

“Peter’s Sermon at Pentecost”

Acts 2:14-41

Our text this morning is found in Acts 2:14-41. It is a long portion of Scripture, but I want to deal with it in its entirety because it is the sermon that Peter preached on the day of Pentecost. It serves as the very first Christian sermon that was preached, and the God-given results of it are nothing short of miraculous.

Those of us who do this each week can tell you about the thousand deaths that we die as unforeseen things happen from time to time when we preach. If you want to humble a preacher, find old tapes of his first sermons. I cringe at the very thought. I remember one time in the first church that I served, I had started preaching. I heard a few snickers and noticed Anita making a hand motion toward her nose. I immediately interpreted it, “This stinks.” So I preached harder. What I didn’t know was that a string was stuck to my upper lip. Every time I said something, it flapped in the breeze. There’s not a Sunday that goes by where I don’t make sure that buttons are buttoned, zippers are zipped, and strings are removed.

I did some calculating this week. I’ve been your pastor since October 2013, and during that time I have preached around 320 Sunday sermons. If you add to that the amount of Wednesday night lessons that I have taught, it is anywhere from 580-600 different messages that I have been responsible for. On average, I’m speaking in a venue like this before a congregation of people for approximately two hours and fifteen minutes every week. That’s twice on Sunday morning, once on Wednesday night. In the last six years, that adds up to roughly 780 hours, or just under five straight weeks of running my mouth...I do have a lot to be accountable for when I stand before Christ.

I've never preached a perfect sermon. In fact, most weeks I fall very short—I misquote things, I forget to cite some of my quotations, and I use a lot of 'filler' words. My wife can tell you that I often hang my head in shame and wrestle with embarrassment after I do what I do on Sunday. I have to combat pride and the temptation to want to appear as if I have got it all together. I'm grateful to God for His mercy and grace and His calling. He uses imperfect vessels in the ministry of His Word, and I'm proof of that this morning.

Well, here in Acts 2 we read about the very first Christian sermon that was preached. It was a sermon preached by Peter on the day of Pentecost. We all know that Peter was an imperfect vessel, yet the words of his sermon contained in this text are far from imperfect because they are the very words of God Himself preserved in inspired and inerrant Scripture. Peter wasn't perfect, yet he was used to preach the gospel on the day of Pentecost, and 3,000 people were saved.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones—*“The conversion of those three thousand people was entirely because of the descent of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Spirit using the words of frail, ignorant man, driving them into the minds, hearts, and consciences of those listening.”*

The first event of church history that followed the coming of the Holy Spirit was Peter's sermon at Pentecost whereby the church was launched. The book of Acts places priority on preaching the gospel message, whether it be the apostles or scattered believers. For example:

Acts 4:2—“...they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”

Acts 5:42—“And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that Jesus is the Christ.”

Acts 8:4—“Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.”

Preaching has always played a central role in the mission of God for His people. In the Old Testament, we read about the ministries of the prophets, men like Moses and Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah. The New Testament presents us with the ministries of the apostles and pastors of local churches who follow in their wake. Paul told Timothy:

2 Timothy 4:2-4—“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

That pretty much sums up where we are today in much of the professing church. So much of what masquerades under the label of ‘preaching’ nowadays falls way short of the apostolic standard established in the New Testament. I’m not talking about style, but content.

In an attempt to reach people and keep people interested, we’ve turned to shallow and pragmatic means that don’t stand up under the scrutiny of Scripture. Anything goes today, as long as it makes us feel good about ourselves in the process. Discernment is the need of the hour. The Bible says in Romans 10:17 that faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ.

Peter’s sermon at Pentecost presents us with the content that ought to be true of a gospel sermon. In many ways, it is a model for anyone who desires to verbally communicate the truth of the gospel with another. I want to show you four critical components that should be found in every sermon, as well as in every gospel presentation:

1—FAITHFUL to the Scriptures (2:14-21)

“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on My male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out My Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Peter’s sermon is faithful to the truth of Scripture. Keep in mind that he didn’t have the New Testament like we do, but he did have the Old. And it will become obvious to us that he knew it well. Notice a couple of things:

The occasion

Peter is responding to the questions that were raised back up in verses 12-13. In the previous passage, we’re told that the Holy Spirit had come to indwell the believers. The disciples were then filled with the Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them utterance. It was a miraculous display of God’s power for the purpose of declaring the gospel to the multiple thousands who were there in Jerusalem.

