

Acts 2:22-24, 32-33

Introduction

For the last several weeks, as a church we've been in Acts chapter two. It's in this chapter that we see the Holy Spirit poured out on God's New Covenant people. This is the fulfillment, Peter said, of the words that the prophet Joel spoke some nine centuries earlier. God's Old Covenant people (the nation of Israel) were set apart and defined by the law (the Ten Commandments) written on tablets of stone. But now, God's New Covenant people are to be set apart and defined by the law written upon the tablet of their hearts. A people who were dead in their sins and by nature children of God's wrath have now been raised up to spiritual life—life in the Holy Spirit. But on what basis has all of this come to pass? On what ground has the Spirit of God now been poured out?

We saw last week that we're living not only in the days of God's eschatological salvation, but also in the days of God's eschatological judgment. The horrific destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 in blood and fire and vapor of smoke, when the sun was—as it were—turned into darkness and the moon turned into blood was the beginning of the judgment of the last day—the judgment that is coming, upon the whole world. So Joel's prophecy of eschatological salvation (of the Spirit poured out) and of eschatological judgment (blood and fire and vapor of smoke) concludes with these words: "And it will be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." It's the wonderful and powerful name of this Lord upon whom we may call and be saved that Peter goes on, now, to proclaim.

I. Acts 2:22a — "Men of Israel, listen to these words..."

Earlier, Peter said: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words." We know that Peter would address himself to us in the same way. "Let this be known to you and give heed to my words... listen to these words." And why should we listen? So that we might be saved. So that we might be saved from blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. So that we might be saved from that great and awesome day of the Lord that has come — and is coming upon the whole world. But also so that the Spirit might be poured out upon us, too. So, then, let us give heed this morning. Let us listen.

II. Acts 2:22b — "Men of Israel, listen to these words: **Jesus the Nazarene..."**

What an inauspicious way to begin. Nazareth was, as one commentator says, a "small, unimportant town in western lower Galilee, with perhaps 400 inhabitants" (Schnabel). To come from Nazareth was, by every human standard, to be nobody special. We read in John chapter one:

- John 1:45–46 — Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." And Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

Does Peter try to hide Jesus' despised and lowly origin? No, he proclaims it at the very beginning. Matthew tells us that when Jesus was still a small child:

- Matthew 2:23 — Joseph and Mary came and live in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken through the prophets would be fulfilled: “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

There's no specific prophecy which says that Jesus would be called a Nazarene, but the Scriptures did say that the coming Messiah in His “servant” form would grow up like a root out of parched ground. He would have no stately form or majesty that men should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should desire Him. The Scriptures did say that He would be despised and that men would not esteem Him (Isa. 53:1-3). We shouldn't romanticize the “village of Nazareth.” Could anything good come from there? But now Peter proclaims this title as if it was, in itself, a part of the revelation of who Jesus is. The next two times that Peter proclaims Jesus (in chapters 3 and 4) he will proclaim Him again as “Jesus the Nazarene” (Acts 3:6; 4:10). Stephen also proclaimed “Jesus the Nazarene” (Acts 6:14). The Apostle Paul proclaimed “Jesus the Nazarene” (Acts 26:9). The resurrected and glorified Jesus Himself, when He appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, said to Paul in response to his question (“Who are You, Lord?”): “I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.”

That Jesus is “the Nazarene” is, in itself, a part of the revelation of who Jesus is. It's a sign of the depths to which He humbled Himself in fulfillment of the Scriptures. And now it's also a reminder of the heights to which He has been exalted. “Although He existed in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a slave, by being made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:6-7). He who was with God and who was God from all eternity became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn. 1:1, 14), living and growing up in Nazareth, a “small, unimportant town in western lower Galilee, with perhaps 400 inhabitants.” It's *this* Jesus the Nazarene, Peter says, who was:

III. Acts 2:22c — “...a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God did through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—

Though Jesus grew up in the obscure village of Nazareth, His life wasn't lived in secret (cf. Acts 26:26). All those who were listening to Peter preach knew of the miracles (the “powers” or “works of [divine] power”) and wonders and signs which God did through Jesus “in [their] midst.”

