



1362 US Highway 395 N Ste 102-200

Gardnerville, NV 89410

E-mail: bill@liferesource.org

Website: www.liferesource.org

Transcript
Being the Body of Christ – Part 2 – Pentecost
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The title of this presentation is *Being the Body of Christ*. It's a Pentecost presentation.

It's good to see everybody today. We're gathered together – albeit electronically – to celebrate Pentecost.

I was thinking back to college days, and recalling that, on Pentecost, the speaker would usually reference Acts 2 and talked about the tongues of fire that came down on the heads of that intrepid band of believers – 120 of them – who fifty days prior had been fired up by the resurrection of Jesus. Many of them saw Him crucified, and some saw His dead body after they took it down. Probably more than traumatic to them.

What happened three days later blew their minds, but in a powerfully good way. If God can resurrect *that* body, He can do anything. Eleven of those present on that first Pentecost were with Jesus the night before He died. At that time, He instituted new symbols for the Passover. He didn't change it into something else – change the frequency or date of it, or rename it. He just instituted new symbols for Christians for the New Testament Passover. He had bread and wine, and He told them to drink the wine, because it represented His shed blood for them. They had no idea, of course, what was going to come next. And He gave them bread, and said it was His body and that they should eat it. We covered all this during Unleavened Bread in our presentation then – how it seemed easier to understand the blood symbol than the body symbol. And we learned that His body is our food. His body gives life to us. With our bodies filled by Him – the Bread of Life – we're to act like He acted – that is, we're to do as He did, value what He valued, live like He lived. That's what we were talking about.

That presentation – the one done on Unleavened Bread – by the way, will be available on our Website next spring. If you are on our mailing list, we will notify you when it's published. If

you're not on our mailing list, and you'd like to be notified, you can sign up for it on our Website, liferesource.org.

But I'd like to take it forward from here today, which is Pentecost. Pentecost foreshadows what the church – the group of Spirit-led believers – does between the time those first 120 believers sat in that upper room, and saw cloves of fire coming down upon their heads to represent the Spirit, all the way right up until the seventh trumpet sounds, and all of them at one time – alive or dead – are resurrected to their reward. So, let's think about that today – what the body of Christ is to do in between that first Pentecost and Christ's return. What should we be doing?

For us, this is another one of those *rubber meets the road* issues, isn't it? A holy day about what you and I are to *do*, as the body of Christ, *now*. Pentecost is the foreshadowing of the church and what it's to do. So, the meaning of the picture helps us to understand what we are to do. So, let's talk about God's plan for all of us.

Let's start in Ephesians 2:18.

Ephesians 2:18 – *For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone – in the King James, it says “chief cornerstone” – in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.*

So, all of us have a place saved for us in this temple. It's a place of honor. One for all those who accept Christ and live under the protection of His gracious forgiveness. No one will be denied who covenants with God on this.

What will it be like? We have scant evidence, but they say a picture is worth a thousand words. We have a word picture in Revelation. We see twenty-four elders, who sit on the throne in God's throne room with Him. We don't know much about them, but, if we could see one of them, we'd probably be speechless. They must be something incredible! We know that each one of them has a crown, surely given them by God as a reward and a sign of their authority. And yet, every now and then, after hearing God's pronouncements, as new parts of the plan are completed or revealed, they, without thinking about it, cast their crowns on the floor of the throne room and fall face first before Him in total speechlessness – astounded at the power and the brilliance of God! What will it be like for *us* when we're there? And how will *we* react? You might have heard the song, *I Can Only Imagine*? If you haven't, you might give it a try.

Moving now to today, I read the book of Jonah recently, and I was reminded that Jonah, after he preached repentance to the Assyrian city of Ninevah, set off in a little hut he had fashioned for himself, and sat there to see what was going to happen next. When the Assyrians repented, Jonah was angry. He had been afraid they would repent and then not have to suffer as they had caused

others to suffer – the Assyrian culture was very brutal – and he would, in his own opinion, be seen as a fool for predicting destruction when no destruction came. So, he was sitting in his little hut, angry and sulking, and then God raised up a little vine with big leaves that grew up in a day and shaded him from the hot sun. Then He caused a worm to kill it, so that there was no shade. It was very hot. It says he was faint. God asked him if he was angry that the vine had died, and he said that he had a right to be. Then God asked him if he, who had no investment in the vine – it wasn't even his idea – was angry because of its demise? Why was it not good for God to have emotion for the people of Ninevah, because of their city-wide repentance? After all, they had been foolish and rebellious children who finally saw the light. He told Jonah something that we don't often think about in our little corner of the church. He said that, if it was okay for Jonah to be upset about the vine, why wasn't it okay for Him to offer Ninevah a chance to repent – “people,” He said, “who didn't know their left hand from their right.” The world saw the Assyrians as a powerful scourge. They were terrified of them. But God saw them as blind, spiritual defectives who had no clue about Him.

Have you ever met an adult that didn't know their right hand from their left? I mean, everybody knows that, right? I met one person in my life that was still confused about that issue. It is pretty interesting. But He said these people – spiritually – didn't know their right hand from their left. They were clueless about Him and His plan. To Him, they were pitiful. They needed saving from their own ridiculous culture.

