

The Book of Acts: The Kingdom on Mission

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Sermon 1, The Kingdom's Certainty, Acts 1:1-6, 28:23-31

Proposition: The book of Acts is written so we can know the certainty of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we begin this morning to look at the second volume of a two-volume work. We are going to be spending the next many months in the book of Acts in our time together each Sunday morning. Why this book? Why not Luke first and then Acts? The short answer is that, like my mentor and childhood pastor, I do not yet feel equipped to preach one of the Gospels. They are the summit of God's revelation to us in many ways, and I do not want to tackle one as an amateur. At this point, I have preached about 430 sermons. I am not quite a beginner. But I would love to see that number closer to 1000 before I feel that I will do justice to the gospels. Anyway, the other reason that we are looking at Acts has nothing to do with my own subjective judgments about whether I am capable of doing justice to a major portion of Scripture, and everything to do with the time in which we live. The gospels deal with a very special three years in redemptive history. We know that the time of Jesus' earthly sojourn was tremendously special and unrepeatable. We understand that the way things were done in the days of Caesar Augustus and Tiberius Caesar is not necessarily programmatic for the church today. Acts, on the other hand, tells us about the era of redemptive history in

which we live today. This book details the further progress of the kingdom of God in the (physical) absence of the King. And that, of course, is where we live. God reigns. That is only too clear from the text of Scripture, and only too dubious when we look at the world around us. If Jesus is King, why is the world run like this? The answer, of course, is that Jesus is King but He is reconquering the territory in which we live. All this realm was lost to Him when Adam took that first bite. Jesus was anointed by His Father for the purpose of bringing the cosmos back under control. Luke tells us about how He completed the first step of that process through His death and resurrection, thereby inaugurating the Kingdom and introducing the Age to Come into this present Age. Acts tells us about the Kingdom of God once the King returned to Heaven. Jesus still reigns from Heaven. He's still doing, still teaching — and we still can't see Him in the flesh. And if we can't see Him, we tend to start to wonder whether He's really there. Acts is written for people wondering whether Jesus really reigns. Acts is a book of reassurance. It tells us about the certainty of what we've been taught. I don't think anyone here struggles much with historical faith in whether Jesus of Nazareth actually lived and did what the gospels say He did. But I know all of us have times when we doubt whether He's still active, still subduing this world under His perfect reign. There is just too much misrule all around us to think that Jesus is completely in charge, right? Except that Luke so clearly tackles that misrule head-on (the last third of the book is all about wicked earthly rulers making trouble for God's kingdom) and gives us even more certainty that everything we've been taught is true and that Jesus' Kingdom really is coming through the spread of the Gospel and the growth of the church. So let's look this morning at the major large-scale features of the book of Acts, and from them draw certainty regarding the things we have been taught.

I. Volume 1: The Temple as the Frame of Luke's Gospel, Luke 1:9, 24:53

Luke and Acts are tied together by similar prologues that address Theophilus. That's how we know that they are two volumes of the same work. But in addition to being two volumes of the same work, they both are written within the literary feature called a "frame" or *inclusio*. I have talked about these before with you at some length as we looked at Proverbs together.

If a piece of literature mentions something at the beginning and again at the end, you know that that something is important not only at the beginning and end, but to everything in between. Thus, as we noted with Proverbs, Solomon mentions the Fear of the LORD at the beginning, middle, and end of that book — making it clear that Proverbs is about the fear of the LORD. In the same way, Luke frames both of his volumes, the first one with the Temple and the second one with the Kingdom of God. Let's talk about both of those.

The gospel of Luke begins with Zechariah called to the Temple to offer incense in his division of priests. While he is offering incense, an angel appears to him and says "You will have a son and name him John." And the story gets moving from there. Thus, after the prologue, the first scene of the gospel of Luke is set in the Temple in Jerusalem. And then, the final verse of Luke's gospel has the disciples in the Temple once again, blessing God. Indeed, Luke actually informs us that the disciples were not just in the Temple once in a while; they were there *continually*. What's the point of this frame? Well, the Temple is the place where God lives. Luke

is telling us something important about the Temple. The Temple is the theme of the gospel, and if you read the gospel you'll see that it's all about Jesus. Your point, Luke? *Jesus is the new Temple!* The place where God dwells among His people was a particular building from the time of Moses onward. But when Jesus came to earth, the place of God's residence with His people moved out of that building and into Jesus of Nazareth.

A. Jesus' Journey to Jerusalem, Luke 9:51

And so a huge portion of Luke is taken up with Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. "And it came about, when the days were approaching for His ascension, that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem" (Luk 9:51). Luke announces this purpose in ch. 9, and he follows it up basically through the rest of the book. Why is it important for Jesus to go to Jerusalem? Because it is there that the showdown will take place between the new way of God's presence with His people and the old way of God's presence with His people. In other words, it is in Jerusalem that Jesus will administer the final blow to the Temple and its whole Levitical system. To get ready to ascend to His Father, He first goes to Jerusalem — because that is where He will die, but also in a certain sense because that is where the Father is.

Luke is about the Temple, and about Jesus as the New Temple.

B. Jesus' Church Starts in Jerusalem, Luke 24:53, Acts 1:4

When we get to the beginning of Acts, we see this emphasis on the Temple rapidly dissipating. Thus, Luke ends with the disciples in the Temple, but Acts begins with them in the Upper Room, an undisclosed location within Jerusalem city limits. To be with God, one no longer needs the Temple. Oh, various apostles will still visit the Temple in Acts, but it is no longer central. It doesn't appear at the beginning and end. We have moved on. The church is indeed started from Jerusalem, just as the prophets said — "Out of Zion will go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."

C. Jesus' Witnesses Journey from Jerusalem, Acts 1:8

But the church isn't going to stay in Jerusalem. Indeed, Jesus' disciples become witnesses who leave Jerusalem and go to Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. You likely already know that Acts 1:8 is programmatic for the rest of the book, that the story begins in Jerusalem and ends in Rome (aka the end of the earth). And yes, that is incredibly important. Luke is circular: We start in the Temple, where Zechariah is worshipping God. We end in the Temple, where the disciples are worshipping God. The whole book centers on being in and getting to Jerusalem, and what goes on in Jerusalem. Not so in Acts! We trace our heritage to Jerusalem and the Jewish church that met there. But we do not feel the need to go back to Jerusalem any more. The church has moved on.

II. Volume 2: The Kingdom as the Frame of Luke's Further Account, Acts 1:3, 6; 28:23, 31

In fact, the Kingdom has moved on. Jesus calls Jerusalem "the city of the great king," quoting Psalm 48. But that quote appears only in Matthew; Luke does not mention it. Instead, he frames his second volume with quadruple references to the Kingdom of God. Jerusalem is the King's city. It is His capital, and He belongs there. We went over all that in Luke, right down to how the

ruling elites of the city rejected him. That continues to be a major theme in Acts — rejection by the Jewish people. It is the note on which the book closes. But I want you to see that one major point of Acts is that the Kingdom is not limited to the King's own city. In fact, that city threw the king out and killed Him, and He was not even born there. But though Jerusalem is sidelined in Acts, the Kingdom is foregrounded. I want to highlight the four aspects of the Kingdom that Luke makes prominent in his frame around this volume.

A. What Jesus Continued to Do and Teach, 1:1

The first emphasis, of course, lies in the past tense (or aorist tense) of “began.” Jesus began to do and teach many things in the course of the gospel of Luke. In the book of Acts, He continues to do and teach many more things! Though He is in Heaven, He is very active on earth through His word, His Spirit, and His people. Luke is going to major on the word, the Spirit, and the church throughout the book of Acts. Behind the action of them all lies the action of Jesus. The Kingdom, in other words, did not vanish when the King was “taken up” (Acts 1:2). Far from it. The King continues to work and teach. But now He does it by His word, His Spirit, and His church.

B. The Kingdom in Jesus' Post-Resurrection Teaching, 1:3

But Luke goes on to mention (what no other New Testament writer covers) what it was that Jesus did during the period between Easter and Ascension Day. During those days, He taught His disciples about the Kingdom. That was the focus of His post-resurrection ministry. He did not prioritize teaching about Jerusalem. He did not cover sacraments in detail. He did not necessarily discuss the theology of resurrection with them. He spoke about the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. And of course, as this is Luke's first mention of the Kingdom, so the last mention of it will not be until the final verse of Acts. Clearly, Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom is highly relevant to those who are going to live in the era between His Ascension and His Second Coming. That's us. We need to know the certainty of the Kingdom. We need to know that Jesus reigns even when the world doesn't look like it.

C. The Kingdom in Salvation History

Well, the largest question relating to the Kingdom at this moment in salvation history is not sidelined or left out. Oh no. Luke confronts it head-on. The Old Testament witness is abundantly clear: The Kingdom of God existed in physical form in the earthly monarchy of Judah. Chronicles literally speaks of the Kingdom of Yahweh in the hand of Solomon.

1. Israel as the Kingdom, 1:6

In other words, if you wanted to know where God reigned on earth, you needed to look to Jerusalem, the city of the great king and the place where Luke directed his focus throughout volume 1. That's where the Kingdom of God is to be found. And over it you could find reigning Yahweh's Anointed, the Messiah and the Son of David to whom the promises were made. Never mind that some of those sons of David were completely wretched, and that many others had no political power to speak of (e.g., Joseph, Jesus' adoptive father!). The OT is as clear as our prairie air here on the high plains: The Christ, if you want to use that Greek title, sat on a throne in Jerusalem and ruled a thousand square miles and a few hundred thousand people. And that had

all been taken away by Babylon some 600 years before the opening of Luke's gospel. After the career of Jesus, then, burning question and the one that the disciples, being good biblical theologians, naturally asked, was "Are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now?" Because the Kingdom rightfully belonged to Israel. The Kingdom was basically coterminous with the borders of Judea. And wasn't Jesus going to bring that situation back, and reign as a new Solomon who would give Tiberius Caesar a worthy foe on the geo-political stage? The time was obviously "now." An unkillable Messiah would give Rome something to think about, for sure.

But what on earth is Jesus' answer? It is a deeply unsatisfying one. Obviously, it is some form of "No." But rather than just say "No," He says "You don't need to know. The Father handles the calendar."

What? Of course, we are going to talk about this more in a couple of weeks. But I want you to feel what the disciples felt. The Kingdom of God that He had just been teaching about all those 40 days wasn't going to get off the ground after all. Rome and Pilate and Herod's various descendants would continue to rule in Jerusalem.

But then Jesus goes on. And His answer to the question seemingly morphs from "No" to "Yes" — or at least, to "If you'll allow me to reframe the question in accurate terms, then yes, the Kingdom is just starting to take off. And you are going to be the ones who spearhead that effort."

What? Israel isn't going to get the Kingdom. You are. "You, the eleven apostles, are going to witness to me here, there, and everywhere." What? How? Well, of course, the rest of Acts is going to answer that question. The Kingdom of God is not going to look like the reign of Solomon any more. What is going to look like? That is an answer that the apostles have to forge with the help of the Holy Spirit. That's literally what Jesus tells them, and then leaves.

What? Again, if you've ever felt that sense of helplessness, that sense of "What on earth do we do now? How is the church supposed to handle *this*?" then join the club! That is how the church was left at the beginning. No longer are we in the days of the Levitical system, where they were told who the personnel were, where everyone was supposed to live, how to set up camp, and how many inches wide the church door was supposed to be. That's all past. The church is suddenly supposed to grow up.

2. The Kingdom Going to the (Gentile) Dogs, 28:23

And it's also growing out — going, quite literally, to the dogs. At least, the Jewish people of that day often called Gentiles "dogs." The end of Acts is about the Kingdom going to the dogs. Paul talks to a huge number of the leading Jews of Rome. He solemnly testifies to them concerning the Kingdom of God. That is the burden of his teaching, and they listen to him on the subject for a whole day. Again, the point is clear: The Apostle to the Gentiles, in common with the whole church, feels a particular burden for the Jewish people. There is no one closer to the Kingdom. There is no one we have a greater responsibility to reach! And yet there is also no one who is simultaneously more familiar with Christian theology and more resistant to it. They heard the message about Jesus from its most powerful interpreter. I mean, honestly, if you can't send Jesus Himself, then you would send in Paul as Christianity's #2. You aren't going to find a more

compelling theologian or a more cogently expressed argument. And the thing he wanted to talk to them about was the reign of Christ. The Kingdom of God is no longer a geopolitical entity in Jerusalem. It is a socio-spiritual entity expressed in the gathering of the people of God — Christians, the church, followers of the Way, whatever you want to call them. That change from geopolitical to socio-spiritual is a tough one to wrap our minds around. Didn't we give up too much when we gave up the Levitical model? Well, anyhow, Paul spoke about the Kingdom for a whole day. And there was a hard core in there who utterly rejected the teaching, provoking Paul to an outburst of bitter prophetic denunciation. "This salvation has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen!" Of course, as I stand here and speak to a Gentile congregation, we all know how true those words were. Surrounded by followers of Jesus, the Jews have held on to their own ways, language, and identity for 21 centuries. The Gentiles listened. The Kingdom has gone to the dogs. We Gentiles hold it now. The Jews will return to it, as Paul so confidently taught in Romans 11 on the basis of prophecy. We will not be the leaders forever. The apostles were all Jewish. Hint, hint. At the end, the church will once again be Jewish-led, I firmly believe. (Our King is Jewish!) But Acts talks about the church and the Kingdom in the in-between time, when Jesus is in Heaven and the Jews are more likely to regard the church as a threat than as a friend (often with good reason, unfortunately!). The Kingdom belongs to the dogs; the saints possess it.

D. The Kingdom in Apostolic Preaching, 28:31

And what do they do with it? They talk about it! If you had to sum up the content of Paul's teaching for those two years under house arrest in Rome, what would you say? Certainly he talked about Christ. There's no doubt. But more than that, he talked about the Kingdom. That is how Acts ends — with apostolic preaching of Christ (the King) and His Kingdom. That is the good news that we are announcing to the world in the in-between time. Luke about the Temple and Jesus the New Temple. Acts is about the Kingdom while the King is in Heaven. He's not precisely absent or away, but He is not precisely present either. We are familiar with this reality, because we live in it every day. Jesus reigns! Amen, we say. But then we look around and say "How can that be true?" Acts shows us that the reign of Jesus takes place these days through His work in His people, His Spirit, and His word.

III. The Purpose of Both Volumes: That You May Know the Certainty of What You Have Been Taught, Luke 1:4

Well, let's conclude this introduction to Acts by looking at Luke's purpose statement. He tells Theophilus in Luke 1 that the purpose of his work is "that you may know the certainty of what you have been taught." That is what Luke-Acts is for: giving us certainty about what we've already heard about Christ.

A. How Little We Would Know Without Acts!

With that in mind, brothers and sisters, just think with me for a moment about how little we would know without Acts. When did we first get called "Christians"? How did the church get its start? To go from the end of Mark or John to the first fragments of church history that we have from around the year 120 is a major jump. It's 90 incredibly important years! And without Luke's work, we would know nothing of Peter's ministry, little of Paul's, nothing of Pentecost,

or how the question of Jewish inclusion in a majority-Gentile church was decided. We would simply be ignorant, with no way of bridging that gap. So just thank God with me here this morning for the information contained in this book. It is of fundamental importance for understanding what is going on with the Kingdom of God during our time here on this earth.

B. Acts: The Teaching of the Kingdom

So in Acts, I want you to look with me for teaching about the Kingdom. The word doesn't occur frequently — only 8 times in the whole book, and half of those are at the beginning and end and another one is in the middle. But precisely because the theme of the Kingdom is found at the beginning, middle, and end of the book, we know that we ought to look for teaching about the Kingdom within these pages. What did Jesus teach about the Kingdom? What did Paul teach about the Kingdom? Luke doesn't mention that they taught just so he can leave us high and dry. Far from it. No, Luke mentions that they taught so he can tell us what they taught. He tells us what they taught by telling us the content of the book of Acts.

Do you want to know what Jesus and Paul taught about the Kingdom? Then stay tuned, for it is what Luke teaches in Acts.

C. Acts: The Certainty of the Kingdom

And that, my friends, is what we will learn — the certainty of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God that our Lord taught and that the apostle Paul taught. These things really happened. This is true history. Luke was there for a lot of it, and he interviewed others and carefully set in order all the information that he gathered.

We are going to see the certainty of the Kingdom. We really can trust Jesus. His reign is real, His reign is now, and we are privileged to be His subjects in the Kingdom of Grace. Let's live like it. Amen.

Sermon 2, The Kingdom's Progress, Acts 8:1-15

Proposition: Flying over the terrain of Acts, we see that the book is about the reign of Christ through His Spirit, over His opponents and all nations, and the vindication of that reign in front of earthly rulers.

- I. The Reign of Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit, 1:1-2:47¹
- II. The Reign of Christ the Lord Over Rising Opposition, 3:1-8:3
- III. The Reign of Christ the Lord Over Outcasts and Enemies, 8:4-9:31
 - A. Samaria
 - B. Ethiopian Eunuch
 - C. Saul
- IV. The Reign of Christ the Lord Over All Nations, 9:32-12:25
 - A. Peter Preaches Christ in Lydda, Joppa, to Cornelius and his Household
 - B. The Jewish-Gentile Church in Antioch Is Established
 - C. Peter Is Rescued from “King” Herod Agrippa I and his Prison
- V. The Reign of Christ the Lord Proclaimed to the Nations: Part 1, 13:1-16:5
 - A. Commission in Antioch, 13:1-3
 - B. Ministry in Cyprus, Pisidia, Lycaonia, 13:4-14:20
 - C. Nurturing the Churches, 14:21-28
 - D. Evaluation in Jerusalem, 15:1-16:5
- VI. The Reign of Christ the Lord Proclaimed to the Nations: Part 2, 16:6-21:36
 - A. Commission in Troas, 16:6-10
 - B. Ministry in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, 16:11-19:41
 - C. Nurturing the Churches, 20:1-21:14
 - D. Evaluation in Jerusalem, 21:15-36
- VII. The Reign of Christ the Lord Vindicated Before the Rulers, 21:37-28:31
 - A. Trial Before the Crowd in Jerusalem, 21-22
 - B. Trial Before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, 23
 - C. Trial Before Felix in Caesarea, 24
 - D. Trial Before Festus and Herod Agrippa II in Caesarea, 25
 - E. Final Meeting with Jewish leaders in Rome, 28

Introduction

Most of you have heard the parable about the king who wanted a map so accurate that it had to be the same size as his whole country. Well, brothers and sisters, in one sense that is what I give you when I preach week-by-week through a book of the Bible. It is my desire to magnify the text, to show it at greater than full size, indeed to expand upon it and draw out its implications. I

¹ This outline is taken from Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus* (Downers Grove/Leicester: IVP/Apollos, 2011), 69-70

have reason to believe that you all appreciate how I do that. But the downside to that approach is that it can be hard to see the big picture. Today, then, we are going to look at a map that is much smaller than the text of Acts. Of course, for that very reason we won't be able to see the details. But I hope that looking at Alan Thompson's powerfully constructed outline will show that Acts is indeed about the reign of Christ, in relation to the Spirit, the church, the nations, and the rulers. Jesus reigns over all these things. Acts confirms the certainty of that for us.

I. The Reign of Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit, 1:1-2:47

The opening two chapters of the book set up the rest of it. As we saw last week, the disciples looked for a restoration of the Kingdom of God using an OT vocabulary. They were hoping to see some kind of geopolitical Kingdom set up. And then Jesus effectively told them "No. You're the Kingdom. You will get the Spirit, and in His power you will reboot the Kingdom of God."

