in Exodus 24, where Moses takes the blood, sprinkles it on the people, and says, this is the blood of the covenant.

You have that sacrifice involved, just as you had an animal sacrifice that was involved in the ratifying of the Old Covenant, you have the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that's involved in the ratifying of the New Covenant. In this case, the remission of sins is made available through His sacrifice because, again, the animal sacrifices they would do there (not just in ratifying a covenant but as they did regularly, especially on Holy Days and at other times) symbolically pointed forward and taught the need for Jesus Christ to come as a sacrifice to cover sins. This is basically what He is saying, that this is wrapped up with the New Covenant because His blood is the blood of the New Covenant.

We have to also understand what is involved in the symbolism of baptism. As I mentioned, there was also, typically, in the ratifying of a covenant, the symbolic picturing of one's death, which was basically saying I'm staking my life, and making a life and death commitment, that if I don't do my part of this agreement, I'm wishing death upon myself. This is tied in directly with the symbolism of baptism. If you'll turn over to Romans 7:4.

**Romans 7:4** *Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. (NKJV)*

The "you" being referred to here is the brethren. The "another" being referred to here is Jesus Christ. Notice it says, you died to the law through the body of Christ; you died through the body of Christ—that's the symbolic death at baptism. When you go into the baptismal water, it's symbolic of the old man dying and you coming out a new person, and it's sharing in the death of Jesus Christ. That is symbolically picturing our death as we go through this. We are making a life and death commitment just like the symbolism of the Old Covenant and how they did covenants back then; there was a picturing of a staking of my life if I don't fulfill my end of the agreement. That is exactly how the New Covenant works, because once you make that commitment, that covenant ends in one

of two ways. If you fulfill your end of the covenant and stay faithful and endure to the end, it ends with, well done now good and faithful servant, come and inherit the Kingdom prepared for you. If we don't, it ends with, I never knew you and you're thrown in the lake of fire. We literally are staking our lives when we say this. Understand that when we look at the story of Acts 2, what we have is not just the giving of the Holy Spirit, we have the establishment of the New Covenant. That's why we always refer to, this is when the New Covenant Church started, because that's the day that the New Covenant was ushered in.

Let's keep in mind the bigger picture in all of this. As I mentioned yesterday in regards to Ancient Israel and the Old Covenant, when God made this covenant with them and made them His special people and gave them His law, this wasn't just so they could wander around the wilderness and have His laws to have a more peaceful society with each other; the ultimate purpose was not only to be in the Promised Land, but to be an edification to all the nations around them. We read that in Deuteronomy 4, God's ultimate purpose was that they would be a great example to the other nations around them, and after some time, other nations would say, it's amazing—life just always goes well for those guys. What are they doing right that things just always keep turning out well for them? Maybe we should learn from what they're doing. Maybe this God they pray to, maybe we should do that too because we want to have the good results. That was the objective, to be an edification for them.

What we have to keep in mind is the New Covenant, for us as firstfruits, has a very similar purpose. Just like God was physically working with Ancient Israel, with an objective of trying to work with the rest of mankind, the same spiritual purpose is playing out with us as firstfruits. He's calling us to this role, not just so we can beat our chest and say we have the truth, and we are the chosen people and we can look down on all these other heathens—that's not what this is intended for. We were given this role as a humbling responsibility to be an edification for the rest of mankind. If you turn over to Revelation 20, we can see this. We're going to read Revelation 20:4; we're referring to the group included in the first resurrection, we're talking obviously about the firstfruits here. Notice what their role is.

**Revelation 20:4** *And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.*

5) *But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.*

6) *Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. (NKJV)*

Notice the entire purpose here is to be an edification to the rest of mankind, to be able to help them to come into the same relationship with God and Christ as well. It's not

just so they can say, we're the chosen people, we're special and all these other lowlifes are beneath us. That's not the objective. We have to make sure we keep the big picture in mind and we don't turn the opportunity of being a firstfruit, of having God's Spirit and having His truth and understanding that, into justification to think of ourselves as superior, because that is certainly not the case. It's not a situation of a badge we can wear or a pedestal that we stand upon to look down at the rest of the world. It's a humbling responsibility and opportunity that we've been given to be an edification for others. That's the entire point here.

