



# Anointed Without Distinction

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**Acts 2:29-39**

We are celebrating Pentecost on the wrong week. Then again, there are aspects of Pentecost we should be celebrating every Sunday, even as we celebrate Jesus' death and resurrection every time we meet together. Our calendar is helpful, but sometimes it gets us focused on the wrong things, becoming a distraction from what is truly important. We are already too distracted from the important things. We don't need any more help in that department.

God's Breath, or Spirit, came upon the disciples at Pentecost. We recall the story of disciples speaking in tongues and the surprise of the populace, causing many to marvel and ask questions, however ludicrous some may have been. Like many of them, we also get distracted with signs and wonders and miss the importance of the event, the message to be heard, the meaning it has for our lives and the lives of so many others. Pentecost marked a sea change in God's dealings with humanity. Jesus had pointed to it in conversation with the disciples. The coming of the Spirit, however, ushered in a new era of God's unmediated presence and anointing that not even the disciples were really prepared to accept.

Peter quoted from Joel 2 in his sermon. He referred to a passage most Jews knew well, though many found uncomfortable. They liked portions of Joel's message, but would rather ignore other parts. Unfortunately for some, it was those other parts Peter chose to stress. It is those same other parts that have tended to cause us difficulty over the centuries since.

By and large every Jew anticipated the coming of Joel's "Day of the Lord." They looked forward to the political and economic restoration of Israel. It is what the disciples had just asked Jesus about in Acts 1:6, "Is this the day on which you restore the fortunes of Israel?" Oh, yes, they were ready for that! They were anxious for Israel to enjoy freedom from Roman occupation, economic recovery, and a position of power and influence on the world scene! That part of Joel's message had grabbed their imagination. If you remember from Acts 1, however, Jesus was not so concerned with talking about Israeli economics, politics, or national sovereignty. He redirected their attention to the powerful anointing of God's breath which would fashion them into witnesses to God.

That was Peter's focus in this first Christian sermon. This event was what Joel had talked about. This was that day when God poured out the anointing of the Spirit upon any and all who would receive, without any distinction among them. This was the day of celebrating the first fruits toward which God had been building in Jesus. The time was ripe, and God was breathing his Spirit upon all flesh.

This Pentecost took people by surprise. It made them uncomfortable. It did not match up with their expectations. It seemed out of order to them. It did not fit with their priorities. God did not focus upon the issues they found so central to their existence, those issues that consumed them. Rather, God stepped in to do the unexpected. It should not have been unexpected. God's doings took them by surprise, anyway.

Joel had anticipated the day. Moses had desired all to have direct access to God, even back in the wilderness days of wandering. Abraham, Noah, Enoch, and Elijah had walked with God. God had called the people to live in daily fellowship, the Almighty taking the first step in calling them out of bondage into relationship. Jesus had spoken of the coming day when God would be more intimately present. They still had not accepted the reality of God's message and will.

Learning takes time. The ads want to tell us we can learn a foreign language in ten days. They tell us we can master a field of study overnight. We know the promises are ludicrous, but we still buy the products because we do not wish to accept that it takes time for our investments in learning to pay off. The lottery offers enormous payoffs to encourage us to create unrealistic expectations. We want to believe we will win. We want to ignore what we know to be true, that the odds are never in our favor. We delude ourselves because our desires interfere with what we hear. We choose not to learn, simply because we desire a different reality, even if we are pretty sure it is unrealistic. We would rather be distracted by believing that reality somehow does not or will not apply to us evenly. We defy the odds.

We believe the message that sounds too good to be true, simply because it is what we want to hear. It is what we want to expect. Then we try to force reality to fit the mold crafted by our own desires. It often requires a shock to the system for us to grapple head on with the truth and with our eyes wide open. Seemingly something must intervene in our practical definitions of life for us to accept that our expectations are wrong, our priorities are misplaced, our goals and ambitions are not worthy of our attention and the investment of our resources.

It is not comfortable facing up to the fact that our will, plan, and purpose do not match up with the will, plan, and purpose of God. It takes courage to respond as those who asked Peter about the course of action they should take. It means setting everything else aside. It means giving up on our plans and dreams to accept whatever God happens to desire in us, of us, and for us. It requires blanket submission and humility to empty ourselves and open our lives to God.

Deep down, we are overly concerned with ourselves. We are ensnared by concerns over our safety, security, comfort, and status. We are swept up in the current that tells us that we are the ones in charge of our own lives. Our future and happiness depend on our initiatives, our drive, our strength, our decisions, and how we measure up to those around us. That is the message we hear repeatedly. It is not, however, the message we hear from Jesus. It is not the message of the gospel we claim to accept.

God's purposes and plans are different. They are not about the distinctions we make between one another. God is not concerned to determine who is the strongest, the prettiest, the fastest, the most intelligent, the wealthiest, the most powerful, or the most esteemed. God is not concerned to pit us against one another to find the most worthy of attention and praise. Those are the things with which we are so concerned. Whether we look at it from a standpoint of being the most important nation or being the most important individual in society, we are concerned with our importance. God is not.

God created us as a diverse body. God cherishes our distinctions from the standpoint of diversity, not from a question of worth. Pentecost means that God cherishes each one of us individually. It means that God desired and chose to place his very Breath within all flesh, as many as would accept. Slave or free, male or female, young or old, Jew or Gentile, makes no difference to God. Those are our categories. Those are our caste systems to rate people according to their worth. God makes no such distinctions in anointing us with the Spirit.

Deep down, we are like children fighting with one another for a parent's attention and affection. Somehow we think we will be better off if we manage to portray another in a lesser light. We act like our relationship with God is a competition, when God has already declared love and acceptance for each one of us without distinction, perhaps even because of our very diversity God seems to relish! This is the message of Pentecost. God has come for everyone who will accept. Our anointing is without distinction. Are we ready to accept one another on that same basis? All else is distraction to the gospel.

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