Whoa. But then, after choosing another apostle (it was essential to be ready for the coming of the Spirit; don't expect the Spirit to do what you need to have people in place to do!), the disciples experienced the coming of the Spirit. It was beyond glorious. Jesus may have come with no fanfare to a peasant girl in a stable, but that is not how the Spirit came. Wind, fire, tongues, power — all of that and more accompanied the Spirit, who came on the feast 50 days after Passover. Peter explains it as the fulfillment of prophecy — and so it is. Through the Spirit, people of every tribe, language, tongue and nation can now have a king who speaks their language. The day of distant imperial overlords who don't speak your language and know nothing of how you live is gone. The Kingdom of Jesus is here, and it is a Kingdom in which God keeps His promise of resurrection life, first of all to His Son Jesus and then to everyone who repents and believes in Jesus.

Anyway, right away we see the power of the Spirit in bringing people to Jesus. Once the Spirit comes, 3000 people join 120. That is what you call spectacular growth. That is 2000% in a single day. That is the work of the Spirit. He comes and the church flourishes.

II. The Reign of Christ the Lord Over Rising Opposition, 3:1-8:3

Of course, the flourishing of the church attracts a lot of hostile attention, then and now. I've told you that at least one university in China will no longer grant a diploma to any student seen participating in Christian organizations. In a society as obsessed with status as the Chinese are, that is a stunningly brutal punishment. Well, similarly, it doesn't take long before the apostles get in trouble with the Jerusalem authorities and are called on the carpet for preaching. That is the first stage of the opposition. In case you missed what the opposition is about, Luke explains how the disciples at this stage turned to Psalm 2, with its depiction of the nations raging against the LORD and against His Christ. That, say the Christians (and surely Luke agrees with them) is the underlying dynamic here. The reign of Christ is under attack by civil authorities because nothing has changed. The judges of the earth have no desire to submit to Christ's rule, and so they stand against it with all their might. Again, it's about the Kingdom! The Kingdom of Christ is not in vogue with the principalities and powers. It never has been, and it never will be. So this opposition from outside stands against the reign of Christ. Meanwhile, Ananias and Sapphira bring opposition to Christ's rule from inside the church. They have no desire to submit to His

commands about telling the truth and being humble. They would rather lie and be proud of what they didn't give to the church.

The second major threat against the church from the inside is division over charitable work; this is countered by the election of deacons to head up the ministry of giving. This is something to pray about for our own church. We desperately need deacons in this congregation. Is God calling you to serve in that office? The church was weak without them.

Finally, in this section we see the reign of Christ challenged by the attempt to silence Stephen by piling rocks on him. But though they succeed in killing him, they can't do it before he gives a ringing testimony to Christ's reign at the right hand of the Father. The Son of Man standing at the right hand of God — Stephen saw Him. Though they could stone him for it, they couldn't make him un-see it. Christ rules even over opposition, within the church and outside. You can be sure that He is in fact at the right hand of God, ruling. You can be sure of this even though good men like Stephen are killed for saying so. The church can't be killed, because her Lord knows the way out of the grave.

III. The Reign of Christ the Lord Over Outcasts and Enemies, 8:4-9:31

Well, the next section highlights the victorious reign of Christ even over those who were once far off or downright hostile.

A. Samaria

Thus, Philip preaches in Samaria, the home of the Samaritans who separated from mainstream Judaism long before. The reign of Christ comes even to outcasts.

B. Ethiopian Eunuch

It comes to those far away, too — the eunuch who served the Kandak of the Ethiopians, for instance.

C. Saul

And it comes to Saul. This is the first of the three accounts detailing his conversion in these pages. All of them emphasize the reign of Christ over people who want to be His enemies and stand against Him. Christ ruled over Simon Magus. He ruled over Saul of Tarsus.

IV. The Reign of Christ the Lord Over All Nations, 9:32-12:25

And in fact, He not only reigns despite opposition and over those long separated from His people. He also reigns over the nations. Thus (though we won't treat each of these in detail) we see that the Kingdom expands to Gentiles. Paul may be the apostle to the Gentiles, but Peter was the one to take the good news to Cornelius. This, in turn, leads to the establishment of the church in Antioch — one of the most important churches in Eastern Christianity, and the place from which Paul was later sent out to continue the spread of the Kingdom. Also, the Kingdom of Christ triumphs over the kingdom of Herod as Peter is liberated by supernatural means and brought back to his home church! Already, then, the gospel is spreading beyond the borders of Israel, particularly into Lebanon and Syria.

A. Peter Preaches Christ in Lydda, Joppa, to Cornelius and his Household

B. The Jewish-Gentile Church in Antioch Is Established

C. Peter Is Rescued from "King" Herod Agrippa I and his Prison

V. The Reign of Christ the Lord Proclaimed to the Nations: Part 1, 13:1-16:5

Next comes the famous “missionary journeys” sections of Acts. As Thompson points out, these tell roughly the same story twice: commissioning at an established church, then ministry throughout Asia Minor/Greece, and then a section on nurturing and strengthening the churches planted. Both conclude with an evaluation in Jerusalem. The first evaluation takes the form of the Jerusalem Council, where the question of whether circumcision and the rest of the Levitical practices are necessary for salvation is answered with a resounding “No” — thus opening the church further toward Gentiles and spreading the reign of Christ that much farther.

- A. Commission in Antioch, 13:1-3**
- B. Ministry in Cyprus, Pisidia, Lycaonia, 13:4-14:20**
- C. Nurturing the Churches, 14:21-28**
- D. Evaluation in Jerusalem, 15:1-16:5**

VI. The Reign of Christ the Lord Proclaimed to the Nations: Part 2, 16:6-21:36

The second of these sections tells a similar story, only instead of the evaluation taking place within a council of apostles and elders, the evaluation instead takes place before a hostile crowd in Jerusalem. Once again, we see the theme of the word leaving Jerusalem. Like Jesus, Paul feels compelled to go up to Jerusalem. There, too, he meets his doom — not a noble martyrdom, but a foolish riot based on a misunderstanding of the gospel. The evaluation is negative, but it is not an evaluation by Christians. It is an evaluation by Jews. They determine that Paul’s theology is incompatible with Judaism, even though he is as much a Jew as they.

This third quarter of Acts once again shows the spread of the Kingdom, as the rule of Christ moves farther and farther even as it is more and more under attack in Jerusalem itself.

- A. Commission in Troas, 16:6-10**
- B. Ministry in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, 16:11-19:41**
- C. Nurturing the Churches, 20:1-21:14**
- D. Evaluation in Jerusalem, 21:15-36**

VII. The Reign of Christ the Lord Vindicated Before the Rulers, 21:37-28:31

The final quarter of the book of Acts contains the accounts of four trials. None of them is exactly successful for Paul, in that he rarely converts anyone and does not manage to get released. On the other hand, he has the opportunity to testify to Christ in all kinds of places — and the consistent testimony of the rulers is not “Wow! We want to be Christians” (that would be a little hard to believe, anyway) but “It would appear that there is nothing illegal about being a Christian.” Hardly a ringing endorsement, but on the other hand, maybe if the civil rulers really love something it may not be the kind of thing you want to embrace heart and soul anyway. The point is that the reign of Christ is not a political power on the same plane as the kingdoms of the earth. You can be a Christian and a Roman. And Paul was both.

- A. Trial Before the Crowd in Jerusalem, 21-22**
- B. Trial Before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, 23**
- C. Trial Before Felix in Caesarea, 24**

D. Trial Before Festus and Herod Agrippa II in Caesarea, 25

E. Final Meeting with Jewish leaders in Rome, 28

So as we continue looking at Acts together, the question emerges: Are you ready to submit to the reign of Christ? Do you want to further that reign by submitting to it yourself? Do you pray for it to spread? Do you believe that Jesus is for all nations, on His terms (not on the terms of your nation, as the Jews who believed in Jesus had to learn over the course of Acts)? Brothers and sisters, we are the ones through whom Jesus reigns. Are you ready for that? Like it or not, you are part of the Jesus administration. You have the Spirit. You have the word. You have the apostles' books. In fact, you're already doing it. So stay in the fight. Keep on worshipping Jesus and submitting to His reign when it looks like He's not really in charge. Acts shows us over and over that even when things aren't going right for us servants of the Kingdom here on earth, the King is alive, well, and ruling for His glory and our good. Trust Him on that. Amen.

Sermon 3, What Is the Church?, Acts 1:1-5

Proposition: The first paragraph of Acts introduces the church's foundation, identity, personnel, and methods.

- I. The Church's One Foundation: Jesus's Words and Deeds, v. 1
 - A. Recorded in Scripture
 - B. Recorded in Two Volumes, v. 1a
 - C. Delivered During the Forty Days, v. 3
 - 1. After the Resurrection, v. 3a
 - 2. Before the Ascension, v. 2a
- II. The Church's Twofold Identity, vv. 2-3
 - A. The Kingdom of God, v. 3
 - B. The People Who Obey Jesus with Spiritual Power, v. 2
- III. The Church's Agents, vv. 2-5
 - A. The Apostles (Chosen by Jesus), v. 2b
 - B. The Spirit (Promised by the Father), v. 4c
- IV. The Church's Methods
 - A. Word, v. 4a
 - B. Sacrament, v. 5

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we begin our study of the book of Acts proper this morning. We've seen two different overviews of the book in the last two weeks. Today, though, we are going to talk about what we see in the first sentence of the book. Luke manages to pack an astonishing amount of detail into this opening statement. He hits on pretty much all of the key themes and ideas of the entire book, right here in the first few lines. And the richness of this statement was only made more apparent by the attempts of the commentators to paraphrase it. Reading the paraphrases emphasized only how much was left out. So rather than paraphrase these lines this morning, I want instead to talk with you about how they describe the church. Here we have the church's foundation in Jesus' words and deeds; the church's identity as God's kingdom and God's people; the church's agents, represented here by the apostles and the Holy Ghost; and finally the church's methods, word and sacrament. Do you want to know what the church is, the identity of the body whose history Luke is going to share with us? Then read on.

I. The Church's One Foundation: Jesus's Words and Deeds, v. 1

The opening lines of the Acts of the Apostles, as we call this book today, tell us about the church's foundation. This foundation is squarely on Jesus, or better, Jesus' words and deeds are the foundation. Now, as some of the commentators pointed out, the interesting thing about this is that the words and deeds of Jesus, outside of His death and resurrection, are almost absent from

23 out of 27 books of the NT. Jesus' words and deeds are hardly mentioned outside the Gospels. Yet we know that His words and deeds are very important. Luke, however, by this statement makes it clear that Acts is just as much about Jesus' words and deeds as the Gospel of Luke was. Yet now, rather than recording what Jesus said and did personally, Luke records what Jesus said and did through His agents, particularly the apostles and the Holy Spirit but also through all the followers of the Way. The things Jesus began to do and teach are in the Gospel; the things He continued to do and teach are right here in Acts.

Before we go any farther, then, let me ask you this: do you believe that when you look around this perfectly ordinary building at the perfectly ordinary people here, when you listen to me read and preach, do you actually have the conviction that you are witnessing something Jesus is continuing to do and teach? Insofar as you have that conviction, you will love being at church and worshipping. Insofar as you lack that conviction, you will not be particularly interested in being here or in listening to Acts.

A. Recorded in Scripture

The first words of Acts mention a former book or treatise — the Gospel of Luke. This book is Scripture, and it is a book in which Jesus' doings and sayings are recorded. Jesus did both. He taught, and He acted. His teachings and actions got Him killed. But it is important to see that we are not left guessing about what Jesus did and taught. Rather, we know what He said and did because we have the Scriptures, Luke and the other 3 Gospels.

B. Recorded in Two Volumes, v. 1a

But just as there is a former treatise, so there is also a latter treatise. That is this book, Acts. We are justified, then, in regarding it as Luke's intent to write a two-volume work, in which vol. 1 records what Jesus began to do and teach and vol. 2 records what Jesus continued to do and teach.

That's what the church is built on. We are here, and not in a synagogue or a pagan Temple this morning precisely because Jesus of Nazareth did and taught the things He did and taught. However, Luke makes one more crucial point about this.

C. Delivered During the Forty Days, v. 3

That is simply that many of Jesus' key teachings that make the difference between Christianity and Judaism were delivered during this period that is covered in just a couple of verses here and at the end of the Gospels. This is the forty-day period between the resurrection and the ascension. The Gospels make it very clear that Jesus lived and died as a Jew. He worshipped in the synagogue. He never made the slightest attempt to found an alternative way of worship during His lifetime (i.e., prior to the crucifixion). So how was it that the book of Acts records a gradual but nonetheless real and apparently permanent split between Jews and the newly christened Christians? The answer has to lie in the teaching that Jesus gave during these forty days. Yes, Jesus mentioned the church by name in the Gospel of Matthew — but Stephen refers to the Hebrews in the wilderness under Moses as a "church" too, in Acts 7.

1. After the Resurrection, v. 3a

The forty post-resurrection days of teaching contained some powerful stuff. Jesus suffered death; then He presented Himself living. In between came the resurrection, an event that takes place offstage and has proven nearly impossible to depict in any way other than the gospels do — that is, by showing an empty tomb. Jesus was once dead, and then came back to life. And during that period when He was living a resurrection life on this earth, He taught the disciples the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. He taught them more openly, in other words, the Trinitarian proclamation that at the end of the day distinguishes Christians from Jews.

2. Before the Ascension, v. 2a

And He also taught this message up until the time “when He was taken up,” as the beginning of v. 2 tells us. The first volume, Luke, covers events through the ascension. The next volume starts with the ascension (we’ll look at it together next week). And also, this second volume records the outworking of the teaching Jesus gave during the forty days. We know that teaching must have been even more revolutionary than what Jesus said during His pre-death ministry, because its effects have certainly been enormous. What themes did that teaching orbit around?

II. The Church’s Twofold Identity, vv. 2-3

Luke gives us two major hints.

A. The Kingdom of God, v. 3

The first of them is a direct statement that Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God. What is the Kingdom of God? It is His rule, particularly the part of it His rule that is capable of increase and diminution, of coming into conflict with Satan’s Kingdom and winning (or losing) in battle against it.

Now, this is not the totality of God’s reign. God reigns over everything; He is omnipotent, and His rule cannot fail to be omnipotent. But we also pray for His Kingdom to come, because in the beginning Adam and Satan worked together to take away dominion over this world from God. They did not succeed in limiting His omnipotence, of course. But they did in a certain sense carve out an autonomous zone within the larger realm of God’s omnipotence. Within this zone, things are not run or done God’s way. Rather, they are done according to the desires and actions of fallen men and angels. Here on earth, in other words, things are so rotten because sin and Satan calls the shots in a way they would never be allowed to do in Heaven. Thus, the mystery of evil is the flip side of the mystery of the kingdom. How can God be defeated? That is the question of evil, the problem of evil. The answer, of course, is that we have no idea. But He lets our evil defeat Him and keep Him out in a certain sense and for a certain time. The campaign that He is waging to bring us and the whole world back under full control such that things will again be done His way is what the Bible calls “the coming of the Kingdom.” Jesus taught them for forty days about His rule and how it is driving back Satan’s rule. What would we give to have that teaching written down? But God did not see fit to give it to us in words. Instead, He gave it to us in examples. As we saw, the book of Acts is framed with references to the Kingdom. We know, then, that everything in between describes that Kingdom further.

What is the relationship between the church and the Kingdom? The church is one subset of the kingdom. The Kingdom is the totality of the rule of Christ in its ability to grow and retreat. But the church is a particular subset where Christ rules. It is the citizens' assembly. The church is not the whole of the Kingdom; it is the people of the Kingdom. Christ's rule is for people, but it is also for animals, plants, planets, and everything else living and nonliving.

B. The People Who Obey Jesus with Spiritual Power, v. 2

But let's talk just a little more about these citizens of the Kingdom. What characterizes them? What are they like? Well, Luke tells us that they receive commands from their Lord, who is Jesus. The church is the group of people who accept and carry out Jesus' commands. Here it is specifically represented by the apostles, but surely the description of them given here fits with every Kingdom citizen. Notice, too, that it's not just that the church receives commands from Jesus. It goes further than that: The church receives commands "through the Holy Spirit." What does that mean? It means that the Spirit delivers the commands and gives the power to carry them out. That's what the rest of the passage goes on to show, as it describes the apostles waiting in Jerusalem to receive the Spirit before they are allowed to spread the message beyond the group.

How does the Spirit carry commands to us? He wrote the Bible. He empowers preaching. He lives in our hearts and speaks to us, reminding us about Jesus. It is His presence that grows the fruits of love, joy, and peace in our lives — and without love, joy, and peace, there is no obedience to the commands of Jesus.

So who are the citizens of the Kingdom? They are the people who obey Jesus with spiritual power. They listen to His commands, and they do what He says through the indwelling Holy Spirit in their lives.

Does that describe you? Do you acknowledge Jesus as Lord in the sense that you receive His instructions through the Holy Spirit? Or do you feel free to blow off what He says if you're pretty sure you have a better idea, or that His command just isn't realistic for your situation, or that another moral standard is more righteous than His? Do you acknowledge, further, that without the Holy Spirit you won't be able to obey? The way you acknowledge that, by the way, is through prayer. If you won't pray, then you are saying "The Holy Spirit does not need to be present for me to do the right thing. I can and will do it on my own, thank you very much."

So that's the church — the population of the Kingdom of God. It is not the sum total of the Kingdom, but it is the most important component of the Kingdom. Christ's goal is to reign over human beings who willingly and lovingly own Him as their Lord and King. I hope that describes every one of us in here.

III. The Church's Agents, vv. 2-5

So how does this kingdom spread? How does Christ's rule over human hearts spread? The opening verses of Acts highlight two agents.

A. The Apostles (Chosen by Jesus), v. 2b

The first of them is the apostles that Jesus chose. The book of Acts will tell us not only about the apostles that Jesus chose during His time on earth, but also about the replacement apostle that the

11 chose and the “13th” apostle, Paul, who does more in Acts than any other human character and who wrote 13 books of the NT. Clearly, brothers and sisters, without the apostles, humanly speaking, there is no church! Whether we look at what we believe (drawn from the writings of the apostles), when and how we meet together (drawn from the practice of the apostles), how we choose leaders for our church (drawn from the teachings of the apostles), and more, we see that the apostles are incredibly important to the Christian faith. Without them, we would be practicing something that would look a lot like Rabbinic Judaism.

B. The Spirit (Promised by the Father), v. 4c

But the other thing to realize is that the Spirit is the key agent in the book. He is the Father’s promised blessing; no greater blessing than Him can be known or imagined! Why? Because He is God with us, the other paraclete that Jesus spoke of. Do you see the Trinitarian emphasis? Jesus chose the apostles, and the Father promised the Spirit. All three persons of the Godhead are at work selecting and empowering the agents of the church’s growth and mission.

IV. The Church’s Methods

So we have Spirit-empowered apostles, sent out by the Father and the Son. But what do they do? By what methods do they spread God’s word?

A. Word, v. 4a

Well, Luke answers that question too. The transition from indirect to direct discourse in v. 4 is rather odd. First the narrator is telling us what Jesus said, and then “which you heard from me.” Suddenly the very words of Jesus intrude into the narrative. The NIV doesn’t like this and actually edits it right out of the text. But it’s there all the same — not because Luke didn’t know how to write, but because he wanted to make a point. The point he wanted to make was that the church proceeds by the very words of Jesus. The commands of Jesus are important, and doubly so when they are expressed in His own words. The church ministers by saying what Jesus said! This is the continuing task of the church. If you don’t get a stiff dose of Scripture here on a weekly basis, then this church is failing in its job.

B. Sacrament, v. 5

The other method by which the church advances is sacrament, and especially (in Acts) baptism. Jesus mentions both the water baptism of John and the Holy Spirit baptism that He Himself offers. Both are important; indeed, the church grows by exercising both. We bring people under Jesus’ rule by sharing His words with them, and by baptizing them in water — and by asking Christ to baptize them with His Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, you are part of the Spirit-empowered, word-and-sacrament fueled population of the kingdom of God that we call the church. This story of Acts is your story. So let’s listen to it, learn it, and be ready to live it out. Amen.