There's a lesson we need to learn from Ancient Israel in how they would come to mishandle their role. In many ways they were offered a firstfruit role as well, from a physical covenant perspective rather than a spiritual one, but God was working with them with the purpose of reaching out to others. Let's notice how they tended to take this. Turn over to Luke 18; we'll start reading in verse 9. This is a common parable you're probably familiar with, of the Pharisee and the tax collector in the temple.

**Luke 18:9** *Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:*

10) *"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.*

11) *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.*

12) *I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'*

13) *And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'*

14) *I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."* (NKJV)

I point out this example because in the time that Christ was walking the earth as a human, the Pharisees were the religious leaders in Judah at the time, and they also saw themselves as the guardians of the law—they were the sticklers for sticking with the law. But look how he's using it. He doesn't see it as a humbling responsibility—I should follow this so I can edify others—he sees it as the pedestal upon which he stands to look down upon others and the club he can use to beat down others. He has totally missed the point as to why they were given the law in the first place. Yes, they are the covenant people with whom God made His covenant, they do have the law that God gave them, but he's missed the big picture of what this was about and perverted the whole focus with his attitude.

We have to be careful that we don't fall into the deception of thinking, as firstfruits, that we are superior to everyone else, that we are special, and looking down at others or thinking that being a firstfruit makes us forever superior to the rest of mankind. Sometimes I think we fall into that mentality, not fully realizing what we are doing, and thinking that we are forever superior to the rest of mankind for the rest of eternity; the

Bible specifically addresses this subject and tells us this is not the case. Turn over with me to Matthew 20:1.

**Matthew 20:1** *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.*

2) *Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.*

3) *And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace,*

4) *and said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went.*

5) *Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise.*

6) *And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day?’*

7) *They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.’*

8) *“So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.’*

9) *And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius.*

10) *But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius.*

11) *And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner,*

12) *saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.’*

13) *But he answered one of them and said, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?’*

14) *Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you.*

15) *Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?’*

16) *So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.” (NKJV)*

What is this parable telling us? As we start off in verse 1, we know that He’s talking about the Kingdom of Heaven. That’s a phrase unique to the book of Matthew, but if you look at the parallel accounts where Christ uses that phrase, Mark and Luke and John will be using *Kingdom of God*, and Matthew will be using *Kingdom of Heaven*, so you realize he is referring to the same thing, he’s just using different terminology. This parable is about the Kingdom of God.

The gospel is called the gospel of the Kingdom of God because the good news is that everyone who lives gets the opportunity to be born into the Kingdom of God, if they follow the rules and they endure to the end and are faithful. We know this is talking about the Kingdom of God, and it tells us there are those who are called first, at the very beginning, and those who are called last—this is not hard to figure out, because what



do we have?—a group called the firstfruits, those who are called first, and we have the Last Great Day, the group that is called much later. These two are not hard to identify.

Notice that He does this swap and says, the last are first and the first are last. How exactly do we apply that statement? He reverses the order in which they receive their reward. Now as we're going to see, that concept really doesn't apply in terms of how it's laid out here; we have to dig a little more to understand exactly what He's trying to say here because we know that the firstfruits become a part of the Kingdom of God at the first resurrection, and the rest of mankind hasn't even been worked with yet; that couldn't possibly be reversing the order there. For argument's sake, let's look at this and ask, what if we apply this parable to just the firstfruits? First Thessalonians 4 tells us the dead in Christ shall rise first and then those that are alive at the very end, come up after them. Okay, that doesn't work either. So some people point out the fact that in Revelation 11, it tells us the Two Witnesses do actually get resurrected prior to the blowing of the seventh trumpet. That's very accurate because you'll see it's several verses prior to the blowing of the seventh trumpet—it describes the Two Witnesses being resurrected. We're talking about two individuals here. As we're going to read here in a moment this phrase is also used that many will fit into this category. Two doesn't really meet the definition of many in this context.

As we'll see, this particular phrase—the first is last and the last first—is phrased a little differently depending upon where it's used, but Jesus Christ is always the one making this statement. There are three different sections of scripture, actually four different sections of scripture, but three different times that it's used. What I mean by that is it's also used in Mark 10, but that's just the parallel account of what we're about to read in Matthew 19. So there are really only three different times you could say Christ made this statement. Two of them flanked this parable that we just read, and there's one other reference in Luke 13. In every case it's referring to the reward that those who make it into the Kingdom of God will receive. Let's pick up in Matthew 19:23; we're going to see that these comments flank the parable we just read.