Now, it doesn't say in this story, but what God's statement means is that He made Himself responsible for the salvation of every person who has ever lived. He has to make His plan work, not just for us, but for every person who has ever lived. In the story, as Jonah had a bad attitude and ran from God, if we had been God working with Jonah, that would have been a problem for us. What are we going to do with this guy? Not a problem for God. He used it to call a group of pagan sailors to repentance. You may remember the story. Jonah – when God told him to go to Ninevah – went the other the direction. He went to the sea, booked passage on a ship to Tarshish, and God caused a giant storm to occur. And the sailors threw him overboard. Then, when the sea calmed, immediately they were all converted to God. So, Jonah – 0, God – 1. Or, maybe more than 1. And then He called the entire city of Ninevah and they repented at the word from the surly prophet. Then, God got the prophet himself.

He seems to be in a much better attitude later when he wrote the story of his mission. He learned that God was bigger than he thought. God had more on His mind than just Jonah. He was working a plan that is infinitely complex in its vast inter-connectedness. And yet, He always works for everyone. His plan includes everyone and it works for everybody. And when we say, “All things work together for good for those who love God,” it's not just talking about us and what just happened today that was a good thing, but it's about everyone all the time.

So, we can relax. We're in good hands. God can use us, even if our attitude is not perfect. It's just harder on us.

Here in our world – and even in our church – we have people grasping and struggling for power and control, maneuvering for position. But in that city temple God is building for us and with us, struggles for dominance will be a thing of the past.

When I first started working as a therapist, and before that, a minister, I felt like an imposter at first – like I wasn't really a minister or really a therapist. But as I learned my way into those roles, I felt better about what I was doing. That is what we are to be learning now – how to be God. And that'll make you feel like an imposter for sure! Because we are. But we will all be happy with what God gives us, because it will have been crafted just for us, and us just for it – a perfect fit. We will see then that what we're doing now is *training* for our later life. David said, "One day in God's courts is better than a thousand other days in the tents of the wicked." We will be welcomed into God's family and move forward through His plan with Him for eternity. And because the responsibility He gives each of us will have been crafted specifically for each of us, we will find it good work and we'll be good at it. To some of us, though, just thinking about it is exhausting. But we need to remember that weariness will be a thing of the distant past, when we're finally there.

So, that is where we're going today – and the One that we are going with. But what about now? In God's infinitely complex plan, where do we fit in our place between the first Pentecost and the seventh trumpet? What are we to be doing?

After we surrender to God and become His through repentance, and join the family in the temple, the very first thing that happens is a trip to God's spiritual Nordstrom for a new wardrobe – all new clothes. If we're to be God, we need to start dressing like God dresses. And how is that? Well, beside clothing, the likes of which we can't imagine, we're going to be given a new persona to put on. And it will fit us. And it will fit us perfectly because it's not going to be off the shelf stuff. It's going to be custom made, custom fit for us now. Did you know that – that's going to happen? What God is going to give us is specific to each one of us and it's going to be perfect for that reason. It's not going to feel uncomfortable. It's going to feel right.

Let's look in Colossians 3:9.

Colossians 3:9-17 – *Do not lie to one another* – this is the persona we're to put on – *seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.* So, it's going to keep fitting, no matter how much we grow. *Here* – he says – *there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved* – holy and beloved, that's how God's going to see us – *compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect*

harmony. That's our new suit of clothes we're to start wearing now. Colossians 3:15: And let – if we let is, it will happen – the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. So, enjoy life and be positive. And whatever you do – it says in verse 17 – in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

So, the picture of a temple extends out to fit something else. We're not only to be part of the family and government of God, but He's to be a part of us. He's going to come live *in us*. And, as we put Him on – like we would a coat – we're going to become like Him. The psalms tell us that David said God was clothed in splendor and glory. So, we put on Christ every day when we wake up, so are we. Now, that's not of our own effort. The coat comes as a gift from God.

So, let's think about this new persona. What's going to happen when we put it on? Wearing it is great, but what's going to happen as a result of that? Well, when we look into the Old Testament every year on Pentecost, we see that there were two loaves of bread, made from grain from the spring harvest, offered. What did they picture? Well, one loaf is the body of Christ. Right? The bread of life. That represents Jesus, who is the Firstborn of many brethren, the Captain of our salvation, the One who is perfecting us, our elder Brother in the faith. That bread pictures His body alive once again. He explained that the bread is His body. Right?

Then, there's another loaf of bread. What do you suppose it is? Well, if we're the body of Christ, wouldn't that represent us – if one loaf represents Him? And if we're His body, then we're bread also, right? The connection is incredible. And, if we are the body of Christ, wouldn't that make us, in some way, also the Bread of Life – Christ's body – now? Think about it. How did you come into the church? Who was there pointing the way? Well, probably several or more – all pointing, urging, lightly tugging, leading in the same direction toward the real Jesus and the real Father.

