

Guest Preacher Rev Donald N Martin

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Preacher: Rev. Donald N Martin

[0 : 00] Back in January 2018, I became a pensioner. I know you wouldn't think it. It was while I was visiting the city of Manaus, way up the Amazon River.

! It's in the middle of the Amazonas rainforest in Brazil. And the church there laid on a party for me, because it was a special birthday.

And they're into cakes there, big cakes. And they brought three big huge cakes. Well, I didn't eat them all, but there was a lot of people in the congregation who they were shared with.

Now, in the late 1800s, Manaus grew during the rubber boom in that area of Brazil to become the richest city in South America.

In fact, it became known as the Paris of the Tropics. It is a beautiful city, but there's a lot of poverty there as well. Many wealthy Europeans at that time settled in Manaus, and bringing with them the European culture and art and architecture, and they built for themselves a very impressive opera house.

[1 : 16] How did I end up being there? What brought me to that place? Well, the church in Gardenston had been supporting a missionary called Fred Orr, who worked with Accra Mission since 1953.

He left as a young man with his wife. He left these shores. He came from Belfast. But he went up the Amazon.

He stayed for a while at Manaus before going another, or maybe a few hundred miles at least, up the Amazon to a place called La Brea.

In La Brea, Fred's first task in that town was to bury his young wife, who had died on the way.

They were just in their early twenties. And, well, she had died from food poisoning on the riverboat that took them up the river.

[2 : 16] So he lived there on his own for about 15 years, and then he married a Brazilian called Sini, to whom they have a son and daughter. And in these subsequent years, they saw the church grow exponentially.

Pastors were trained, Bible colleges were founded, and thousands came to Christ out of Catholicism. Fred then moved from La Brea to Manaus in the 1990s, and founded another church there.

There's a big story to that as well, but we haven't got time to go into it. Now there are four churches, and a Bible college. And for their 25th anniversary weekend, as a supporting church for their mission over these years, I was invited to preach there.

It was truly amazing. It was a wonderful visit, wonderful to see how the church was so committed to serving Christ and thriving.

Before we returned home, we were given another real treat. We were given a boat ride up the Amazon to what is called the Meeting of the Waters, where the Amazon Solimos, as they call it, that part of the Amazon, and the River Negro join just beside Manaus.

[3 : 52] It comes together as one river. Now, the Amazon is a dirty, clay-filled river, and the River Negro, as the name suggests, is clear, crystal clear.

It looks black. We saw many indigenous villages along the banks of the river, including two floating churches, two Baptist churches, serving the people there.

Brazilians speak about the Meeting of the Waters on the Amazon, and it was a great privilege to see that, coming together into one river.

Search Manaus on Google Maps, and you'll see it quite clearly. Now, wonderful and amazing as that site was, even more so the Meeting of the Old Testament and the New Testament, coming together to blend into one story of God, His story.

And in the verses we read together today, we discover how the Old Testament Feast of Shavuot celebrated the receiving of the Torah, the Law.

[5 : 15] And it comes together at the time when the Holy Spirit was being received in the New Testament. Shavuot, as the Jews call it, was celebrated at the same time, and the Holy Spirit was revealed at Pentecost, 50 days after Passover.

Now, in the Old Testament, Pentecost was a harvest festival, and the first Pentecost, following the death of Jesus, saw the believers gathered in Jerusalem, as we read, waiting for instruction.

But I want us to consider a little bit about the rich history of Shavuot in the Old Testament, where God comes alongside His people, Israel, as they leave Egypt and bondage behind and head for the Promised Land.

Leviticus 23, and there's details of the Feast of the Lord there, and you don't need to look it up. I'll just read you some verses. The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the people of Israel, and say to them, These are the appointed feasts of the Lord that you shall proclaim as a holy convocation.

These are my appointed feasts. The Sabbath, in verse 3, Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh is a Sabbath of solemn rest.

[6 : 41] The Passover, verse 5, In the first month, and on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, is the Lord's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month, the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord.

For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. And then verse 9 says, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.