**Matthew 19:23** *Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.*

*24) And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."*

*25) When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"*

*26) But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (NKJV)*

Notice what Peter is asking here in verse 27.

*27) Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?"*

In other words, he's asking, what is our reward?

28) *So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

29) *And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.*

30) *But many who are first will be last, and the last first. (NKJV)*

Notice He is making this statement, and the very next verse starts the parable of the workers in the vineyard. So He makes this statement about the first and the last, and then tells this parable, and then states that again at the end of it. Basically He's telling them this parable helps understand what He's talking about in this regard. What is this really trying to tell us? How do we deal with the reversal of the order? Understand that all of this is in the context of the reward you receive in entering the Kingdom of God.

There are two other parables in the Bible that cover two other concepts involved with this. For time's sake I'm just going to summarize these because I think you're probably familiar with them. If you look in Matthew 25, you'll see the Parable of the Talents. Christ lays it out and describes several different individuals, giving five talents to this guy, two talents to this guy, one talent to this guy; at the end He comes back and the guy who had five now has ten, the guy who had two now has four, and they doubled everything, but what you'll see is they both get told the same thing: Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the Kingdom of God.

There's one individual who had only one talent and of course he doesn't do anything with his talent and he's excluded, not because of where he started but because he didn't do anything with it; he didn't use the one that he had. The point being that these individuals started in different places, different walks of life. You can apply that in numerous ways in terms of not only when they were called, but maybe their physical circumstances, their education, their wealth, their health, the various different walks of life and circumstances with which they dealt. Some had more advantages than the others but they all hear the same thing; they're all offered entrance to the Kingdom of God. There's no difference between the opportunity put before them.

However, if you look in Luke 19, what you'll find there is the Parable of the Minas and I'll summarize that one as well, for time's sake. In that case, Christ gives out one mina to everyone—it's a level playing field. Everybody has this one mina that they have to work with; however, the people perform differently. One does much better with his mina than the other ones do and the reward is attached to that. You did well, you turned your mina into ten minas—be over ten cities. He does this according to how their performance was. Think about this, this one started as a level playing field. What is it that we all receive when we're converted that is equal?—regardless of what our walk of life is, what our education is, our health, our wealth, whatever it is—we all receive the down payment of God's Holy Spirit, and it's a question of what we do with it, how well we fulfill the role that we've been given because that levels the playing field. Some of us are

wealthy, some of us are poor, some of us are healthy, some of us have health problems, some of us are very educated, some are not—that's just life. It's not about the circumstances of life that you have, it's what you do with what you've been given.

We have to realize that when He says the first are last and the last are first, the context there is all in the reward that we receive. There are two concepts the Bible lays out in terms of reward, regardless of our different circumstances in life when we're called and what our physical circumstances are—these are not what's important. What's important is what we do with the opportunity that we've been given. The reward we receive varies based upon how well we perform with what we have received. So understand when He's saying the first can be last and the last first, He's saying there are those who are firstfruits who will have a lesser reward than those who are called later, and there are those who were called later who will have a greater reward than some who are firstfruits, because it all depends on how well they perform the role that they were given.

How do we arrive at the idea that just being a firstfruit inherently makes one superior to the rest of humanity? The concept is based around the idea of the Bride of Christ, because the concept is put across oftentimes that the Bride is exclusively the firstfruits, and the rest of humanity is excluded from that. If you start looking at the scriptures that deal with that particular subject, here's what you're going to find. You're going to find things like Matthew 22—the Kingdom of God is like a father arranging a marriage for His Son; Matthew 25—the Kingdom of God is like ten virgins on their way to a wedding. You will repeatedly see this language referring to the Kingdom of God, the opportunity that everybody receives. You'll also see it in Ephesians 5, when Paul goes through gender roles in marriage. At the end of that chapter he says, I'm speaking of a mystery; I'm talking about Christ and the Church. That would have been a very good place to put in the word *firstfruits*, if that's what he meant. What he put was the word *ecclesia*, referring to Christ and the Church—the body that everyone joins when they receive the Holy Spirit.

