Peter’s First Sermon Acts 2:14-36

Today we’ll return to the narrative in the book of Acts.

The past four weeks we paused to look a little closer at the Person, work, and relational aspect of the Holy Spirit, what the church is and what its purpose is, and then a practical look at what the gospel message is and how to simply communicate it.

Before that, we made our way through the first chapter of Acts, as well as the first 13 verses of chapter 2, which is an account of the Holy Spirit’s coming upon or filling the apostles on the day of Pentecost.

When that happened, a crowd gathered to see the commotion, and what a crowd!

Since it was the Feast of Pentecost, there may have been more than a million Jewish worshipers in and around Jerusalem during that time.

Before we get into the text, I want to remind you of a couple things.

This account takes place just under 2,000 years ago, in the epicenter of Jewish culture and religion.

At this point, the people of Israel had been reading and studying prophetic scripture for over a thousand years.

They longingly awaited the Messiah, the “Anointed One” or “Christ” (Messiah and Christ are interchangeable terms) sent from God who would overthrow their oppressors and establish a never-ending kingdom, ushering in prosperity, peace, and freedom for their people forever.

A little over seven weeks earlier they had witnessed the brutal crucifixion of a man who had claimed to be the Messiah.

He had undoubtedly done many miracles and performed signs that showed some kind of connection to the supernatural, but clearly, in their eyes, He wasn’t the Messiah.

He had died in shame on the bloody cross that day.

Everyone knew it.

Although some, many in fact, claimed that He had risen from the dead, they were members of His odd-fringe sect following, and so were discounted or credited as misguided religious zealots.

It was clear now that although some very strange things had happened the day He died, and there were claims that He lived again, this man was NOT Messiah.

Where was their deliverance?

The Romans still dominated.

Nothing had changed.

As we join the narrative, the Holy Spirit has just come upon the disciples with an incredibly loud wind kind of sound that drew attention to the disciples location somewhere near the outer court of the temple.

A bright glow or fire appeared above the head of each disciple and filled now with the Holy Spirit, the disciples rushed out into the crowd, loudly proclaiming the deeds of Jesus on earth in a variety of foreign languages to the growing crowd of Jews from around the known world.

Jesus’ rag-tag band of Galilean disciples were somehow speaking in languages they couldn’t possibly know, loudly proclaiming miraculous works of Jesus while He was on earth.

What was going on?

were these Galilean followers of Jesus drunk, some joked?

And then one of them stood on a riser above the crowd in the outer temple court and began shouting...

In a bold, Holy Spirit inspired sermon, Peter made an astonishing claim: this man they recently tortured and put to death, Jesus, he shouted, is alive and is both Lord and Messiah, just as he claimed! He is God!

Today we will read and examine this powerful first sermon.

Before we proceed, however, here is some good background information.

SLIDE 1

Early apostolic preaching regularly comprised four elements (not always in the same order):

(1) the announcement that the age of prophetic fulfilment has arrived, (2) an account of the ministry, death, and triumph of Jesus,

(3) a citation of Old Testament scriptures whose fulfilment in these events proves Jesus to be the one to whom they pointed forward, and/or a statement of eye-witness testimony,

(4) and finally, a call to repentance.

These four elements were present in Peter’s proclamation.

Bear in mind, Peter spoke the words the Holy Spirit compelled him to speak.

At this point, he didn’t know what was to take place in the future.

He had no idea the people of Israel would reject the gospel message and that the total fulfilment of prophecy would be placed on hold for the next two thousand years (as we see clearly now), and that somehow even Gentile dogs would be brought in as legitimate inheritors of Jesus’ kingdom.

It’s fascinating to consider Peter’s sermon with this kind of hindsight.

At the point at which this all took place, it was all about the people of Israel, although there are hints in prophecy that God’s offer of salvation would ultimately be extended to Gentiles.

Read with me from Acts chapter 2, beginning in verse 14.

This is Peter’s sermon...

