

The First Sermon

Acts 2:13-28

Introduction

In our last discussion, we discovered some wonderful truths behind the events of the last Pentecost.

It was a fulfillment of the Lord's own promise, found in Acts, chapter 1, verse 8,

... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

That is exactly what is taking place in Acts, chapter 2. The Pentecost of Acts, chapter 2, begins with the descent of the Holy Spirit. The baptism and electrifying supernatural signs of the Holy Spirit's coming were all part of God's plan for the creation of the New Testament Church.

Then, the preaching of the power of God through languages previously unlearned by the speakers was further proof that this was indeed the last Pentecost. It was the last of the old and the beginning of the new.

We also, in our last discussion, looked at the response of the audience. There were three responses that included:

- amazement and confusion, as we are told in verse 12 of Acts, chapter 2,
And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"
- ridicule, or rejection, as we read in verse 13,
But others were mocking and saying, "They are full of sweet wine."

That reaction became the introduction to Peter, who is standing toward the front of Solomon's porch where the disciples are gathered with the multitudes below and around them. He begins to preach the very first sermon of the New Testament church.

Now first sermons are traumatic experiences. Perhaps you can remember your first public speaking experience. It may have been in speech class or a personal testimony to a group of college students. For many, it is a nerve wracking experience.

I can remember as a teenager, preaching my first sermon during the Teenagers Sunday Night Live. That was when the teens of the church took the evening service hostage and left no survivors. I remember being terrified as I preached on Nehemiah building the walls of Jerusalem. I also remember the audience being especially kind to me afterward.

And, by the way, your desire to learn and study is the greatest compliment you can pay me or anyone else who fills this pulpit. I have had remarks from guest speakers and visitors about how many Bibles are opened and the wonderful rapport. It makes a difference my friends, and I commend you!

This was not so for Robert Strand of Grand Junction, Colorado. In the middle of a service and just before the sermon, one lady in the congregation remembered she had forgotten to turn off the oven at home. Hurriedly she scribbled a note and passed it to the usher to give to her husband who was in the choir. Unfortunately, the usher misunderstood and took it to the pulpit, just as Pastor began to preach. He stopped, unfolded the note, and read aloud, "Please go home and turn off the gas."

An audience, in many ways, has an affect upon the preacher. I can remember in college, preaching at a little chapel every Wednesday night, to about six or seven faithful, country people. The same man slept through every sermon I ever preached. It became my passion to try and preach him awake. Nothing worked, until I used an illustration from World War II. That man taught me the effectiveness of an illustration and I never forgot it. In fact, I am using it right now on you.

The truth is, preaching the truth of Holy Scripture is a wonderful and holy calling. It is the priority of the New Testament mandate, in Matthew, chapter 28, verses 19 and 20, to,

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I commanded you . . .

So, throughout the book of Acts, this new form of communication called preaching, will be accomplished over and over again. For example:

- Acts, chapter 4, verse 2,
. . . they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.
- Acts, chapter 5, verse 42,
. . . they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.
- Acts, chapter 8, verse 4,
. . . those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.

Their ministry echoed the ministry of Jesus Himself. He began His ministry, as we read in Matthew, chapter 4, verse 17,

. . . Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Mark writes, in chapter 1, verse 14, that,

Jesus came . . . preaching the gospel of God

The apostle Paul picks up the banner and states, in I Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 17,

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.

History is filled with the blessing of God following on the heels of clear and bold preaching. The Reformation awakened the centrality of

preaching. Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, and Zwingli thundered the truth without apology.

One of the results of the Protestant Reformation in fact, was that churches were re-designed so that the pulpit occupied the primary place on the platform. This denoted the centrality of preaching the scriptures to the New Testament church’s mission.

In our land today, at the very time our own generation is in need of clear preaching and teaching of the word, biblical preaching is losing its priority in the church.

Let me read the advertisement of one very large “mega” church.

There is no fire and brimstone here. No Bible-thumping. Just practical, witty messages. Our services have an informal feeling. You won’t hear people threatened with hell or referred to as sinners. The goal is to make them feel welcome. As with all clergymen, our pastor’s answer is God – but he slips God in at the end, and even then doesn’t get heavy. He never uses the H-word. Call it Lite Gospel. It has the same salvation as the Old Time Religion, but with a third less guilt.

John MacArthur wrote these insightful words,

In an effort to appeal to people’s interest, the church today emphasizes a great many different programs, methods, and approaches. Not all of these things may be harmful. Some in their proper place, may even be helpful. But what has too often been sacrificed in the flurry of activities and programs is the priority of preaching.