Now we might say: That's fine for them, but we didn't get to see any of these things for ourselves. We must understand that the miracles God did through Jesus were never intended to “prove” something independently (on their own) as though they could be the ultimate authority and ground of the people's faith.* Miracles bear witness as attesting signs to the word of God—which is (by itself) self-authenticating—because it is the word of God. This means three things. First, miracles as attesting signs are always given as God's condescension to our fleshly weakness—to our existence as fallen human beings in a fallen world (cf. Jn. 4:48). Second, when a person's heart is hardened to God's self-authenticating Word, no amount of the miraculous will

* If that were the case, then even the antichrist might be proved true and genuine by apparent—or even “real”—miracles (Mat. 24:24; cf. Exod. 7:11, 22; 8:7, 16-19).

ever convince him or bring him to saving faith (cf. Mat. 12:39; 16:4; Lk. 16:27-31). For this person, miracles can only serve the purpose of increasing condemnation (cf. Lk. 10:13-14; Jn. 15:24). And third, this explains why miracles, in the Bible, are generally reserved for specific epochs or milestones in the progressive unfolding in redemptive history of God's self-authenticating Word (Moses [Acts 7:36]; Elijah/Elisha [2 Kings 2:9-10; Mal. 4:5; Lk. 1:17]; Jesus [Acts 2:22]; Apostles [2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4]). We see, then, why God doesn't give everyone who hears the Gospel the chance to see miracles. That would be pointless. It would contradict the purpose and the meaning of miracles (2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4). It would contradict the Bible's teaching about the hardness of the human heart and the self-authenticating authority and truthfulness of God's word.

The life and ministry of Jesus the Nazarene, who is Himself the eternal "Word" of God and who spoke only the words that the Father gave Him to speak (cf. Jn. 7:17; 8:28, 38; 12:49-50; 14:10), has been "attested" *already* by the miracles and wonders and signs that God did through Him in fulfillment of the Scriptures. When John the Baptist sent to Jesus to ask Him if He was the promised Messiah or if the people should look for someone else, Jesus answered:

- Matthew 11:4-5 (see Isa. 35:5-6; 61:1) — "Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."

The works of power that God did through Jesus in fulfillment of the Scriptures all testified to the word—or to the gospel—that Jesus preached. Jesus said:

- John 5:19, 36 — "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing from Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in the same manner... the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness about Me, that the Father has sent Me."

The works of power that God did through Jesus attested—and still attest today—the reality that He was sent from God, that He only ever did the will of the one who sent Him (Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38), and that the *words* that He spoke were life and truth. Let us, then, wrestle and struggle with what Peter says next.

IV. Acts 2:23 — ...*this Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of lawless men and put Him to death.

The public shame and torture of the cross was usually reserved for slaves, and violent criminals, and political rebels. Even more significantly, for the Jews, to be hung on a tree was a sign that one was a law-breaker and therefore cursed of God (Deut. 21:23). The apostle Paul writes: "Being found in appearance as a man, He [Jesus] humbled Himself by becoming *obedient* to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8). To whom was Jesus the Nazarene obedient? He only, always did the works that *the Father* had given Him to do. His food, even in death, was to do the will of the One who sent Him (Jn. 4:34). "***This*** man"—the very one who was attested to the people by God with miracles and wonders and signs that God did through Him; the one whose food was to do the will of the one who sent Him—was "delivered over [to death on a

cross] by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.” God did not put His own Son to death. May it never, ever be! It was the Jewish people who did this by the hands of lawless men. And yet in a mystery that can never be penetrated by us, this greatest evil that has ever been committed in all the history of the world took place according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God (God foreknowing it insofar as He had planned it). Centuries earlier, the prophet Isaiah said this about the coming Messiah in “servant” form:

- Isaiah 53:7–8 — He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living...?

