

Peter's First Sermon

ACTS 2:14-41

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If you were here with us last week, then you might remember that we had a special song service along with several readings from the Bible, all focused on the GOOD NEWS. And we learned (according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15) that the gospel is the good news about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. He died for our sins according to the scriptures, he was buried, and he came back from the dead. We respond to the gospel in faith, reenacting the good news in our own lives. We are dead to sin, we then allow ourselves to be buried with Jesus in baptism (for the forgiveness of our sins), and when we come up out of the water, we begin the Christian life.

This morning I want us to keep this picture in mind as we look together at the very first gospel sermon, the first time that this good news was ever preached in a public assembly. The account is found in Acts 2 (p. 1701). We remember that after the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection, he told his disciples not to go home but to stay in Jerusalem. They stayed, and on the Day of Pentecost (50 days after the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection), the apostles were gathered together when they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in a number of languages, languages that were spoken by the thousands who had come together from all over the known world at that time. When they started speaking, immediately, several in the crowd started mocking, accusing the apostles of being drunk. And at this point, Peter speaks up. Notice with me, please, the first public explanation of the gospel - Acts 2:14-41,

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day [9 o'clock in the morning]; ¹⁶ but 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;***

***¹⁸ Even 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 — ²³ 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. ²⁴ But 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. ²⁵ For 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;*

²⁷ *Because 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. ³⁰ And 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, ³¹ he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. ³² This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. ³³ 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. ³⁴ For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says:*

*'The Lord said to my Lord,
"Sit at My right hand,*

³⁵ *Until I make Your enemies A footstool for Your feet.'"*

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

³⁷ *Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" ³⁸ Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized 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 your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." ⁴⁰ And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse*

generation!”⁴¹ So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

This morning, I want us to think about Peter’s words here, but before we get into the text of his lesson, I just want to make sure we are very clear as to who heard these words. I trust you have your Bibles open, so I would invite you to go back with me to verse 5, and notice, please, Acts 2:5, ***“Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven.”*** Those who heard these words, therefore, were devout God-fearing people, some of the most faithful people on the earth at that time, men and women who had traveled far away from home to celebrate the Day of Pentecost. What does this mean? It means that Peter was not speaking to “bad” people. This is not the general public. These are not idol-worshiping pagans. But instead, Peter is talking to a large group of those who were already trying to honor God in their lives. These are God-fearing people. I just want us to keep this in mind as we study. If you are here this morning or if you are listening to or reading this lesson online, please remember: These words were first spoken to decent people, trying to do the right thing, who went into this assembly probably assuming that they were okay with God. The point is: Let us not tune Peter out here, assuming that he is talking to somebody else. In reality, Peter is talking to people like most of us here this morning. So, with this as background, then, I want us to jump in and make four observations about Peter’s sermon here.

I. As we look at the text itself, as we look at Peter’s words, we notice first of all that Peter’s lesson was BASED ON THE WORD OF GOD.

Peter’s sermon takes up 22 verses, and out of those 22 verses, 13 of them contain direct quotes from the Old Testament. Of the remaining 9 verses, most of them simply explain and apply the other 13! Peter, then, based his message on the word of God. He starts by quoting a chunk of verses from the Old Testament book of Joel. Most of you can probably see the quote indented and set aside almost like poetry in verses 17-21. Peter quoted from Joel, word-for-word. Scripture is important. And the point in quoting from Joel is to show that what was happening here on the Day of Pentecost is the fulfillment of prophecy, a prophecy that had been made more than 800 years earlier. Peter is saying: Those of us standing up here are not drunk; but instead, what you are witnessing is God’s fulfillment of those signs and wonders predicted by Joel so many years earlier.

Peter continues basing his lesson on scripture by quoting several verses from Psalm 16, a reference to the Lord’s resurrection. He moves along and quotes from Psalm 132 and Psalm 110, both of these being quotes from King David concerning the future arrival of one of King David’s descendants. From beginning to end, therefore, Peter bases his comments here on the written word of God.