Some had asked the question, “What does this mean?” It was apparent to all that these disciples were under the influence of something. Others who were skeptical wrote it off as a display of drunken behavior. Peter, however, raises his

voice to explain how they were were not drunk, not under the influence of something. Rather, they were under the influence of Someone. The multitudes who had gathered were witnessing the power of God as His Spirit had been poured out on the believers. The crowd was suddenly confronted by a group of men and women, who were obviously very simple people such as fisherman and Galileans, but they were entirely changed. There was an influential power evident in their lives. I mean something totally amazing had happened to them, a change in their lives. They were all so noticeably different that it provoked the question, "What is this?"

I can't help but think that sometimes people don't listen to what we say because they can't get past what they see when they look at our lives. The disciples were different. There was a supernatural power that was on display in their lives. Peter's sermon then becomes the basis for the explanation of what had happened.

The exposition

Notice in verse 16 how Peter connects what happened with the Old Testament Scriptures. He appeals to what the Scripture had said and expounded it in terms of the facts. He says, "These aren't drunk like you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day." (9am) Instead, he says that what they were witnessing had been 'spoken' of in biblical prophecy. His entire sermon is a recital of the facts and an explanation of those facts. Peter then quotes directly from **Joel 2:28-32**. What was the significance of this?

The prophet Joel ministered during a time of disaster in Israel. Locusts had swarmed over the land and destroyed every green thing. Every tree, plant, and crop had been consumed by the locusts, and it spelled disaster for Israel's agrarian economy. Joel used the opportunity to show how the destruction

caused by the locusts would be nothing compared to the coming judgment of God.

However, Joel also spoke of a future time of blessing in which God would 'restore the years that the locusts had eaten.' He declared that God would one day pour out His Spirit upon the nation as they were repentant. The result of the Spirit's filling would be God's people declaring His truth.

This is what Peter references in his message as he shows how Joel's prophecy has now been partially fulfilled in the sending of the Spirit to live within believers, empowering their prophetic witness.

“Day of the Lord”—*refers to the end of the age*

Prophecy in the Old Testament often had dual focus. The prophets saw the coming of Christ and the day of the Lord linked as one event, not two. From our perspective, you and I know that the end of the age didn't accompany the coming of Christ. The prophets saw the two events like two mountain peaks in the far distance, but couldn't see the valley in between, which is where we live today. The first peak is the first coming of Christ, but the second peak His return. In between the Lord's first and second coming is the missionary period of the church in which we currently live.

We live in the age of mission, and the Spirit of God has come to empower us for that mission. The church by its very existence is a missional organization. That mission involves preaching the gospel to every nation!

Peter isn't through. Down in verse 25 he is going to quote from Psalm 16:8-11, and then in verse 34 he quotes from Psalm 110:1. This tells us that Peter was a man who was devoted to the Scriptures. He knew God's Word! He relied upon the power of God's Word as he preached. That he was filled with the Spirit is

seen in the fact that he was also full of Scripture. The two always go hand in hand.

See both **Colossians 3:16** and **Ephesians 5:18**...

2—FOCUSED on Christ (2:22-35)

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised Him up, loosing the pains of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it. For David says concerning Him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’ Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both dies and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that He would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool.’

Like a laser beam, Peter's preaching focuses in on Jesus Christ and His redemptive work. He interprets Scripture in through the lens of Christ and sees Him as the fulfillment and focal point of it all. His message contains the truth of:

The sinless life of Christ

Look at what he says in verse 22:

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know..”