And then further on in verse 15 it says, You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath. From the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, you shall count fifty days, that's from Passover, to the day after the seventh Sabbath.

Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the Lord. So Moses received the book of Leviticus from the Lord within a month of the tabernacle's construction.

That's between the first month and the second month of the Jewish year. Now, Shavuot literally means weeks, hence the Feast of Weeks, signifying the seven weeks or fifty days from Passover to Shavuot in the Old Testament.

[7 : 56] And as I said, it also celebrates the giving of the law, the Torah. That's Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, to Moses at Mount Sinai. Now, Pentecost itself is a Greek word, meaning 50th.

And in Christianity, it celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit to the church, fifty days after the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, if you compare the two, you'll find that there's many, many parallels between Shavuot and Pentecost.

This is no mere coincidence, but this is part of God's plan. It is a foreshadowing of the redemption of sinners through the death of Jesus.

So, Shavuot was first celebrated after the Exodus, and it marked the birth of the nation of Israel. Pentecost comes after the death and resurrection of the Messiah, when sin was dealt with, and is often seen as a birth of the church, where Jew and Gentiles become co-heirs with Christ.

On Shavuot, the very day the Jews celebrated the giving of God's law, the Holy Spirit came to write His law, God's law, upon the heart of man, thus fulfilling the prophecy we see in Jeremiah 31 and 33 to 34.

[9 : 36] Behold the days of coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest of them.

says the Lord. And if we are in Christ, His law is written on our hearts. Fifty days after the sacrificing of the Passover lamb in the Exodus story, the people of Israel received a covenant from God.

And fifty days after Jesus, our Passover lamb was sacrificed, the waiting believers, there in the upper room and Mount Sinai in Jerusalem received a new covenant from God for the peoples of the Old Testament and the New Testament under God's plan redeemed.

And it doesn't stop there. There are two mountains, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. So when the law was given in Mount Sinai, what happened?

[10 : 59] God descended with fire. And when the Spirit came at Pentecost on Mount Sinai, the fire settled on the hundred and twenty Jews who were gathered in the upper room.

In both cases, there were voices and wind and fire and smoke. The people were in fear, of course. And Shavuot also marked the wheat harvest in ancient Israel, celebrating and giving thanks to God for His bountiful provision for His people.

Shavuot is celebrated not only as a commemoration of the giving of the Torah, but also as a remembrance of the Holy Spirit, of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

We also remember that story in Exodus 32 of the golden calf and 3,000 people died that day because of their sinfulness.

And you remember what happened on the day of Pentecost. 3,000 came to life in Christ. 3,000 were born again, were saved, having accepted the Lord's offer of redemption.

[12 : 10] All of those parallels between Shavuot and Pentecost are important. surely a foreshadowing of the work of Christ seen in Shavuot.

As Christians, we ought to have times of thanksgiving, for we are grafted into God's original family. And Paul, writing to the Gentiles in Rome, said in Romans 11, if part of the dough offered as the first fruit is holy, then the whole batch is holy.

If the root is holy, so are the branches. If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive fruit, have been grafted in among the others, and now share in the nourishing sap of the olive root, do not boast over these branches.

If you do consider this, you do not support the branch, the root, but the root supports you. Now, many Jews are out of sync with the things of God in these days, but we praise him that there are many Jews who are coming to Christ in these days.

They are called Messianics, Messianic Jews primarily. The day of Pentecost reverses the confusion in the Old Testament of the Tower of Babel as the followers of Jesus come together in one accord.

[13 : 33] They were filled with the Holy Spirit. They spoke in other tongues. It wasn't babbling. It was actual tongues. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, enabling people who had come from all the different nations in the known world at that time to understand what the disciples were saying.

Acts 2, 9-11 has a list of the nations including Parthians, Medes, and Egyptians, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus in Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs.

We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues. Amazed and perplexed, they ask one another, what does this mean? Can you imagine being in the vicinity of all that was happening?

Many of those people who heard the languages being spoken were Jews who could speak the languages of the lands to which they were dispersed into, people of the diaspora, lands to which they had been scattered over many years.