Sermon 4, How to Handle Jesus' Departure – and Return, Acts 1:6-11

Proposition: The reality that Jesus will return the way He left prompts us to stop date-setting and Heaven-gazing and focus instead on power, the Spirit, and witness.

- I. Coming Together to Say Goodbye, v. 6a
- II. A Final Question: Is the Kingdom Coming to Israel Now?, v. 6b
- III. The Question Reframed, vv. 7-8
 - A. What's Not For Us: Knowing the Father's Times and Dates, v. 7
 - B. What Is For Us, v. 8
 - 1. Power
 - 2. The Spirit
 - 3. Unrestricted Witness
- IV. Going on the Clouds, Coming on the Clouds, vv. 9-11
 - A. He Went Up and the Cloud Took Him, v. 9
 - B. The Two Men Explain, v. 10
 - 1. Heaven-Gazing Is Not the Way to Look for Jesus' Return, v. 11a
 - 2. Jesus Will Return as He Went, v. 11b
 - a) It's Not About Knowing the Time and Date
 - b) It's About Power, the Spirit, and Unrestricted Witness

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come this morning to the event that was already anticipated in v. 2 of this chapter. I'm talking about the Ascension. We know that Jesus sits at God's right hand, and that He left this world in a dramatically supernatural fashion to drive that point home to His disciples. But I want us to focus on what Jesus focused on with His ascension. The focus is on power, the Spirit, and witness, not only in Jerusalem (the hometown of the church!) but beyond it, in Samaria (a region where a sect of Judaism flourished) and all the way to the end of the earth. Acts 1:8 is well known as being the outline of the book, and so it is. But more important and relevant to us than where the gospel was preached in those early days is how it was preached. The final instructions our Lord left were appropriate not just for that moment in church history, but for every moment right up to His return. So let's examine this story and listen to those instructions in more detail. What we'll see is that the reality that Jesus will return the way He left prompts us to stop date-setting and Heaven-gazing and focus instead on power, the Spirit, and witness.

I. Coming Together to Say Goodbye, v. 6a

Our text begins with the disciples coming together — as we can see from v. 12, this is a coming together to say goodbye. It's a farewell gathering on the Mount of Olives. You have probably been to a number of farewell gatherings like this. They are formalized at the end of weddings, of

course. We gather to see the new couple into the getaway car. We have also been to parties at which we say goodbye to friends who are moving. In the same way, the disciples gathered because this was the end. Jesus was leaving.

II. A Final Question: Is the Kingdom Coming to Israel Now?, v. 6b

But before He want, they had a final question: Is the Kingdom coming back to Israel now?

What kind of a question is this? It is something that they really want to know! Is Israel going to be freed from Roman rule and made once again the geo-political Kingdom of God?

Why would they wonder such a thing? Because like the Dispensationalists and Zionists of our day, they read the Hebrew Bible and saw that God had promised to give Israel a land, presumably a land they controlled in a political sense, with a Davidic king on the throne. Folks, that conclusion is not hard to draw from the pages of what Jews call the Bible and what we call the first 39 books of the Bible. We cannot judge the disciples harshly here, for not only they but many Christians of today would pose this very same question to Jesus. Calvin says “There are almost as many errors as words in this question.” But it is better exegesis to attempt to see what Luke thought of the question, or rather what Jesus thought of it.

III. The Question Reframed, vv. 7-8

And thankfully, we have His answer right here in the text before us. Brothers and sisters, this answer is incredibly important. It is the answer, not to the question of when Israel will once again become a geo-political religious state, but to the question of how the disciples ought to live after Jesus’ departure. Jesus’ answer to this question gives two sides of the issue — what isn’t for us, and what is. Obviously, as we read further, we will see that Acts is not some NT version of Joshua and 1 & 2 Samuel, all about establishing Israel as a nation-state. This book simply does not cover that question. Rather, it covers the question of how we can be certain of the Kingdom and act as the Kingdom’s subjects in this era where the King is in Heaven and not on earth.

A. What’s Not For Us: Knowing the Father’s Times and Dates, v. 7

What is not for us in this age is to know times and dates. God has determined that those things are not for us. It’s easy to see why. When you know when and where something is, it’s easy to attend, or to give it a miss. If I happen to know that the International Society of Coal Mining Engineers is meeting at the Cam-Plex in July of 2021, I can purchase a ticket and plan to be there — or not. The human world works on planning, schedules, and calendars, for those things enable the coordinated action that allows us to be powerful and make stuff happen in this world. We all believe in making stuff happen and getting things done. In this very passage, and in many others in Acts, the disciples “came together,” implying that they knew when and where to meet and that they went to the right location at the right time. They knew the date and time of the ascension of Jesus Christ. Wow! And it was helpful for them to know that. But if we knew the date and time of His return, we would plan on it in the most literal sense. “I don’t have to worry about the Second Coming until 3 days before it’s going to happen.” Can you imagine how many generations of Christians would have been able to conclude that they need not know or think anything about the Second Coming? I daresay none of you has given serious consideration to how your family will celebrate the 300th anniversary of the USA. Some of you were around for

the bicentennial celebrations in 1976. I'm sure they were spectacular. But most of us who are old enough to think about how our families will handle holidays aren't planning to be living in the USA in 2076. In other words, as Christians who knew the time and date fixed by the Father's authority for the second coming, we would be as interested in the second coming as Americans presently are in their nation's 300th anniversary. It's just not even a factor in anyone's planning, not a blip on the radar screen of bureaucrats and museum curators. Would you like the second coming to be functionally irrelevant in your life? Then try to figure out the time set by the Father for it.

How about the time when China will become a Christian nation? The time when there will be more faithful pastors than hypocritical ones? The time when Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox will settle their differences and become a truly unified church that is more faithful to Christ than any of the communions can presently imagine? How we wish we knew the times when these events would occur! And yet, to know their time is to render them functionally irrelevant to all but a few generations in the scope of church history. So we pray for ecumenical rapprochement now. We pray for the church in China now. We pray for hypocrites to be expelled from the church and true pastors to flourish now!

Jesus and the Father reveal to us what we need to know to be faithful to them in our generation. Knowing that the "biggies" of Christian history aren't for our generation isn't going to help us.

B. What Is For Us, v. 8

So what is going to help us? What did Jesus offer instead of a timeline of major events in church history?

1. Power

The first thing He offered was power. We know that kingdoms and power are intimately associated. Kings have power, which is what allows them to establish and maintain their kingdoms. Whether or not Israel is going to become a religious geopolitical entity endorsed by God Himself is not something you and I need to know. But we desperately need power, because a powerless kingdom is pretty soon going to be a non-existent kingdom. You will receive power! What kind of power is Jesus talking about here? Well, obviously it is the kind of power appropriate to the kind of kingdom in which they were going to need to live. And thus, it is not geopolitical power. It is not power over the weather, or power over plants and animals. It is not electrical power. It is power relevant to the goals of the kingdom, which are to bring people out from under Satan's power into the glorious liberty of the children of God. In other words, it is power for evangelism, conversion, and sanctification.

2. The Spirit

The source of that power, as Jesus makes clear, is the presence of the Holy Spirit. The third Person of the Trinity, who proceeds from the Father in the Son [that "in" is not a typo], the Spirit is truly and fully God. He is breathed forth by the Father, and His ministry cannot be separated from that of the Word. The Word and Spirit are two Persons who travel and work together.

We will see much more about the Holy Spirit in Acts. Without Him, there is no power for ministry. Without power for ministry, there is no church.

Times and dates aren't for us. The Spirit is. The rest of the New Testament gives much information on how He comes to us, how we ought to worship Him, and what we can do to maintain His presence in our lives. We won't go into all that here. But let me just say that if your Christianity is more interested in speculating on times and dates than in the Holy Spirit, you have not understood the message of the book of Acts!

3. Unrestricted Witness

The final thing that is for now, for the apostles, and by extension all Christians, is unrestricted witness. Jesus names the region they are in — Judea. Then He names the neighboring region, the homeland of the half- or almost-Jews: Samaria. Then He names "the end of the earth." The progression is clear. It is like the progression "in Gillette, and in Campbell County, and in Wyoming, and to the end of the earth." The witness would move outward from Jerusalem just as the prophets said it would. The book ends with Paul in Rome, at the "end of the earth" (as the Psalms of Solomon called Rome), and we today, meeting here in Gillette, are certainly in a location that Luke, Paul, and Peter would consider to be the absolute end of the earth as well.

But the broader point is not that we need to go to Jerusalem in order to learn what we need for now. The point is that power, the Spirit, and unrestricted witness in every region of the earth are what we need for now. We don't need to know times. We need Spiritual power and unrestricted witness. That's how the church lives.

Not everyone in the church is an evangelist. Acts does mention ordinary believers talking about the word, but obviously its main focus is on just a few extraordinarily gifted people set apart for the work of evangelism. Still, if you think that power is for every citizen of the kingdom (it is — "the saints of the Most High will possess the Kingdom) and the Spirit is for every citizen of the Kingdom (He is), then you must also admit that witness is for every citizen of the Kingdom.

What does "witness" mean? It means someone who saw something. That's what a witness is. To be a witness for Jesus you may indeed have to testify. If subpoenaed, you will certainly have to testify. But the point is not primarily the act of evangelizing; the point is primarily the firsthand experience of Jesus' reality. If you have read about Jesus in a book but not experienced Him, you are not a witness. If you have heard me talk about Jesus but have not seen Him do anything, you're not a witness. If you have told other people about secondhand information about Jesus and seen them believe it, you're not a witness — at least, not unless you saw Jesus saving people through your non-eyewitness words.

You have power. You have the Spirit. And if you have Spiritual power, then you have experienced Jesus' work in your life. That's what is needed for now. I'm not talking about ecstatic feelings. I'm not talking about the burning in the bosom. I'm not talking about a subjective feeling of assurance. I'm talking about witnessing growth in love, joy, peace, and the freedom from guilt that comes through having your sins forgiven by Christ. If you have those fruits of the Spirit and a knowledge that God no longer holds your sins against you, you are a

witness to the power of Jesus. You are a witness of His saving grace. And if you have seen the church love on you, you are a witness to His love expressed through His people.

Jesus didn't say "You will be my evangelists." You're something better than an evangelist. You are a witness. Your memory holds firsthand evidence pointing to the reality of Jesus Christ and the sufficiency of His work. That's a big deal. That's a huge deal. And you heard it from the lips of Jesus, right here in Acts 1:8.

You're a Spirit-empowered witness. That's better than being a citizen of an Israel restored to Solomonic glory.

IV. Going on the Clouds, Coming on the Clouds, vv. 9-11

The final scene in this narrative of the ascension tells how, after redirecting the disciples' question, Jesus went up.

A. He Went Up and the Cloud Took Him, v. 9

He soared into the air and a cloud took Him. This was it. This was the final ascent, going up to God's right hand where He will stay until the second coming. The cloud is associated with the glorious manifestation of God throughout the Bible. Clouds and darkness swirl around Him; the Son of Man is coming on the clouds of Heaven, just as the apostles saw Him leave on a cloud. C.S. Lewis has a passage somewhere on the language here and how we often feel that it lacks sublimity. But what better symbolic way to signal going out of the world than floating off the ground and being whisked away by a cloud? If you can think of one that triggers more symbolic associations, I would be glad to hear it.

B. The Two Men Explain, v. 10

Suddenly, they realized that two men were standing there. Like attending a going-away party, this too is an experience we've all had — and it's not an entirely pleasant one. If you are standing somewhere looking at something, and suddenly realize that another person is standing there too, it can be a bit of a shock. "Where did you come from?"

1. Heaven-Gazing Is Not the Way to Look for Jesus' Return, v. 11a

But the two men in white have a point to make: This isn't the Transfiguration. As one commentator pointed out, it's easy to imagine Peter and John saying "Don't worry; we've seen this before. He'll be back in a minute." But of course, He wasn't. And looking hard at the place where He disappeared won't change that. Just as getting a timetable of church history is not what's needed for Christians right now, so Heaven-gazing, where we stand there and literally watch the sky looking for the second coming is not the way to do it. Jesus has a different calling for us. What is that calling? Well, it is to do our daily work in obedience to Him. It is to live as the people of His Kingdom until He returns and claims the throne.

2. Jesus Will Return as He Went, v. 11b

The two men in white point this out. The way to look for Jesus' return is not to examine every last cloud that floats by.

a) It's Not About Knowing the Time and Date

Nor — and this is tougher one to wrap our minds around — is it about getting the time and date onto our calendars so we can be ready. Lots of Christians have predicted particular times and

dates. Some have even blasphemously said “No man knows the day or the hour, but we can know the year and the month”. That’s rubbish. Precisely because Jesus will return just like He went, our business is not to stand around looking at the sky.

b) It's About Power, the Spirit, and Unrestricted Witness

Instead, our business is to honor His closing instructions. The way He left was saying “Don’t worry about times and dates. Worry about power, the Spirit, and unrestricted witness.” We are witnesses everywhere. We have power everywhere. We have the Spirit everywhere. Jesus will come back just like went up — and When He returns, He wants to see us doing what He told us to do when He went up. He wants to see us full of the Spirit, powerful for the Kingdom, getting (and yes, sharing) firsthand knowledge of Jesus’ work in our lives and in our communities.

That’s how to handle His departure. That’s also how to handle His return. Get ready. He’s coming back. You and I don’t know when. But we do know how, and we know how we’re supposed to get ready for it.

Seek the Spirit. Walk in power, not weakness. And watch what Christ is doing so that you can tell about it. Amen.

Sermon 5, A Replacement for Judas, Acts 1:12-26

Proposition: We're the new Israel, and so we need to gather for prayer and preaching, and we need 12 apostles to be our foundation.

I. What the Church Did, vv. 12-26

A. Gather, vv. 12-15

1. Pray, vv. 13-15
2. Preach, vv. 16-20

B. Get Ready for the Spirit, vv. 21-26

1. Replace Judas
2. Complete the Twelve Apostles
3. Reconstitute Israel

II. What the Church Should Do

A. Gather, vv. 12-15

1. Pray
2. Preach

B. Walk By the Spirit

C. Build on the Apostolic Foundation

1. Get Ready to Deal with Apostasy
2. Expect to be Ridiculous
3. Don't Expect to be Prominent

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we saw last time that witness is the task of the church in this era between the Ascension and the Second Coming. We know from the rest of the Bible that worship is the primary task of the church, and that witness is a means to the end of worship. But as we look at the history Luke has recorded for us here, we see that the rest of chapter 1 talks about two crucial elements of that witness. They are gathering and preparing for the Spirit. That's what happens in the text before us. The church gathers for prayer and preaching, and while gathered they do what they need to do to be ready for Spirit-empowered witness. That, of course, is to select a twelfth apostle to replace the apostle who apostatized — Judas Iscariot. What I want to show you this morning is that we need to gather for prayer and preaching like the church did in those days, and that they needed a twelfth apostle to make up the full complement of the New Israel. Now that that 12th apostle has been chosen, we need to build on the foundation of the apostles by keeping in step with the Spirit.

I. What the Church Did, vv. 12-26

What we should look at first this morning is what the church did. I say the church, of course, even though our text opens apparently with just the apostles, the “Galilean men” who were there at the Ascension and then walked back to Jerusalem. But it quickly moves forward to tell of the

120 disciples, men and women, who were gathered in the upper room. Some of what the text tells us is simply what happened. Thus, I don't expect to find a deep spiritual lesson in the distance between the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem (though the Venerable Bede correctly says that if we don't take "the sabbath journey" of repentance and faith during our working life here on earth, we will not attain to the heavenly sabbath that God has promised to everyone who follows Him), or to say that we all ought to meet for worship on the second floor. But in general, brothers and sisters, I would say that it will be clear to us as we keep examining Acts what's merely local and incidental and what is the result of deeper principles about how the church ought to be governed. We will talk more about this as we get farther into the book. For now, though, see if you don't agree with me that this first scene presents two major things the church ought to be doing while gathered.

A. Gather, vv. 12-15

And that is the first and main thing: The church gathers. Jesus-followers get together. There were a bunch of them, and they all knew each other. There were no nobodies in this church; they were all somebodies! Luke emphasizes this by saying "the crowd of names" — a unique phrase, but one that emphasizes both that they were a crowd and that they were all well-known to each other and to their leaders. This was a crowd, but a definite one, a crowd of somebodies. Just as you doubtless make it your habit to look around and see who's here, so I do as well. In fact, my two churchgoing habits back before I became a preacher sat ill with one another. I loved to sit in the front row, and I loved to look around the whole church at everyone who was there. Well, it's hard to both of those without being really obvious about it. In that sense, I praise God that He called me into the ministry, because now it's my job to sit near the front and to look at you all. Anyway, this crowd of names, this group of somebodies, had come together for a specific purpose.

1. Pray, vv. 13-15

They had gathered to pray. In fact, all of them with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer. It wasn't a few, or some of the most spiritually-minded, but the whole group. And it wasn't that they prayed occasionally, or even regularly, but that they were at it all the time. Now, again, this is not necessarily Luke's way of saying they did it 15 hours a day, 7 days a week, anymore than if we said that so-and-so is always in church we mean that he's here 15/7. But it is important to see that with Jesus gone back to Heaven, the church devoted itself to prayer. They even agreed on what to pray for — which, indeed, I think you will find to be one of the easiest places to find unity in the church today. Everyone agrees that we ought to pray for greater holiness, for more of the Spirit, for more laborers in the harvest field, and on and on. The eleven apostles prayed. The Virgin Mary prayed. The women prayed. Everyone was included; no one was exempted. That is what the church did as it got ready for the descent of the Spirit, the fulfillment of the Father's promise.

2. Preach, vv. 16-20

But though the church began with prayer, it certainly did not stop with prayer. After prayer, they had preaching, as Peter got up and explained the word to them. Now, I daresay that when we read Psalm 69 earlier, you did not immediately think that it was about Judas. Yet Peter says here

that Psalm 69, and Psalm 109 too, are about Judas. How can that be? Historically speaking, these psalms were written a thousand years before Judas was even born. We know that King David was wise, but do we really believe that he was familiar with the name and character of Judas Iscariot and decided to write a psalm about him? That would be a little bit like William the Conqueror writing a poem about Adolf Hitler. It just doesn't fit.

Some people, confronted with this, have thrown in the towel and walked away from the Christian faith. Peter Enns, once a conservative professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, did something along these lines about fifteen years ago when he realized that some things in the Bible just, as he saw it, could not be true. What can we say to Prof. Enns and those like him, who are prepared to say that King David could not have been talking about Judas Iscariot and therefore that Peter is a liar and the Christian Bible is all based on a total misunderstanding of some ancient texts compiled by Hebrew priests in the 500s B.C.? We would say this: The Bible is a thoroughly supernatural thing. It is a thoroughly natural thing too. It is fully human and fully divine, just like the Son of God. But also like the Son of God, its divine element is first and controlling. David was writing about the king of God's kingdom and cursing the enemies of the kingdom of God in those two psalms. He was not thinking about Judas when he wrote them — but the Holy Spirit was, and the Holy Spirit was writing them through David's mouth. That's what Peter says, right here in v. 16.

The Spirit knew what Judas was going to do. And David knew that the Lord's Messiah would be betrayed by a close friend (Ps. 41). He knew that this man would deserve an overwhelming curse and that another man would have to be appointed to take his office. And so David wrote about it in these two psalms, and Peter quotes it here. Later on, we'll see how the church applied Ps. 2 to a situation of persecution.