And this is the first observation I’d like for us to think about this morning. Whether we’re talking about a sermon, a Bible class, or just explaining God to a friend or neighbor, there is no better place to go than God’s word! The word of God means everything to us. As Paul would go on to write later in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, ***“All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”*** The word of God has the power to change people’s lives. It wasn’t really Peter, but it was the Bible that convinced 3000 people to change their hearts and be immersed in water for the forgiveness of their sins. Peter’s thoughts here are based on the word of God, just as our thoughts should be today as well. Whether we are speaking to a crowd of thousands or whether we are teaching a friend one-on-one, the Bible is a powerful tool.

II. **There is a second observation I'd like to make based on what we've read this morning, and that is: Not only was Peter's lesson based on scripture, but the lesson itself was FOCUSED ON JESUS CHRIST.**

Peter preached Jesus! He preached the Lord's life, death, and resurrection. In verse 22, Peter introduces the crowd to ***"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."*** Peter here was saying: Think back to what you know about this man – you know that he did some amazing things, miracles that cannot be explained – changing water into wine, healing the sick, raising the dead, feeding thousands with just a bit of bread and a few small fish. Peter, then, was presenting the evidence.

In verse 23, he moves along to the Lord's death – he died according to the ***"predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God."*** In other words, the Lord's death was not an accident, but he died for a reason. What Peter is saying here is that Jesus died in our place, that Jesus offered his life as a sacrifice. The devout men and women in the audience would have picked up on this immediately. Most of them were in Jerusalem to offer various sacrifices at the temple. And so Peter was saying: Jesus died as a sacrifice, the perfect Lamb of God.

Also in verse 23, we have the first hint that the people in the audience were those who were actually responsible for the Lord's death, ***"...you nailed [Him] to a cross by the hands of Godless men and put Him to death."*** Yes, the Romans drove the nails, but all of you are responsible. Jesus died as a substitute for all people who have ever sinned, and so by sinning, all are responsible. Some might say, "But I don't want that responsibility!" The only alternative, though, is that we pay our OWN way, that we live a perfect life ourselves. However, once we sin, we can no longer afford the sacrifice. And so we are left with either paying for our own sins with an eternity away from God, or we can accept the Lord's sacrifice on our behalf.

Then, in verse 24, we have a reference to the resurrection, ***"But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death."*** The resurrection serves as God's stamp of approval we might say, proving that the sacrifice for sins has been accepted.

Peter then goes on to make the argument from David that Jesus is the one referred to in those passages. David is dead and buried. If they wanted to, they could have dug up King David's bones. And so when David speaks of somebody's body not undergoing decay, he must have been talking of somebody other than himself. Peter makes the case that the someone else is Jesus. The body of Jesus did not suffer decay; instead, Jesus was brought back from the dead. As Peter says in verse 32, ***"This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses."***

And then, in the last few verses of Peter's sermon, Peter closes with the argument from scripture that David's Lord would make his Lord's enemies a footstool for his Lord's feet. The idea there is that David's Lord would dominate. And so from beginning to end, this lesson is not just based on the word of God, but it is focused on Jesus Christ.

Certainly we think of what Paul would go on to write several years later in 1 Corinthians 2:1-2, ***"And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."*** In the same way, Peter did not preach about himself, but he preached the Lord Jesus Christ. And once again, Peter serves as an example for us today. Thinking about Peter's emphasis here, I would like to ask a question for us to think about this morning, and the question is: Over the past week, how many times have we

mentioned the name of Jesus to someone? The heart of the good news is Jesus, that Jesus died, he was buried, and he was raised from the dead, and for the good news to be spread, the name of Jesus must be spoken – not as a profanity, but with the utmost of respect. As Peter would say just two chapters later (in Acts 4:12), ***“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”*** Peter’s first sermon focused on Jesus. In light of what Peter did here, I would challenge everyone here this morning to at least mention the name of Jesus to at least one person who is currently outside of Christ at some point during the next seven days. Do you think we can do that? Peter’s lesson focused on Jesus, and our words should focus on the Lord as well.

III. As we look back at Peter’s first sermon in Acts 2, we notice something else in verses 36-37 as we find that Peter’s words were VERY PERSONAL – his words were DIRECT AND CONVICTING.

