

Peter Preaches the Gospel

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[0 : 00] We're continuing our study of Peter's sermon preached in Acts chapter 2 on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. And I'd like to read to you the same passage that we had last week.

It's Acts chapter 2 and I want to read from verse 14 to verse 41. And you'll find this on page 910 in the big hardback Bibles if you have one.

So Acts of the Apostles chapter 2 beginning to read at verse 14. 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. For these men 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.

[1 : 05] 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.

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 pangs 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.

[2 : 15] 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 died 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 are all 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.

[3 : 23] 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. So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about 3,000 souls.

Well friends, what I want us to look at today is the latter end of this great event, and particularly to consider verses 37 to 41. This day of Pentecost, this first day of Pentecost, was of course in many ways a unique day.

It was the day when Christ poured out the Holy Spirit on his disciples. And it was the day when the good news about Jesus Christ began to be preached, in many languages, to many foreigners.

[4 : 48] And the remarkable fact is recorded here in verse 41, that 3,000 souls were added that day. In other words, 3,000 new followers of Christ were added to the church.

But, while there were unique aspects to this great day, there were also patterns set on that day, which continue to be repeated in every generation.

So, for example, Christ's disciples continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit. He's given to every disciple. The gospel continues to be preached all around the globe, and in many languages.

And new Christians continue to be added to the Lord's church in their thousands every day. Now, I want to look at verses 37 to 41, so as to see how it is that people become believers.

That's really our subject for today. How is it that people become Christian believers? Now, I trust that this will be of particular interest to anyone here today who is not yet a Christian, not yet a follower of Christ.

[5 : 48] But it's also, of course, for all of us, it's very good news for all of those who are already Christians, for us to look at these verses again, and by their light, to review our own lives, and to ask whether we're continuing as we started, and to ask if we, who are Christians, are still unspeakably glad to belong to Jesus Christ, and to have been salvaged by him from the grip of sin and unbelief.

Now, we saw last week how the main content, the main message of Peter's sermon, from verse 22 to verse 36, is simply Jesus.

So he begins in verse 22, Men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, etc., etc. So there's no airy-fairy philosophy here, there's no mystical experience being recounted, rather, it's about a man, this man, this unique, wonderful individual.

He is the content of the good news, always. And the good news is a series of facts about Jesus. In fact, there are four great facts, as Peter explains them here.

First, in verse 22, there are the miracles of Jesus. Peter says that God attested Jesus by enabling him to perform these mighty works and wonders.

[7 : 04] So God attested him, that is to say, declared him to be his unique son by these miracles. Then secondly, there's the crucifixion. Verse 23, God planned his crucifixion because if there was to be rescue and forgiveness available for sinful men and women, the cross could not be avoided.

Then third, verse 24, there's the resurrection. God raised Jesus from the dead, revealing thus the beginning of the new creation where death has no power. And then fourthly, there's the exaltation or the ascension of Jesus.

Verse 33, God exalted Jesus to his own right hand, thus vindicating him before the eyes of the universe. So it was God who attested Jesus by the miracles.

It was God who planned his crucifixion. It was God who raised him from the grave. And it was God who seated him in the position of highest eminence in heaven. And then Peter presses his point home in verse 36 when he says, 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 isn't that an appalling way for Peter to end his sermon? What I mean is this, that his hearers would have been appalled to hear that.

[8 : 28] These were the very people who about six weeks previously had cried out crucify him, crucify him and their wish had been granted. Although at one level it was God who planned Jesus' crucifixion, at another level it was an act of brutal barbarity on the part of the people of Jerusalem as well as Pontius Pilate.

And when we get to verses 36 and 37 the Holy Spirit is beginning to open the eyes and hearts of these people to understand that they, thinking they were acting rightly, had actually murdered God's Messiah, the true king.

And so they were appalled at what they'd done. Was it Good Friday or Bad Friday? Well, it was both. Yes, it was very much Good Friday in that God used the crucifixion for his wonderful saving purposes, but it was also Bad Friday in that Peter's hearers directed their murderous hostility towards the Son of God and they had their way.

And in verse 37 they realize what they've done and they are horrified because they realize that they have been hating not only God's Messiah but God himself.

This is a crime against humanity but it's also a crime against divinity. Now, on the whole the Bible is more interested in facts and history than it is in human feelings and human reactions.

[9 : 52] And that makes it all the more striking when human feelings are recorded for us. But they are recorded for us here in verse 37 which I'd like to read again. Now, when they heard this they were cut to the heart and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles brothers, what shall we do?

So the people suddenly see the enormity of their crime and it comes home to them. I had an uncle who was given a powerful catapult as a birthday present when he was about 11 or 12 years old.