I occasionally receive invitations in the mail to other churches in our county. While I know little or nothing about their doctrine, I have read everything from “the most exciting church in town,” to one flyer that asked, “When’s the last time you had fun in church?” The one that really got to me was the church advertisement that promised a “donut recess”. Now that was tempting!

Rarely do you read the “p” word – preaching, or the “e” word – exposition. In fact, so the marketing strategists tell church leaders, you do not want to intimidate or convict anyone. They say that when an unbeliever can come in to your church and feel perfectly comfortable and find everything enjoyable and interesting, you have “arrived” and can now be

called a “user friendly church”. If you want to build a church, do not deliver verdicts; do not be intolerant, you will never pack ‘em in that way. Get with the times!

So, just what kind of sermon launched the New Testament church? Isn’t it safe to believe that the sermon that began the church is the kind of sermon the church needs to continue delivering?

The First Sermon Begins With a Rebuke

Let us go back to the very first sermon ever preached in the New Age of Grace. We will begin in Acts, chapter 2, verses 13 through 15.

But others were mocking and saying, “They are full of sweet wine.” 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. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day

Now, the third hour of the day was about 9 a.m. The first meal of the day was not until the fourth hour and on the Sabbath, a larger meal was served at the sixth hour, which was around noon. Peter is in effect, saying, “Listen, no one is drunk here. Why we haven’t even had breakfast yet, and lunch is three hours away.”

The criticism was absurd and Peter began his sermon by letting everyone know that drunkenness was out of the question!

The First Sermon Expounds the Scriptures

Now, notice the way his sermon begins to expound on the Old Testament scriptures. Look at verse 16 of Acts, chapter 2.

but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:

Continue to verses 17 and 18.

“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; even on My bondslaves, both men

and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit and they shall prophesy.”

Now, stop at these verses. In some circles today, they are teaching that Pentecost has fulfilled the prophecy of Joel. They say, “Didn’t Peter say in verses 16 through 18,

but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: “. . . your sons and daughters shall prophesy . . . your young men shall see visions . . .”

So, they say, “That’s what is happening today. The Spirit is being poured out; this is the fulfillment of the Prophet. How wonderful to be living in these last days of special outpouring.”

Oh? Might I remind them not to put a period where Peter simply takes a breath and then keeps on preaching. Look at the next verses, verses 19 through 21.

And I will grant wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come. And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

I do not think you want to be on planet earth during the days described in these verses. The prophecy of Joel is actually talking about the events on earth related to the second coming of Christ. Those events are taking place during the tribulation and they are spelled out in the book of Revelation. In fact, turn to Revelation, chapter 6, and let us look at verses 12 through 16.

I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts it unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the

throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

Now, turn to Revelation, chapter 8, and look at verses 6 and 7.

And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them. The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

Skip to verse 12.

And the fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day might not shine for a third of it, and night in the same way.

Notice the fulfillment of smoke along with fire as Joel prophesied. Look at chapter 9, verses 18 through 21.

A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads; and with them they do harm. The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of the murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.

Now, we know from other passages in Revelation that there are many who do indeed call upon the name of the Lord and are saved.

Turn back to Acts, chapter 2.

So, what was Peter saying when he referred to Joel's prophecy in relation to Pentecost?

Well, for one thing, in verse 16, Peter did not say Pentecost was the actual fulfillment of Joel, chapter 2. We know that simply because all of the terrible things in his prophecy did not occur, thank the Lord.

Peter is simply saying, in effect, "This is that same Holy Spirit that Joel wrote about. He is now here. And the same Spirit who will have the power to perform all of Joel's prophecy is now empowering us to speak in unlearned languages. That Holy Spirit who will one day be poured out on all people [notice verse 17 says, "all mankind"], has now been poured out on some people [the one hundred twenty who were speaking in unlearned languages]!"

Now, at this point Peter re-introduces the King who will sit upon the throne of David when the prophecy is finally fulfilled. Look at verse 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 –

In other words, Jesus Christ did things only God could do. And, His miracles had a divine purpose.

Those who say we should be able to heal, and raise from the dead, etc. because Jesus did all of that, overlook the basic principle of this verse. Jesus did those things not simply for the doing, but for a the reason behind the doing.

Jesus broke bread and fish into five thousand meals not because people were hungry, but so that He could validate His claim that He would then utter, in John, chapter 6, verse 35a,

. . . I am the bread of life . . .

