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The First Christian Sermon

Acts 2:14-40

Intro: Last time, we looked at the arrival of the Holy Spirit on the assembled disciples at the beginning of Acts 2. Though we noted that the obvious result of the Spirit's filling of the disciples was their miraculous ability to speak in other tongues, this does little to inform us as to what the Holy Spirit desires to teach us about Himself in the passage. The focus of the passage is on the symbols or images the Spirit employed to present Himself to the disciples. He appeared as a rushing, mighty wind and as tongues of fire.

The image of the wind relates to the creative, dynamic, life-giving breath of God while the image of the tongues of fire points to the reality of God's presence with His people but with one major difference. Under the Old covenant, the Holy Spirit rested on God's people more as a nation. Under the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit now rests upon God's people individually – the tongues of fire sat upon each of them. Fire is a source of light and the Spirit's arrival brought spiritual illumination to the disciples and enabled them to enlighten others with the truth of the Gospel. The image of fire also points to the necessity of purification. Just as a refiner uses fire to purify gold, so the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives burns away that which is temporary, leaving only what will last – that which is eternal.

So, we've considered what the Spirit has revealed about Himself and we can see what effect His arrival had on the disciples but how did the public respond to it? Remember, although this was a spiritual event, it was also physically real; although it could not be touched, it was still tangible – the people outside the upper room heard the Spirit's arrival and flooded out into the temple courtyards to see what was going on. There, they began to hear the disciples speaking in their own languages about the wonderful works of God. What was their initial response? They were all amazed but while some honestly inquired as to what was happening, other mocked the disciples and the event (13).

This brings us to our text today: Peter's great sermon, the first Christian sermon of the new church age. Peter's sermon was great and it produced tremendous results – not because Peter was such a great speaker but

because God blessed this sermon: He blessed Peter with the power of the Holy Spirit which enabled him to deliver this impromptu message and He blessed the audience with the grace to hear and the faith to believe the truth. It's easy to get excited about the miracle of speaking in tongues and desire to see it duplicated today. It would be nice to see a miracle and this was certainly an important one on that day but speaking in tongues was not the most important thing that happened that day. The important thing was that those who were filled with the Holy Spirit began to be witnesses of Jesus Christ, as He told them they would be (1:8).

Our text today focuses on Peter's Pentecost sermon. This is a model sermon but not just because it was the first sermon of the Christian era or that it was preached by the most prominent of the apostles or because it resulted in a great blessing of salvations. It did and was all of that, sure; but it's a model sermon for us today because it sets down principles that should govern our own witnessing efforts. Peter's sermon is a model for us because it was centered on the Bible, it was centered on Jesus and it was delivered in both a fearless and reasonable manner.

14-16 – When the Holy Spirit filled the disciples, they all began to speak in other tongues and they all began to declare the wonderful works of God in those other tongues. They were praising God together in such a way that the people who were in the temple that day, from all different parts of the Roman Empire, could understand what they were saying in their own native language. But something happened to change all that. Peter, as the representative of the entire group of apostles, stood up to inform the crowd of what they were experiencing – Peter stood up to preach!

We should also note that when Peter began to preach, the speaking in tongues ceased. It's quite obvious that the ability to speak in tongues was a miracle wrought by the Holy Spirit. It's equally obvious that the Holy Spirit would now begin to work through Peter's preaching to bring a great harvest of souls into the kingdom of God. It would be unconscionable that the Holy Spirit would work against Himself by allowing the speaking of tongues to continue unabated. In light of this, it should be obvious which of these works the Holy Spirit considered the most important.

Peter stood up initially to counter the false and dismissive accusations of the mockers. They tried to dismiss the whole thing by accusing the disciples of

being drunk. This doesn't mean the disciples were acting like they were drunk. When a person is drunk, they lose control of their normal mental and physical functions. The disciples didn't experience this while they were filled with the Spirit and they certainly didn't appear to be intoxicated to others. On the contrary, one of the fruits of the Spirit is "self-control" not the loss of it. Furthermore, the contemporary concept of being "drunk in the Spirit" has no foundation in Scripture whatsoever. In fact, this whole concept actually stems from the comments of the mockers on the Day of Pentecost and has no basis in reality.

