

Acts

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8 ESV)

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42 ESV)

The Sermon That Changed The World

September 18th, 2022

Acts 2:14-41

Rev. Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning! I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of Acts. We are jumping back into our series, and we're picking up where we left off in chapter 2, verse 14.

We've been on a long break, so let's take a moment to get our bearings again. Here in Acts 2, we are back in Jerusalem during the festival of Pentecost. Something like the sound of thunder has rattled the city and a crowd has gathered. As they make their way towards the source of the disruption, they're met by 120 followers of Jesus crying out the mighty works of God in languages that they have never learned. The whole scene must have left the crowd feeling disoriented and confused.

But then, breaking through the noise and the confusion, one of the Jesus' followers rose his voice and seized the attention of the assembly. In Acts 2:14 we read:

But Peter, standing 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. (Acts 2:14 ESV)

And with that, the crowd hushed to a silence as Peter preached the first Christian sermon¹.

¹ Yes, I am well aware that Jesus preached in his earthly ministry. I use the term "Christian" to refer to sermons that proclaimed the completed work of Christ. Peter's was the first sermon to point back to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and to explain its salvific effect.

There are some sermons that the Holy Spirit uses in a profound way to shape a generation. In the 18th century, Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon entitled “Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God” and mass revivals rocked America. More recently, John Piper’s sermon “Don’t Waste Your Life” set a fire for mission and world evangelism in my generation. Every denomination and every corner of Christendom can point to sermons that were instrumental in shaping their movement.

But none of those sermons were more instrumental or influential than the sermon before us this morning. Before any of those great sermons there was THE great sermon – the FIRST sermon ever preached by the New Testament church – the sermon that changed the world!

The Sermon That Changed The World

My job today is relatively straightforward – Peter has already drawn up the outline and landed the application – I’m simply going to read aloud this Pentecostal sermon, explain the Old Testament references, and then join with you in marvelling at the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We’re going to consider this sermon section by section. Look with me now to verses 14-21 where Peter proclaims:

1. The beginning of a new era

But Peter, standing 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. ¹⁵ For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶ But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ “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;

¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;

²⁰ the sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,

before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.
²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ (Acts 2:14-21 ESV)

Good preaching meets people where they’re at. Peter was a good preacher, and he could hear the questions and the objections that were making their way through the crowd.

“What is happening here? Are these people drunk?”

Those were legitimate questions. You and I would probably be wondering the same thing! Peter didn’t *dismiss* their questions. Instead, he *used* them to pull the congregation in. “This IS a curious episode, isn’t? I can see it in your eyes – you think that these folks are drunk! No – it’s 9 in the morning! They’re not drunk. It’s not that. But let me tell you just what it is.”

Before we go any further, I think it’s worth noting that mysterious signs and wonders in the New Testament are always followed by clear explanations. Sometimes, we can lose sight of this. There are all too many churches who have given full vent to wacky, unbiblical, distracting displays of nonsense and attributed it to the work of the Spirit of God. But the signs and wonders have always functioned as a *means to an end*. The signs prepare people to see and receive the truth. But if there is no explanation, then confusion reigns, and that is unacceptable because, as Paul explained to the Corinthians:

God is not a God of confusion but of peace. (1 Corinthians 14:33 ESV)

The crowd in Jerusalem was confused, but the confusion gave way to clarity. The sign was explained. And the explanation that Peter gave came from the book of Joel. If we’re going to understand this explanation, we’re going to need to do a quick survey of the book of Joel.

You can summarize Joel’s sermon into two points. The first was a message of judgement. The Israelites were living in sin, and they were about to experience the just consequences for their sin.

However, it wasn’t all bad news. Joel was granted to see *beyond* the judgement to the last days. In those last days God would pour out His Spirit on all peoples. Men, women, slaves, young, old –

ALL of God's people would be filled with the Spirit – ALL of God's people would be used by the Lord to prophesy. And those last days would be marked by a gracious opportunity for repentance.

²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.' (Acts 2:14-21 ESV)

This was point two of Joel's sermon: The days of judgement would give way to deliverance! The days of silence would give way to days when EVERYONE would be prophesying! That sign would mark the beginning of the LAST DAYS – the dawn of a NEW ERA.

