May God’s grace ever increase in your life

*My voice rises to God, and I will cry aloud;*

*My voice rises to God, and He will hear me.*

 Psalm 77:1

Notice the confidence in the Psalmist’s words: *I will cry aloud; He will hear me*. That is the confidence we have in Christ Jesus. Because we are joined to Jesus by faith through grace, we are adopted children of God the Father. He is the perfect Father and He always has time for His children.

And He will answer us perfectly. We are to raise our voice and cry to God, as if He is far away in heaven, but knowing He is right here with us. Then we are to trust Him; believing that He has heard our prayer and that He will act.

How reassuring; we pray and know that our Father hears, and then we can rest knowing that what ever comes will be according to His perfect will, and will ultimately be best for us.

In Christ’s love

John

 9-19-21

Leviticus 23:15-22

We come now to the last of the spring festivals in the Jewish calendar: the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost. I think we are all aware of the great significance of this day in the New Testament. The spring festivals began with Passover, which celebrated the Israelite’s redemption from the slavery in the land of Egypt. Jesus was crucified on Passover whereby He fulfilled this feast by being the perfect Passover lamb; redeeming us from the slavery of sin.

Passover was immediately followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which lasted for a week. This lasted for a week to remind the people of Israel of the hasty escape from Egypt. Leaven is sometimes a symbol for sin in the Bible. Jesus fulfilled this by removing sin from His people. He was in the tomb at the beginning of this feast.

During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of First Fruits took place. This was an offering of the first of the barley harvest and was given in thanksgiving and in faith to God. Jesus likely was resurrected on the day of this celebration; He became the first fruits of the dead. The idea of first fruits brings with it the promise of more: those who follow Christ.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread, including Passover and encompassing the Feast of First Fruits, is one of three Solemn Feasts. This is a time when all able-bodied Israelite men were to attend the feast in Jerusalem. The Feast of Weeks is the second Solemn occasion. This was a one-day feast.

It was called the Feast of Weeks because the people were to count 7 weeks, plus one day, or 50 days, to determine when to have this celebration; it didn’t have a fixed date. In the New Testament it is called Pentecost because the Greek word for “fiftieth” is Pentecost. As you can see, Pentecost always took place on a Sunday. Notice that the same type of numbering goes into the year of Jubilee. The year following seven times seven years, or the fiftieth year, is the year of Jubilee. This was the year when all Israelite servants were released and all land was returned to the family from which it had come.

The occasion for the Feast of First Fruits was the barley harvest; now the Feast of Weeks was to celebrate and give thanks for the wheat harvest, which took place a couple months later. Wheat was a finer and better tasting grain than barley, so it was looked forward to.

The people of Israel were to make two loaves of bread from the first of their wheat harvest and bring it to Jerusalem for a wave offering to Yahweh. A wave offering was waved in front of the alter by the priest, signifying that it was dedicated to the LORD. But the LORD then gave this back to the priests for them to eat. This was a way for the priests and Levites to get food for themselves and their families.

This offering was very different from other bread offerings: it contained leaven. This shows that leaven itself is not evil. The unleavened bread in the offering of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, was given in thanksgiving for God’s provision, but it also recalled the haste with which they left the land of slavery. The offering of leavened bread in the Feast of Weeks showed that the people were settled in freedom and things were normal. Another blessing from God.

The other sacrifices from the herds and flocks, the grain and wine, were communal offerings. Each person was only responsible for his two loaves of bread. Also, this was considered a Sabbath day of no labor, regardless of which day of the week it fell on.

Verse 22 reiterates what was already stated in chapter 19, verses 9 and 10. Land owners were not to gather every scrap of harvest from their land. Anything missed on the first time through and crops along the edges were to be left. Further, the landowners were to allow any of the poor to come on their land to gather the left overs. This was one way the Lord provided for the poor. If the landowners obeyed the Lord, they would have plenty and would not miss the left over. We see a good example of this in the book of Ruth.

This same principle holds for us today, although it primarily involves money instead of crops. Instead of hoarding as much money as possible, we are called to help the poor. For us, this is not a law to be followed. It is a life to be lived that is pleasing to Jesus; and because it is pleasing to Jesus, we are pleased to do it.

Let’s look at how Jesus fulfills this Feast of Weeks. In [Matthew 9:37](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%209%3A37&version=NASB1995) we read, ‘*Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few*.”’ This is just one example of bringing souls to Christ being referred to as a harvest. The Feast of Weeks celebrated a harvest of wheat and the New Testament Pentecost celebrated a harvest of souls. Jesus also had made a promise to His disciples in John 14:16-17. “*I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you*.”