Notice how Peter directs their attention to the life of Jesus of Nazareth, a man 'attested' by God. By identifying Him as such, Peter is pointing out the humanity of Jesus and uses a name that reflects the humility of His life. The Son of God left His eternal glory and was born as one of us. He grew up in the home of a carpenter in Nazareth.

John 1:45-46—“Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’”

That He was from Nazareth in Galilee was something that the religious leaders had used as an excuse to reject Him as Messiah. It was a rough neck kind of place, an obscure village, not the kind of place the Jews were looking for their Messiah to come from. Yet He was 'attested' by God.

“Attested”—*a word used to speak of exhibiting something; proof; promotion to high office*

In what way was He 'attested' by God? Peter mentions at least three ways in verse 22:

- *Mighty works*—the word means ‘miracles’ and is a derivative of the word ‘dunamis’ which refers to explosive power
- *Wonders*—describes the marveling that takes place in the mind of the one who witnesses the mighty works
- *Signs*—speaks of the intention behind the miracles; was always for the purpose of pointing to spiritual truth

When Peter says that Jesus was ‘attested’ by God, he is saying that Jesus was shown to be God in human flesh, something that was confirmed by many convincing proofs. He has been highly exalted and given a name that is above every other name! He is our tested and proven Savior.

The atoning death of Christ

“This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”

Peter says, “This Jesus—the very One who was attested by God through the miraculous signs that were associated with His life—you crucified and killed!” How’s that for being direct? He’s exposing their sin. Though Christ’s death was according to the plan and the foreknowledge of God, they were responsible for having Him crucified and put to death by the hands of lawless men. The sovereignty of God in the matter did not absolve them of personal responsibility. No, they were fully responsible before God.

The bodily resurrection of Christ

“God raised Him up, loosing the pains of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it... This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.”

Even though He had been put to death on a cross, death could not hold His body in the grave. God raised Him up! The pains of death were loosed, which means that God put an end to the agony of death for Him.

“Pains”—*word literally means ‘birth pangs’*

Like the pain of a woman who is in labor and childbirth, the pain is only temporary and it leads to a wonderful result—new life! In the same way, death was only temporary for Jesus and resulted in the glory of resurrection. Because He is God incarnate, death could not hold Him. His life guaranteed that death would have no power over Him.

Major Ian Thomas—*“He had to be what He was in order to do what He did. He had to do what He did in order that we might have what He is. And we must have what He is in order to be what He was.”*

In other words, it is only through faith in His death and His resurrection that you and I can possess His life. The Bible says that Christianity is the life of God in the believer.

The exalted position of Christ

“Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing...”

He lived, He died, and He rose again from the dead. He is now in an exalted position at the right hand of the Father. And Peter says that the evidence is the Holy Spirit and the power that had been poured out which they had witnessed.

This was the fulfillment of promise:

Psalm 110:1—**“The Lord says to my Lord: Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies your footstool.”**

What I want you to pay attention to here is that Peter had taken his text and was faithful in the exposition of that text. He interpreted that text in light of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ—His life, death, resurrection, and ascension to glory. He is both Lord and Christ! And that it was all the fulfillment of prophecy is one of Peter's main arguments. He will say the very same thing much later on in his life:

1 Peter 1:10-12—“Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.”

As an old man about to die, Peter said once more:

2 Peter 1:12-14—“Therefore I intend always to remind you...as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder...For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.”

Peter's point over and over again is that prophecy is a matter of fact. Christ's death, resurrection, and glory is established fact and, as such, it demands a response.

3—FEARLESS in its delivery (2:36-40)

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles,

‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.’ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this crooked generation.’

A good sermon will always be faithful to the Scriptures and focused on Jesus Christ. A third essential component is that it will be fearless in its delivery. Lloyd-Jones said that preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire.

Courage

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

For the second time in his sermon, Peter uses very direct language that called on his hearers to recognize their sin and personal responsibility. It takes courage and spiritual fortitude to do something like that. Where does this kind of courage come from? Certainly it wasn't something that Peter came up with on his own.

Fifty days earlier, Peter had cowered in fear and denial...