So, Peter begins to counter the false accusations of the mockers and he does this by sharing scripture. In the midst of this great outpouring of the Spirit, in the midst of the signs and wonders and speaking in tongues, in the midst of the amazement of the crowd, what does Peter do? In essence, what Peter says is, "Let's have a Bible study! Let's see what the prophet Joel had to say about this?" Before He left, Jesus had told the disciples that "when the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth" (Jn 16:13). The highest source of truth is God's Word so Peter's focus on God's Word didn't quench the move of the Spirit, it actually fulfilled it! All the signs and wonders and speaking in tongues were all just preparation for this work of the spirit through the Word of God.

Sadly today, some people set the Word of God against the work of the Spirit. They think that if the Spirit is "moving" in the worship service then its okay, even preferable, if this supercedes the sermon. The sad thing is, its probably true! This speaks to the weak and unspiritual teaching that often comes out of such pulpits. In our modern church environment, if a "move of the Spirit" fails to lead to or resolve into a serious engagement of the Scriptures, one that results in a better or clearer understanding of Jesus Christ and His purpose for our lives, then it's probably not a move of the Holy Spirit. Oh, it may be the move of a spirit, just not the Holy Spirit.

17-21- Peter's sermon was great because it was centered on the Bible. Now, Peter only had the OT but not only did he have it, he knew it too! On one hand, we could say that this remarkable sermon had no preparation behind it. Peter didn't wake up that morning knowing he would preach to thousands or knowing that thousands would embrace Jesus as their savior through his preaching. This sermon was given spontaneously – without notes. On the other hand, we could say that this sermon was well prepared.

It was drawn from Peter's previous life with God and relationship with Jesus. It's likely that Peter and the rest of the disciples had been studying the OT thoroughly since the ascension and probably even before that. Jesus started them on this track. He had instructed the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus, starting with Moses and all the prophets (OT), things concerning Himself.

Peter's sermon doesn't have many points but it does have a few scripture text, 3 actually, and he expounds on each of them. The first is from the Book of Joel. Joel's prophecy occurred during a time of great disaster in Israel. A plague of locust had destroyed every green thing in the land and in an agrarian society – this was a matter of life and death for most people. Joel speaks about this but instead of trying to encourage the people, he basically tells them, "Get ready – things are going to get worse!" But, in the middle of this doom and gloom, Joel mentions a blessing that will come in the latter days. He says God's going to restore the years the locusts had eaten. There will be a time when God blesses the people with satisfaction. Then Joel begins to speak words of true comfort when he quotes God as saying, "I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh."

Clearly, Peter referred to this text as it was the most obvious OT prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Of course, what happened on Pentecost was a near fulfillment of this promise while the final or ultimate fulfillment will occur in the last days. With wonderful clarity and urgency, Peter linked this passage in Joel to what everyone in Jerusalem was seeing – namely, the clear, powerful proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone in their own tongue. Peter's reference to Joel explained what was happening but it didn't explain why it was happening.

22-24- This sermon was also great because it centered on Jesus; the natural consequence of being Bible centered. The Bible is all about Jesus so a sermon centered on the Bible will also be centered on Jesus Christ. But, this was Pentecost! The Holy Spirit had just come upon the disciples, and Peter had begun his sermon with a great OT quote dealing with the Holy Spirit. You would expect Peter to continue teaching on the doctrine of the Third Person of the Trinity, showing who the Holy Spirit is and how He operates. But, Peter doesn't do that. He shifts gears and begins to speak on the life and work of Jesus. Everything before this was introduction. Now it's time for the essential message!

This is not by accident, it's by design. Jesus had told the disciples, in His final discourse before He was arrested, that when the Holy Spirit arrived, "He will testify of Me" (Jn 15:26). A little later He told them that the Holy Spirit would bring honor to Him because He would "take of what is Mine and declare it to you" (Jn 16:14). The Holy Spirit came upon the disciples; Peter began to preach; and because the Holy Spirit was guiding, Peter preached about Jesus. He begins preaching about Jesus in vs22 and continues to nearly the end of his sermon. What is strange is the nowhere in his sermon does Peter mention the specific teachings of Jesus.

Clearly, the teachings of Jesus are important. That's why we have the Gospels; His teachings are recorded for our benefit. But here Peter is preaching to people who were not believers in Jesus Christ; people who were dead in their sins apart from the work of the Holy Spirit; and he knew he couldn't preach successfully to spiritually dead people by telling them to, "Do what Jesus tells you." Some of them likely had crucified Jesus because they didn't like what He had taught. So Peter doesn't bother to tell them what Jesus said; instead, he declares what Jesus did for them. He manages to squeeze in doctrines concerning the ministry of Jesus, His death, burial, resurrection and ascension as well as His present ministry in heaven for believers.