The Spirit of truth is the Holy Spirit. Of course, the world cannot receive Him because the world is of satan who is a liar. Those who were following Jesus at that time had the Holy Spirit with them; He would occasionally help them in their walk with Christ. But a time was coming when the Holy Spirit would be in them; the Holy Spirit would indwell them. Once He indwelt them, He would never leave them. And this was a promise for all who would choose to follow Jesus in the future. At the right time, Jesus would ask the Father to give the Holy Spirit and He would do so.

Keeping these two things in mind, the giving of the Holy Spirit and a harvest of souls, lets look at Acts chapter 2. This is verses 1-4.

*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.*

I’m not going into speaking in tongues, that’s not the focus of this sermon. What we have here is the first pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Jesus’ disciples. These are the first fully endowed Christians; these are the beginning of the church. There were 120 disciples gathered together here, including the 12 apostles. Jesus has ascended to the Father about 10 days before and they were in a room praying. This was the day of the Feast of Weeks; it was the day of Pentecost.

The room was filled with the sound of “*a violent rushing wind*”; notice that there was no wind, but the sound. We think of what Jesus said in John 3:8 as He was speaking with Nicodemus, “*The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit*.” Bear in mind that the Hebrew word for wind, breath, and spirit is the same word. In this moment, Jesus fulfilled His promise to the disciples and they received the Holy Spirit to indwell them and never leave them.

These disciples left the room and spilled into the streets of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was packed; this was the Feast of Weeks, the second of the required Solemn feasts ordained by God. The next several verses of Acts let us know that all those who could hear were amazed. Jews from all over the known world were there and they spoke many different languages; yet each of them were hearing these people, men and women, speaking in their own language. The Jews heard them praising God and recounting His mighty works. Indeed, they were witnessing a mighty work of God.

In this atmosphere, Peter, emboldened by the Holy Spirit, stood up and preached to the masses. Jesus’ crucifixion was recent history; the people there would have known about it. They would have known about His miracles and preaching. They would have heard about His rising from the dead. It would have been a topic of discussion. Now, here was Peter telling them that this Jesus was the Messiah and they needed to believe on Him.

It is obvious that the Holy Spirit worked with many in the crowd. In verses 37-41 we read, “*Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!” So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls*.”

By Jesus sending the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, we see a harvest. This is the first fruits of the harvest; the 120 disciples and the 3000 souls brought in by them.

Something unique about the Feast of Weeks is that it would fall during the wheat harvest; not before or after, but during. So, the first fruit offering of the loaves would be made from the first of the harvest, but then the harvest would continue. And that is what we see here in Acts; the harvest continues. Peter told the crowd that the promise was for them and their children and for those who weren’t even around. And so the harvest continues today and will continue until God recreates the heavens and the earth.

God has always planned that this harvest would spread throughout the world. In His promise to Abraham, God told him that all the nations would be blessed through him. He spoke through the prophet Isaiah in chapter 2 verse 3.

*And many peoples will come and say,
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
That He may teach us concerning His ways
And that we may walk in His paths.”
For the law will go forth from Zion
And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

*“And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”*  See how this prophecy is fulfilled here; the Gospel began spreading from Jerusalem on that day of Pentecost. Many people have since heard it and an harvest is being gathered.

After His resurrection, Jesus spoke something to His disciples that is recorded for us in Luke 24:46-49. *He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high*.”

In this passage, Jesus reassured His apostles that what had happened to Him was exactly what had already been written in the Scriptures; it was no surprise, it was part of God’s plan. The good news was that because of what Jesus had gone through, sins could be forgiven for anyone who chose to accept Him. He knew that many would, that there would be a harvest, and it would start in Jerusalem.

Because these apostles were witnesses to Jesus’ ministry, they would be the first fruits and the first harvesters. Again, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit who would give them the power they needed to work.

Each of us here, who have accepted Jesus as Saviour, are part of that harvest that began long ago. We are also recipients of the promise; of the Holy Spirit. Because we are clothed with that power from on high, we are also laborers in the field of the earth. Each of us has a ministry. May the God of Glory expand the powers of each God given ministry here.

Prayer

We praise You, Lord of the harvest. You bless us with a harvest from the earth to sustain us in this world. But You are also the One who provides salvation so that You may reap a harvest of souls. Thank You that we are part of that harvest; that we will be gathered into Your barn forever.

Thank You for the life-giving gift of the Holy Spirit. How precious it is that the creator of the universe would bow to live within His creation. This reveals Your glory, and may You always be glorified through us.

And now, we not only ask for, but know we require Your constant help. As disciples of Jesus and blessed with ministries from God our Father; guide us with wisdom in the work we do for You. Help us to always do everything as if it is for You; and may all things be done to Your glory.

We pray these things in Jesus’ name

Amen