That Jesus was a Nazarene, and that He had performed miracles, and that he had been nailed to a cross and put to death, all the people knew already. But if they were ever to fully understand the meaning of these historical facts—if they were ever to understand the mystery of the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God—then Peter must proclaim to them what they still did not know. “*You* nailed [this man] to a cross by the hands of lawless men,” Peter said, “and [*you*] put Him to death...”

V. Acts 2:24 — “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.”

What is the “agony” of death? What is it about death that makes it so fearful? The agony of death resides not primarily in the physical sufferings that may accompany it, or even in any fear of the “unknown,” but more specifically in what death *is*—in the very nature of death as God’s judicial sentence of condemnation for our sin. God commanded Adam in the garden:

- Genesis 2:16–17 — “From any tree of the garden you may surely eat; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat from it; for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

If death was natural to us, then in and of itself, no human being would fear it. But death isn’t natural—and therein lies its true “agony.” Death is the judicial sentence that God has passed upon all men, women, and children because in Adam all sinned (Rom. 3:23; 5:12; 6:23).

What does it mean, then, when Jesus the Nazarene dies? In so far as Jesus was nailed to a cross and hung on a “tree” according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, God was declaring to all that this death was, indeed, a judicial sentence of condemnation: “For it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’” (Gal. 3:13). But then we remember this wonderful mystery—that Jesus was “obedient” even to the point of death; that even in death, Jesus was doing the work that the Father had given Him to do. And so we understand that the death Jesus suffered on the cross and His hanging there on the “tree” was not the judicial sentence that God had passed upon Him for His own sin (as the people imagined; Isa. 53:4b), but the sentence of death and condemnation that was due to all of God’s chosen, covenant people.

- Isaiah 53:5–6 — He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities... Yahweh has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

Paul says simply: He became a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). This is *why* the one whom “*we*” put to death according to *God’s* predetermined plan, *God* raised up again—and so put an end to the “agony” of death forever. This is why it was impossible for Jesus to be held in death’s power. And so in the resurrection of Jesus, the very nature of death is wholly changed for all who are united with Him by faith. For the one who is in Christ, death is no longer God’s judicial sentence of condemnation, but has become instead a doorway through which he is taken up into the presence of Jesus the Nazarene; awaiting, from then on, his own resurrection and the redemption of his body (Rom. 8:23). In the incarnation, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us so that “through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives” (Heb. 2:14-15). When God raised Jesus up again, He put an end to the “agony” of death.

Behold, then, the completed work of Jesus the Nazarene in His life, in His death, and in His resurrection. The man whom God attested with miracles and wonders and signs in life and who was then delivered over to death according to God’s predetermined plan and foreknowledge—this man God raised up again. And now, skipping ahead to verse 32 (for today), we listen as Peter picks up again where he left off:

VI. Acts 2:32–33 — “***This Jesus*** God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God [in further fulfillment of the Scriptures; vv. 34-35], and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, ***He*** has poured out this which you both see and hear.

After proclaiming the completed work of Jesus in His life, in His death, and in His resurrection, Peter comes back now to the reality that gave rise to this sermon in the first place—the Holy Spirit poured out from heaven upon all of God’s New Covenant people. Remember what Peter said in verses 16-17:

- Acts 2:16–17 — “...but this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall be in the last [*eschatos*] days [the eschatological days],’ *God* says, ‘that *I* will pour out My Spirit on all flesh [on all of New Covenant Israel].’”

Only now, in Acts chapter two, who is it who pours out the Spirit upon us? It is “*this man*”—this Jesus the Nazarene whom God attested with miracles and wonders and signs in life, who was delivered over to death according to God’s predetermined plan and foreknowledge, and whom God has now raised up again thus putting an end to the agony of death. It is this man—this Jesus—who having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, now pours out the Holy Spirit upon us (cf. Jn. 3:34).

