

I Know What I Saw

I was there when ... (illustration) ... and I know what I saw!

Acts 2:32-33 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

I am an eyewitness to Pentecost. Nothing can dissuade me, confuse me, or convince me otherwise. I am not merely a proponent of some strange doctrine, ferociously paddling my fragile little theological canoe upstream against the prevailing current of modern Christianity. I know what I saw.

I make no claim of being 2,000 years old. I was not there for Acts 2. In fact, that is the point. If the Upper Room was a "once-and-never-again" historical fluke, Pentecostal theology – subject to the ravages of time – would be forced to stare forlornly at its own history through the dusty exhibits of some ecclesiastical museum. But we are not just a fluke!

I was there when ... (events) ... and I know what I saw!

Those who would reduce Pentecost to the status of a treasured relic deny its greatest reality. That reality is this: the same Jesus who came in power in the Upper Room has not just left us to our own devices. He is still in His church through the Holy Ghost, and He still can do what He always did.

The apostolic doctrine was that every believer should be filled personally, not just in theory. That conviction, that holy priority, is at the epicenter of the Pentecostal earthquake that has shaken the church and the world for the last 100 years. The Pentecostal power, some 2000 years old, remains unbroken and undiluted by time.

Did it ever occur to Peter, even years after the Upper Room, that the Pentecostal experience was optional, or that Christianity would some day try to divide itself into non-Pentecostals and Pentecostals? Certainly not!

A non-Pentecostal Christianity would have been no more imaginable to the First Century Church than a non-electrified city would be to modern Canadians. Pentecost is the church's defining Power and Light!

Martin Luther did not envision a Protestant church, but a biblical one! John Wesley didn't hope to create a Methodist church in England, but a spiritual renewal! The Bible College students in Topeka and the humble churchgoers at the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles didn't envision a Pentecostal denomination, but an empowered church!

It is critical to realize that we do not possess some "new" revelation. That we exist at all is a reminder that the Pentecostal experience today is the very same fire that burned in Acts 2, unextinguished by denominational formalism and doctrinal corruption. Without Pentecost, the Church in every age becomes hardly more than a glorified Kiwanis Club.

In Dr. C.I. Scofield's dangerously misguided footnotes on Acts 2, he suggests that after Pentecost "no Christian need seek the Holy Spirit," because now the whole church is somehow automatically filled. Nonsense! The book of Acts makes clear the apostolic priority that all believers should have a personal Pentecost.

Look at Acts 8 – Peter and John arrived at Samaria and immediately prayed for a city full of new converts to "receive the Holy Ghost." That is a wasted prayer if all new believers are filled by virtue of what happened in the Upper Room.

Look at Acts 19 – Years later in Ephesus, Paul is still asking a question arising out of the same apostolic priority: "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" (Acts 19:2). That is a superfluous question if Scofield was right. But he was not right, and the question must be asked of all believers until the rapture of the Church.

Look at Acts 10 – See just how important this experience was to the First Century church. What proved to Peter's Jewish entourage that God wanted to save the Gentiles at Cornelius' house? It was when they heard these Romans speaking in tongues (Acts 10:46). And Peter immediately commanded them to be baptized in Jesus' name (Acts 10:48).

If Peter expected this experience for his converts, we must preach no less if we want to belong to the same church!

The Church and its doctrines did not produce Pentecost; Pentecost produced the Church and all its doctrines. It was not merely the preaching of the Apostles that brought down power from on high; rather, men full of the Holy Ghost spent the rest of their lives trying to explain, articulate, and invite others into the power God had given. They were not mere Pentecostal apologists defending some creed out of a sense of duty to the prophet Joel; they were souls on fire whose doctrinal utterances on Spirit baptism came out of their own experience.

Doctrine is good. We are admonished to preach sound doctrine. But there are whole churches and denominations sinking like dinosaurs into the tar pits whose doctrines on paper are right. They are destined to become nothing but fossils of former revivals, because they have the right doctrines, but they are not radically altered by a real experience.

Experiential Pentecost, not doctrinal Pentecost, is the apostolic model. The right doctrine will always follow the right experience. In Acts 19 at Ephesus, Paul didn't ask, "Do you believe there is a Holy Spirit?" They could have answered that right. But he asked, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

Pentecostal preaching of DOCTRINE may ensure that we BELIEVE in the Holy Ghost. But only Pentecostal preaching of spiritual HUNGER ensures that we will RECEIVE the Holy Ghost. A believed-in Pentecost is good, but it was a received Pentecost that turned the world upside down. And it still works that way!

YOU DON'T RECEIVE THE HOLY GHOST THROUGH YOUR HEAD,
BUT THROUGH YOUR HEART! YOU MUST BE HUNGRY FOR IT!

The book of Acts is very concise in its theology ...

- This same Jesus (1:11, 2:36)
- With one accord (2:1)
- What meaneth this? (2:12)
- This is that (2:16)
- And ye shall (2:38)
- The same day (2:41)
- The Lord added (2:47)
- Look on us (3:4)

The power poured out in the Upper Room is not optional equipment, it is utterly indispensable. But Pentecostals, it is not what we believe or what we say about ourselves that the world will regard, but what they see! Peter and John were fresh from the Upper Room and in the midst of an antagonistic religious environment – they did not say, "Listen to us," they said, "Look on us." Can we say the same?

Don't tell me what you believe, tell me what happened to you! That is what the world really wants to know – "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

Today, we have third and fourth generation Pentecostals in our pews who fully understand our Pentecostal distinctives but stand apart from them experientially. Dare we be content for them to say only that they know what their Movement teaches? Surely not!

We must pray and preach until they can say, "I know what I saw!"