In other words, brothers and sisters, the Bible is about Jesus. Insofar as David was a type of Christ and one of His most prominent ancestors, the things that happened to David are fulfilled by the things that happened to Christ. And since we are united to Christ, the things that are written about Him become true of us as well as we grow more and more like Him. We will see that over and over as we go through this book of Acts, which is completely saturated with references to the Psalms and the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, for the apostles and the rest of the characters in Acts, there was nothing "Hebrew" about it. It just was the Bible. They were writing what we know as the New Testament, but they hadn't written any of it yet when Peter cited these two psalms and said "This kind of enmity to Christ came to a head in Judas' attack on Jesus. So his property is desolate, and another man will have to take his office."

That was what they did for preaching in those days: They took a text out of the Bible and explained its relevance to the church that was there sitting in front of them. And that's what I am called and every preacher is called to do, week by week. Woe unto me if I don't preach the text and explain how it is relevant to you and to me this week! If I'm not talking about the word of God to the people in front of me at this historical moment, I'm not preaching. That's clear already from this first reported sermon in Acts. It behoves you, as the people of God, to insist that your preacher deliver the word of God to you and explain to you what you're supposed to do

about it. If he doesn't do that, pray for him. If he continues to not do it, talk to him and redouble your prayers. And if he still doesn't do it, you will probably need to find a preacher who does. I'm serious. Peter preached to them while they were gathered. And I preach to you while you are gathered.

B. Get Ready for the Spirit, vv. 21-26

Well, what does Peter say that the church in front of him needs to do? They need to replace Judas.

1. Replace Judas

That's the application section of his message. It starts in v. 21 with the word "It is necessary that." He doesn't say "We have to," or "You should." He uses an impersonal construction: "It'll have to be done." This impersonal construction was slightly more common in Greek than it is in our English today, but we still use it, particularly in phrases like "It's raining." If you ask someone who says that, "What's raining?" the person will have a hard time answering you. We just say that it is raining. Well, the Bible typically uses the impersonal construction to mean that God regards it as necessary. God requires it. That, of course, is what preaching is about. It is the preacher's job to tell you "This is what God wants." And what God wanted them to do was to replace Judas.

2. Complete the Twelve Apostles

Now, why did God want that? Peter knew not just by reflecting on Scripture (Psalms 69 & 109 hardly say "There always need to be 12 apostles"), but by reflecting on the church's situation too. Where were they in salvation history? They were in the unique 10-day period between the Ascension and Pentecost. They needed to be ready for the Spirit to come. And for that, there needed to be 12 apostles.

3. Reconstitute Israel

But again, why? Where does it say "Thou shalt have 12 apostles"? Of course, as you all know, the Bible doesn't say that. Jesus didn't say "You, plus the one you pick to replace Judas, will be my witnesses in Jerusalem," etc. Rather, Peter knew that there should be 12 apostles because there were 12 tribes of Israel. In other words, Peter preached these texts from Pss. 69 & 109 in light of the historical foundation of Israel on the 12 sons of Jacob. Those sons each had a tribe named after them, yielding twelve tribes. We can also note in passing that there were really 14 tribes, and there were also 14 apostles — not 12 of either, even though 12 is the headline figure. If you remember, though, Reuben was banned from being a tribe because he defiled his father's concubine. Joseph, meanwhile, did not have a tribe of Joseph. Instead, he had two tribes, named for his sons Ephraim and Manasseh. So that means that we have 12 sons, but two have been subtracted and two added so that we still come out with 12. But in Revelation, instead of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, John mentions the tribes of Reuben and Joseph. There were 14 tribes, folks. And in the same way, we have the original 12 apostles, minus Judas, plus Matthias and then Paul. That leaves a total of fourteen apostles, just as there were fourteen tribes of Israel.

Anyway, that is not the lesson for us at the moment. Instead, the lesson for us is to look at Peter's symbol-driven biblical reasoning. Peter knew that there were 12 tribes. And he knew that

the church is the new Israel, or better, the reconstituted Israel. And just as Israel started with a dozen leaders, so the church needs to do so as well. This symbolism is important to God; it's picked up in Revelation, where we are told that the foundations of Heaven have the 12 names of the tribes of Israel, but the gates have the 12 names of the apostles of the Lamb. The city is built on ancient Israel and its tribes, but the way into it is through the apostolic teaching. That's incredibly important — and it's why Peter said "We have got to have a 12th apostle." He was not looking at a direct command; he was looking at what was fitting for the church in that historical moment based on Biblical teaching and example.

It is imperative that you find a pastor who can do that — one who is able to understand not just the direct commands, but also the broader symbolic picture of the church. You might say "That must be why Peter was an apostle, because how he got that lesson is way beyond me." And you would be right, more or less. But we must also say that anyone can see that Israel had twelve tribes, and that the church is the group that has become the new Israel, the new kingdom of priests and holy nation. Thus, it was important to get the foundation complete so that the new Israel could be built on this foundation of the apostles. You can't make a foundation out of a missing, apostate apostle.

So Peter preached, and so we know to be the case. The body there put forward the two men who met Peter's criteria for an apostle. Jesus chose one of them by speaking through the casting of lots. He no longer ordinarily speaks by the flipping of a coin. But He did on this occasion to make it clear that this apostle was not self-appointed, nor human-appointed, but chosen by God Himself.

II. What the Church Should Do

Well, that is what the church did in the passage in front of us. And what can we learn from it?

A. Gather, vv. 12-15

The first thing we learn is that we need to gather. You and I need to come together.

1. Pray

And while we are together, we need to pray. Prayer is mentioned over and over in Luke-Acts. Jesus prayed. The disciples prayed. The early church prayed. And if you and I don't pray, together, united in heart and voice with one another, then we are not like the early church and we should not expect to see the blessing that attended the early church. This church has two prayer meetings because not all of us have prayer partners at home. Thus, we as your elders have established two prayer meetings because we want to emphasize the necessity and power of united prayer. Waiting for God's promises to come true doesn't preclude praying; in fact, it emphatically includes praying! If you don't come to prayer meeting, you are not a bad Christian — necessarily. But you certainly need to be praying with your family, with a prayer partner, or in some other prayer meeting not sponsored by this church. Do you know how many times the New Testament talks about individual prayer? That's right: one time. One time! Jesus says "Go in your closet and pray." Every other command to pray in the NT is in the plural. I will certainly say this: If you never pray with others, you are a bad Christian. You are not doing something that Jesus was incredibly clear about. Christians pray, and they don't do it alone. They do it with

others. Yes, we pray as part of our worship service. That's a good start. But let's just say that if you only talk to your father at family gatherings, you're not as close to him as you should be. But if you don't talk to him even there, there's something wrong with you.

2. Preach

The other thing the church needs to be doing is preaching. That has two sides, talking and listening. From the beginning, the church has had one person stand up front and do the preaching, even as Peter did in the text before us. But the whole church — and this very much includes the preacher — is called to be the listening church. If you're going to talk to God and expect to be heard, you better listen when He speaks to you — which He does in His word, both read and preached.

You all are fairly good at gathering for preaching. Many of you are good at gathering for prayer, too, within your own families or with the church body or both. I praise God for that. But don't rest on your laurels now. Don't decide that now is the time to take it easy. Pray. Preach.

B. Walk By the Spirit

And walk by the Spirit. In this passage, the church is getting ready for the Spirit to come. We already have Him! That means that in order to imitate the early church, we should not be readying ourselves for the Spirit. We should be walking by the Spirit, keeping in step with the Spirit. He is here. We live like that by worshipping Him in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord.

C. Build on the Apostolic Foundation

And finally, we build on the apostolic foundation. Our chapter was about selecting the twelfth apostle so that the foundation of the church could be complete. Our life in the body today, in the moment in history in which God has placed us, is not about selecting a twelfth apostle but about listening to the apostles we already have. What do they tell us?

1. Get Ready to Deal with Apostasy

Well, I find three major lessons in this text. The first has to do with the gory story of Judas. We read the story of Jesus already knowing the end. We see the name "Judas" and shudder. But actually, of course, to them he was Judah, and he was maybe the most trusted of all the apostles because they had made him treasurer. He is notable not for wanting to call down fire, but for wanting to give to the poor. When Jesus said "One of you will betray me," they didn't all say "Yeah. Judas. It's pretty obvious who the snake is."

No. They had no idea. They each thought He was talking about them. Peter thought He was talking about Peter, etc. That's because Judas fit right in. He was just as good an apostle as the other 11. And don't you forget it. Yes, of course sometimes the apostates will be the people that don't surprise you. "Oh, yes. Them. Yeah, I saw that one coming 25 years ago." But just as often, the apostates will shock you. For instance, you know that Ravi Zacharias engaged in sexual misconduct. And the list could go on and on. Indeed, sometimes it's easier to list the prominent preachers about whom there has been nothing scandalous than to list those who have fallen to theological heresy, sexual sin, or financially shady shenanigans.

Judas Iscariot apostatized. Just try, just for a moment, to hear that again with fresh ears. *One of the twelve apostles was a devil.* I mean, we all know it. And we just mentally write off Judas from the get-go. But he was a genuine apostle, appointed by Jesus, treasurer of Jesus Christ Ministries International, Inc. And he fell hard, so hard that he sold out Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

And you're not apostles. You're not handpicked by the Son of God like Iscariot was. What makes you think that you will do better? That you are less likely to fall? Or, failing that, that your pastor won't fall into sin? That your spouse/sibling/elder/granddaughter will not deny Christ? Apostasy is a real thing, and it's a common thing. Get ready to deal with it. How do you deal with it? By recognizing what Peter said in v. 16: The Bible promises that apostasy is necessary. Jesus said "It must needs be that offenses will come." Paul said "There must be heresies among you." Why is it necessary? Because God tests us. Because He wants us to see who is genuine and who isn't. And He wants us to see whether we are genuine — or not.

So apostasy doesn't take God by surprise. It's a necessary part of life in a fallen world. And don't let it take you by surprise either.

2. Expect to be Ridiculous

Though that's the case — though the world acts like it's not surprised by apostasy because "Who could believe that garbage anyway?" — the world still likes to laugh when Christians fall, and especially when apostles fall. Apostolic apostasy is the mother of all scandals. And it's openly recorded in the pages of the New Testament. Even people who don't know anything about Peter and Paul can probably tell you the name and salient characteristic of Judas Iscariot.

And you serve the Messiah who picked him.

Yes. Jesus picked a thief for His treasurer. He gave His whereabouts to the one who was going to sell Him out. If that's not a good reason to walk away from the faith, I don't know what is. Of course, at the end of the day Jesus did that because He came to die. Judas was part of that process — a willing part, a willing partner with Satan, but also one who figured in Jesus' plan to die for our sins. Judas meant it for evil, but Jesus meant it for good.

That said, you serve a Messiah who died in weakness, naked on a cross. He was crucified by a colonizing empire, at the behest of the religious elites who theoretically served Him. If you want a muscular message of domination and triumph, don't look here. In some other religion, perhaps, Jesus would have called the twelve legions of angels and watched while they tortured Judas right there in front of Him, and then He would have invaded Rome, killed the high priest and started over with someone faithful in that role, and generally set the world right in a way that it could understand. He didn't do that. That's not how He works. He set the world right by dying in front of it, taking its pain and shame and guilt on Himself. And if you want to serve Him, get ready for that. Get ready to be jeered at and to live and die in weakness.

3. Don't Expect to be Prominent

Finally, don't expect to be prominent. Yes, you're somebody. You're a name in the kingdom, as we saw in v. 15. But Matthias was an apostle, for crying out loud — and he promptly vanishes after the final verse of this chapter. So do all the rest, except Peter, John, and James. There were

12 apostles, but only a quarter of them did anything. Thus the church was founded, and in that noble tradition it has carried on to this day — oh, wait. Excuse my sarcasm.

Anyway, not even the apostles get a lot of space in Acts. How much less should you expect to be remembered as somebody who was really somebody in the Kingdom of God?

You can be certain about the Kingdom. You can be certain that Kingdom citizens gather for prayer and preaching. You can be certain that the church should build on the apostolic foundation. And you can be certain that people around you will leave the faith and leave you a laughingstock for having trusted them. That's not a reason to despair, give up, or be sad. It's a reason to put your faith in Jesus, the great Lord of the church who built it on the foundation of the apostles but was Himself its cornerstone.

Pray. Preach. Gather. And believe. And I'll see you in Heaven. Amen.

Sermon 6, The Spirit Comes, Acts 2:1-13

Proposition: Jesus kept His promise and poured out His Spirit on the whole church, attracting the attention of world Jewry and provoking a divided reaction among those who witnessed it.

- I. The Feast of Firstfruits Fulfilled, v. 1
- II. The Spirit Comes, vv. 2-4
 - A. With Noise of Wind, v. 2
 - B. With Tongues of Fire, v. 3a
 - C. To Every Christian, vv. 3b-4
 - D. To Empower Preaching in Many Languages, v. 4
- III. World Jewry Takes Note, vv. 5-13
 - A. Devout Jews Are the Church's Original Target Audience, v. 5
 - B. The Sign of Tongues Brought Public Attention, vv. 6-8
 - C. Babel's Scattering Healed by Christ's Gathering, vv. 9-11 w/ Gen. 10-11
 - D. Preaching Jesus Produces a Divided Reaction, vv. 12-13
 - 1. Interest: "What does this mean?" v. 12
 - 2. Rejection: "They're drunk," v. 13
 - E. God Reserves the Right of Authoritative Interpretation of His Actions, vv. 14-36

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we embark this morning on a survey of one of the most important and comprehensive chapters in the New Testament. If Romans 8 and Revelation 21 are both peerless and unique in their comprehensive descriptions of the Christian life and the world to come, respectively, so Acts 2 is peerless and unique in its picture of what the church is and what the church ought to be. The text before us is certainly one of the great mountain peaks of Christian teaching. We will take our time scaling its slopes and surveying the majestic view they afford us; indeed, I plan to spend eight weeks on this chapter alone, getting a good orientation toward what Luke has to say to us about the foundation, progress, and activities of the church. What we will see in this first segment of the chapter is that Jesus kept His promise and poured out His Spirit on the whole church. That coming of the Spirit attracted the notice of world Jewry, and it provoked a divided reaction among those who witnessed it.

I. The Feast of Firstfruits Fulfilled, v. 1

The opening verse informs us of the time when the Spirit came. He descended on the Day of Pentecost. In English, we would call this the Day of Fiftieth, or just Fiftieth. That's what the Greek word means. In Hebrew, this was the Feast of Weeks, otherwise known as the Feast of Firstfruits. It was called "weeks" because it was a week of weeks, i.e., 49 days, after the ending of Passover. Thus its Greek name "fiftieth." Depending on how you count, it's either 49 or 50 days after the end of the previous great holiday. It's associated with the first fruits of the wheat harvest, as the later Feast of Ingathering was associated with the first fruits of the grape harvest.

Anyway, here we are, 10 days after the ascension, 50 days after the resurrection. We are at the time when Israel of old began to cut the first heads of grain. And Luke doesn't say "When the day of Pentecost had come," as every English version renders it. He says "In the fulfillment of the day of Pentecost, they were all together in one place." The word is "fulfilled," as in what happens when a prophecy comes true. I have no idea why all our English translations are allergic to this word. What Luke is saying is obvious: For all those centuries, Israel celebrated the Feast of Firstfruits at this time. They were celebrating the eternal recurrence of nature, where each year the crops grow again and provide food again from God's bounty. But this year was the final year of Pentecost, because this year the eternal recurrence of nature was transcended by a new kind of life, a Spirit-empowered resurrection life. With the resurrection, the age to come has begun breaking into this life. Under the cursed order of nature in which we live, we only live to die, and what we breed and reproduce lives but to die as well. The birth of my baby daughter was wonderful, but in no sense is it an answer to the problem of death. She will die too — hopefully not until she too has born children and passed on the human life which is in her. But her birth doesn't stave off death, much less stop it altogether. In one sense, every birth just provides more for death to strike down. Every harvest is the end of the line for all those wheat plants.

But that cycle has, in principle, come to end with the fulfillment of the Feast of Firstfruits. This is the final harvest; after this comes not death but enduring life, life pertaining to the age to come, life without death. And when this 50th to end all 50ths was fulfilled, so ended the need to celebrate the grain harvest at a religious festival. With the coming of the Spirit, a better offering came to our Heavenly Father. Instead of getting some loaves of bread, He got 3000 people added to His Kingdom.

Well, let's read on to hear what exactly happened when Firstfruits was fulfilled.

II. The Spirit Comes, vv. 2-4

What happened, of course, is that the Spirit came just as Jesus said He would. Now, how does a Divine Person, who is by definition omnipresent, change His location? What the theologians have determined is that when we talk of a spirit being, and especially of an omnipresent God, to say that He is in a particular place is to indicate that He is exercising power in that place. Obviously, the Spirit is omnipresent and immense (that is, larger than size; the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him). He did not "leave" Heaven. Rather, He began to exercise His power in a new way where the disciples were. He manifested His coming with two signs that highlight His nature and personal characteristics.

A. With Noise of Wind, v. 2

The first of these manifestations was the noise of a mighty rushing wind. Notice that He did not come as a wind. Yes, the name "Pneuma" in Greek and "Ruach" in Hebrew equally mean "wind" and "Spirit." But it is not written that the Spirit came as mighty wind that blew buildings over. Here in Wyoming, we are familiar with that kind of wind. We have all seen semi trucks in the gutter with all 18 wheels up in the air. They were blown over by a mighty rushing wind! But that is not the kind of thing that the Holy Spirit is or does. Yes, He is free like the wind, as Jesus emphasized. He is mighty and uncontrollable like the wind. But He is not a force of chaos who

comes in and destroys things. He is the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of the Logos, who is the principle of order and rationality in all that exists. So when you hear that the Spirit sounded like a rushing wind, know that He is like the wind in freedom and power and speed. He is pure act, pure rushing energy, just like the Father and the Son. But He is not coming to knock Jerusalem down; He is coming to bring Jerusalem to Jesus. He sounded like a wind, but He was not a wind.

B. With Tongues of Fire, v. 3a

The second physical manifestation of the Spirit was to the sight. The first was to the ear, the second to the eye. They heard wind, but saw fire, dividing and coming to each one of them. The Spirit is like a fire — again, a sign of His mighty, rushing, self-feeding energy. Just as the Angel of Yahweh appeared to Moses as a flame of fire in a bush, so the Spirit appeared to the early Christians on this fulfillment of Firstfruits as a flame of fire. But rather than remaining in one, as the burning bush did, this fire divided itself to everyone. This fire can be infinitely multiplied, infinitely distributed, without losing a particle of its energy and power.

C. To Every Christian, vv. 3b-4

What's the point? The Spirit came to every Christian! He divided Himself to each one of them, Luke says in v. 3b. And then, in case you missed it, he repeats in v. 4 that the Spirit came to them all! This was not merely a gift for the apostles, for the leaders, for the super-Christians. He was a gift for the entire body, for every last follower of Jesus.

The wind and the fire are yours. The Spirit of Jesus has come, and He has come to the whole church and to each individual Christian. He is free, He is mighty, He is pure energy, a consuming fire just like the Father and the Son. And He is in you.

Can you believe this truth? Do you know that you have the gift which is the Spirit? Let me just say here that if you have the Spirit, you will love the word of God. If you have the Spirit, you will love to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. If you have the Spirit, you will be full of love, joy, and peace. Do you have these marks? They are your birthright if you are a follower of Jesus. They are His gift to you, a personal gift that comes not (in the final analysis) from trying harder but rather from the work of the Spirit in you.

D. To Empower Preaching in Many Languages, v. 4

Well, in this particular event, the Spirit came for the extraordinary purpose of fulfilling the feast of Firstfruits. He came, in other words, to begin the mighty work of harvesting souls for Jesus. He is still continuing that work; He is still busy about gathering, not the firstfruits, but the ongoing fruits, of the world harvest. So in this coming, He emphasized the means by which those fruits are gathered. That means is the spoken word, and particularly speaking in the language of the audience. That is what the Spirit empowered this firstfruits crowd to do.