And my uncle he was the oldest of three brothers and my father was the youngest but the three boys when this new catapult had arrived they went out into the garden one day and my uncle spotted in the distance a song thrush singing at the top of his voice at the top of a tree and he said to his two brothers you watch me get that bird and he picked up a stone and he fired the catapult it was about 50 yards away but he hit the bird killed it it fell out of the tree and fluttered to the ground and he walked across and picked up this little lifeless corpse and he said to his brothers what have I done?

He was overcome with remorse when he realized that he had slaughtered something lovely. That's a bit like that here in verse 37 brothers what shall we do?

We realize that we've slaughtered the very one whom God has made both Lord and Christ we've killed the Messiah is there any hope for us? That's the implication of the question is there any hope?

[11 : 26] Now friends you and I in the nature of the case were not personally present at the crucifixion of Jesus but don't we share the guilt of those men in the sense that every last one of us has not at least in the past has not wanted Jesus to be our Lord and Christ our Lord and King because we have wanted to follow a different King a King more to our own liking a King whose regime we imagined would be better for us and who is this better and more attractive and more desirable monarch?

Well it turns out to be ourselves me we've wanted self-rule so we've ousted the only true King the only King who has proper rights over us in favour of this other monarch self what a miserable exchange this is of a false monarch for the true one so although we were not personally at the cross nailing Jesus to it we have wanted to blot him out of our lives we've wanted to organise every part of our lives as if he didn't exist isn't this true?

that we've wanted to please ourselves and serve ourselves in the way we've spent our money the way we've organised our leisure time the way we've conducted ourselves at work and the way in which we've related to our families and friends in all these things hasn't our own pleasure and profit and advantage been the ruling motivation and the one whom God has made both Lord and Christ we have made a person of no account in spirit and mind we have stood with those who crucified him but people become Christians when they're cut to the heart at the thought of blotting the true King out of their lives and then they cry out brothers what shall we do and the good news comes now in Peter's reply look with me at the first word he uses in verse 38 Peter said to them repent and that means change your whole way of thinking around your whole way of thinking about God about Jesus and about yourself repentance is the profound change now at risk of oversimplifying it let me describe repentance repentance in two ways first it means saying sorry saying sorry to God for what we have done to Jesus now let me illustrate this if I may imagine you're a car driver and you're driving your car along the street one day and entirely through your own negligence your own fault you knock over a young man and kill him it's simply because you weren't paying attention your car rides up on the pavement this young pedestrian is walking along you knock him over and kill him now later on when you're in the hands of the police and legal proceedings begin against you you realize that as well as having to submit to legal process you also need to go to this young man's parents and see them face to face and apologize to them for killing their son now can you imagine doing that finding out their address going to their front door knocking at the door wondering how on earth you can put into words how desperately sorry you are for what you've done

I am so so sorry for killing your son that's what we need to say to God to go to him to kneel before him and to say to him I'm so sorry for rejecting Jesus for living without him for treating his right to rule me as something contemptible for blotting him out of my mind and life and heart but repentance means a great deal more than saying sorry it also means secondly changing around your whole way of thinking and living you could call it a Copernican revolution in the 16th century there was a leading astronomer and scientist called Copernicus I think he lived in Poland or Czechoslovakia but Copernicus put forward the theory that the earth went round the sun now that was revolutionary in the 16th century because everybody believed at that time that the sun went round the earth

Copernicus said the sun is the center of the system and the earth orbits it but everybody else said Copernicus you're daft everybody knows that planet earth is the center of the system and the sun goes round the earth but of course Copernicus was right even though his theory wasn't widely accepted for at least another century and that change from the old wrong theory to the new understanding became known as the Copernican revolution it signified a huge shift in understanding now repentance is very much like that before we repent we imagine that everything revolves around us we are at the center of our world and everything else exists to serve us and to bring us advantage and pleasure and if you think of God as the sun even the sun revolves around us in other words God's job in our pre-repentant state is to serve us and to look after us so when we pray it's so that he should do our pleasure and help us and particularly so that he should get us out of scrapes and tight corners we regard him rather as