And the visitors were confused because those who spoke in tongues were simple men, simple Galileans. What did the Galileans know? Well, the Galileans had the Spirit of God in them.

[15 : 00] They couldn't speak other languages supposedly. Well, maybe they couldn't until this phenomena happened. This is a spectacular act of God which led to the gospel being spread throughout the world as it's still doing.

Acts 1, the risen Lord Jesus instructed the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Father's promise, the Holy Spirit. And Jesus told them in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit and they would receive power to be Christ witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth.

I was preaching in Jerusalem one time many years ago and I took the text from Acts 1, 8 where I had come really from the ends of the earth at that day, in that day which was the western peripheries of Europe to come back to Jerusalem with the very same message that had gone from Jerusalem 2,000 years ago.

Just as the Holy Spirit descended on him as a disciple so also the disciples needed the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit to be with them in their ministry.

Earlier on in the gospel story they had received a measure of the power of the Spirit as we read in John 20. He breathed from them and said receive the Holy Spirit if you forgive anyone whose sins they are forgiven if you do not forgive them they are not forgiven.

[16 : 45] At Pentecost they will receive the Holy Spirit in full measure. Acts 2 has to be understood as a specific historical event.

It's not a story it's an actual event that happened beginning a new period of God's dealings with his people. When we speak about God's Spirit dealing with his people we sometimes forget that just as he dealt with people in the days of the New Testament he does so in this our day.

God through his Holy Spirit continues to reach people across the generations of the world. Elam is a ministry in Iran its name Elam is from Jeremiah and it says I will set my throne in Elam Elam was a part of the kingdom of the old Persian empire and this is what the Elam mission wrote recently every day and you know what's happening in Iran it's a horrendous situation every day Iranians are coming to Christ despite persecution every week new house churches are being born in Iran they can't meet like we meet they have to meet in their homes in secret many times how amazing it must be to live under times of refreshing times of revival times of renewal it is also a fearsome time as the

Lord deals with the sins of the people to make them his very own something this area experienced what some 75 years ago and even before then God was moving in marvellous ways it's documented and I read it fairly recently of a revival in Barbersson 1822 and some of you may know about it better than I do and this grew out of the translation of the Gaelic Bible Gaelic schools had begun in 1811 and by 1833 there were 15 schools across the island and the sole textbook was the Gaelic Bible which brought invaluable benefits to the islands through this God God's word and God was going to use literacy through his word and that's still important it's still important to support organisations like the

Bible Society who take the gospel to many peoples in their native tongues I read an article about some time ago about a young girl in this area who had learned to read the Gaelic Bible at school one day she had a stay of school her mother had been unwell and the girl read in Gaelic of course of the crucifixion of Christ and this so impacted her mother she began weeping the girl was afraid and called for a neighbour and the neighbouring woman came and was told what was taking place she in turn had to hear the story for herself and she too was deeply affected now I don't know who these people may have been when the husband came home and saw the commotion he asked to read the story and he too was touched by the story I'm not sure that the story said that anyone converted that through that but certainly they were deeply touched during that time the Holy

[20 : 46] Spirit moved in the community touching home after home all have been touched all have been moved and I'm sure many saved at that time through the Holy Spirit's work you can correct me if I've got the story wrong that's how I read it it seems to me that we don't have to work hard to win souls for Christ all we have to be is obedient to his calling and to live out our lives for him our walk in Christ our walk with Christ is crucial many people at the time of Acts would have been illiterate that's why the Galileans were seen as stupid but that did not keep people from seeking Christ they knew their need they knew they needed their sins dealt with is there a longing in the hearts of

Christians today to see God move and work among us again among the people of Barros and across this island across the nation or if there was any age and generation that that their country needed God to work surely is now but we believe that the Holy Spirit is at work glory be to his holy name there was another story from from maybe not quite this area but from Oog the Reverend Alexander MacLeod came to Oog in the 1820s and God used Reverend MacLeod and many people were saved but not before him having to take some drastic action when he arrived he found hundreds of names on the communion roll but many of those whose names were on the roll were not living a