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead not because Lazarus was His good friend and He did not want to see Mary and Martha grieve, but to validate His claim that He would then make, in John, chapter 11, verse 25a,

. . . I am the resurrection and the life . . .

If Jesus, in fact, healed people simply because they were sick, then He becomes the cruelest person to have ever walked the face of the earth. Why? Because while He was on earth, He did not heal everyone.

Jesus often retreated to a town that had a leper colony, yet we read of Him healing only one leper in that city. And, the leper colony remained after Christ's ascension. Why didn't He heal them all?

Jesus carefully selected miracles of varying kinds to prove He was indeed, the Messiah. And according to Peter, the Israelites knew it. They knew it so much

so that Jesus could say the words in John, chapter 15, verse 25b,

. . . They hated Me without a cause.

The First Sermon Delivers the Verdict

Now Peter drives his audience toward the verdict! And the verdict is, “Guilty!”

Look at verse 23 of Acts, chapter 2.

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.

Skip to 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.

How is that for user friendly preaching? How is that for making unbelievers comfortable?!!

True preaching declares truth propositionally. The Spirit of God moves through the declaration and exposition of biblical truth.

Now, just in case they think they had everything to do with it, and before you blame the Jewish nation for being solely responsible for having killed God in the flesh, make careful note of Peter’s next words. Look at verse 23 again.

this Man was delivered over by the predetermined plan . . .

(“boule” in the Greek, or “counsel”),

. . . foreknowledge of God, . . .

(yes),

. . . you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

It was part of the plan, before the foundation of the worlds, by the counsel of the Triune God. And now listen to the rest of the plan. Look at verse 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.

Now Peter goes on to expound on the passages from David’s pen that directly relate to the resurrection and ascension of the Messiah. Peter is drawing the net around his Jewish listeners:

You crucified Him, God crowned Him.

You entombed Him, God enthroned Him.

You cast Him out, God caught Him up.

You executed Him, God exalted Him.

“That is the truth, whether you like it or not.”

Notice the result in verse 37.

Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, . . .

(the word that is translated “pierced” or “pricked” is the Greek word for “stun” – they were literally stunned with the realization that they had crucified their Messiah and that they were guilty before God),

. . . and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”

What a terrific question. It sounds much like the Philippian jailer who said, in Acts, chapter 16, verse 30b, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

The answer to that question is the most important answer in all the world. In fact, my friend, if someone were to ask you, “How do I become a Christian? How can I be saved?” what would you say?

Answers to that question might include:

- a *legalist* would say, “You’ve got to stop doing all those bad things!”
- a *moralist* would say, “You’ve got to start doing a lot of good things!”
- a *religionist* would say, “You need to start going to church and reading your Bible!”
- a *philanthropist* would say, “You need to give money and things away!”
- a *pluralist* would say, “You need to develop your own religion and hope for the best!”

My friend, most of the answers to the question, “How do I become a Christian?” would fall into two categories. Let me give them to you.

- One category could be defined by the word “process”.

In this category, becoming a Christian is a process. You feel bad about your life, then you decide to turn over a new leaf, then you start attending a church and a Bible study, then you become a Christian over a process of time.

- A second category could be defined by the word “transaction”.

The Bible teaches that becoming a Christian is a transaction, not a process. It is one event in one moment of time when you bow your heart to Christ,

confess your sin, and ask Him, on the basis of His work alone, to save you. At some point in your life, you recognize the biblical truth that you cannot save yourself and that nothing you do will ever earn heaven, so you cry out to the One you now recognize as the only Savior you will ever need.

The first word out of Peter's mouth as he answers them, according to verse 38a, is,

Peter said to them, "Repent . . ."

"Repent" in the Greek is 'metanoeo,' which means, "to change your mind." Before salvation, you think your pretty good and Christ is rather unnecessary, but you change your mind; you realize you are a sinner and He is altogether necessary.

Now, the next part of verse 38 has been especially troubling to many. Peter said,

. . . Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins . . .

Two answers to baptismal regeneration

Those who believe in baptismal regeneration, or that you must be baptized by water in order to complete your salvation, will use this as one of their primary proof-texts.

Let me provide two answers to that errant theology. First, however, circle the word "for" in verse 38,

. . . for the forgiveness of your sins . . .

This word "for" is "eis," which is a little Greek preposition that often demands an expanded translation for the sake of the English reader.

Preposition of expectation – baptism is sacramental

- "For" can be translated as a preposition of expectation. So, verse 38 would be translated, "You are to be baptized for the purpose of the forgiveness of your sins; if you are baptized, you can expect your sins to be forgiven." For those who believe that, baptism is sacramental.