These biblical statements are rich with cross-connection, aren't they? The whole picture is neatly tied up, interlinked the way they also connect all of us to each other and to God and Christ, and to all the other holy days, and to our work as the church. From the first ones of us, who sat in the upper room and saw the Spirit descending, right up until the two witnesses finished their work at the trumpet blast.

My first encounter with God was through a church that was the ministry of one man. He was a gifted speaker. He used radio to reach people – that's how he reached me. I, and others with me, were just the support for his work. Since then, I've realized that the Church of God is not just one man's ministry. In 2004, I went to training in Chicago about evangelism. And what I learned there was that someone had done one of the largest studies in human history – as in four million surveys about what causes a congregation to grow. Do you know what they discovered? Well, I'll

give you a clue. It wasn't how much air time a congregation bought.

After I moved from San Jose – this was a long time before I went to that evangelism conference, by the way – but after I moved from Jan Jose, where I was a pastor, to Pasadena, where I worked at the headquarters of my church, I met a man who had a keen interest in evangelism. He had meticulously gathered stats on our church's growth. And though the original man had died, the church was continuing on with his work and was spending a lot of money – this time on TV programs. They had a number of speakers doing various TV programs, and the church was growing. But my friend showed me the rock, solid evidence – the statistics – that showed that our church was no longer growing by television efforts. Guess how it was growing? Well, new people were coming in from member contact. They were learning about it from members and being convicted of its validity by the behavior of the membership. All those people had put on their clothes. And they were out there meeting the public – and friends. They were the spiritual food – the Bread of Life. And that's exactly what this training taught me – key to congregational growth is the spiritual health of the congregation. Have they put on their new clothes? Are they modeling Christ's life in the community. There's a pun in there in there somewhere, isn't there?

So, is the congregation a warm, safe, inclusive place for all, including children? Does the leadership and the membership even think about the children? Is the congregation focused on its mission? And what is that? Well, to exemplify Christ in the community. Are people in the community able to look at the members of the congregation and wish their life could be like the lives of the people going to that church? Are the people in the congregation other-centered and Christ-centered, instead of self-centered? Or, is everything about them, like Jonah? Or, do we know that, if they focus their interests on others and on Christ, God will take interest in, and then care for them, and then use them to do His work?

Look at this word picture. It's in Ephesians 4:17.

Ephesians 4:17-32 – *Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do – Gentiles. So, if the church is the Israel of God, who are the Gentiles? Well, everyone else. So, you must no longer walk like unconverted people do – in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. As God said about Ninevah, they don't know their right hand from their left. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ! — assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self – the old persona – which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. That's what our new clothes are. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin – anger is not always bad. But, if it causes us to sin, it is. Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no*

opportunity to the devil. When we get angry, sometimes we're giving opportunity. Another way is that the devil is first and foremost a liar, and we grant him opportunity by believing his lies, which are mostly about us. So, *let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands* – and why should he do that? – *so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths* – so how do we let these good things happen? Well, there already in us by the Holy Spirit. All we have to do is let them out. *...but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.* When we talk, that's how we should talk to people. *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption* – by heeding our own desires and not heeding the impulses of God in us. *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

I mean, it's only fair, right? You get to be forgiven, so our job in being the bread of life, like Christ is, is to forgive others. That's how He would act in our place. If we do that, Christ will draw people through us, just as He did when He walked the earth. We will be His body, which is bread – life-giving spiritual food for others.

Okay, so I hope you don't think the word *let* means it's all easy. What did Jesus say? "This is My body, which is broken for you." That's hard.

Romans 6:5-11– *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.* Now, any time someone dies, it's a hard thing. Our metabolism fights for life. That old man, old person, old self in us wants to keep on living. It's what we're used to. It's what's comfortable. But putting on the new man, for a while, is uncomfortable. It has to become us. So, we have to live with that and work with it. Also, if we want to kill off our old persona, our old person, it takes effort and courage, and that can only come from God. That's where we have to do a lot of praying and a lot of serious work on ourselves. And that's where commitment comes in. We know that Jesus went through all this before us. He's not asking anything of us, as His body, that His body didn't already experience.

I was talking to Elaine a few nights ago, and she mentioned that in her wonderings about why Jesus' father, Joseph, had to die, if it wasn't so that Jesus could also experience the loss of a loved one, and could say that He suffered all things as we suffer in this life. Well, it doesn't say that specifically in the Bible. We don't know if that was the reason for Joseph's death, but we do know that Jesus suffered that loss too.

I had a friend that died recently after a long battle with cancer. And on his deathbed, he told his wife she should not be sad, because in the next moment, as he breathes out his last breath of life and loses consciousness, he, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, will be awakened with new life – a life beyond anything that we can understand now. He had been preparing for that moment all his adult life – putting it on. And he was dying in faith, looking for something much better, confident in Christ, who has been his life, all his life. And I think, in this life, it doesn't get any better than that.

So, that's part of what it means to be the bread of life – the body of Christ – to live in the temptations of this life to exemplify Christ to the world, in spite of that, to be resurrected to life with a new body – a new body like Christ. And that's what we are to do as the body of Christ now. That's one of the things we're to be reminded of on Pentecost.