

THE DAYS AFTER PENTECOST

By Samuel Chadwick, D. D., in "Heart and Life"

The test of a day is in the day after. This is true of all days. The peril of a day of victory is the day after. That is why a wise general consolidates his gains, and why St. Paul bids the spiritual warrior not only to stand fast in the evil day, but, having done all, still to stand—girt, ready, watchful, prayerful.

Many a victory is lost after it has been dearly won. David lost faith, and fled after his most brilliant victory. Elijah fled from the triumph of Carmel, and sank, discouraged and dispirited, under a juniper tree. Jonah not only fled from Nineveh at the beginning of his commission, but after he had saved the city by his mighty preaching he got into the slough of despair and angrily prayed that he might die.

Everyone knows the bitterness of reaction. The wilderness lies hard by the Jordan, and every unusual experience of glory is followed by arid deserts, where hunger, wild beasts, and demons rack the brain and haunt the soul. From every quarter there come hurtling darts of doubt and difficulty. The world is full of "ifs" and "buts." Everything is questioned and challenged, or cajoled and traduced. Hunger is not for the favored of God. Poverty cannot be the will of the Father for His only begotten Son. The ordinary limitations of men cannot be the appointed way of the chosen of God. The blessing of one day is tested in the temptation of the next.

The Lost Blessing

John Wesley expressed sorrowful surprise that many who received the blessing of Pentecost lost it. That is so common a commonplace that it is constantly quoted as a proof that the blessing lacks the permanence of reality. It is ascribed to superficial and transitory emotion, and sometimes it is attributed to Beelzebub, the prince of devils.

The fact of failure cannot be denied, and in some instances the explanation may have some truth, but the fact of Pentecost remains, and its abiding reality is abundantly verified in the lip and life of many credible witnesses. Many are kept from seeking the blessing by the failure of those who make profession of having received it. The main stumbling-block is not with those who are an open reproach, as were Ananias and Sapphira, but with those who go back on the confession, and for one reason or other give it up. The triumph of Jericho is followed by the defeat of Ai, without its recovery. They fail to find the abiding elements of reality and to translate them into facts of experience and life. Why do they fail?

Symbols and Reality

Pentecost is the initial day of a new order. In some aspects, it is a sample day, and in others, it is unique. The Spirit of Christ brought humanity into a new relation with God. Pentecost was a new thing in the world. For the first time, it was possible for the Spirit of God to dwell in human personality. He had dwelt in Christ, in whom the divine and human nature were combined. Now He comes to dwell in men as He had dwelt in Him. A new type of man was created in Christ, and it is at Pentecost that the Christ-man becomes possible. That is why the Spirit could not be given until the work of Christ was accomplished. It was a new beginning, the beginning of a new spiritual life, a new relationship, a new fellowship, a new authority,

a new kingdom, and a new power.

The birth of the unique is accompanied by unique signs and symbols. As at the Incarnation, so it was at Pentecost. The signs are not mere external tokens. In them there is definite correspondence with the reality they signify, but they may have a power apart from reality. Many believed on Jesus because of the signs they saw; but Jesus, we are told, had little confidence in such faith. He knew its weakness: it lacked the elements of permanence. So it is still. Wind and fire and tongues, the overwhelming power of exultant joy, and the convincing logic of truth aflame were calculated to sweep many into confession and surrender. The teaching of the symbols is clear enough, but if there is no understanding, there will be no abiding. The wind and noise, the fire and wonder, were not permanent elements, but the accompaniments of a new order. The faith must be rooted in the Eternal, if it is to survive the test of the day after the day.

The Way of the Spirit

The Spirit guided the Church into the way of security and progress and those who fail to keep it fail at one of the most vital points. The new life created a new fellowship among men. The Christian Church was born at Pentecost. They that believed were added to the Church. Apart altogether from questions of doctrine and sacraments, the first fact is that believers were added to other believers. No experience of God can live, apart from fellowship with men of like faith and life. Fire fuses as well as burns. Fire in the heart sets the tongue aflame. The Spirit came in tongues of fire which sat upon each of them, and they all spake as the Spirit gave them utterance. There seems to have been no exception. There was only one preacher on that day, but each Spirit-filled disciple was a witness.