Conviction

Notice the response of the crowd there in verse 37:

“Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’”

When they were confronted with the truth that they were responsible for the crime of crucifying the Son of God, they were 'cut' to the heart. The word means to be pierced within. Has the truth ever 'pierced' your heart? That's what happened here. Ray Stedman gives this illustration:

“Imagine that you were on your way to a job interview and you have a car accident. The other driver gets out of his car, and you beat him, curse him, and kick him. Then you get back into your car, drive to the interview, and arrive at the boss’ office—only to find yourself ushered into the presence of the man you have just cursed and beaten!”

Maybe that gives you a small taste of what the crowd must have felt as they heard Peter preach and were confronted with the truth that they had crucified the Lord of glory. They become convicted of their sin. No person ever gets saved without first being convicted of his sin. It is not something the preacher does. Rather, conviction is the work of the Holy Spirit who takes the truth of God’s Word and brings it to bear upon the mind and conscience of a person.

John 16:7-11—“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you. And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see Me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”

Someone has well said that conviction is the key that the Holy Spirit uses to unlock the heart and open it up to salvation. Without this key, one’s heart remains locked.

Peter’s listeners were broken over their sin, smitten within their hearts, fully aware of the fact that there was nothing that they could do to undue the past. Was there any hope?

Clarity

Upon being convicted and cut to the heart, the crowd asks the question, “What shall we do?” In view of our sin and wickedness, what should we do? What response before God should there be? Look at what Peter says in verse 38:

“And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

Peter is clear in what their response ought to involve, and he mentions three things:

- the repentance that is mentioned

“Repent”—*word is ‘metanoeo’ and means to turn around*

Real repentance is more than feeling sorry for sin. It is not simply remorse, neither is it regret or reform. Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of behavior. It is both inward and outward.

- the reflection that is mentioned

Upon repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, a person is to be baptized in water as a tangible, visible expression of his or her repentance. It is a picture of salvation, of publicly becoming identified with the One in whom you trust.

- the result that is mentioned

The gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit is the result of being saved. God gives His Spirit to the one who repents and trusts Jesus Christ. They could have the same life!

4—FRUITFUL in its results (2:41)

“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”

It speaks of the God-given, supernatural results of Peter's gospel sermon. Those who received the word were baptized. I would imagine that there were a lot more who heard the message, but only those who received the message benefited from it. On that day, there were 3,000 who became followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. They repented of their sins. They were baptized and added to the original group of 120 disciples.

Isaiah 55:10-11—“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

What if I told you that God saved you to make a 'preacher' out of you? It's true. Not all of us may preach in a formal sense, but every single one of us have opportunity to 'preach' Christ to those we meet. Your effectiveness as a witness is not the eloquence with which you speak. It is not whether or not you have a dynamic personality. Real effectiveness involves you being filled with the Spirit and faithfully sharing what Christ has done to save sinners. It means you rely upon the truth of God's Word as you share Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and then trust God with the results.

God's saves men and women, puts His Spirit within them, and opens up their mouth to declare to others the saving message of Jesus Christ. In Romans 10:13, Paul says that same thing that Peter does in Acts 4:21—“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” But then Paul asks the question:

Romans 10:14-17—“How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never

heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!’...So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

How will they ever hear without a preacher? Once more, the words of Spurgeon are ever so appropriate:

Charles Spurgeon — *“If Jesus is precious to you, you will not be able to keep your good news to yourself; you will be whispering it into your child’s ear; you will be telling it to your husband; you will be earnestly imparting it to your friend; without the charms of eloquence you will be more than eloquent; your heart will speak, and your eyes will flash as you talk of His sweet love. Every Christian here is either a missionary or an imposter. You either try to spread abroad the kingdom of Christ, or else you do not love Him at all. It cannot be that there is a high appreciation of Jesus and a totally silent tongue about Him...If you really know Christ, you are like one that has found honey; you will call others to taste of its sweetness; you are like the beggar who has discovered an endless supply of food: you must go tell the hungry crowd that you have found Jesus, and you are anxious that they should find Him too.”*