You've heard the old saw "Preach the gospel. If necessary, use words." We know that St. Francis did not say that, because he understood that the gospel is the good news about the Word, the Logos, and that it cannot be done; it must be said. The church makes disciples by baptizing and teaching. Yes, Baptism signifies the gospel. But that has to be explained with words. I could go to a group somewhere that's never heard of Jesus and baptize them all, and they would know no more of Jesus after that baptism than before. That's why the presence of the Spirit enabled the

utterance of new languages. Now, we know that this was not just talking about any old random topic, just in a different language. They were not given the ability to speak in Sanskrit or Old English or Ancient Chinese for the purpose of discussing cricket scores, Roman politics, or the dating of Late Bronze Age pottery fragments recently dug up during one of Pilate's construction projects in Jerusalem. No; as v. 11 tells us, the content of their speech was the mighty works of God. They were talking about the good news of Jesus. That is the means by which the firstfruits were harvested. That is the means by which the Spirit continues to harvest souls for Jesus. He empowers us to speak about God's mighty works.

Do you do that? The point is not so much the tongues as the content of the tongues. Tongues go away in Acts. Tongues are not a major feature of the vast majority of the sermons in Acts (and almost a third of Acts consists of sermons). This is a crucial point to remember in the modern debates over speaking in tongues. Listen: No one in the church of God has a problem with you speaking the mighty works of God in any language of men. Go right ahead! But blabbering nonsense that linguistic analysis can prove to be not an intelligible language because it consists of the repetition of the same three or four sounds is not what Luke is describing here, nor what Paul is describing in 1 Cor. 12-14, nor what the Bible represents as normative for the church age. Don't tell me that you are speaking in an angelic tongue, and of course it sounds like nonsense to human analysis. You don't know that; that is a guess. It is not subject to rational evaluation, because we know nothing of the speech of the angels. But what we do know is that when we interpret the less clear passages by the more clear passages, it becomes clear right away that the gift of tongues is the ability to speak of the mighty works of God in a language you've never learned *for the purpose of harvesting souls for Jesus*. If that's not what your "gift of tongues" is, then you are not engaging in anything like what the early church was doing here.

III. World Jewry Takes Note, vv. 5-13

Well, Luke describes the Spirit's coming in only four verses; most of his account zeroes in on the audience. Who saw this sign, and how did they respond?

A. Devout Jews Are the Church's Original Target Audience, v. 5

Well, the obvious answer is that the sign was for the Jews. Luke has been at some pains to make clear that this happened in Jerusalem, and that Jesus insisted that it needed to happen in Jerusalem. Is the Spirit somehow limited according to place? Does He have no power outside Jerusalem city limits? Such a question is ridiculous. Jesus poured out the Spirit in Jerusalem because that's where He wanted to pour Him out. He had a plan and still has a plan for Jerusalem. It is the city of the great king, and I have never heard of a king who simply gives up His capital city permanently. Yes, Jesus has strategically given up Jerusalem. But the Bible ends with the New Jerusalem, all that the old Jerusalem was supposed to be. The point is that the great king has not given up His city to the enemy, never to see it again. No. He must reign until He is back in His capital city.

Anyway, lest we miss the obvious, Luke goes ahead and says it. "There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews." No kidding. Jews in Jerusalem? Who knew? Even if you knew nothing about the Old Testament, if you've read the Gospel of Luke then by this point you know that Jesus is a

Jewish man and that He spent a lot of time in the province of Judea, which is populated by Judeans or Jews for short. So why does Luke put on his Captain Obvious hat for just a second here in v. 5? The answer is that the presence of the Jews is really important for his narrative of the descent of the Spirit. Jesus said to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit. Why did He say that? Because Jerusalem is filled with Jews, and Jews are the target audience! They are going to be the firstfruits. They are the ones He wants to convert to Himself in fulfillment of this ancient wheat harvest festival. As Jesus begins to reap the earth, He starts with His own people in His own royal city. The church began in Jerusalem.

Now, these Jews were not just locals. In fact, Luke emphasizes the Jews from elsewhere who were living in Jerusalem at that time. Currently, more than a fifth of Canadians are foreign-born. Well, I don't know what proportion of the residents of Jerusalem were foreign born, but there were a lot. Nonetheless, they were all Jews — at least, that's what Luke emphasizes. He doesn't say "No gentiles witnessed this sign." But he only tells us about Jews witnessing it. Why? Because Jews are the church's original target audience. To use some kind of banal marketing analogy, you don't target old women with ads for beard trimmers. You don't target young men with ads for menstrual pads. And you don't try to sell snow shovels to Floridians. It just stands to reason. You don't try to bring a long-awaited Messiah to people who never wanted a Messiah. You announce the coming of the Messiah to those who have been looking for Him since Jacob announced that Judah would rule until Shiloh came, and that to Him would be the obedience of the people.

The book of Acts will go on to record how the Jews and Christians ended up going their separate ways. But it begins with an overwhelming emphasis on reaching the Jewish people. Let me just say it again: The Jews are our original target audience. Better, they are Jesus' original target audience, both in His personal ministry and in the early days of His church.

B. The Sign of Tongues Brought Public Attention, vv. 6-8

Well, the target audience noticed fairly quickly. One of my commentaries is by a Welshman, and he indicates that in 10 years in the USA he has heard someone else speaking Welsh only one time. It immediately attracted his notice. I don't have quite the same experience, but I vividly recall being in the Tokyo airport and seeing a huge man with a giant black Stetson on his head. I was immediately drawn to him, because I heard the babble of a language I didn't know all around me and I dearly wanted to hear my native English once more!

Thus, the power the Spirit gave to speak in other tongues caught the attention of world Jewry, and caught it immediately.

C. Babel's Scattering Healed by Christ's Gathering, vv. 9-11 w/ Gen. 10-11

Indeed, Luke is pressing this theme of world Jewry so hard that he includes a list of all the places where these Jews and converts to Judaism were from. This list bothers commentators a lot, because the principle of selection and ordering is not particularly obvious. Suffice it to say that Luke is listing all the nations for which he could find evidence that a Jew from that nation heard the proclamation on this firstfruits day. The scattering from the Tower of Babel, in other words, began to be reversed by the gathering of the nations that Christ was doing by His Spirit. Once the

tongues were divided, and the people scattered over the face of the Ancient Near East and beyond. Now the tongues are united, and the people are gathered into one congregation as they hear in their own language the mighty deeds of God.

That was what happened at Pentecost. The Spirit came, and He empowered preaching about God's mighty deeds in every language.

D. Preaching Jesus Produces a Divided Reaction, vv. 12-13

And brothers and sisters, this preaching produced quite the divided reaction. World Jewry was interested — but only half interested. Luke is foreshadowing the story he will tell over and over through the rest of this book: Some are interested, and some mock and reject the message.

1. Interest: "What does this mean?," v. 12

The first group was prominent on this Pentecost day. They were amazed and baffled by what they were seeing, and they really wanted to know what to make of it. They were trying to find out what was going on, and they were open to the explanation that Peter was about to give.

2. Rejection: "They're drunk," v. 13

And then there was the other reaction: "I know what's happening here. They're drunk. This is definitely not a mighty work of God; this is a mighty mess of alcoholics, stone drunk when they ought to be celebrating the Feast of Firstfruits. What a bunch of losers."

Actually, of course, in the history of responses to the gospel, this is one of the nicer ones. But it is a negative evaluation of the coming of the Spirit and the proclamation of the mighty works of God.

E. God Reserves the Right of Authoritative Interpretation of His Actions, vv. 14-36

Well, the text goes on to describe how Peter stood up and provided an authoritative explanation of what was really going on. We can broaden this to say that God always reserves the right to authoritatively interpret what He's done. And that's what is ideally going on in the preaching of the church to this day.

Brothers and sisters, the Spirit came. Firstfruits was fulfilled. Do you have the Spirit and walk by the Spirit? Do you live in a way that would have been impossible before Pentecost? If not, repent — and embrace the fullness of the Spirit. He came to bring you to Jesus. You are a sheaf in Jesus' barn. Live like it! Amen.

Sermon 7, What Pentecost Means: Pt. 1, Acts 2:16-36

Proposition: Pentecost means that God has acted in Jesus to bring last-days salvation to the house of Israel.

I. God Kept His Promise to Pour Out His Spirit, vv. 16-22

A. Text: Joel 2:28-32

1. The Spirit Is for All Flesh, vv. 17-18
2. The Spirit Signals the Arrival of the Last Days, v. 17
3. The Spirit Signals the Coming of Judgment, vv. 19-20
4. The Spirit Signals the Arrival of Salvation, v. 21

B. Relevance: This Is the True Explanation of What You're Seeing, vv. 12-13

II. Jesus of Nazareth Is the Lord Who Brings Last-Days Salvation, vv. 21-32

Introduction

Have you ever wondered about the sermons in Acts — why on earth they are so short? How did Peter preach a discourse that takes 3 minutes to read, and by means of that discourse convince 3,000 people to believe in Jesus? If that was the case, why don't we just go ahead and adopt 5-minute sermons in general? Maybe the church would be more effective, right? But a close reading of the passage indicates that what we have here is essentially no more than the outline of Peter's sermon, and that to properly preach this sermon could easily occupy two to four hours. I have taken the liberty of outlining Peter's sermon in the same style that I usually use to outline my own sermons, and the result is on the back of your bulletin. As you can see, the outline is long. Pretty much all of the capital letter points (A, B, etc.) are quite sufficient for an ordinary sermon in one of our churches today. But Peter didn't preach just one of those capital letters. He preached this entire discourse, with "many other words" too, as v. 40 so clearly tells us. We are not going to look at all of Peter's points in detail this morning. In fact, we are going to take today to try to get our minds around the first step in the argument of this powerful sermon, and next Sunday to get our minds around the second step in its argument. On the third Sunday, we will look at the sermon's mechanics. So today and next Sunday: Peter's main argument, which is that the coming of the Spirit means that God has acted in Jesus to bring last-days salvation to the house of Israel. The following+ Sunday: How Peter preached, with lessons for preachers (and listeners) today. But on to Peter's argument.

I. God Kept His Promise to Pour Out His Spirit, vv. 16-22

As we will observe next week, Peter's sermon is intellectually demanding. He does not simply give a few simple ideas that are easily absorbed. Part of the difficulty here is Luke's condensing process, of course, as Peter's illustrations, transitions, etc. are not spelled out. But the flip side of that difficulty means that this text is rich. It is full of gospel meat for hungry saints.

Peter begins with his first major point: What you're seeing is explained by the descent of the Spirit, and the descent of the Spirit is explained by God's promise to pour Him out! As we'll

comment next week, Peter does not proclaim this in a vacuum. His sermon began with the question his audience was actually asking — a key point for preachers then and now. They wanted to know the explanation for what they were seeing; Peter wanted to tell them that explanation.

A. Text: Joel 2:28-32

And so he introduces his text: Joel 2:28-32. We could do a whole sermon series on the book of Joel, and I would certainly love to do so. But unsurprisingly, Peter quotes the Psalms 3 times for the one time he quotes from a minor prophet. We'll talk about that in a minute; suffice it to say that Joel wrote sometime during the OT era. His book, like the book of Job, is timeless. It contains no references to dateable events in political history in the prophet's own day. Instead, it is entirely about God's latter-day judgment, symbolized under the image of a plague of locusts. And then, the prophet introduces the message of the pouring out of the Spirit in the latter days. This is the part that Peter quotes, for it is this part which was fulfilled when the Feast of Firstfruits was fulfilled 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. What does this part say?

1. The Spirit Is for All Flesh, vv. 17-18

The Spirit is for all flesh, the text says. Peter adds "Says God" to make explicit what is always implicit in prophetic revelation. From Joel's perspective, the coming of the Spirit was future; from Peter's perspective, the coming of the Spirit was happening right in front of him. And just as he saw the tongues of fire go to every believer, so now he emphasizes that the Bible had already taught that such would be the case. The Spirit is for all flesh — in this case, we understand, for all flesh of God's servants, which is how the verse goes on to describe it.

Now, does the presence of the Spirit automatically imply prophecy, dreams, and visions? The text certainly mentions these things. Yet they have never been the mainstream experience of all Christians, or even most Christians. Rather, it is best to understand these things like the generalized "blood and fire and smoke" of the next verses. The Spirit comes and stays; the signs come and go. They are real enough, but they do not have the staying power of the Spirit. When you have the reality, you don't need the sign. When I'm married, I don't need my wife to wear a wedding dress every day so that I can know I'm actually married to her. We've dropped the sign because we have the thing signified.

2. The Spirit Signals the Arrival of the Last Days, v. 17

Not only is the Spirit for all of God's people; He is a sign of the last days. You see, Joel said simply "after this I will pour out my Spirit." But Peter paraphrased that as "in the last days." The general "times afterward" of Joel become, in Peter's preaching, a clear sign of the dawning of the end. This "eschatological" (as theologians call it) streak runs all through the New Testament. It is a thoroughly apocalyptic document, constantly urging us to make decisions about what really matters in light of the imminent end of the world. In this, of course, it is supremely realistic. How, you ask? Precisely because the end is near for each one of us. Yes, Jesus has not come back yet and He left for Heaven almost two millennia ago. But in that time, how many Christians have died and gone to be with Him? It is literally true that, as Peter would go on to write, "the end of

all things is at hand.” But it is even truer that the moment of your death is rapidly approaching, and to live as though you will never die is the supreme folly.

The New Testament describes the entire era after the Ascension as “the last days.” By this it means that God has no more major salvation-historical events on the calendar. We have experienced everything He was planning to happen before the end. Obviously He still has minor events, like the planting of this church or the conversion of your neighbor that you’ve been praying for. But the major event was the resurrection, in which nature’s cycle of birth, death, and rebirth was definitively broken by the irruption of the Age to Come and the power of Jesus’ indestructible life. That principle of indestructible life is now working itself out, and the final end of the world will be when Christ’s indestructible life has conquered the last enemy of itself — namely, death.

We live in the time between inauguration and consummation, the mixed-up time when the principle of indestructible life (who is the Holy Spirit) is loose and at work in the world, and yet death the destroyer of life is also at work in the world. How can resurrection life live alongside death? We don’t know. But we know that it does.

So the Spirit signals the coming of the last days. That is one of Peter’s points. It’s a subplot, but a very important one.

3. The Spirit Signals the Coming of Judgment, vv. 19-20

You see, under that subplot are two further truths: the Spirit signals the coming of judgment and the arrival of salvation. Both of these are end-time realities. Judgment will happen at the end, when the whole story has been told, when all your acts have been enacted. And salvation will be complete then too. But already the death and resurrection of Christ signals the completion of God’s wrath (judgment) and the finality of God’s salvation. Peter mentions the signs of judgment that Joel talked about.

Obviously these things are not good. Darkness, blood, fire, and smoke are far from being the things that we associate with good and wonderful things. Far from it. No; the coming of the Spirit with these dismal signs signals the coming of judgment. And in the last days, God judges. His final judgment is reserved for the end, but the coming of the Spirit is a signal to get ready. Nothing but your next breath stands between you and judgment; nothing but the return of Christ, which could be at any moment, stands between you and the end of the world.

4. The Spirit Signals the Arrival of Salvation, v. 21

But by the same token, the Spirit’s coming also signals the arrival of salvation. Huh? How is this possible? Because salvation and judgment are two sides of the same coin. That coin is the *presence of God*. God is here. He will save those who trust Him and damn those who fight Him. The same sun that melts butter hardens clay. The difference is not in God; it’s in the people in front of Him.

Because God is coming in His Spirit, He will save everyone who calls on His name. What does that mean? It does not mean merely saying “Lord, Lord!” Calling Him Lord means nothing without doing what He wants. To invoke His name truly is to ask Him to keep His promises — clearly, in this case, the promise of last-days salvation. To call on the name of the

LORD is a concept that first appears in Genesis ch. 4 and recurs throughout the rest of the Bible. It means relying on God's character and promises.

A name signifies something. There are certain individuals whose rock-solid integrity and reliability is so well-known that a simple mention of their name is enough to calm a situation or change an attitude. We have a judge in our congregation. Let's call him Morales. "Morales is going to handle that case."

Immediately, you can stop worrying about that case. Morales has got it. There is no need to worry; it will be judged justly. Well, imagine that you are thrown in the dock before Morales. To call on his name would be to say, "Are you Judge Morales, your honor?"

When he says, "I am," you respond:

"Your honor, your name is good. I know that if I lay the facts before you, you will judge justly in my case because of who you are and your commitment to the law."

Well, to call on God's name is to ask Him to be who He is. It is to reaffirm His identity and apply it to your particular situation. The ones who do that in this period of the last days will be blessed with salvation. God saves those who call on Him according to who He really is. Yelling at Him as the child abuser in the sky is not calling on His name. But trusting Him to be who He said He would be, and affirming that trust by prayer, is exactly how you get saved and how you stay saved.

Now, Peter stops quoting there. But I want to look at the next verse as well for just a moment here, because it describes so perfectly what happened: "For in mount Sion and in Jerusalem shall the saved one be as the Lord has said, and they that have glad tidings preached to them, whom the Lord has called" (Joe 2:32 LXE). That's the Greek version that Peter was using. It prophesies that in the last days the gospel will be preached in Jerusalem. That happened in this very Pentecost sermon!

B. Relevance: This Is the True Explanation of What You're Seeing, vv. 12-13

Well, Peter's first point is obviously relevant to the audience because it answers the question of what on earth is going on. How did these men from Galilee start speaking in other tongues? The answer is simple. God poured out His Holy Spirit on them, just as He said He would. You aren't looking at drunks; you're looking at the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Well, we don't have time this morning to look at the rest of Peter's sermon in-depth. Let me just point out to you the nature of the pivot. Peter started by announcing that the spectacle in front of his audience was the result of the coming of the Spirit. And then he appears to start over.

II. Jesus of Nazareth Is the Lord Who Brings Last-Days Salvation, vv. 21-32

How does Peter do this? What is the nature of the pivot from "Spirit and prophecy, as already predicted in Joel 2" to "Jesus of Nazareth?" Let me just say that if you can understand this pivot then you understand the essence of New Testament preaching. If you don't understand it, if it appears to you be nothing more than Peter saying "Hey, I've got a crowd here and so I might as well talk about what I want to talk about whether it has any relevance to what they're asking or not", then you are far from the spirit of the NT.

Why does Peter do this, going from the Spirit to Jesus like this? *Because of his fervent conviction that Jesus and the Spirit are united in a very important way!* Peter is not abusing the audience. He's not just randomly tacking Jesus on at the end of a discourse that ceases to be relevant as soon as Jesus is mentioned. Rather, he is backing up to give the deeper explanation of what happened. Yes, Joel prophesied it. But why did Joel prophesy it? Why did this event have to happen at all?

The answer, of course, lies in the identity and career of Jesus of Nazareth. The Spirit came because Jesus sent Him. And why did Jesus send Him? Because of who Jesus is and what He came to do. In other words, brothers and sisters, *if you think that Pentecost is about the Spirit then you need to stop reading Peter's sermon at v. 21.* But Pentecost is not about the Spirit. It is about Jesus, just as the Spirit Himself is about Jesus. That's why Peter backs up and says "You're interested in the symptoms here, which are a manifestation of the Holy Spirit of God. Well, let me tell you: The Holy Spirit didn't send Himself. Yes, He is God and perfectly capable of initiative and desire and action. But He is the Spirit of Jesus and He came from Jesus, for He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and Son is worshipped and glorified."

In other words, brothers and sisters, whatever our Pentecostal brothers and sisters say about the Spirit, we can affirm. He is all that and more, for He is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. Yet He did not come on His own account. He came to bear witness to Jesus. He is the Spirit of Jesus who came from Jesus for Jesus. That's where Peter winds up: The whole life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, for the sake of which the entire OT was written, culminates here and now in the glorious coming of the Spirit. Jesus poured this out. Yes, the Spirit is responsible, but behind Him stands the Logos. The Spirit proceeds from the Son.