That was Joel's message, and Peter is saying, "This scene that you are witnessing is THAT! We are now living in the last days! Don't you see? The NEW AGE has come! All of us – men, women, boys and girls are now FILLED with the Spirit of God! This isn't *drunkenness*! This is EVERYTHING YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR, so LEAN IN and LISTEN CLOSE!"

In the Old Covenant, prophecy was reserved for the prophets. But not anymore. Now we are ALL prophets! Each of us has been filled with the Spirit of God! Each of us has been enabled to teach the word of God about the Son of God. We are all disciple makers – each and every one of us. In this new era, we are ALL empowered by the Spirit and equipped for the task of proclaiming Jesus to the nations! Do you believe that!? There are no spectators in the church. A gracious opportunity for repentance has been extended to the world – and it is being extended *through us*!

So let us not be silent.

Having declared the beginning of a new era, Peter moves into point two of his sermon. Let's pick back up at verse 22, where Peter points us to:

2. The man who conquered death

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— ²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. ²⁵ 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;
²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
my flesh also will dwell in hope.
²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One see corruption.
²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

²⁹ “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ 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, ³¹ he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. ³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. (Acts 2:22-32 ESV)

When we think of Pentecost, our minds naturally gravitate to the tongues of fire and the thunder and the foreign languages, but at the heart of Pentecost is a testimony about Jesus! This, by the way, is exactly what anyone who sat under Jesus’ teaching would expect. He told his disciples:

But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, **he will bear witness about me.** (John 15:26 ESV)

The Holy Spirit didn’t come so that we would spend all our time talking about and fixating on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came to MAGNIFY THE SON! Which is why, at the center of Pentecost lies a passionate, Holy Spirit empowered sermon about Jesus! As Al Mohler explains:

Where you find the Spirit of God present, you do not find so much testimony *about* the Holy Spirit as you find a testimony about Christ. Where you find, therefore, a bold, biblical, urgent, accurate, enthusiastic, joyful, and life-changing testimony of Christ, you can rest assured that the Holy Spirit is vibrantly at work.²

That’s what we see here. Peter looks out at the crowd and declares, “Men of Israel, do I have your attention? Good! Because I need to speak with you about JESUS! You know him! You heard him preach with an authority that was unlike anything you had ever heard! You watched as he healed the sick and the lame! The blind received their sight, the deaf heard, the mute spoke, the dead came to life – you SAW! And yet:

² R. Albert Mohler Jr. *The Apostle’s Creed - Discovering Authentic Christianity in an Age of Counterfeits* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2019), 140-141.

this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, **you crucified** and killed by the hands of lawless men. (Acts 2:23 ESV)

As one old pastor notes:

In that statement we find the whole mystery of the Cross.³

The cross was always God's plan for redemption. He knew what it would cost to redeem His rebellious people – even before He ever spoke the world into existence. It wasn't a surprise – it was the preordained solution. God was sovereign over the cross.

And yet, we did this. Woe to us for crucifying the Lord. God is sovereign AND we are responsible. This is the mystery of the cross.

We could spend an entire sermon on that verse, but that would be to miss the point of Peter's sermon. He wouldn't have us camp here. Peter wants us to understand that the cross is not the end of the story! He wants us to understand that a man has conquered the grave! And he roots his announcement in another passage that would have been familiar to his listeners. He cites Psalm 16 – a Psalm in which David declares:

²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One see corruption. (Acts 2:27 ESV)

Now, before the resurrection, this Psalm was perplexing. It was perplexing because, while David had accomplished many impressive feats, *immortality* was not one of them. David died like every other king. He was buried. His body saw corruption. "Therefore," Peter says, "Psalm 16 was pointing forward to someone else! And that someone is Jesus! And that's why, three days after you crucified him, he broke the chains of death, and he walked out of his tomb! We witnessed this! We have seen the risen Christ! We touched the wounds in his hands. We shared meals with him. Ask any of us here, and we will all tell you the same thing – He has risen! Jesus is the Holy One of God – the one that David prophesied would come! Don't you see? This is THAT! And this is the most important announcement that you will ever hear in your LIFE!"

³ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts Of The Apostles* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1924), 64.

This leads to the resounding conclusion of Peter's sermon where he declares:

3. The King is on his throne

Let's pick back up at verse 33:

³³ 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. ³⁴ For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

“The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at my right hand,
³⁵ until I make your enemies your footstool.”

³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Acts 2:33-36 ESV)

Peter pulls together all the threads and concludes his argument with a quotation from Psalm 110. It is no surprise that Peter would use this Psalm – he had, after all, the benefit of having listened to Jesus preach on this passage. We see the way that Jesus handled this Psalm in Matthew 22:

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, ⁴² saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” ⁴³ He said to them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴ “The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at my right hand,
until I put your enemies under your feet”?”

⁴⁵ **If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?** ⁴⁶ And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions. (Matthew 22:41-45 ESV)

Do you see the point that Jesus is making? The Jews were expecting that the coming King – the Messiah – would be a son of David. And they were right...ish. He *would* be a son of David, but he would have to be MORE than that, because, in Psalm 110, David doesn't call him “son”; David calls him “LORD”!

Bringing it all together then, Peter says, “Look at the signs that you are witnessing! Do you know why the promise of Joel 2 is being fulfilled in your midst? Do you know why the people of God

are being filled with the Spirit of God? Do you know why Jesus – the Jesus who worked miracles in your midst – rose out of the grave and fulfilled Psalm 16? It’s because this Jesus is the KING! He’s the MESSIAH! He is LORD! And He is presently seated on the throne – just like David prophesied in Psalm 110! All of the prophecies and promises are being fulfilled before your eyes! The King is on his throne!”

But Peter doesn’t end his sermon there. He concludes with this terrifying indictment.

“And you crucified him.”

Before they could understand the good news, they needed to be confronted with the bad news.

“The King is on his throne! But you have proven yourselves to be rebels and enemies of God.”

That was the sermon – and it was the kind of sermon that demanded a response. Unsurprisingly, in the very next verse we read:

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?” (Acts 2:37 ESV)

As Peter preached Christ and him crucified, the crowd realized that they were guilty, and they were cut to the heart.

Can I tell you something this morning? We are just as guilty.

Romans 3:23 tells us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We have rejected Jesus. We have rejected the King who conquered the grave. We have rejected his authority. We have chosen our own way. We have sinned. We have hurt people. We have broken trust. We have lied, cheated, stolen, lusted, hated; the list goes on and on. “It was *my sin* that held him there.”

Those first listeners were asking the right question, and it’s the same one that we should be asking:

Brothers, What Shall We Do?

Thankfully, we can see the answer in verses 38-41:

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. ³⁹ 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.” ⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:38-41 ESV)

Are you a sinner? Are you living in rebellion to God? Are you on a road that leads to eternal death? What shall we do? Peter couldn't be clearer in his answer. First:

1. Repent

Repentance lays aside all the excuses. Repentance stops pointing fingers and deflecting blame. Repentance tells the truth. Repentance says, “I am a sinner. I am guilty.”

But repentance is more than that. Repentance turns words into actions! Saving faith doesn't simply *confess* sin – saving faith *turns away* from sin!

Saving faith starts with repentance. And this is only made possible by the Spirit of God. I can't simply muster up repentance. In my flesh – in my own strength – I would never acknowledge my sin, because that would mean acknowledging that I am not the Lord of my life! But, when the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see Jesus, repentance immediately follows. As Robert Murray McCheyne writes:

The first work of the Spirit on the natural heart is to *reprove the world of sin*. Although He is the Spirit of love, although a dove is His emblem, although He be compared to the soft wind and gentle dew; still His first work is to convince of sin.⁴

Where there is conviction of sin, you can rest assured that the Holy Spirit is working. And his first work is to give us a repentant heart.

That's step one. Repent. And then:

⁴ Robert Murray McCheyne as quoted in Warren Wiersbe, *Treasury of the World's Great Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1979), 382.