Only when we understand the completed work of Jesus, the Messiah, in His life, death, and resurrection can we understand what it means that He is the one who pours out the Holy Spirit upon us. The Spirit of God is now also to be known by us as the Spirit of Christ (cf. Rom. 8:9-10). When the Spirit of Christ, then, is poured out on us by Christ Himself, all of that infinite

saving value of Jesus' life (which God attested with miracles and wonders and signs), and Jesus' death (which was according to God's predetermined plan and foreknowledge), and Jesus' resurrection (through which God put an end to the agony of death) has now been sealed and applied to us. Because the Spirit *of Christ* has been poured out upon us *by Christ*, we have been brought into a living, vital union *with Christ* so that all our sin has been imputed to Him who suffered the agony of death in our stead, and all the righteousness and obedience of His perfect life has been imputed to us. Therefore, we are forgiven. The guilt of all our sin has been pardoned for Christ's sake. Therefore, we are justified. God the righteous Judge declares the ungodly sinner to be righteous for Christ's sake. Here is no legal fiction, but rather the fruit of that real union that we have with Christ—He in us, and we in Him—through His Spirit poured out upon us.

Conclusion

The Apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth:

- 1 Corinthians 6:11 (cf. Gal. 5:4-5; Rom. 2:28-29; 5:5-9) — ...but you were washed [cleansed and forgiven], but you were sanctified [consecrated as holy and set apart unto God], but you were justified [declared to be righteous] in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

How humbling it is to see the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—at work in our salvation. God the Father, from all eternity, **purposes** and **plans** and **decrees** our redemption (“according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God”). God the Son, from all eternity, undertakes to **effect** and **accomplish** our redemption (Jesus the Nazarene; attested by God; nailed to a cross by the hands of lawless men; and then raised up again). And God the Holy Spirit, from all eternity, undertakes to **apply** and **seal** to all those whom God has chosen before the foundation of the world this redemption that Christ has accomplished (“having received from the **Father** the promise of the **Holy Spirit**, He [**Jesus**] has poured out this which you both see and hear”). And so we understand now how this glorious mystery of the Trinity is, indeed, “the foundation of all our communion with God, and of all our comfortable dependence upon Him” (LCF 2.3). We see in this eternal counsel of redemption, as it has now been revealed to us in the preaching of the Gospel, the fullest revelation of the glory of God, and so we bow down before Him and we worship. “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever, Amen” (Rev. 5:13).

But there's still one pressing question, isn't there? What is the means by which God makes us partakers of the Spirit and so partakers of this redemption that is in Christ Jesus? It cannot be by any work that we do because the salvation that we need is from the condemnation that all our works deserve. It cannot be by any work that we do because we could never gain the perfect righteousness of Christ through even the “best” of our works. We're reminded of that wonderful word that God spoke through the prophet Joel: “And it will be [in that day] that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Here is no work that we do, but simply the cry of faith that rests in the promise of God. Listen to what Paul wrote to the Galatians:

- Galatians 3:1–7, 13–14 — O foolish Galatians, who bewitched you, before whose eyes *Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?* This is the only thing I want to learn from you: ***did you receive the Spirit*** [the Spirit who conveys to you all the saving benefits of Christ] by the works of the Law, **or by hearing with faith?**... [D]oes He who ***provides you with the Spirit***... do it by the works of the Law, **or by hearing with faith?** Just as Abraham **believed God** and it was **counted to him as righteousness**, so know that those who are **of faith**, those are sons of Abraham [counted righteous even as he was]... Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”— in order that *in Christ Jesus* **the blessing of Abraham** might come to the Gentiles [the blessing of being counted righteous by faith alone], so that we would receive ***the promise of the Spirit*** [the Spirit who applies to us all the work of Christ for our forgiveness and justification] **through faith**.

Do you know even now this “hearing with faith”? Have you received the promise of the Spirit through faith? Are you forgiven, justified, and redeemed? What a wonderful gift is the gift of faith (cf. Rom. 10:9-13)!—This living, vital faith that calls upon the name of the Lord, resting fully in His promise. And what is this name upon which we call? We read in Matthew chapter one:

- Matthew 1:18–21 — Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the One who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bear a Son; **and you shall call His name Jesus**, for He will *save* His people from their sins.”