So the coming of the Spirit signals the last days; of course it does. But the reason it signals the last days is that Jesus came and did what He did and so brought in the last days.

Do you believe that? Do you trust Him? If the answer is yes, then you share in His Spirit. If the Spirit and His fruits are AWOL in your life, then you don't yet know Jesus.

Joel prophesied that God would pour out the Spirit. What he didn't mention was that it was specifically the Son of God who would pour out the Spirit, having earned the right to do so by living, dying, and rising again. Peter now makes this clear.

Do you look to Jesus Christ as the source of the Spirit? Do you ask Him for His Spirit? Do you keep in step with the Spirit? Brothers and sisters, the Spirit is for all flesh, for every Christian. If you belong to Christ, His Spirit belongs to you. Live like it. Amen.

Sermon 8, What Pentecost Means: Pt. 2, Acts 2:16-36

Proposition: The Spirit came to Israel from Jesus, and in particular from Jesus because of all that Jesus did on earth — life, death, resurrection, ascension.

- I. God Kept His Promise to Pour Out His Spirit, vv. 16-22
- II. Jesus of Nazareth Is the Lord Who Brings Last-Days Salvation, vv. 21-32
 - A. His Nature, v. 22
 - 1. He Was a Man
 - 2. God Publicly Endorsed Him
 - 3. He Carried God's Miracle-Working Power
 - 4. Relevance: You Witnessed His Miracles
 - B. His Death, v. 23
 - 1. God's Plan Delivered Jesus to Death, v. 23a
 - 2. Relevance: You Delivered Jesus to Death, v. 23b
 - C. His Resurrection, vv. 24-32
 - 1. It Was Accomplished by God's Power, v. 24a
 - 2. It Was Metaphysically Necessary, v. 24b
 - 3. Text: Psalm 16:8-11
 - a) David's Flesh Would Be Kept from Decay, v. 27b
 - b) David's Flesh Decayed, v. 29
 - 4. Text: Psalm 132:11
 - a) God Had Promised David a Descendant, v. 30
 - b) The Promises of Pss. 16 & 132 would be kept to this Descendant
 - c) Therefore, David Was Speaking of Christ, vv. 30-31
 - d) In Fact, God Kept These Promises to Jesus, v. 32
 - 5. Relevance: Jesus Poured out What You See and Hear, v. 33c
 - D. His Ascension, vv. 33-37
 - 1. God Exalted Jesus to His Right Hand, v. 33a
 - 2. God Gave Jesus the Spirit, v. 33b
 - 3. The Text: Psalm 110:1
 - a) David himself Did not Ascend, v. 34
 - b) David's Lord Ascended
 - 4. Jesus's Ascension Proves His Status, v. 36
 - a) He Is Lord
 - b) He Is Messiah
 - 5. Relevance, v. 36
 - a) Know Jesus' Status
 - b) Know Your Guilt

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, I originally hoped to cover Peter's Pentecost sermon in one message. That proved to be impossible, and here we are taking a second look at it. Last week we saw how Peter had deployed the prophecy of Joel to explain what was happening in Jerusalem on that day in late May/early June when the Spirit came. We also looked at what I called "the pivot," where Peter brought his point about the Spirit gracefully to an end and then launched into a second point, one beginning "Jesus of Nazareth, a man . . ." and continuing from there. We saw last time that the point about the Spirit was not the main point; in one sense, it was only a preliminary point. Far be it from me, or from the Apostle Peter, to sideline a member of the Trinity. That's not the idea. But at the same time, we worship and God best by listening to what He actually tells us, rather than by guessing about what words like "equal in power and glory" should imply. And what does God actually tell us here? That the descent of the Spirit was not about the Spirit. It was about Jesus. The Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus who came to inspire preaching about Jesus and convert people to become Christians (not Pneumatics or Holy-Spirit-ites). The Spirit came from Jesus, and that is where Peter wants to take his audience. So we saw last time that the coming of the Spirit brings the last days and their eschatological judgment and salvation. But today we will further see that the Spirit came from Jesus, and in particular from Jesus because of all that Jesus did on earth — life, death, resurrection, ascension. The Spirit would not have come without the events recorded in the gospel. Hence another reminder that Acts is the second volume of a two-volume work. It is a real sequel; the events of this book make no sense without the events of vol. 1!

I. God Kept His Promise to Pour Out His Spirit, vv. 16-22

Clearly, the first point of Peter's sermon is that God kept His promise to pour out His Spirit. And just as clearly, that point is only a small fraction of his sermon, with the bulk of the message being taken up by proclamation about the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Again, Peter moves from the Spirit to Jesus because the Spirit came from Jesus and the Spirit would never have come without Jesus' work here on earth in historical time.

II. Jesus of Nazareth Is the Lord Who Brings Last-Days Salvation, vv. 21-32

So what is it that Peter has to say about this Spirit-sending Christ?

A. His Nature, v. 22

Peter begins by highlighting Jesus' human nature. This was the presenting side of Him after all.

1. He Was a Man

The apostles did not sit in the boat after Jesus calmed the storm and wonder "Why do I find it so surprising that God has all the power I always thought He had?" Not in the slightest. They said to themselves, "What kind of *man* is this?" There was no doubt in their minds as to His humanity. There was no uncanny valley, where He acted almost-human but something was just a tiny bit off. You know how you can tell within the first couple of words whether you're getting a robocall? I don't know how I can tell. Obviously the robot is playing me a recording of a real woman (it's always a woman) saying something. But always that robotic note is there. Well, there was absolutely nothing like that in Jesus. He was totally and completely *normal*. There was

absolutely nothing creepy or unhuman about Him. He was intense; no question. He was brilliant; absolutely. But He was 100% man, 100% manly, and completely human.

So that's what Peter leads with. "Jesus of Nazareth, a man."

2. God Publicly Endorsed Him

Yet the story only *begins* with His manliness. What comes next is astonishing. This was a man endorsed by God Himself. You might find a man with a certificate from Harvard University indicating that he knows a little about quantum mechanics, or that he is good at teaching English as a Second Language. You might get a man who is endorsed by your local steelworker's union to be excellent at welding, or find a man endorsed by this or that church as an excellent preacher. But I challenge you to find a man publicly endorsed, accredited, affirmed, or attested by God Himself. Such a man is hard to find. I can find millions of men who will endorse God for every man that God will endorse. But that's the thing about Jesus of Nazareth. God literally spoke from the sky and said "I am pleased with this one." When you set out to hire me, you looked at my credentials. I did not have anything on Heaven's official letterhead with God the Father's signature on it endorsing me. Not even close. But Jesus of Nazareth (metaphorically speaking) had such a document. Now, not having seen Heaven's official letterhead, none of us would know how to verify such a thing. So instead of a paper testimony, and instead of asking His Father to speak from the sky every time someone wondered whether He was genuine, Jesus showed His credentials in a slightly different way.

3. He Carried God's Miracle-Working Power

That way was the way of miracles. Jesus carried God's miracle-working power. The signs were divine in origin. They came from God. They were genuine miracles, things that transcended the entire order of nature. The greatest of them, of course, was the resurrection, which Peter will get to in a minute. We have already talked about the resurrection as the paradigmatic miracle, breaking the cycle of nature that has birth, life, reproduction, and death, with the next generation performing the cycle all over again. The race lives on, yes — but every individual dies. Our baby is no victory over death. We have postponed death's ultimate triumph by a few weeks or years, perhaps, but by bearing children within the order of nature we are ultimately raising fodder for death to gobble up. The resurrection completely transcends this order of nature, for the same individual who died has now come back to life. He lives by the power of an indestructible life; death has lost. The order of nature has been transcended to be reconstituted on another plane. This is what the NT calls "New Creation." And Jesus carried it. He went around exercising the power of God to do miracles and signs and wonders.

4. Relevance: You Witnessed His Miracles

And then, as always, Peter brings it back to his audience. You know this. You saw it. You were living right here in town while all this was happening, and these things were not done in a corner. Just as all Gillette got the chance to hear about Bob Vomhof's little tussle with Mayor Carter-King, so all Jerusalem got to hear about Jesus of Nazareth and His run-ins with the religious authorities.

In other words, Peter continues his pattern of connecting his message back to his hearers. He openly invites them to check his words against their pre-existing knowledge of the subject he's talking about.

B. His Death, v. 23

Then Peter moves on to talk about the death of Jesus. He was certified by miracles that only God could do, the greatest of them all being the resurrection with its transcending of the order of fallen nature.

1. God's Plan Delivered Jesus to Death, v. 23a

Yet He was betrayed, handed over by God's plan. We will have a whole sermon on this verse in two weeks, so I'm not going to say a lot here. But know that Peter preached the death of Jesus, and the first part of Jesus' death that he preached was that it was part of God's plan.

2. Relevance: You Delivered Jesus to Death, v. 23b

Again, he ties this back to the audience right away, forthrightly accusing them of killing Jesus by the use of wicked agents. He did not say "You personally hung Him there." He said "Your hired thugs did this for you, and you were totally consenting to it, to the point that you essentially did it through them."

This is good preaching. It's not afraid to confront the crowd with their own sins and problems.

C. His Resurrection, vv. 24-32

But Peter doesn't linger on Jesus' death. The longest section of the sermon is given over the resurrection. The resurrection is the key event. After all, God has certified people before; look at the OT prophets, especially Moses. And good men have been crucified by wrongdoers before. That's not enough to start a movement that will endure for centuries. Assuming for the sake of illustration that George Floyd was murdered, in an open-and-shut case, we cannot imagine that his legacy is going to be powerful enough to start a worldwide group of Floydians who gather on a weekly basis to remember his death. It hasn't happened yet and it's not going to happen. So the reason that Peter slows down here is because this is the novel part of his message. The rest of it was either a pretty standard interpretation of Joel 2 or else the recounting of events that, though rare, were not unprecedented. Suddenly, with v. 24, we are in different territory. Suddenly we are talking about the resurrection from the dead — not a temporary resurrection, as with Lazarus and others mentioned in the OT and gospels. No. We are talking about a permanent resurrection. The order of nature has been transcended. Jesus will never die again.

1. It Was Accomplished by God's Power, v. 24a

How? How can you say this, Peter? This is unparalleled in human history. This is contrary to the order of fallen nature. Everything that grows dies; every individual perishes at some point. Yet, insists Peter, the New Creation is breaking in now. God's power has raised Jesus from the dead. Now, this is important. All good Jews of that era would have understood that God's power was at work in every natural process. Yes, I begot my son, but God sustained and upheld that. Yes, the fish I eat feeds me — but God's power makes it do that. Without His creative and sustaining work, I would not be able to generate or be nourished or anything else. In Him we live and move

and have our being! But Peter is not making this claim, a claim that his Jewish audience intuitively understood. He is not saying that God's power is active in nature. He is saying that God's power is active over against nature, overruling nature and changing nature into a shape it will never assume under the sun. He is saying that God did something that nature as it is would not allow Him to do. God raised Jesus from the dead and endowed Him with indestructible life.

2. It Was Metaphysically Necessary, v. 24b

Why did God do this? Well, the first answer Peter gives is that it was metaphysically necessary. It was impossible for death to hold Him.

Why?

Because death is the wages of sin, and He had no sin. You can't keep a good man down! In other words, everything dies not because that's God's original design, because that is natural in the strict and absolute sense, but because that's the futility and bondage God has imposed on this world due to our sin. Death can't hold the one who is perfect. Death can't keep the one who has not forfeited His life. In other words, death too is perfectly moral and just. It doesn't seem so to us because we are ignorant of the depths of our own degradation and evil. We think, for instance, that it is unjust for a child to die because at the end of the day, we don't take sin seriously enough. But God does take sin that seriously, and He frequently exercises His right to take away life from anyone who is contaminated with sin in the slightest degree.

But Peter is not just interested in this metaphysical side of it, the question of possibility and in what sense it might be possible for death to hold onto someone. He is also interested in the Biblical side of it. And for that, he turns to Psalm 16.

3. Text: Psalm 16:8-11

Psalm 16 is a prayer for God to preserve David. But it ends with the triumphant affirmation that God will in fact preserve him, that God will not abandon his soul to death or let His holy one see corruption. Peter says, "Right here! Look: The OT affirms that the one who sees God and trusts Him will not see decay."

a) David's Flesh Would Be Kept from Decay, v. 27b

David would not be left in the underworld; he would not rot. That's what Psalm 16 says.

b) David's Flesh Decayed, v. 29

Yet, he then emphasizes, David's flesh did decay. He died, he was buried, and his tomb was still visible in Jerusalem. Though David meant that he would rise again at the end, that meaning was predicated on the very existence of the resurrection of the dead — something that actually happened in Jesus! The reason David could affirm his eventual resurrection was that Jesus was going to be resurrected first, and that resurrection would indeed be so speedy that He would not decay.

4. Text: Psalm 132:11

In other words, says Peter, moving to a new text, David was speaking in the person of Christ. The full meaning, obvious to us in light of its fulfillment, is that resurrection applied in the first instance not to David, but to His Son. David knew this, because he was a prophet. It's not that he spoke better than he knew; rather, he knew more than he wrote.

a) God Had Promised David a Descendant, v. 30

As Psalm 132 makes clear, God had promised a seed to David, a seed who would rule.

b) The Promises of Pss. 16 & 132 would be kept to this Descendant

What Peter does not explicitly say, but what his argument clearly implies, is the premise that the promises of Pss. 16 & 132 would be kept to this seed. God would keep His promises to David by keeping them to David's seed first, and then, through that seed, to David himself and to every other Christian. Another way to put it is that the promises were originally made to Christ, and to the elect in Him as His seed.

c) Therefore, David Was Speaking of Christ, vv. 30-31

David looked ahead by prophetic inspiration. He was talking about the Messiah.

If you believe that David could not have known about Jesus, then you will reject this conclusion. Peter got it wrong; the NT is founded on a mistake. But if you believe the Holy Spirit knew all about Jesus even in the time of David, and that He was able to share that knowledge with David, then you will accept that Psalm 16 and Psalm 132 are, in fact, about Jesus as the one who would not decay and who would sit on the throne as David's greater descendant.

d) In Fact, God Kept These Promises to Jesus, v. 32

Indeed, Peter insists that he and the rest of the apostles have firsthand knowledge that God kept these promises to Jesus. They saw that Jesus rose from the dead. You see, that's what it keeps coming back to. The Psalm 16 passage is about someone who would die and then rise from the dead, never to die any more. The Psalm 132 passage says that an obedient son would sit on the throne forever — again, a reference that seemingly makes sense only with death permanently out of the picture.

Notice the perfect blend of the prophetic and apostolic, of what we would call the Old and New Testaments. The prophetic witness from the Psalms is quoted at length — and then compared with the apostolic eyewitness testimony in order to bring out the full truth about Jesus.

5. Relevance: Jesus Poured out What You See and Hear, v. 33c

Once again, Peter pulls it back to his audience. All of this material from the Psalms is relevant because Jesus has ascended and poured out everything that's happening right in front of you. Do you want to know what's going on? It's Jesus — the one that David foresaw. The OT is relevant to you because Jesus is active right in front of your face. Do you want to know what His activity means? Then listen to the Bible, because it's about Him.

D. His Ascension, vv. 33-37

Well, Peter closes out his sermon by describing the ascension of Christ.

1. God Exalted Jesus to His Right Hand, v. 33a

He does not talk about the journey from Earth to Heaven. He does not get into the question of whether Jesus flew through outer space, and if so, how a human being can do that. (The same way he can fly through the atmosphere, of course — supernaturally!) He focuses on the destination, which is the Father's right hand.

To sit in that place of honor is to be the second greatest in Heaven, subject only to God the Father. Jesus is the greatest power in the universe; He shares the throne of God Almighty.

2. God Gave Jesus the Spirit, v. 33b

And furthermore, He received His Spirit from His Father. One of the key points the NT makes over and over about Jesus is that everything He had, He got from His Father. He is not independently wealthy, much less independently existent. He got His being from His Father, just as all of us here got our being from our fathers. And Peter highlights that the Spirit too is a gift. Hence the Orthodox reluctance to affirm the *filioque*. The Spirit proceeds from the Father, as Jesus said. He is the Spirit of the Son only because the Father has given Him to the Son, not because the Son also breathes Him forth. So the Orthodox say. Anyway, whether the Spirit proceeds from the Son or not, He most certainly belongs to the Son now. He is the Spirit of Jesus because the Father gave Him to Jesus.

In metaphorical terms, would you love to receive your earthly father's spirit? If he was a good man, you no doubt want to approach things like he did. But you have already received your Heavenly Father's Spirit. That is one of the major points of Acts 2!

3. The Text: Psalm 110:1

Once again, Peter doesn't ask the audience to take his word for it. He goes to another Messianic psalm. This Psalm is so Messianic that it cannot really be interpreted coherently in any other way.

a) David himself Did not Ascend, v. 34

After all, the Psalm specifically says that David's Lord is sitting at the Father's right hand. David did not go to the Father's right hand. There is nothing about that anywhere in the Bible.

b) David's Lord Ascended

Rather, as the psalm so clearly says, it was David's Lord who went up, and is now sitting at the Father's right hand.

4. Jesus's Ascension Proves His Status, v. 36

Because of what is written in Psalm 110, we know that Jesus really is exactly what He claimed to be. His ascension, as prophesied by David, proves His status.

a) He Is Lord

He is Lord. This means that He is Yahweh, the God of the OT. He is the boss, the one in charge, the one whom you and I have to obey. Peter brings his sermon to a climax with this declaration that Jesus is Lord.

b) He Is Messiah

Secondly, Jesus is Messiah. He is the one Anointed by God to save the world. All three psalms together testify to His identity as the Anointed Lord.

5. Relevance, v. 36

And on that climactic note, Peter brings the sermon back once again to speak directly to the crowd in front of Him. He has a dual application, and it's an application to knowledge. "Just so you know." It's a catchphrase that my wife's family uses all the time. It doesn't mean "Just so you know." It means "Just so you adjust your behavior accordingly, I think it's best to inform you

know about" whatever the subject is. Well, Peter is saying "Just so you know and can adjust your behavior accordingly." You should know for certain that God has made Jesus Lord and Christ.

a) Know Jesus' Status

That's the first application — a use of information. The one we're talking about is not some random man (though He is a genuine man). He is Lord and Christ.

b) Know Your Guilt

And you killed Him!

This is the final straw; this is Peter's last word on the subject. It's a hard-hitting conclusion. And of course, it's followed up with an altar call in the next couple of verses. But Peter did not let them off the hook within the body of his sermon. He denounces them as murderers and then sits down.

The effect was electric. It was overwhelming. We'll come back next week and talk about it. But what I want you to take away as that Jesus was foreseen by David in the Psalms, and that apostolic preaching is about Him. He pours out the Spirit, whom He received from His Father. And now He lives to make intercession for us.

Know that He is Lord and Christ. And you killed Him, for without your sin, He would never have had to die. Amen.