Christian life there was a missionary who used to come to gardens and he used to say you're as well having your name on a sausage roll as on a communion roll if you're not walking with Christ he had to make a very extreme action he did a very brave thing he suspended communion can you imagine he suspended the breaking of bread for three years and this made him deeply unpopular with the people and he began teaching a systematic teaching he began meetings for prayer and some people were coming under conviction of sin he later wrote that many people at the first communion young and old were in tears on the Lord's day how many of us are in tears as we sit around the table of communion in gratitude of what the

Lord has done for us many people were so moved they were unable to contain themselves at that day in 1825 he wrote they now come to me from every corner saying what must I do to be saved like we heard of the Philippian jailer in act 16 just a year earlier Reverend Macleod had no men he could ask to pray and now he could count on more than a dozen!

showers of blessing being poured! from heaven on a people in a dry and thirsty land!

[24 : 45] At that first Pentecost after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ God was equipping his church with the power of the Holy Spirit in order for him to be glorified across the nations and he still at work in our world and our day he has brought us into his fold God's plan is in the words of Habakkuk 2 and 14 God has been at work challenging and changing his people right through the Old Testament and into the New Testament times right down to our day when the day of Pentecost came they were all together in one place suddenly a sound like a blowing wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting they saw it seemed to be tongues of fire separate and came to rest in each of them and all of them were filled with the

Holy Spirit began to speak in tongues as the Spirit enabled them here were the disciples waiting for the promise of Jesus to come and in a sense they didn't know what to expect but it was no coincidence that God should have chosen the time when pilgrims had been flocking into Jerusalem for the feasts of Passover and Pentecost Shavuot people all over the region would have come thousands would have been in Jerusalem at that time and each one would carry home with them news of the phenomena that had been happening in this land phenomena that had grabbed the city of Jerusalem even if it had not been among the three thousand that were saved God had his plan

God still has his plan to reach out to the nations mentioned there in verses 9 to 11 and he prepared the apostles like Paul and Peter to go out with the gospel one to the Jews the other to the Gentiles and when they did go they found people who had already committed to Christ in these places like Lydia and Philippi or the believers in Rome when Paul arrived the Holy Spirit which had come in power at Pentecost was giving people a deep desire of God all over that area and when we receive the Holy Spirit Paul writes you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you but if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ he does not belong to him do you and I have the

Spirit of Christ within us the main evidence of being filled with the Spirit is the fruit of the Spirit a godly character the acts of a sinful nature are obvious sexual immorality impurity and debauchery idolry and witchcraft hatred discord jealousy fits of rage selfish ambition dissensions factions and envy drunkenness or just and the like I warn you as I did before that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God and then he says in Galatians 5 and 22 but the fruit of the Spirit is love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness and self control against these things there is no law let's walk with Jesus by living for Jesus and may the Lord through his Holy Spirit working in us fill each one of us with the fruit of his goodness that we might be used to reach others on this earth amongst our families amongst our friends amongst our workmates and in doing so populate the kingdom of heaven here on earth and in heaven itself amen let's pray oh father we think of these wondrous days of old when you were moving in power amongst the people and amongst the nations and Lord we thank you that your power has not diminished but that your powers have worked throughout the nations of the world even to this day and we hear of your church growing in different places and yet it seems to be so different here

Lord we invite you again to come and do business with us that we might do business with you that we as a nation might turn back to you our God and our saviour Lord hear our prayers in Jesus name amen sing psalms number 16 verses 8 to 11 that's on page 17 of sing psalms before me constantly I set the Lord alone because he is at my right hand I'll not be overthrown to God's praise before me constantly before me constantly I said the

[31 : 12] Lord alone because he is at my right hand I'll not be overthrown therefore my heart is glad my tongue with joy will stay my body in fear will rest secure in hope unwavering for you will not allow my soul and death to stay nor will you leave your holy holy one to see the tombs decay you have made known to me the path of life divine bliss shall

I know at your right hand joy from your face will shine and to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy to the only God our saviour be glory majesty power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord both now and forever more amen to up