2. Be Baptized

3,000 Jews were baptized in the name of Jesus on Pentecost. It's hard for us to understand just how shocking that event would have been for those watching. Richard Longenecker notes:

The Jews generally looked on baptism as a rite only for Gentile converts (i.e., proselytes), not for one born a Jew. It symbolized the break with one's Gentile past and the washing away of all defilement. So when Jews accepted baptism in the name of Jesus on hearing Peter's message, it was traumatic and significant for them in a way we in our mildly christianized culture have difficulty understanding.⁵

In other words, the Jews saw baptism as something that “unclean outsiders” did in order to come into the community of faith. But on Pentecost, 3000 Jews went public and declared “WE are the unclean outsiders, and we need to be cleansed from our sin in Jesus’ name!”

This was a big deal!

It was public! There was no private, backyard pool. They would have done this in one of the public baths in Jerusalem and there would have been hostile witnesses watching on with suspicion and anger. Imagine if we held our baptism services at the Rec Centre during the free swim time.

It was also costly. They weren't silently slipping in and out of the water. They were walking out to meet one of the 12 disciples – men who were easily recognizable as followers of Jesus – and then they were being immersed into the water in Jesus’ name! Let me remind you that this was a mere seven weeks after this same Jesus had been crucified in this same city by these same people! Crowds had shouted with glee at his death! The men and women who took this step of faith went through with their baptism with the very real possibility that it would cost them their lives.

When we were in India, we visited the golden temple. The golden temple is for a Sikh what the Vatican is for a catholic. The temple was surrounded by an enormous pool, and pilgrims would lower themselves into the pool in order to wash away their sins. Can you imagine if I preached

⁵ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary (John - Acts)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 9, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 286.

Christ there in the golden temple and then proceeded to step into that pool and baptize 3,000 former Sikhs in the name of Jesus? That's roughly what's happening here in Acts 2!

Baptism is public! Baptism is costly! Baptism is an outward expression of an inward possession of faith. The people who were baptized that day were the people who "received the word." When a person is baptized, they are declaring: "I am a sinner who sins! I am guilty! But the Holy Spirit has enabled me to see that Jesus has died as my substitute. He has cleansed me from my sin! He has risen from the dead, and he has promised to deliver me from the grave. I believe him! So, I'm dying with him. His death is my death. I'm taking up my cross, and I'm following him wherever he leads, no matter the cost. Come hell or high water – come persecution or abandonment – come suffering or death – Jesus is LORD!"

Pentecost was the birthday of the New Testament church, and here on day 1, we find the church engaging with the assignment that God entrusted to us. Before he ascended, Jesus said:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20 ESV)

Baptism is the front door into the community of faith. It is step one of Christian discipleship. It is the place where faith goes public.

Let me ask you: Have you gone public with your faith?

Repent. Be Baptized. And then, Peter concludes:

3. Receive the gift of the Spirit

I don't want you to think that these events are disconnected – as if you could be baptized and then receive the Spirit months afterwards. Repentance, faith, and the receiving of the Spirit are all intertwined. Peter says:

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.** (Acts 2:38 ESV)

When you bow your knee to King Jesus, you receive His Spirit. You will never grow in godliness without the Holy Spirit. You will never desire the things that you should without the Holy Spirit. You will never overcome the hardness of your heart without the Holy Spirit. The life that God has called you to live is impossible without the help of His Spirit.

But thanks be to God, He has given us the Spirit! Every true believer – everyone who has confessed his sin and professed his faith in Jesus Christ – has received the Spirit!

Why did this sermon change the world? Because 3,000 people surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ and then went out into the world with the transforming power of the Spirit of God!

There are some people here this morning who are floundering in life. You've been trying to make changes, but you keep falling back down to where you started. You've been trying to do life in your own strength, but deep down you know that something is wrong. You try to numb that feeling, but it's there. There is a dissonance in your heart that won't resolve. There's a longing that you can't satisfy. There's a dread, but you can't put your finger on it.

On Pentecost, 3,000 people were feeling that same feeling. And the truth that you need to hear is the same truth that they needed to hear: You are a sinner who needs a Savior. The Savior has come, and his name is Jesus. Apart from him, you are condemned. Apart from him, you are guilty. Apart from him, you are dead in your sins.

So, what must you do?

Repent. Be baptized. And receive his Spirit.

This is a call to a public faith – a costly faith – a transforming faith. This is a call to the life that you were made for. And this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.