

## Acts 2:1-21

Pentecost; May 31, 2020

William Carey has been called the “Father of Modern Missions.” He was born in England in 1761. He worked as a shoemaker from the age of 14 to 28. He became a born-again Christian at the age of 18 and began preaching in the evenings. At the age of nineteen he married a girl named Dolly. William was obsessed with the conviction of taking God’s Word to every nation. Finally he convinced his wife to go with him to India. A country that had millions of people, and yet barely any people who were Christians.

While there his wife lost three small children. Eventually, she could not cope with the strain of living below poverty in India that she lost her sanity. No one would have blamed them if they would leave India. But they stayed on. For six years, William Carey, preached the Gospel every day, and not one person came to faith in Jesus. He endured malaria and impoverished living conditions. Was it all worth it? It would take years before anyone would see the results of his work. It would take till year 7 before the first person became a believer in Christianity. William Carey didn’t look like much; he didn’t seem to accomplish much. I can’t help but wonder if William Carey wondered if he made a mistake.

They weren’t much to look at, these followers of Jesus. They were huddled together to support and comfort each other after Jesus ascended into heaven. They were glad that Jesus had ascended into heaven because Jesus had finished his work on earth. So, these followers of Jesus were waiting for something big to happen, something special. They were waiting for Jesus to keep his promise in sending the Holy Spirit. For ten days they waited. I wonder if any of them during those ten days wondered if Jesus was going to keep his promise. Did they make a mistake following Jesus? Scripture doesn’t say they thought that, but I wonder if they did. I wonder how they felt about Jesus’ assignment to them: **“you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”** How were they going to do that?

He was hands down the greatest preacher this world had ever heard. He knew how to use his words and craft the perfect sentences. He could use his words to paint the perfect illustrations. You could listen to him preach for hours. Tens of thousands of people had come to listen to him speak. He knew how to cut people to the heart. He knew how to comfort them with his love. He had done things this world had never seen. Yet, when the people began to see that he had not come to setup the kind of “church” that they had wanted, they began to drift away. Finally, his Church watched their preacher be killed on a cross. The preacher’s name was Jesus. The people had killed Jesus of Nazareth – the Son of God. When Jesus left, the Christian Church didn’t look like much. It was only a 120 people. Not much from the thousands and thousands that had once followed him. How would they ever get back to the days of thousands following him?

But then Jesus sent his disciples a game changer. He kept his promise. He poured out the Holy Spirit on his disciples. But Jesus gave this small group of believers a promise: **“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”** **“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.”** They may not have fully understood what those words meant, but they trusted Jesus. They returned to Jerusalem and they began to wait. They talked with each other. They prayed together. They helped each other to grow in their faith. They were all good things. But God had bigger plans for them. He wanted all of them to be his witnesses. He wanted all of them to be missionaries. He gave them the tool they needed. God had a plan. What a plan it would be!

The festival of Pentecost was not new to the Christian Church. Pentecost was one of the three main festivals that God had asked Jewish people in the Old Testament to return to Jerusalem to celebrate. It was celebrated 50 days after the Passover. It was the Festival to celebrate the early harvest. It was a festival that was celebrated to give thanks to God for the blessings that He had given them. But this time God had a different harvest in mind. People from all over the world had come to Jerusalem. Perhaps, as many as a million or two. The stage was now set. It was now time for Jesus to make good on his promise.

One of the rooms where they were meeting was filled with this tremendous sound of wind, but there was no wind. But that wasn’t the gift he had promised. Flames of fire appeared above people’s heads, but hair was not burning. A miracle – yes; but still not the gift he had promised. Suddenly, the Apostles could speak in languages that they had never learned. People were utterly amazed, but that wasn’t the gift. THE GIFT was that all were filled with the Holy Spirit. God

had given his Church the power it needed to carry out its purpose of going to all nations. They stop just sharing the message of Jesus with just each other, but now they find all kinds of people from all over the world to share the message.

Have you ever wondered why Luke records the number of ABOUT 3,000? I wonder what God's point is with giving the number of 3,000. God doesn't tell us why he had the number recorded. Nowhere else in the New Testament is there another number that is given that is connected to the results of proclaiming the Gospel. Can we look at that number and see God blessing his Church? Yes

But maybe that number is giving a different message. Is it possible that God's point with the 3,000 number, is that this is only a small start? If the city of Jerusalem had a million or two there for this festival of Pentecost 50 days after the Passover, then this number is small. Many of these people were believers in God. They had to come to Jerusalem to worship God. So, what does Peter do? He connects the dots between the Old Testament and the message of Jesus. Jesus was raised from the dead -- miraculous signs, witnesses, roaring wind sound, flames, speaking in different languages. Out of 1 million people -- how many people believed? Only 3,000? Maybe, God's point is: *What happened with all the rest of the million people?* God has work for his Church to do. Is God possibly saying to these men that their job was to share the message of Jesus and let God do the bringing of people to faith?

For the past 2 ½ months, we've been doing worship services the way we have been doing them. The plan is that next week, we will once again begin to worship face-to-face. We fully understand if there are some who feel uncomfortable coming these first weeks. That is okay. I look forward to seeing many of you who I haven't see for months. But there has been a blessing that has happened with doing these services online like we have been doing. Hundreds of people are watching our services every week. It isn't just in our little corner of the world. For example, when I look at some of the "insights" of our Facebook page that I can see, and you can't; there are people who have been reached by our Facebook posts from about 20 countries around the world. People who live in cities all across the country are watching our worship services on Facebook. Hundreds of people in a week are watching us on our website, Facebook and YouTube. It's amazing when I look at some of the numbers that are behind the posts. Those numbers are growing each week as you share those posts and services.

This isn't limited to just St. Paul's. It's happening with our congregations as well. I find it amazing how God has taken a horrible thing like COVID-19 and turned it into a blessing for his Church. A door might have been closed for a while, but the Holy Spirit threw the windows wide open to the world.

It would have been easy for William Carey to think that he was a failure in spreading the Gospel to the people living in India a couple of hundred years ago. Seven years of work and only one person. But God had a bigger plan in India. Do you know how many Christians there are in India today? 28 million. It is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest religion in that country behind Hinduism and Islam. A small beginning with a man named William Carey and a couple of hundreds of years and it's a pretty big group of people who are Christians. Those disciples sitting in a room on Pentecost didn't look like much. But God would use these 11 men and a couple of thousand years, and the Christian Church has grown throughout the world. Let's not underestimate what God can do. Let's give thanks that **"everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."** That is the message of Pentecost. Amen.