Preposition of explanation – baptism is a memorial

- "For" can also be translated as a preposition of explanation. So, verse 38 would be translated as A. T. Robertson did, "Repent,

and be baptized on the occasion of, because of your sins which have been forgiven." For those who believe that, baptism is not sacramental, but memorial.

I believe that both ordinances of the church are memorial, not sacramental. The Lord's supper is a table of remembrance and the water of baptism identifies the believer with the past death and burial of the Lord.

So now, you can interpret Acts, chapter 2, verse 38, with a little Greek grammar under your belt.

There is another way to arrive at a correct answer, without knowing a Greek preposition from a computer chip. It is a principle of biblical interpretation called, "the analogy of scripture".

You might think, "Oh terrific."

My friends, this is one of the most important principles!!! It simply means, "No passage of scripture, when correctly interpreted, will ever contradict another passage of scripture."

So, is salvation a result of faith in Christ plus water baptism? What does the rest of scripture say?

Look at John, chapter 1, verse 12,

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God . . .

Also, look at Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 8 and 9.

For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, . . .

(baptism is something you do in obedience to God – it is a work),

. . . so that no one may boast.

Why is baptism unimportant to salvation

Just how important is the handling of Acts, chapter 2, verse 38? Let me carry it a little further. Just why is baptism unimportant to salvation or rather, if water baptism is necessary for salvation then what are the results? Let me give five.

The meaning of the new covenant is disregarded

1. If water baptism is necessary for salvation, then the meaning of the new covenant is disregarded.

Ladies and gentlemen, the new covenant is not water plus blood, it is blood alone.

I Corinthians, chapter 11, verse 24, says,

. . . this . . . is the new covenant in My blood . . .

Ephesians, chapter 1, verse 7, tells us,

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace

Romans, chapter 5, verse 9, says,

. . . having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God . . .

I John, chapter 1, verse 7, lets us know that,

. . . the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

The purpose of Christ's incarnation is destroyed

2. If water baptism is necessary for salvation, then the purpose of Christ's incarnation is destroyed.

Jesus came to die. And, Hebrews, chapter 10, verse 10 states,

By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Why come to die if you can be saved by water?

The meaning of Christ's last words is diluted

3. If water baptism is necessary for salvation, then the meaning of Christ's last words is diluted.

In Matthew, chapter 28, verse 19, we read the command of Christ to His disciples to,

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit

Disciples made public their identification with Christ through baptism. These were disciples, not infants. They were believers who placed their identity in Christ.

The integrity of Paul's ministry is decreased

4. If water baptism is necessary for salvation, then the integrity of Paul's ministry is decreased.

In other words, Paul's ministry is a failure if water baptism is necessary for salvation.

In I Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 17, Paul boldly stated,

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel . . .

The essence of the gospel is diminished

5. Finally, if water baptism is necessary for salvation, then the essence of the gospel is diminished.

I Corinthians, chapter 15, defines the gospel as the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ saves – not Christ plus water; not Christ plus good works; not Christ plus morality; not Christ plus ritual; not Christ plus religiosity – Christ alone.

In Acts, chapter 2, verse 38, I believe that Peter is saying, "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ because of the forgiveness of your sins."

Why is baptism important in the life of a believer

Why then, is baptism so important in the life of the believer that Christ would command us to be baptized? If baptism is not necessary for salvation, why is it necessary? Let me give three reasons.

Baptism reveals a break with the old life

1. Baptism is important in the life of a believer because it reveals a break with the old life.

For the Jewish nation, this was a traumatic, life-changing event. To be publicly baptized as a follower of Christ was to completely turn away from Judaism and the Old Covenant. They were saying, "In the past, the forgiveness of our sins was related to our sacrifices, but now, the forgiveness of our sins is related to our Savior, who was sacrificed once and for all for all of our sins."

Baptism obeys the command of Christ

2. Baptism is important in the life of a believer because it obeys the command of Christ.

Baptism follows salvation; it does not cause it. However, do not forget that Peter commands it in verse 38. And also, Christ commanded the New Testament church in Matthew 28, verse 19, to baptize

(that is, “baptizomia” in the Greek, or “to immerse”), disciples. Disciples are those who come to faith in Jesus Christ. Have you obeyed this command?

Baptism identifies a believer not only with Christ, but with His church

3. Baptism is important in the life of a believer because it identifies the believer not only with Christ, but with His church.

We will look at this more later in Acts, chapter 2, and will continue the study of this chapter in our next discussion.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/20/1996 by Stephen Davey.

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