Sermon 9, Preaching Jesus, Acts 2:13-36

Proposition: The first Christian sermon contains scripture, Jesus, application, and relevance — the elements necessary for good preaching

I. Peter Began With the Questions His Audience Was Asking, vv. 13-16

A. Questions

1. “Are They Drunk?,” v. 13
2. “What Does This Mean?,” v. 14

B. Answers

1. They’re Not Drunk
2. This Means that God Has Kept His Promise from Joel 2

II. Peter Proceeded by Expounding Scripture, vv. 17-36

A. Joel 2

- B. Psalm 16
- C. Psalm 132
- D. Psalm 110

III. Peter Preached About Jesus, vv. 17-36

A. In Scripture (see previous point)

B. In Everyday Life

1. You See the Effects of the Spirit, v. 16
2. You Saw the Ministry of Jesus, v. 22

C. As Related to the Father and the Spirit, vv. 17, 22-24, 33, 34

D. In Terms of His Offices

1. Savior, vv. 21b-22
2. Lord, v. 36
3. Christ/Messiah, v. 30

E. In History

1. As the Descendant of David, v. 30
2. As One Who Lived Among the Audience, v. 22
3. As One Who Died, Rose, and Ascended, vv. 31-34

IV. Peter Consistently Applied Every Point to his Audience, vv. 22, 23, 33, 36

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have looked for the past two weeks at the content of Peter’s sermon to the Jews from many lands who had gathered for the fulfillment of the Feast of Firstfruits. But this morning, I want to look at the form of the sermon. What elements did it contain, and what can learn about Christian preaching from the presence of those elements? What I hope to show you is that Peter’s sermon was very appropriate to be the first

Christian sermon because it contains scripture, Jesus, application, and relevance — the elements necessary for good preaching.

I. Peter Began With the Questions His Audience Was Asking, vv. 13-16

Well, the first thing I want to point out is something I read in Ajith Fernando's commentary on this passage. Peter began with the questions his audience was asking! I don't know how many sermons I've heard that completely fail this basic test. But Peter didn't speak to them about something in which they had no interest. He didn't address questions that absolutely no one was wondering about. Rather, he took their questions and thoroughly answered them, not just literally but according to the spirit of the question.

A. Questions

1. "Are They Drunk?," v. 13

Some were wondering if the apostles were drunk.

2. "What Does This Mean?," v. 14

But the real question was "What on earth is going on?" That is what was on everyone's mind as they saw that so many were proclaiming, in multiple languages, the mighty works of God.

B. Answers

And so Peter answers the first question with a quick one-liner:

1. They're Not Drunk

They aren't drunk, because this is not the time of day for public drunkenness. He doesn't refute this charge at length; rather than explaining what a silly charge it was, getting out the breathalyzer, etc., Peter rebuts the charge by giving the true explanation of what's going on.

2. This Means that God Has Kept His Promise from Joel 2

You all want to know what's happening. I'll tell you: God has kept His promise from Joel 2! And with the mention of that promise, Peter is off to the races. The rest of his sermon is devoted to explaining in detail what it means for God to keep that promise — in other words, to explaining in detail exactly what is going on in the streets of Jerusalem on this Pentecost morning.

My preaching, then, needs to address what you're wondering. You may be wondering in general terms what's going on, how the Christian life is to be lived in the circumstances of the time and place in which we find ourselves. You may be wondering about particular theological questions, or particular questions of church order. You may want to know about parenting, or about what God thinks of political topics x, y, and z. If I'm going to preach like the apostles, then I need to take the questions you're asking and be able to give them a full answer in light of the teaching of the word of God.

If you're all wondering what we do as we experience God's judgment, and I'm preaching to you about middle knowledge or supralapsarianism, I'm a bad pastor. If you're wondering about how to love your spouse, and I'm preaching to you about the merits of the two different proposed dates of the Exodus (1446 B.C. or 1250 B.C.), I'm a bad pastor.

Anyway, Peter started with the questions his audience was asking and showed them how those questions were comprehensively answered by the word of God. And that brings up the next point.

II. Peter Proceeded by Expounding Scripture, vv. 17-36

What was Peter's method? Yes, he answered the question his audience was asking. But how? He didn't answer them out of his own head. He didn't present the latest empirical research, philosophical theorizing, or expert opinion. He did not summarize the zeitgeist (far from it!). No. He proceeded by methodically expounding Scripture. Peter's method was to quote large portions of text and then extract the points from them by comparing them with each other and with the actual course of events. Again, this is what good preaching does. It does not expound socio-political theories. It does not trot out empirical research. It is about the Bible.

A. Joel 2

Peter first turns to Joel 2, where God promises to pour out His Spirit on all flesh. In the summary of his remarks given by Luke, he does not expound this passage at length. Instead, he expects his audience to be able to see its immediate relevance to their situation. The speaking in tongues about the mighty works of God is the fulfillment of God's promise to pour out His Spirit. We say "What about the fact that what Joel describes is not exactly like what happened? We don't see any dreams or visions here, and the prophesying is described as telling the mighty works of God rather than as revealing new, previously unknown truths. So how can Peter regard the connection as simply obvious?"

The answer is that the point of connection is the coming of the Spirit. Peter is first of all talking about the events of the day. The Spirit came. That's how Jesus described it, and that has to be the correct interpretation of what they saw. So even though the Spirit did not immediately produce all the phenomena that Joel describes, nonetheless, His coming was a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. Peter wants to go behind the coming of the Spirit, though, to ask where He came from. How did the Spirit get here? The answer is that He came from the resurrected Lord Jesus.

B. Psalm 16

So Peter turns to Ps. 16 and explains that the words there cannot literally apply to David; instead, they have to apply to one of David's descendants. But it's right there in Scripture that David, or one of his descendants, would not be held by the grave. This passage gets significantly more exposition than any of the other texts Peter quotes. He argues closely, knowing that the obvious reading is that the promises are for David but explaining in detail why we have to conclude that the promises are for Christ in the first instance and then secondarily for David and everyone else in David's seed.

C. Psalm 132

Indeed, as Psalm 132 recounts, the promise to David focused on the one who would descend from him. That was quite clearly Jesus. Peter just references Ps. 132 in passing — another lesson for preachers. Not every text you mention needs extensive exposition. One text can and should be used to expound another.

D. Psalm 110

We also see that Peter mentions Psalm 110 to further expound Ps. 16. He uses good and necessary consequence to explain his point here, because he cites Ps. 110 to explain his point that David did not ascend into heaven. Now, Psalm 110 doesn't say "David didn't ascend." Instead, it

says “David’s Lord ascended.” Now, that implies that David didn’t ascend, because he ascribes sitting at Yahweh’s right hand to this one he calls “Lord.” But Peter does not hesitate to call the implication of the text “Scripture” every bit as much as the text itself.

So Christian preaching expounds some texts in detail and it uses other texts to expound the first texts. It is based on the conviction that Scripture is a unit and that one part is illuminated by all the other parts, and similarly that all the other parts are illuminated by one part.

III. Peter Preached About Jesus, vv. 17-36

Peter preached about Jesus. That is very clear.

A. In Scripture (see previous point)

His method was to expound Scripture, but his topic was to preach about Jesus. He found Christ all through the Psalms, and he found the work of Christ in Joel’s prophecy about the Spirit.

B. In Everyday Life

But he also relates Christ to the daily life of his audience. Again, this is what good preaching needs to do. If you know all kinds of theological truths, and all kinds of historical and linguistic truths, but don’t know how they relate to your everyday life, your Christianity will be quite impoverished.

1. You See the Effects of the Spirit, v. 16

So Peter tells them “You see the effects of the Spirit.” “This is what was spoken by Joel.” The work of Christ is taking place right in front of your face! And again, in today’s church we see the work of Christ more than anything in evil people becoming good people, in wretched people becoming full of love, joy, and peace.

2. You Saw the Ministry of Jesus, v. 22

Peter tells them “You saw the ministry of Jesus. He worked in your midst as you yourselves know.” Again, good preaching relates to what the audience has firsthand knowledge of. That doesn’t mean that I try to preach about making arrests to a congregation of cops, or that I try to preach about planting seeds to a congregation of farmers. Rather, it means that I preach about what you know of Jesus’ work to you. I build on the common ground that you already have with the realities the text is speaking of. You know how Jesus is at work in your midst. My preaching should tie that to Scripture, history, and metaphysics.

C. As Related to the Father and the Spirit, vv. 17, 22-24, 33, 34

But Peter also preached about the relationship between Jesus, the Father, and the Spirit. He preached all three persons of the Godhead.

The first verse of the Joel prophecy recounts God’s promise to pour out His Spirit — a promise that Peter then says was fulfilled by Christ. Christ and God are intimately related, and both have the Spirit. He comes from God, and He comes from Jesus too.

Well, after that fully Trinitarian opening, Peter moves on to emphasize the relationship between the Father and the Son. In v. 22, rather than talking about the Son as begotten of the Father before all worlds, he speaks of the relationship between Jesus in His human nature and the Father as divine. The Father attested the Son, vindicated Him before men by showing deeds that only God could do.

Now, Peter emphasizes that the miracles wrought by Christ were done by God through Him. In other words, Jesus did not do miracles by His own power. He did them by the power of the Holy Spirit, which is also the power of the Father. (Of course, the Father and the Spirit are Jesus' own Father and Spirit.) Jesus says in the gospels that He casts out demons by the finger of God, who is the Holy Spirit. And Peter emphasizes the same thing here: Jesus did mighty works, but did them through being embedded in the Trinity. He was not a lone ranger. He operated at all times in the power of the Father and the Spirit.

The same goes for us! We are Christians, meaning that we share the same Anointing that was on Jesus. The Spirit abides with us. The Spirit empowers us. And thus we can do what Jesus did, and even greater things, as He said Himself. Anyway, Peter emphasizes that Jesus did these works in tandem with His Father and Spirit.

He then goes on to talk about Jesus' greatest work, His passion. This, too, was not done by Jesus alone, but in concert with the Father and the Spirit and also in concert with the plans and desires of evil men. The Father's definite plan and foreknowledge handed Jesus over. His death was not something unknown to the Father or outside the Father's plan. Instead, it was something that the Father had providentially ordained. Yet the Father did not sin by betraying Jesus; it was the crowd in front of Peter who had sinned in that way.

Finally, Peter describes the Resurrection in Trinitarian terms. God raised Him up. Jesus raised Himself in one sense, but in another, it was His Father.

A bit further in, on vv. 33-34, Peter explains how Psalm 110 and the promise of the Spirit plays into this as well. The ascension was something Jesus did, but its goal was the Father's presence. And as soon as Jesus had entered the Father's presence, He received the gift of the Spirit, whom He then poured out on His people who were waiting in Jerusalem. Again, this is all the result of the Father's initiative, for He invited and commanded the Son to sit at His right hand while He conquered His Son's enemies.

Brothers and sisters, any preaching that only speaks of the Son and does not define His relationship to His Father and Spirit is defective preaching. Peter relates the Son to the rest of the Trinity at every step in his argument. And so should I and every preacher who claims to be talking about Jesus. If you are not constantly reminded that the Son is one of three persons in the divine nature, then you are not being well-fed.

D. In Terms of His Offices

But Peter not only speaks of Jesus as the Son of the Father and the dispenser of the Spirit who is also anointed with the Spirit by the Father. He also talks about Jesus in terms of His offices as our Redeemer.

1. Savior, vv. 21b-22

Thus, he first addresses Jesus as savior. By quoting from Joel — “Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved” — and then transitioning directly to “Jesus of Nazareth, a man,” Peter makes it clear that the LORD who does the saving is Jesus of Nazareth. Yahweh saves and He does it through His Son, whose human name is “Yahweh saves,” or *Yahshua*. Because that is who Jesus is, He is Savior. Call on His name and you'll be saved.

2. Lord, v. 36

He is also Lord. What this means is that He rules David. He tells David what to do. David is the greatest king of Israel, and if Jesus is greater than him, He is definitely greater than us.

Ultimately, to confess that Jesus is Lord is to confess that He is Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament and the one to whom we owe absolute obedience. Peter didn't preach merely the forgiveness of sins. Indeed, if you notice, he does not even mention the forgiveness of sins until the application section, after the end of the sermon proper. The first mention of forgiveness in this chapter is in v. 38.

Forgiveness is important in this chapter. But the role of the Holy Spirit and His provenance from the Son, who got Him from the Father upon completion of His Messianic task, is the main point of Peter's sermon. Brothers and sisters, any preaching of forgiveness not rooted in the Trinitarian character and absolute authority of our Lord is bad preaching. Yes, the Lord still forgives those with a defective understanding of His character. But to call on the name of Yahweh requires you to know that name! To seek salvation from one who is not going to be your Lord is preposterous — and to preach salvation but not lordship is equally preposterous. Peter openly announced that the Lordship is the source of the salvation, not vice versa.

3. Christ/Messiah, v. 30

Finally, Peter closes his message with the announcement that Jesus has been made not only Lord, but also Christ. He is the Messiah, the one Anointed by God to save the world. And therefore, you need to worship Him as such. Jesus is Lord! That is the core confession of the early church. But no less important is the declaration that Jesus is the Anointed One. Jesus is not a freelancer. He is the one God chose for this mission.

Peter preached the offices of Christ. If my congregation doesn't know that Jesus is the Anointed One and that He is Lord, then I am failing as a preacher. If your children don't know those things, you are failing as a Christian parent.

E. In History

Peter also brought out the historical reality of Jesus of Nazareth. He pointed out three major facts about Jesus.

1. As the Descendant of David, v. 30

First, He was a descendant of David. Jesus came from a specific bloodline and had specific parents. He was the recipient of all the promises made to David a thousand years previously. Peter emphasizes this; it is important. "Jesus" is not a free-floating spiritual idea. He is a particular historical character who came from the royal house of the tribe of Judah. He lived at a particular time and inherited the promises that belonged to His family line. Just as the name "Kennedy" or "Rockefeller" conjures up specific ideas among Americans, so the name "David" resonated with the Jewish people. Of course, the Kennedys and Rockefellers are already about played out. Their rise was meteoric, and their fall will be gradual. But David's line endures on and on in eternal grandeur, for it culminated in one who rules a Kingdom that cannot be shaken, and whose seed can never be destroyed. We are privileged to be citizens in the Kingdom of David's Son.

2. As One Who Lived Among the Audience, v. 22

One of the features of preaching in the apostolic era is that the audience had seen and interacted with Jesus. Peter addresses these people as those who had hosted Jesus in their midst. Of course, this feature has not changed! Ordinary preaching in the church is still directed to people who are familiar with Jesus from their everyday lives. If you preach to you like you've never heard of Jesus, you'll say "What on earth is wrong with this pastor?" Sometimes you will meet new people who have never heard of Jesus, and you will have to start at the beginning. But usually, you will be talking about Jesus to people who have already met Him.

3. As One Who Died, Rose, and Ascended, vv. 31-34

Peter also emphasized the historical reality that Jesus the man died, rose, and ascended. He talked about things they all knew, such as the tomb of David, and vigorously emphasized that Jesus had really been there, in their midst, doing what Peter was describing, as they all knew and had seen.

And so it is today: The preacher who's worth his salt should be emphasizing that Jesus really was, really lived, really died, really rose, and really is at the right hand of God. An ahistorical sermon is a bad sermon.

IV. Peter Consistently Applied Every Point to his Audience, vv. 22, 23, 33, 36

Finally, Peter brings every point back around to apply it to his audience. Again, this is the task of today's preacher. Peter applied each aspect of Jesus' life to his audience by reminding them of their firsthand knowledge of the things he was preaching. Then, at the end, after the conclusion of the discourse proper, he explains the application in response to a point-blank question. So we can see that every point of a sermon needs to be relevant to the audience, but it is also appropriate to put the major application into some other format — say, a post-worship Sunday School discussion, or a congregational letter.

Brothers and sisters, what's the application here? Preach like this, if you're a preacher. Demand preaching like this, if you are a non-preaching church member. And above all, listen to preaching like this and take it to heart. Those who listened to Peter were cut to the heart. Are you? When preaching is done like this, it makes a big impression on those who hear. So preach, and so listen, that you get to know the subject of preaching: our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hi Pat — Alexa shared with me your question about “What is my role in the church now? I knew what my role was at the last church and now I’m not so sure.”

I am glad you’re asking that question. Part of what I do as a pastor is to help people have the paradigm shifts they need to faithfully serve Christ in the context where He’s placed them. There are two things here. One is the paradigm I’m reacting against, one that I’ve heard preached countless times and one that I daresay you’ve heard frequently too. This paradigm says that the church is primarily something good church members need to do things for. A good Christian is a nursery worker/building maintenance volunteer/lawn care helper/communion setter-up/etc., etc., etc.

The other paradigm is the one I’m hoping to teach God’s people at Harvest. In this paradigm, church is a delight, not a burden. The primary posture of the Christian toward the church is one of social engagement with other people. The primary task of the church has nothing to do with buildings or programs. Instead, what we are about is worship, because in worship we witness (we gain firsthand knowledge of Jesus). The way we build the church is by cultivating relationships (gaining firsthand knowledge of Jesus’ people). Ephesians 5 describes it as “speaking the truth in love” and “joined together by what every joint/ligament supplies.” I paraphrase this second one as “making connections.” That is how the body grows — by connecting and truth-speaking. All of the rest — the buildings and programs and events — are in the service of connecting and talking to each other. Now, obviously the “event” of worship is important because that’s the thing we have in common. That’s what we connect around. As we draw closer to Christ, we draw closer to each other. Firsthand knowledge of His people is, in a very real sense, firsthand knowledge of Him.

So of course it’s a wonderful thing to be heavily involved in the infrastructure that supports the church’s primary activities. Without volunteers like you and Jim, the church could not worship or grow into a true family of brothers and sisters. But in the busy-ness of serving, whole churches and denominations have forgotten that it’s really about gathering with our Father and His children and having a family reunion every week.

All that is to say that the place in the body that God has prepared for you (and for every one of us) is primarily about getting to know and enjoy each other. Thus, what you and Diane are doing at the coffee shop every Friday is ministry to the body of Christ.

I would love to talk to you more about all of this sometime soon. But I wanted to give you some preliminary thoughts to help you think about your place in the church. By the way, one of the most important tasks in the church that older women have is to tell a young pastor “Hey, that was not a good idea.” Your input and even rebukes are always appreciated! We are so grateful for

your presence at Harvest; the gifts and needs you bring to the body are just perfect. Keep asking what the Lord has for you, and He will make it clear to you in His perfect time.

Sermon 10, Predestination and the Cross, Acts 2:23

Proposition: God's sovereign plan handed over Jesus to wicked men to kill Him.

I. Peter's Three Points

- A. Jesus Was Handed Over by God's Predetermined Plan and Knowledge, v. 23a
- B. The Judeans Killed Him by Lawless Men, v. 23b
- C. God Raised Him Up, v. 24a

II. The Implications

- A. Evil is part of God's plan and subject to His all-wise bounds and limits
- B. Evil is carried out not by God but by wicked men
- C. God brings good even out of evil

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we know that Acts has been written in order to give us certainty about the coming of the Kingdom. In this time of the King's absence in Heaven, how do we know that He continues to reign? There are many facets to this question, and Acts addresses pretty much all of them. But perhaps the biggest facet of the question is the problem of evil. We know that evil flourishes and prospers in this era. If Jesus reigns, why does evil seem to be practically omnipresent? Peter does not shunt this question to one side. He addressed it head-on in his Pentecost sermon. At the fulfillment of firstfruits, he made a one-verse comment on evil, putting responsibility for it squarely on the shoulders of those wicked men who bring it about by simultaneously indicating that God's plan and knowledge bound, restrain, and yes, even direct evil for God's holy and good purposes. In biblical language, God's sovereign plan handed Jesus over to wicked men to kill Him. In philosophical language, God rules and ordains evil but never does evil. Let's look, then, more closely at the Bible's teaching on the problem of evil and its relation to the Kingdom or sovereignty of God.

I. Peter's Three Points

Last week, we looked briefly at the Trinitarian implications of this verse. It clearly shows that the Father was involved in the crucifixion. And I want to drill a little more deeply into what Peter actually says about that here.

A. Jesus Was Handed Over by God's Predetermined Plan and Knowledge, v. 23a

The verse says just what your translation implies that it says: God's bounded, definite plan and God's foreknowledge were the agents by which Jesus was handed over. The grammar here is passive. Jesus is the subject. "This one," Peter says, clearly referring to Jesus of Nazareth from the previous verse. RSV and ESV add "Jesus" here in v. 23 to make the referent crystal-clear. We're talking about the most important person in history, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. In other words, Peter is confronting the problem of evil in its most acute form. Why do bad things

happen, not merely to good people, but to the best person the world has ever seen and ever could see? Why do bad things happen to God Almighty? That's the question that Peter confronts.