So how did we get the idea that the Bride of Christ is exclusive to the firstfruits? The argument is always based around Revelation 19, and the reason being that in that particular chapter it refers to the marriage supper and the marriage between the firstfruits and Christ. At that point in the timeline, the only people that could be present there would be firstfruits. But remember, as we've seen throughout both of these sermons, there's an incredible duality between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The Old Covenant was a marriage as well. In Exodus 24, that is a direct parallel to Revelation 19. There was one generation of Israel standing there at Mount Sinai who said all that the LORD has said, we will do, and had the blood sprinkled upon them.

Have you ever heard anybody ever even attempt to argue that the Old Covenant marriage was exclusive to the one generation of Israel standing there? No, because the Bible makes it very, very clear that that's not the case. Multiple generations later, after those people are long since dead, what do you see in the Bible? God is still referred to as the husband, Israel is still referred to as the wife, that language is still being used,

because who was the bride? The bride was the physical nation of Israel. It wasn't exclusively the one generation that was standing there and that didn't exclude everyone else who was born into this nation as the generations progress. Why would this marriage be any different? If you look at this from the standpoint of saying, it's exclusive to just that generation, the Old Covenant marriage wasn't.

If you look at this, who is the bride really? Spiritual Israel, because what is the Church referred to as? Spiritual Israel. You become part of Spiritual Israel when? When you're baptized and you enter into the New Covenant, and you're grafted into spiritual Israel regardless of whether or not you came from a Gentile background. It's the same thing. If we understand it from this perspective, we realize being a firstfruit is not an inherent superiority, it is a responsibility. It is a unique role. It's a humbling responsibility to be an edification for the rest of mankind. It's not a badge of superiority of which we can say, I'm a firstfruit, so I am forever superior to the rest of mankind. No, we just fulfill a unique role because of the time in which we were called. It doesn't mean we, forever, for the rest of eternity, are some superior God being just based upon when we were called. That's based upon how we perform the role that we've been given.

We have to understand the concept that Jesus Christ taught the apostles, because if you read through the gospels, when Christ is dealing with the apostles, one of the concepts that repeatedly comes up is who is going to be the greatest? Which one of us of the twelve is going to have the most prominent position and be the most honorable guy? Christ is always trying to tell them, you have this all wrong, that's not how you should be thinking. So as my final scripture, turn over to Luke 22:24.

**Luke 22:24** *Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest.*

25) *And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.'*

26) *But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.*

27) *For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves. (NKJV)*

He's pointing out the fact, just like He did at Passover when He washed their feet, you call Me Lord and Master, and you're right, but notice what I'm doing—I'm bending down washing your feet, I'm acting as a servant. Basically, this is a lesson that we need to learn. We have an awesome responsibility as firstfruits, and the whole objective of this responsibility is to not only set an example in this life—to diligently live God's way of life to be an example to others—but once we're made God beings in the Kingdom of God, to help everyone else come along to this same opportunity. We should understand it and see it in that regard, that our responsibility is to be servants to edify others. It is a humbling responsibility, it is not a badge of superiority that we wear or the pedestal upon which we stand to look down at others. They have the opportunity to have a greater reward than we do if we don't do well with the responsibility given us. We have a unique role.

Again, what it all comes down to is not the role you're given, it's how you fulfill that role. One of the mistakes we made back in the days of the Worldwide Church of God (unfortunately oftentimes a rank-conscious organization) was the idea that if you had a role in the ministry or if you were somebody important at headquarters, that meant your position in the Kingdom of God was better, and that is absolutely wrong. It does not work that way. Yes, being in a role in the ministry, there is a unique role there, there are unique responsibilities and there are unique stresses that come with it, but that doesn't promise anyone forever, for all time, an inherent superiority to everyone else. God looks at it from the standpoint of how you work with what you have been given and how well you were faithful in whatever role He placed you in. That's what's really important and that's what ultimately will determine our reward.

As we look at our responsibilities as firstfruits in fulfilling this Feast of Pentecost, let's see this again as a humbling responsibility to be servants, to not only be an example but to be an edification for the rest of mankind. Let's not look at it as any form of superiority to the rest of mankind, because, as Jesus Christ put it, he who is greatest among you, let him be servant of all.