And really, we see this throughout the sermon, from the opening words (in verse 14), all the way to the very end. If I counted correctly, Peter refers to these people as ***“you”*** at least 20 times in this short lesson. He was not speaking in generalities, but he was speaking to ***“you,”*** to all of those who were listening. And the words are quite pointed and direct. We come to the climax in verse 36, ***“Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom YOU crucified.”*** You murdered the Son of God! This was not about unbelievers out there in the world somewhere, but this was personal – direct and to the point. In the tradition of the prophet Nathan, this is one of those ***“You are the man!”*** moments. And so we find here that in response to Peter’s accusation, the people were ***“pierced to the heart,”*** they were overcome with grief, even terror. They had murdered the Son of God!

For hundreds of years, the Jewish people had dreamed of the coming Messiah. They sang about him. They prayed that they would see the Lord in their lifetime. They longed for that day to come. They imagined what it would be like to see the Messiah come in their lifetime. Oh, they would welcome him. They would bow down and worship him. They would crown him. Peter says, though: You did NOT honor him, but you nailed him to a cross, the most horrific death that anyone could even possibly imagine. This is a theme in Peter’s preaching. In Acts 3, speaking to the religious leaders, Peter refers to Jesus as ***“...the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate...you disowned the Holy and Righteous One...you put to death the Prince of Life.”***

To me, it is interesting that Peter is the one speaking these words. Peter knew something about guilt, didn’t he? Peter knew what it meant to weep bitterly over sin. Just a few weeks earlier, Peter had quite forcefully denied even knowing the Lord. And now Peter is delivering the very first gospel sermon – a sermon based on the word of God, a sermon focused on Jesus, and a sermon that is very direct and personal in addressing sin and guilt: You have murdered the Son of God. And in response, the people interrupt with that question (in verse 37), ***“Brethren, what shall we do?”***

IV. This brings us to our final observation this morning as we notice that Peter ends with a DIRECT APPLICATION, A CALL FOR ACTION.

As soon as these people understand what they had done, they want to do something about it. What do we do? How do we make this guilt go away? There is something the people need to do in response, and Peter makes it very clear. The answer is not confusing. Peter doesn’t use any complicated words. I love Hugo McCord’s translation of this verse, ***“Peter said to them, ‘Change your hearts, and let each one of you be immersed in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins might be forgiven, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’*** Very clear and direct. Peter did not leave them wondering what to do, but Peter gave them

the answer. What do we do? **“Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins.”** The word **“repent”** refers to having a change of heart, a change of heart that results in a change in the way we live. The word **“baptize”** refers to dipping something. The word refers to immersion. That is why we practice immersion here.

Some of you know that I will occasionally use the *Catholic Encyclopedia* as a reference. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* is available online and is an officially recognized document produced by the Catholic Church. I wanted to print out their article on baptism and bring it with me, but it is 28 pages long. So what I did was to copy the section on the physical act of baptism, and I have put it on the wall up here. They explain in the first paragraph that baptism is a “washing.” They go on to explain in the second paragraph that the Catholic Church currently accepts three forms of baptism – immersion, pouring, and sprinkling. But I want us to notice what they say in the third paragraph about the history of the act of baptism:

The most ancient form usually employed was unquestionably immersion. This is not only evident from the writings of the Fathers and the early rituals of both the Latin and Oriental Churches, but it can also be gathered from the Epistles of St. Paul, who speaks of baptism as a bath (Ephesians 5:26; Romans 6:4; Titus 3:5). In the Latin Church [that is, churches who follow the Pope in Rome], immersion seems to have prevailed until the twelfth century. After that time it is found in some places even as late as the sixteenth century. Infusion and aspersion [pouring and sprinkling], however, were growing common in the thirteenth century and gradually prevailed in the Western Church.

I hope you see what happened here. This is not me saying this. This is their own material. Immersion was the accepted practice of the church for the first twelve hundred years! They are saying: Baptism was immersion for the first 1200 years...until we changed it, until we changed it to pouring or sprinkling. And we agree with their assessment here. From the beginning, people were immersed in water for the forgiveness of their sins.