Peter is not shy in his presentation. While he declares that Jesus' death was part of God's plan, clearly known and eternally determined, he also says they are still responsible for their rejection and execution of Jesus, the actions of their lawless hands. He didn't hesitate to accuse them of crucifying Jesus. His first concern was not to please his audience but to tell the truth and this was a truth they needed to hear! But even though their actions led to His death, Jesus could not remain bound by death. It was impossible for Jesus to remain a victim of the sin and hatred of man – he would certainly triumph over that! The word Peter used for pains in vs24 is actually referring to birth pangs. It was no more possible for the Chosen One of God to remain in the grip of death than a pregnant woman can retain a child in her body indefinitely. It can't happen and Peter returns to Scripture to prove his point (Ps 16:8-11).

25-31- Peter points out that this Psalm can't be speaking of it's human author, David. He was dead and remains buried. If anyone doubted that,

they could go to his tomb and dig up his bones. Thus, David must've been speaking as a prophet, looking ahead to the Messiah who, being God and not a mere man like David, would not see decay. He would die, suffering for the sin of the world, but His body would be preserved and be raised incorruptible.

32-36- Jesus of Nazareth, the man they all knew was the one who fulfilled this prophetic Psalm. How did Peter know this? He had seen the resurrected Jesus with his own eyes! And not only has He been resurrected, but He has also ascended back into heaven and is exalted at the right hand of the Father. Peter then affirms that what the crowd is witnessing is nothing other than the work of this risen and ascended Jesus who has poured out His Spirit upon His church. To finally drive his point home, Peter references one more scripture: **Ps 110:1**.

This verse has the distinction of being the most quoted OT passage in the NT. It is directly quoted or indirectly reference at least 25 - 30 times. It's easy to see why this verse was so important. In Hebrew the first word for Lord is Jehovah - the one great God of Israel. The second Lord is Adonai - an individual greater than the speaker. So here David cites a word of God in which God (Jehovah) tells another person, One greater than David, being David's Lord, to sit at His right hand until He (Jehovah) makes His enemies a footstool for His feet. This other person could be no one other than a divine Messiah. In conclusion, Peter declares this passage refers to Jesus and only to Him.

37-40- Another thing we should notice about Peter's sermon is that it was fearless. It was preached in Jerusalem: the same city Jesus was crucified in. It was preached to some of the very people who had cried out for Jesus to be crucified. It was preached in the temple, no doubt attended by the very same religious leaders who had plotted to kill Jesus. Peter and the other disciples had cause to be afraid but they weren't. Why? They weren't afraid because the risen Lord was with them. The Jesus they served was not just a man who had been crucified. He was also the Son of God who had been raised from the dead, who had ascended back into heaven, and was now seated at the right hand of the Father, directing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the gospel.

These men weren't afraid because they had no time for that. They boldly

stood and declared the truth and they expected results. They knew that this was what the work of Jesus was leading up to all along. He had died for sin. Now it was their job to preach the gospel. They expected the Holy Spirit to bless their preaching, and the Holy Spirit did just that, in a big way.

Not only was this sermon fearless – it was also reasonable. Peter challenged the people to think reasonably. They knew about Jesus – His life, ministry and miracles. They knew this was God’s way of authenticating Him. How could He have done miracles if God hadn’t been with Him? They knew how their leaders arranged for His execution. They saw how He was killed. Now they also knew that He had risen from the dead – there were plenty of eye-witnesses and their combined testimonies couldn’t be denied. The resurrection and ascension proved that God had accepted Jesus and had rejected their rejection of Him. It’s the same Jesus who has poured out the Holy Spirit, who’s power they could now see and witness for themselves.

Peter’s conclusion was also reasonable: if this Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, as Scripture clearly indicates, then you have killed your long-awaited Messiah! There is nothing else that you can do except repent of this great sin, believe on Jesus Christ as not just your Messiah but as your Savior; be baptized in His name and begin to identify yourself with Him, the One who loved you and gave Himself for you.

Was his audience filled with reasonable people? Yes! The Holy Spirit brought the truth home to their hearts. Luke says they were “cut to the heart” and 3000 believed, were baptized and were added to the church on that very day.

Maybe you’re listening today and are not sure where you stand with Jesus. Maybe you’re not sure if you are honestly inquisitive or just a mocker. The offer hasn’t changed in all these years. Jesus bore the full wrath of God on the cross to pay for your sin but you don’t get the benefit of that unless you do as these men did: repent of your sin and accept Christ as your Savior. It’s the only reasonable response to the Gospel – won’t you make that response today? 😊