[17 : 06] Aladdin regards the genie of the lamp you know how the genie springs up and says your wish is my command so we regard God like that and if God doesn't do our pleasures and get us out of tight corners and exempt us from suffering we dismiss him or we even say that we don't believe he exists at all but when we repent he is no longer the sun revolving around us and doing our bidding he then takes up his rightful position at the center of our lives and we then revolve around him to do his bidding and then we discover that this is the way of life that we were made for he made us to do this he made us that we should love him and honor him and serve him and make it our chief delight to do the things that please him when we repent we become his children his servants his friends his ambassadors and representatives in the world so repentance begins by saying sorry to God for rejecting Jesus as our king but it goes on to produce a radically reconstructed mind and life where God and the Lord Jesus are put in the center where they are honored loved delighted in talked about rejoiced in served and worshipped now it should be added that repentance can be in fact repentance normally is costly and this shouldn't surprise us after all when we've been accustomed for years perhaps even for decades to bending our energies and our time and our money into serving our own plans and pleasures it can be a shock to the system to start bending our time and money and strength into serving King Jesus but we can gladly bear that cost when we remember the cost that our new king has borne in order to rescue us when we remember the lengths that he went to culminating in that awful death think of the cross he would gladly have avoided being tormented by the forces of hell as he hung there he would gladly have avoided being forsaken by his father as he hung on the cross but he knew that our rescue could not be achieved unless he went through with it the price of our eternal life and our forgiveness and freedom was the cross so when we remember what he has done for us any sacrifices and changes that we might now have to make in the course of repenting are very small by comparison he loved us when he went to the cross and he loves us today so if repentance does prove costly to us it is a cost well worth paying now Peter the apostle says a bit more than repent so let's spend a final few minutes seeing what else he says as he answers this question brothers what shall we do

I'd like to note briefly two more things mentioned by Peter which are part and parcel of what it means to become a Christian the first is we receive a washing verse 38 repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins now baptism is a lovely picture of being washed clean the Bible's teaching is that our sin our rebellion against God and Jesus leaves us deeply stained profoundly unclean in God's sight but when we repent and we turn to Christ this deep polluting stain of sin is removed and we are forgiven completely forgiven to have our sin and rebellion forgiven by God is the great need the greatest need of anyone who is not yet a Christian I remember when I was a teenage smoker I developed nicotine stains on my fingers you know those yellowish orange stains that you get if you smoke quite heavily and when my parents were around

I used to keep my hands either in my pockets or behind my back because I knew I'd cop it if they discovered what I was spending my pocket money on one day I was on the train and I saw a big poster beside the railway and this poster pictured a pair of hands under a running tap of water the fingers of the right hand were deeply nicotine stained and the left hand was holding a stiff scrubbing brush and was trying to get the stain off the fingers of the right hand but underneath the caption read you can't scrub your lungs clean now as far as our relationship with God is concerned is the pollution indelible can it be scrubbed clean well thank God it is not indelible to the person who repents God is willing to forgive everything and baptism pictures God's head to toe total washing and then second we receive a new birth still in verse 38 and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when an individual repents and turns to Christ the Lord himself in the person of the Holy Spirit comes to take up residence in that individual's life and heart and the Bible describes this coming of the Holy Spirit as the new birth now the new birth doesn't mean that a person becomes different psychologically so for example if a person is very introverted and quiet and shy before becoming a Christian he'll still be introverted and quiet and shy afterwards and equally a very confident extrovert person will remain a confident extrovert person but the new birth produces a new orientation of life the Copernican revolution begins to take place the individual begins to see his life as revolving around God's pleasure and God's will so the born again person begins to love God and to pray to God to read the Bible with real interest and hunger and to ask many questions about how to live the Christian life and the New Testament also teaches that this new birth is but the first installment of belonging to the new creation receiving the Holy Spirit and being born again is like the first taste of heaven it's the guarantee that in the eternal future we shall be part of God's new order we shall be co-heirs with Christ of everything that God has prepared for his people to receive the Holy Spirit and the new birth is the first step on the glorious road to heaven and verse 39 makes the point that this promised

Holy Spirit is even for people who have felt a million miles off from God here's verse 39 for the promise the promise of the Holy Spirit is for you and for your children and for all who are far off everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself when Peter speaks of those who are far off he really means the Gentiles he's thinking of those who live at the very farthest off corners of the earth places like John O'Groats and Strathbungo even people who have felt way beyond the fringe beyond the pale beyond redemption beyond everything I wonder if that describes anybody here well Peter is saying that repentance and washing and new birth are available to those who have been furthest away but you see in verse 39 that those who are furthest away are the very ones that God calls to himself he calls to that far far away man or woman the person who feels

I could never come to God when I think of my past I've sinned too much I've been too far away from God for too long I must be lost forever that is the person that the Lord God calls to himself he says come to me it is God who calls don't resist that call don't trifle with God and what happens to people who turn to the Lord like this who repent well Peter tells us in verse 40 they save themselves from this crooked generation in other words they break ranks with godlessness and despair they escape the downward pull of the godless society that we live in and a new life begins verse 42 begins to paint the picture of the new life they become part of the Lord's church their bread and butter now is to listen to the teaching of the apostles to join in with the Christian fellowship and to pray with other Christians and to share their lives together all these things happen to those who listen to the gospel and respond to it even to those who feel furthest away from God and the Bible insists that this is the only road to reality it's the only road to God the only road to heaven friend will you step onto that road if you've never stepped on it before the road is being