Going back to Peter’s sermon: Forgiveness is available, then, to all people who will change their hearts and allow themselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of their sins. This was true in 30 AD when these words were first spoken, and it is still true today. And I would emphasize: Peter was not just sharing information. This wasn’t just a lecture. But this was something these people needed to do. And the fact that they could do something to remove this guilt is the best news they had ever heard – the good news. They had murdered God’s only Son, but forgiveness was available if they would only change their hearts and allow themselves to be immersed, buried with Christ in baptism.

Some have asked: What did they need to repent of? Well, I find it interesting that Peter did not stop by telling them to repent. Instead, once he could tell that their hearts were touched by the message of Jesus, he kept on going. It is easy to overlook verse 40, **“And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation!’”** What sins did Peter warn about here? I don’t know. But I do know what sins we need to warn about today. As most of you know, I have passed out some cards and I also sent out an email last night, asking for your input: What are some of the most widespread sins in the world today? I want to read your answers with the idea that these are the sins Peter would warn about if he were here with us today:

- Materialism
- Selfishness
- Homosexuality

- Adultery
- Murder
- Selfishness
- Greed
- Adultery
- Greed
- Covetousness
- Divorce
- Lying
- Violence
- Theft
- Turning away from God
- Lack of faith
- Homosexuality
- Gossip
- Drunkenness
- Anger
- Murder
- Oppression
- Murder
- Working away from God because it is fun/easy
- Language – inappropriate types of communication, destructive and degrading
- Self – lack of self control, self-indulgence, being self-centered to the point you are the only thing that matters
- Lying, hiding something or lying about something a person either has or has not done
- Whining
- Divorce
- Gossip
- Lust
- Pornography
- Gossiping
- Being unkind
- Gossip
- Deceitfulness
- Lying
- Bragging
- Lying
- Fornication (premarital sex)
- Gossip
- Slander
- Adultery – sexual affairs, mate swapping
- Homosexuality and flaunting it
- Widespread use of foul language
- Greed
- Envy

- Lying
- Selfishness
- Judging, judgmentalism
- Jealousy
- Love of money and self
- Murder
- Violence

“...with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation!’” All of these sins can be forgiven if we will repent and allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism. These are the sins Peter would warn about if he were here with us today.

Conclusion:

As we close, there are two ways Peter’s lesson can apply to us today. First of all, for those of us who are already Christians, we can use this as a pattern – not just for preachers, but for all of us – whether we are preaching to thousands or talking one-on-one with a friend. We’ve noted several times how simple Peter’s words are here – brief and to the point. I highlighted Peter’s words in my computer last week and did a quick word count – less than 700 words! Peter’s entire lesson takes less than five minutes to read. There is nothing complicated here, but the lesson is direct and quite easy to understand. So I want us to keep this in mind. As we explain the good news to the people around us, the message itself is simple – based on scripture, focused on Jesus, very personal, and calling for action.

But the second application of Peter’s sermon is for those of you here this morning who have not yet truly obeyed the gospel. If you were sprinkled as a baby and later confirmed, that is not what Peter is calling for here. If you prayed some kind of prayer to be saved and were baptized at some point months or years later to join a church, that is not what Peter is calling for here. What Peter is calling for is for all people to turn away from sin and to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins.

If you have any questions, please let us know. Give us a call during the week. We would love to study God’s word one-on-one. We even have a series of Bible study courses that can be done at your own pace through the mail at no charge whatsoever – we even pay the postage. Give me your address, and we will send you the first lesson. I promise that I will not stop by your house to harass you. Our mission as a congregation is to get Peter’s message out to the world. So, if you have any questions, let us know. But, if you are ready to obey the gospel right now – if you want to do this morning what they did 2000 years ago, we would love to help you with that. The church that began on the first Pentecost after the Lord’s resurrection is still in existence today, and if we follow Peter’s instructions, the Lord will add us to his church, just as he did with those who obeyed at the beginning. We would invite you to let us know about your decision as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com