Acts 2:14-36

**“But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: “Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. 15For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is *only* the third hour of the day; 16but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:**

**17*‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams; 18Even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit  
And they shall prophesy. 19‘And I will grant wonders in the sky above And signs on the earth below, Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. 20‘The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood, Before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come.  
21‘And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’* 22“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— 23this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. 24But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. 25For David says of Him, *‘I saw the Lord always in my presence; For He is at my right hand, so that I will not be shaken. 26‘Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted; Moreover my flesh also will live in hope; 27Because You will not abandon my soul to Hades, Nor allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. 28‘You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of gladness with Your presence.’***

**29“Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat *one* of his descendants on his throne, 31he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. 32This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. 33Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. 34For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: *‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand,  
35Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”’***

**36Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”**

Okay.

Let’s just call a quick time out here.

This is Peter.

The man who denied Jesus three times on the night before Jesus was crucified.

Only a little over seven weeks later, and Peter stood up, ROSE up, and loudly announced to the same crowd who cheered Jesus’ death, as well as many who actually had Jesus put to death, that they were guilty of killing the Christ!

Peter had to know he was basically signing his own death warrant. Why didn’t he care?

What changed?

Before we answer that, let’s examine Peter’s sermon.

As I mentioned earlier, there are several elements of the apostolic message that are always present in some form or order.

These are: an announcement that the age of fulfilment has arrived, an account of the ministry, death, and triumph of Christ, a citation of the previously fulfilled prophecies, and a call to repentance.

In today’s passage, we see the first three elements, and next week we will dive into the fourth, the call to repentance.

As we go through this, notice that Peter used a mixture of eye-witness testimony of Jesus’ works and fulfilled prophecy.

In other words, FACTS, as he presented the gospel.

For today, we can divide Peter’s proclamation into four fairly distinct sections:

SLIDE 2 – Are they drunk?

Verses 14-21 serve as a sort of introduction whereby Peter addressed those who mocked the outpouring of the Holy Spirit by saying the apostles were drunk, then he cited scripture foretelling the very things that happened that morning.

He set the table with scripture.

Let’s read this section again:

**“But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: “Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. 15For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is *only* the third hour of the day; 16but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:**

**17*‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams; 18Even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit  
And they shall prophesy. 19‘And I will grant wonders in the sky above And signs on the earth below, Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. 20‘The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood, Before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come.  
21‘And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’***

Peter redirected the crowd away from jeers about drinking to scripture. Peter’s quotation of Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28-32) meant that the days of the fulfilment of God’s purpose, had arrived.

The “last days” began with Christ’s appearance on earth and will be consummated by his reappearance on earth

They are the days during which the age to come overlaps the present age (already but not yet).

Hence the assurance with which Peter quoted the prophet’s words and declared “This is it.”

Interestingly, at this point even Peter was unaware of the significance of the idea that “God’s Spirit will be poured out on *all* mankind” and that “*everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

This reality has everything to do with the fact that you and I are in this building worshiping the Lord together.

This is amazing.

The next thing Peter told them was a declaration of facts making the case for belief in Jesus.

Verses 22-36 provide a three-fold argument that contains the heart of the Gospel Message.

SLIDE 3

There are three parts to Peter’s argument.

1. Verse 22 – Jesus is approved by God (He is the Messiah)

2. Verses 23-32 – Jesus died and rose again

3. Verses 33-35 – Jesus ascended to preeminence over all creation.

Finally, in verse 36, Peter capped his persuasive proclamation.

Jesus is both Lord and Christ!

In each case, Peter backed his statements up with scripture.

Let’s go through these arguments.

1. Verse 22 – Jesus is approved by God

**“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—**

The “mighty works and wonders and signs” which God accomplished through Jesus of Nazareth among the “men of Israel” needed no elaboration; they were fresh in the minds of everyone.

That these acts were performed by divine power had been generally acknowledged except by those who saw that such an acknowledgment would involve unwelcome theological implications.

The miracles of Jesus were not just “wonders”; they were “mighty works (see Acts 2:11 where the disciples were proclaiming these in foreign languages),” evidences of the power of God operating among the people, and “signs” of the kingdom of God.