Thousands lose the gift of Pentecost because they stand aloof from fellowship, and fail to witness in Spirit-filled utterance. Speaking with tongues is a question that need neither detain nor disquiet us. Those interested can find the explanation and value in the teaching of St. Paul. It does not mean speaking in foreign languages of which the speaker has no knowledge. "Other" tongues may mean "new" and not "foreign," and in the utterance of tongues the speech is unto God and not unto men. The Holy Spirit speaks through the Spirit, apart from the ordinary basis of understanding in an ecstasy of exaltation glorifying God. The gift of the Spirit must not be confused with the gifts of the Spirit; but confession must be made to the realities of the experience, if the gift is to be retained. Admission to the fellowship was by baptism, on confession of the Name.

They Continued Steadfastly

They set their hearts and minds with resolute purpose. Their faith was assailed. Pentecostal believers are militant saints. The devil sees to that, and many good people help him. The experience never goes unchallenged. It is criticized and caricatured, misunderstood and misrepresented. They continued in the Apostles' doctrine. They became students of the Word, the experience of it, and its practical counsels. Of those who received the seed in the Parable of the Sower, the vast majority failed for lack of understanding. The Spirit-filled are Bible searchers and Bible believers. It is at this point that most of those who fail come to grief. The holy life is not possible

without the Holy Book; and the Holy Book is a dead letter without the interpretation of the Spirit who inspired it.

Pentecost quickens understanding and awakens interest. Many books have been written to guide believers in the way of the Spirit; but only one is needful. The Apostles' teaching is recorded in the Scriptures, and the Word of God is the manual of the Holy Spirit. No faith stands the test of the next day, and the day after, that is not rooted in the truth of God's Holy Word; and no one ever lost the blessing who continued steadfastly in the Word of God, and in prayer. Read other books, by all means, sit at the feet of apostolic teachers, but the prayerful habit of searching the Scriptures is the secret of spiritual wisdom and effective testimony.

Fellowship in Worship and Ministry

The fellowship of the Christian Church is the most wonderful organization in the world. It is a family of God without respect of persons. Every believer is every other believer's brother. There was no distinction of race, rank, or wealth. They were all one in Christ. They met together for the breaking of bread, and in the simplicity of the act are momentous implications. The most striking example of this immediate admission to the fellowship is in the salutation of Ananias of Damascus to Saul of Tarsus. He took him by the hand and called him "Brother Saul." So it is still. The brotherhood of the Spirit is more sacred than the most intimate fellowship of blood. Those early Christians gave more than lip homage to brotherhood. They had all things in common, and shared the gifts and the joy.

Pentecost created a new seat of authority, and evolved with a new and marvelous power. They had the power of healing. They had no silver or gold, but at their word the lame man leaped and was healed. When they were forbidden to preach and to heal, they appealed beyond the authorities to the seat and Source of all authority.

The Spirit of Pentecost is the Lord, the Spirit. Loyalty is the abiding law of His kingdom. Disobedience cancels grace, sterilizes faith and nullifies the act of God. The Spirit must not be grieved, lest He be quenched and Pentecost be lost.

They were a joyous people. They had radiant faces, and the exuberance of their spirits made people think that they were drunk. All life was sanctified and glorious. They did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to them daily those that were being saved.

Pentecost was a great day, but it was still greater the day after, and the days after that.

WRONG ORDERS

Some years ago a passenger train was rushing into New York as another train was emerging. There was a head-on collision. Fifty lives were snuffed out. An engineer was pinned under the engine, frightfully injured, and tears were running down his cheeks. In his dying agonies he held a piece of yellow paper crushed in his hand, and said: "Take this. This will show you that someone gave me the wrong orders." Unregenerate men and women will stand before the Great White Throne and point to their Modernist preachers, saying, "Someone gave me the wrong orders!" "Thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that make my people err . . . It shall be night unto you" (Micah 3:5, 6).—Charles E. Fuller.