

Building on The Foundation

In last week's sermon St. Peter laid the foundation by preaching to the people who were in Jerusalem for Pentecost. He laid a foundation, with Christ as the cornerstone, just as we heard in our scripture reading from Ephesians chapter 2 this morning. Christ is the cornerstone with all of us tying into Him. We are as, Paul says, "then built into a living temple by the Holy Spirit." But, let's quickly review why Paul would say that Christ is the cornerstone. It is because He is the very beginning of everything Peter had pointed out to the people in his sermon. That it was Christ who was prophesied, it was Christ who was attested to by God through miracles wonders and signs. Again, that concept or those specific words: miracles wonders and signs that Paul chose, on purpose, because those are the words that are used in the Old Testament to describe how God works. How he reveals Himself through miracles wonders and signs. Then Peter pointed out to the people that they had ignored this and that they had ended up finding themselves fighting against God himself when they had Jesus crucified. He then pointed out that God won because God is the Creator, He is Almighty, and He had planned this going all the way back to the garden of Eden. Why? Because we are his creation and God loves His creation. He and He alone could pay the price of our sin. He and He alone could forgive our sin. And, He and He alone could overcome the effects of sin, which is death. So, Christ rose - defeating sin, death and the devil. Christ ascended into heaven. Where He prepares a place for those who believe in Him. And, Christ will return to take those who believe in Him and have put their trust in Him to take us home and to judge the unbelieving world.

Now, when all the people who were in Jerusalem, both the Jews and the Gentiles, for Pentecost heard this sermon and heard Peter say, "and you crucified him!" We see quite a reaction. In fact, we see a change of heart. Earlier, when the disciples were speaking in different languages, some were amazed because they were Galileans. In other words, they were uneducated people from the North. Now they speak to Peter and say brothers what shall we do? It's no longer "you Galileans," it's "brothers." When they ask, "what shall we do?" it is an acknowledgement. It's an acknowledgment of "we did what you said we did." We crucified Jesus, we fought against God, and we, since we did the wrong, we're accountable. We need to take care of it. What does God demand? And that is scary. Because, I want you to think about what happens when someone has a child killed and the murderer is caught. What do the parents want? What do they want to see happen to the individual who killed the child? In fact, what does society even want to see when a child is killed in a brutal terrible way? I want you to think about that. Think about the protests that are going on in America right now. Someone's child who was a full-grown adult died. Died at the hands of police. Died with the knee of a policeman on his neck. It has led to protests worldwide because people want justice. Now let's remember that this individual who died had just committed a crime. He also had a fairly lengthy rap sheet that included some pretty violent offenses. He was also a father of five children who he had abandoned back in Texas. And society is screaming for justice?

At Pentecost, Peter points out that the Jews, God's Chosen People, had just killed God's Son. These same people, the children of Israel and the Gentiles who had become Jews were asking the question, "what does God want?" They are admitting, we killed His child, his only begotten

Son. How did Peter respond? What did he say God wanted? “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. They had asked, “ brothers what shall we do?” Peter picked up on the fact that they were taking personal accountability and he responded in a very direct manner. In essence, he said, just as he had said “you crucified Him,” he now says every one of you repent and be baptized. It's a two-part plan that God wants. Step one, repent and receive forgiveness of sins. Because God is faithful and just and he will forgive the sins of all those who confess. Step two, be baptized and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It's a very unique two- part plan: repent and be baptized. He follows it with a two-part solution: God forgives because we repented, and God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit through baptism. Why do this? Why this plan? Using the terminology of COVID-19 and our leaders today, what's the data that this is based on? Peter gives the answer. Here's why, “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.” It is a promise that begins in Genesis 3:15. “ I will put enmity between you and the woman between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head and you shall bruise His heel.” What is the seed of woman? It's her children. This is what God said to Satan after he tempted Adam and Eve to sin. I'm going to put enmity between you, Satan, and the woman. Between your offspring or what you are going to bring about, and what she is going to bring about. For out of a woman will come the Savior who will destroy you and all the mess you have made of My creation.

How will we know who that Savior is? Again, we return to the prophecies; to the promises of Isaiah 7:14, “therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign (a sign to identify this child) behold the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel.” Well, that's a pretty specific sign; the Messiah will be born of a Virgin. That really narrows the field significantly, doesn't it? But God continues through the Prophet Malachi, He narrows it down even a little bit more, “but you O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be counted among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for Me One who is to be ruler of Israel who's coming forth is of old (that means prophesied) from ancient days (and that's a name for God the ancient of days). God is going to provide the Savior who will be born of a woman, not just any woman, a Virgin woman, in the town of Bethlehem. That narrows it down pretty well doesn't it? Remember, all of these prophecies were from about 450, 700 and 5000 years in advance. But also notice that Peter said, “ the promise is for you and for your children for all who are far off everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” So, the promises of Jesus and the promises that God will call us to Himself flies directly in opposition to so much of what we hear today. Think about how many times you have heard someone say, “ I asked Jesus into my heart” and now think about what Peter has said here, “ whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.” Now think of the words of Jesus in John 6 verse 44, “ no one can come to me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.” Why would Jesus say this? Well, first Corinthians 12:3 says, “ no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” So, God calls us to Himself and we can't accept Jesus, we can't say He's Lord, unless the Holy Spirit, who Jesus promised to send to us, draws us. When we go to Second Thessalonians 2:13 we read, “God chose you to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.” It's again God who acts; He chose to save us, and it is the Spirit who sanctifies us or sets us apart to be God's children, to be saved. He