The second argument in Peter’s sermon was that,

2. Verses 23-32 – Jesus died and rose again

**this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. 24But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. 25For David says of Him, *‘I saw the Lord always in my presence; For He is at my right hand, so that I will not be shaken. 26‘Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted; Moreover my flesh also will live in hope; 27Because You will not abandon my soul to Hades, Nor allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. 28‘You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of gladness with Your presence.’***

**29“Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat *one* of his descendants on his throne, 31he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. 32This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.”**

Again, remember that Peter was putting his life on the line in saying this.

He dropped the hammer, rightly accusing the Jewish establishment of the murder of Jesus.

He reminded them that this was foretold.

They through their actions literally brought prophecy to life.

He then strongly told them that death could not hold Jesus.

This was and is true prophetically (Peter cites Psalm 16:8-11) as David reflected on how God would raise His Holy One, thus rescuing David himself from death, and this was verified by Jesus Himself, who said in John 14:6 that “I am the Way the Truth and the Life.”

Jesus is LIFE itself. Have you ever wondered where life comes from? Was it a spontaneous, luck occurrence?

What is this life force that scientific inquiry relentlessly searches for yet cannot find?

It is found in the very name of Jesus.

The very same name that many use for a curse word, and deny belief in.

John 1:3-4 says,

**“All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. 4In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.”**

If Jesus would have stayed dead in His tomb, there could be no life.

Peter finished his argument in this section by explaining what David’s prophetic passage means.

He said in verse 32 that God raised Jesus up from the dead, and that the apostles were witnesses of this.

This brings us to the third part of Peter’s persuasive proclamation.

3. Verses 33-35 – Jesus ascended to preeminence and supremacy over all creation.

**Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. 34For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: *‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, 35Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”’***

**36Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”**

Peter finished his sermon by reminding his audience of what they had just seen and heard, the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is at the seat of universal dominance at the right hand of the Father, and on this day He poured out His spirit.

This is the Trinity in action.

The Pentecost outpouring of the Spirit testified to the fact that Jesus is both Lord and Christ.

And in a mic-drop phrase, Peter reminded them that they crucified Jesus the Christ!

The context of this sermon is that it was delivered to the “House of Israel.”

But God in His omniscience always knew that this proclamation would be rejected by His chosen people.

That’s why God has poured out His Spirit on all mankind, and that all who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

At the time of Peter’s sermon, though, these things were still clouded. This was an offer of salvation to the House of Israel, first, and then later through the Holy Spirit’s revelation to the Apostle Paul, it was made known that we (Non-Jews) are included.

We don’t see the ministry of inclusion to the Gentiles begin until chapter 13 of Acts.

That should give us a hint as to God’s program.

This offer of salvation was made to the the Jews first, then the Gentiles, as Paul reminds us in Romans in Romans 1:16 and 2:9.

So there you have it.

The first sermon delivered by someone not named Jesus.

Peter backed up what he said with facts in the form of fulfilled prophecy and eye-witness testimony.

SLIDE 4

In a fascinating correlation, Paul delivered an equally clear and succinct gospel message to a group of Gentiles like us in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

He wrote,

**“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...”**

Do you see a difference in Peter and Paul’s proclamations?

There is no mention of the fulfillment of prophecy.

Paul simply says, “according to the scriptures.”

What knowledge of prophecy would a gentile have?

So, there is the gospel proclamation in all its simple, profound glory.

We asked earlier what changed for Peter?

How did he go from a man who would deny knowing Jesus three times on the same night for fear of punishment to a man who stood in front of Jesus’ killers and accused them to their faces of the murder of not only God’s anointed one, but in fact God himself, knowing that this proclamation could very well end in his own death?

Peter believed!

He gave eye-witness testimony and the verification of prophecy as proof.

His belief was not based on mysticism or inner experience, but on facts!

So, now we get down to the nitty-gritty.

There is only one question that matters, and only one answer to the question that brings life.

SLIDE 5

Do you believe?