does this through belief in truth. This is faith, faith in the truth of God's word, which leads us to 2nd Thessalonians 2: 14, "to this He called you through our gospel." How does the Holy Spirit call us? How does he work faith in us? It is through the gospel of Jesus Christ and nothing else. What does he call us to do? Second Timothy 1: 10 says, "He calls us to a holy life." This is a life that is set apart, a life that is sanctified; holy does not mean perfect, it means set apart. Its synonym is sanctified or set apart. Is this sanctification something that we do? First Peter 1:2 gives us the answer, "by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit to obey Christ." It's the Holy Spirit who works faith in our hearts. It is the Holy Spirit that uses that faith to set us apart for God. It is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us and sets us apart to a life of obedience to Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this is a big deal! All too often we want to take credit for part of our Salvation and scripture leaves no room for that. It's not "I asked Jesus into my heart." It's, "God chose me from the beginning of creation because I am part of his creation to save me through the atoning sacrifice of His Son, to call me through the power of the Holy Spirit, to be his child and who has set me apart. It is not me. I didn't set myself apart for Jesus. No, He did it through the Spirit who worked faith in my heart and who has led me to be set apart for Him, to be obedient to Jesus." The only time we can use the word I is after we've been honest and have said, "God saved me, I was a Sinner. He saved me because He sent His Son to die for me and He gave me his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit used His word to draw me to the gospel, to show me my sin and to create faith in my heart and set me apart for him. When I realized this, I repented and was baptized." There you go, it's not that Jesus came to me because I asked him. He came to me because He loves me, and He went to the cross for me and He sent his Spirit to me. He did it all and His love overwhelmed me.

Let's compare that to what Paul writes in Ephesians 2, "in which you once walked following the course of this world following the Prince of the power of the air the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." That is who we were we were following the spirit that is now at work in this world and it is one that is disobedient to God. How do we get the Holy Spirit versus the spirit of this world? Think about what we heard in our gospel this morning, where John the Baptist was confronted by people who thought he was the Messiah. John made it very clear, he was not the disciple, he did not want to take any of God's glory. Instead he said that there's one who's coming after me, he's greater than me. What will He do? "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." Fire is symbolic of purification, of forgiveness, the old is gone the new has come.

When the people in Jerusalem heard this sermon from Peter and they asked, "brothers, what shall we do?" Peter laid out God's two -part plan for them:

1. Repent, or acknowledge your sin and turn from it.
2. Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

He was telling them that they really couldn't do anything but that they needed humble themselves and let God start working in their hearts. The result of this sermon was profound. We read that about 3000 souls were baptized. When Luke records that about 3,00 souls were baptized it means men, women and children were baptized. Then we see the Holy Spirit going to work. The same Spirit who sets us apart to be obedient to Jesus Christ. Through Him, the 3000 believers devoted, that is sanctified themselves, to:

1. The apostles teaching or Bible study.
2. The fellowship - the word is Koinonia it means participation or sharing. The 3,000 participated, they shared in their lives, they shared their meals they shared with each other as was needed. If someone needed something the others shared with them. If someone experienced a death in the family the others grieved with him. If someone got married, they celebrated with them.
3. The breaking of bread - that's the Lord supper.
4. And listen to this, verses 46 – 47, “they devoted themselves to, day by day, attending the temple together.” Why were they going to the temple? They were praising God or worshipping Him. You know, I just find this unique, that in this day and age we have people who say it doesn't say anything in the Bible about going to church. Frankly, people are doing that because they don't want to go to church one day a week .

What was the early church doing? Day by day attending the temple together praising God. They went every day to church and what was the result, I quote, “and having favor with all the people.” Of course, they were having favor! When you are set apart to obey Christ you are set apart for righteousness, you’re doing what’s right and that is what people ultimately want. This is how the church began. This is the growth of the church. And, we read “the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” Who added? The Lord added!

It wasn't their missionary efforts. The Lord used their missionary efforts. It was his word. It was His Spirit that was moving in the hearts of the people that were converted. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ when we look at the early church it sets the stage for what we are to do: We are to, first of all, acknowledge we're sinners. Then we are to acknowledge it's God who works salvation in our hearts. Finally, it is God who has called us to bring that gospel message so that the Holy Spirit may work on the hearts of others and set others apart for salvation. In all of this it's because God is the one who is at work in us through the power of his Holy Spirit. There is the full foundation. It's all about Christ and The Spirit that He has sent to carry the gospel message into our hearts and to carry that gospel message to others through us, so that He might create faith in their hearts, set them apart for obedience resulting in God being glorified and his church growing in our savior's name. Amen.