The answer he gives, then, is that bad things happen to God Almighty because He planned those events in detail. Peter uses this phrase "determinate counsel" (KJV), also rendered "definite plan" (ESV) and "deliberate plan" (NIV). The Greek word is the standard one for plans or considered decisions, and affixed to it is the adjective "horizoned," from which we get the English word "predestination." To "encircle" or "horizon" something is to fix it within definite boundaries and limits. The horizon marks of the circle of Earth's surface which is visible to us. You can see for a certain radius around yourself wherever you happen to be standing; that radius is called the horizon. It's a Greek word in origin, and it refers to a boundary, in this case, the boundary of sight. Well, God's plan was not a fuzzy plan, with steps like "See what happens" or "wait for humanity's reaction to my Son." No. God's plan had some clear boundaries and limits. It was not accidental; it was deliberate. It was not fuzzy; it was definite, or defined. That's the plan which, according to the Apostle Peter, handed over Jesus.

The definite plan of God is paralleled with the foreknowledge of God. Peter says "God's definite plan and foreknowledge." What does this mean? Obviously foreknowledge is simply information prior to the event. To have foreknowledge is to be aware of what's going to happen before it happens. But if God's foreknowledge is a purely passive awareness, it would make no sense to say that God's foreknowledge handed Jesus over. If I am passively aware that the New York Stock Exchange will open at 9:30 AM Eastern time tomorrow, I can hardly say that the opening bell will be rung by my foreknowledge. I have knowledge that such an event is happening, but there is no causal relationship of any kind between my knowledge and the event. Instead, what "causes" my knowledge is the settled habits of those who run the stock exchange. They have announced that they will be open from 9:30 to 4 on business days.

But Peter's statement about God's foreknowledge by which Jesus was delivered indicates that God's foreknowledge is simply another way of referring to His plan. God foreknows what's going to happen because it is all part of His plan. I know the plans of the NYSE operators, and so my knowledge is based on their plans. But God's knowledge is not based on the plans of Roman soldiers, chief priests, stock exchange operators, or anyone else. His knowledge is based on His own plans, their definiteness and solidity.

Remember how in 2 Peter we saw Peter using so many phrases in which he used two words to refer to the same reality — "life and godliness," "glory and virtue," and on and on through the epistle? Well, this is just a tiny bit of that same Petrine style here in Acts 2. Notice that the second half of this verse contains another one of these pairs: "crucify and kill." Is there some kind of major difference between crucifying and killing, like there is a major difference between hating and loving, for example? Not at all. We can conclude on very solid grounds that, just as Peter will go on to use "crucify and kill" to mean one action, that of killing Christ, so he here uses "definite plan and foreknowledge" to mean one piece of information in the divine mind, viz., knowledge that God definitely planned that Jesus would be betrayed and killed in exactly the way in which the events took place. That definite plan is perfectly certain; there is

absolutely no chance of its failing to come to pass. And therefore, simply by knowing His plan, God can also know the entire course of world history.

God's knowledge of what would happen was a knowledge of what He Himself planned to do but also a knowledge of what everyone else planned to do. This plan was set by God, ordered by God, and actuated by God.

In other words, if you want a demonstration that Jesus really reigns, that the Kingdom really is secure, Peter actually dares to point to the worst evil in human history — the cross. Even the cross is evidence for God's sovereign rule, for the fulfillment of His plan! The announcement is breathtaking, so breathtaking that a good many Christians openly doubt it, speak against it, say it ain't so. Yet Peter is perfectly clear, as are Paul, Isaiah, Moses, and Jesus Himself. God does not do evil. But He does plan it, define it, and set boundaries to it. He knows evil will happen because He plans on it happening.

B. The Judeans Killed Him by Lawless Men, v. 23b

But, that said — and this is incredibly important — God does not do evil. Peter credits the death of Jesus not to the plan of God, but to his audience acting by the hand of lawless men. Yes, God's plan handed Jesus over. But it was the Judeans who took Him. God handed Him to you, and you took Him! Peter puts "handed over" and "received" right next to each other in his Greek sentence, emphasizing the seamless transition of Jesus from God's power to theirs. Judas, so prominent in ch. 1, has disappeared here (thus giving the lie to the idiots who think that if a biblical writer doesn't mention something then he doesn't know about it). Peter knows about Judas, but he wants to emphasize how the Judeans collectively handed Jesus over to the Romans, here described as "lawless men." The Romans prided themselves on law and order, but they demonstrated their deeper lawlessness when they took Christ, crucified and killed Him.

In other words, Peter does not see competition between God and man. He does not say that God's agency stops where human agency begins, and vice versa. In the last chapter he talked about Judas as the one who betrayed Jesus; here he says that it was all part of God's plan. Clearly, brothers and sisters, if the betrayal was part of God's plan the crucifixion was too! Yet Peter does not suggest that God was powerless once the Judeans got involved and started encouraging these lawless men to crucify the Son of God. Rather, God's power continued to operate. The solution to the problem of evil is that God and man are both at work on two different levels of causality. God always does what is right, but human beings often perform evil actions. The presence of evil in history, in other words, is no sign that God does not reign; rather, it is a sign that His reign is large enough even to encompass evil actions! We'll talk more about that in a minute. But I want you to notice where Peter goes with this. God let the wicked Jesus. He even planned on it. But He did not let evil have the last word!

C. God Raised Him Up, v. 24a

Rather, God raised Jesus up. Evil did its worst, and killed Him. But evil will not and cannot triumph permanently, for Jesus rose from the dead. The evil they perpetrated was undone.

This may in fact be the most crucial point of all in Peter's apologetic. The problem is evil is mitigated after a fashion when we understand that God allows and ordains evil. When you're

suffering some evil event, don't freak out. God's got it under control! The alternative is to say that He doesn't have it under control, to say that God is helpless here and that evil is omnipotent within its sphere. The resurrection says otherwise. The resurrection says that evil has been defeated, on its own turf. Jesus has risen from the dead; the power of God has broken into the closed system of birth, death, and new individual lives that has dominated all of fallen human and natural history. It was impossible for death to hold Him! Burial was not the end of His story. Again, this is the most important part of our defense against the problem of evil. Evil can't last! Evil must fail. Evil must be overcome and undone. God handed Him over, but not permanently. God freed Him from death.

II. The Implications

So, theologically speaking, what can we say about Peter's statement that juxtaposes God's plan with the actions of lawless men?

A. Evil is part of God's plan and subject to His all-wise bounds and limits

The first thing to emphasize is that evil is NOT outside of God's plan or control. There is not some dualistic division of the world whereby one part is evil and one good, and the two are run by different masters or opposing principles.

No. This world is run by God, and His plan includes things like the suffering of Israel in Egypt, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, the capture and burning of Jerusalem, and even the first fall of angels and men and the crucifixion of Christ. The Bible says so. God planned on evil and contained it within His boundaries and limits. He ordained it. That includes the evils of our recent past, like slavery, and of our present, like abortion. God ordained those things, and they are evil.

B. Evil is carried out not by God but by wicked men

But He did not do those evils, and does not do evil now. We do evil. Wicked men and angels sin. They crucified Christ. They hurt each other.

Any adversarial account of divine and human agency, which insists that where God's agency stops man's begins, and vice-versa, is false. Divine and human agency run along together. But though God gave you the power of choice and plans on and sustains you in your evil choices, He does not Himself choose evil. You did it, not God. This is the foundation of freedom in human governments, the real source of the "right to be wrong." The right to be wrong does actually exist, in the sense that it is something God underwrites for His fallen creatures. God kept Adam and Eve breathing and their hearts and limbs going while they ate the fruit. He kept in existence and good health the men who were nailing His Son to the cross. He keeps you and me alive and sustains us while we do, say, and think evil things. He gives us the freedom to sin. But He does not sin, any more than I sin by providing a car and a credit card to my son who then goes out and uses them for evil. You say, "Yes, but at some point your action becomes willful negligence." So it does. And you know what, folks? Attempts to get God off the hook for evil can only end by making evil as powerful, or more powerful, than God. All we can say that it looks like negligence to us and that an ethical deity would have terminated the experiment the moment the snake entered the garden. But God has reasons beyond what we can understand.

After all, if we could understand all of His thoughts, would we really believe Him to be a being far smarter, wiser, and better-informed than ourselves? Imagine taking a hick off the street in Arkansas and making him the ambassador to the People's Republic of China. Can you foresee anything going wrong because the hick has no understanding of China or its concerns — or even a good idea of what Washington wants to signal to Beijing? Well, we can say that for a certain number of hicks in Arkansas, thinking like the diplomats who staff the American Embassy in Beijing is completely out of reach. The hicks will never understand or care about what the diplomats understand and care about — and yet both are human, made in the image of God, equal in the eyes of the law. How much more, then, should we expect that most of us are never going to understand God's reasons for ordaining and allowing so much evil? God knows what He's doing. That is our confession of faith. We will be sure that it's true when evil has been finally vanquished, when the Kingdom comes and His will is done on earth as it is in Heaven.

C. God brings good even out of evil

That day is coming, for God can bring good even out of evil.

Reality is indeed ultimately two, not one — but the split is not between a good reality and an evil reality, but rather between two kinds of good reality, the created and the uncreated. God exists, and so does the world, but they do not exist with the same kind of existence. The world's existence is derived and dependent, and that's why evil can get some purchase here. It is a purely negative thing, like a hole in a shirt. There is no "pure hole." Evil is a parasite on the good, a defect within something metaphysically good.

So no, evil is not something within God Himself. It is an accident that takes place in the created world under the sun, as opposed to being a substance created and sustained by God in being.

When you insist that reality is one, and that everything boils down to the same thing, then you must also affirm that evil is not evil, or at least that it is not essentially different from good. At worst, in a pantheistic framework where there is no distinction between God and the world, there is also no distinction between right and wrong. Evil becomes, at worst, a necessary step on the way to achieving the good. Understood this way, the crucifixion was not wrong at all, but a necessary step that ultimately produced the great good of the resurrection. Folks, that is entirely the wrong way to look at it.

Yes, God brought good even out of evil. But that does not reduce or eliminate evil's wickedness. It only exacerbates it. This evil had a good outcome because of the goodness of God, not because of the evil of the evil that was done! Your wicked action does not become a good action because God used it for good. The fact that Jesus would die to save us from sin did not make Adam and Eve's sin better, but worse, because it not only cost the lives of the entire human race, but now the life of God Himself, too.

In other words, God blast you if you say "Let us do evil that good may come. I am going to go sleep with my girlfriend in order to obtain the grace of forgiveness and thus bring about a greater good." No. Evil is still evil. Precisely because Christianity teaches this immanent frame, this world which is created by God but is not God, we have room for evil to be itself. Evil is bad

and always will be, and will never become good. It can't and won't. But God does *use* evil, though it always remains itself and He always remains Himself, to bring about good. The evil of those lawless men brought about the good of your salvation. But we don't sing hymns of praise to Pontius Pilate every week. We instinctively understand that he was a weakling and a villain. He was not a good person, nor a step on the path to good. He was evil — but God overruled his evil and brought good out of it anyway.

So Jesus was delivered over to wicked men by God's plan. God planned their evil, but they did their evil. But God overcame their evil, raising His Son from the dead.

And so He will overcome your evil and raise you from the dead. Believe it, and you will live. Amen.

Sermon 11, What Do We Do About the Gospel?, Acts 2:37-40

Proposition: The gospel demands that, taking it to heart, you repent and get baptized because God has promised to give Himself to everyone who does (which is another way of saying everyone He calls).

- I. Take It to Heart, v. 37a
- II. Find Someone Who Can Answer Your Questions Accurately, v. 37b
- III. Follow the Apostles' Teaching, vv. 38-40
 - A. What to Do, v. 38
 - 1. Turn from sin to God (active), v. 38a
 - 2. Be Baptized (passive), v. 38b
 - 3. Receive Forgiveness, v. 38c
 - 4. Receive the Spirit, v. 38d
 - B. Why to Do It, vv. 39-40
 - 1. Because God Has Promised to Give Himself, v. 39
 - a) To the Judeans
 - b) To their children
 - c) To the geographically distant
 - d) To everyone He calls
 - 2. Because our Generation Is Perverse, v. 40

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have spent the past month of Sundays looking at Peter's sermon on the day when the Feast of Firstfruits was fulfilled. Today, we come to the end of the sermon and look at the audience's reaction to it. What does Luke's account teach us about how to respond to gospel preaching? What do we do about that gospel? The answer is that we need to repent and be baptized; that's what the gospel demands.

I. Take It to Heart, v. 37a

Peter did not end the sermon with an altar call. He ended the sermon with a message of condemnation: You crucified Jesus! That's where he leaves it. But then, with the sermon over, he immediately engages the crowd in conversation, in dialogue after his monologue has come to an end on a climactic point.

What did the crowd do? They took Peter's message to heart. And so we must do with gospel preaching. Our age is, to put it mildly, not an age of sincerity. To be sincere is to be thought simple-minded and foolish, because ours is an age of irony, of sarcasm, of detachment. We are used to the outrageous. We can't afford to get upset about the way things are, because that would cost too much emotional energy. Instead, we hold the world at arms' length. The mark of sophistication is ironical detachment.

But that's not the mark of a correct response to the gospel. True citizens of the kingdom of Christ respond to the gospel with heartfelt interest. We have to believe in our own guilt as well as in God's offered way of salvation. It has to actually affect us, deeply, at the core of our being. That's what the heart is; it is the central organ that directs every part of our human life. And to take something to heart is to believe it and pay attention to it because it seriously affects us.

You have probably shared the gospel with someone who didn't take it to heart. You have probably recognized that you yourself have failed to take certain gospel truths to heart. What's the giveaway when someone doesn't take it to heart, doesn't take it seriously? You know they are failing to believe it from the heart when it is just an intellectual question, just a source of entertainment, just a fun pastime. By the same token, sometimes you meet someone who has taken to heart something totally unworthy--say, the performance of his favorite sports team. When the Broncos lose, he is genuinely down in the mouth. When the Orioles win, his mood actually changes; he treats his family better after successful games.

Well, if you take the gospel to heart then it will affect your mood. It will affect your life. It will change how you think and feel. Particularly, in view of the text before us, I should say that if you take rebuke for sin to heart, it will get you going down one particular path: How do I deal with this sin? Clearly I am in the wrong and have offended the Almighty. The question is, what do I do about that?

II. Find Someone Who Can Answer Your Questions Accurately, v. 37b

The preliminary answer is that you need to find someone who can answer the question for you. If you have been a Christian for a long time, then you probably already know how to deal with your sin. You can answer your own questions. But if you are confronting the problem of your own sin for the first time, then it is imperative, like the crowd that day in Jerusalem, you secure the services of a trustworthy guide who can answer your questions accurately. In other words, you need to find a knowledgeable believer who will be good at explaining to you what you need to know in order to follow Jesus Christ. That person may be a pastor, elder, or church lady. It may be an apostle, as it was for the crowd who was in Jerusalem on that Pentecost day. But the main point is that we as Christians should not be expecting books, tracts, recorded sermons, podcasts, and the like to do the work of evangelism for us. Those things are all good things. But at the end of the day, they primarily service the needs of the already-converted. If you have a new Christian who has been cut to the heart and is eager to deal with his sin, for God's sake don't hand him a book and say "This will answer all your questions." No! He needs human contact, human help. "Twenty pages of a four-volume systematic theology and three chapters of the Bible per day" is not what the apostles said in response to this question. Nor should we. Instead, we as believers should be reading those things precisely so that we can answer the questions of baby Christians who are just trying to figure all of this out for the first time.

We all need someone trustworthy who can answer our questions, even in areas of everyday life like law, finances, medicine, and small gasoline engines. How much more in areas where life and death are on the line, and where what we believe will have eternal consequences?

So find a trustworthy guide, no matter what stage of the Christian life you're at, but most especially if you are right at the beginning of the Christian life.

III. Follow the Apostles' Teaching, vv. 38-40

That trustworthy guide may be defined as anyone who will tell you to do (and show you how to do) what the apostles said to do. Peter answered the question of the crowd by telling them both what to do and why to do it. Again, he is answering the question of "How do I deal with my sin?"

A. What to Do, v. 38

1. Turn from sin to God (active), v. 38a

His first answer is to repent. "Re-pent" in Latin means "think again." You think that adultery is okay? Think again! To repent in biblical usage means to turn — to turn from sin to God. It means to stop what you're doing and make a 180-degree pivot toward what you ought to be doing. It is an active thing, a step you take. Later Luke will tell us that repentance, too, is a gift from God. But here, Peter emphasizes the other side of it as a human activity.

The first step toward following the apostles' teaching is to repent. You do this, brothers and sisters, by turning away from sin. Don't say "Well, I sinned and I will try to stop but I'm not going to make any promises." I agree that it's not about promising; what it's about is making up your mind that you will no longer engage in the kind of thinking, talking, or acting that you now know to be sinful.

In other words, repentance isn't easy. But it's necessary.

2. Be Baptized (passive), v. 38b

The second thing you and I need to do is to be baptized. Notice that though repentance is something you do, being baptized is something someone else do for you. It is parallel to the third and fourth elements Peter mentions, for to receive baptism is a passive activity with active overtones. To receive is a present is not simply to sit there like a corpse while this gift is pressed into your uncaring hand. No; to receive something demands that you be awake enough and aware enough to claim it as your own. God delivers the package, but you need to open it. Yes, in one sense it's still yours even if you don't open it. But you are not getting the benefit of what's inside unless you open it up and engage with it.

So be baptized! Let yourself be washed in water in order to signify your being engrafted into Christ, partaking of the benefits of His covenant, and committing yourself to belonging to God.

Peter didn't say to be baptized because baptism saves. Repentance doesn't save either. No. Christ saves. And He saves us by giving us repentance, baptism, forgiveness, and His Spirit, along with Himself. To ask, therefore, whether you are saved if you have only one of these four things is to miss the point. Of course you're not saved if you only have one; but if you only have one, then you don't have even that one anymore. Repentance without forgiveness, the Spirit, and baptism is not forgiveness. Put better, we could say that when God gives you salvation it's a total package. He will never forgive your sins without giving you His Spirit too.

Hence Peter's demand: repent and be baptized. Already the church is necessary, for you can't baptize yourself.

3. Receive Forgiveness, v. 38c

Then, you will receive forgiveness. That's what baptism is for. Now, for the ten millionth time, Baptism does not forgive sins and save. Jesus forgives sins and saves! But He does use baptism to do those things, in a very important sense. Baptism is not the efficient cause of salvation and forgiveness; Jesus is. But Baptism is an exemplary cause of those things, because it shows very graphically that you have been united into Jesus in His death and resurrection. His life, death, and resurrection are what save you.

Forgiveness is a key part of receiving Jesus. It means that the pain of your sins has been absorbed by somebody else. God no longer will exact that pain back out of your hide; instead, He took it on Himself in the person of His Son at the cross. Now you are free from condemnation and liability to punishment, because the punishment has already been administered and borne in full.

Would you like your sins taken away? Then embrace Christ through repentance and baptism. Receive the Father's gift of Himself!

4. Receive the Spirit, v. 38d

Because that is the fourth thing listed here. Repentant believers who are baptized into Christ receive two enormous benefits. The first is forgiveness, such that God no longer threatens to punish them for their sins. The second is even greater; it is the gift of the Holy Spirit, who reveals Himself to those who repent and are baptized in Christ.

Notice that Peter lists only one thing you actively do: repent. The other three items are gifts, things that God supplies to His children: baptism, forgiveness, and the Spirit. And as I said, repentance too is a gift. When you hear the gospel, respond to it by seeking the gifts of God. As you turn from sin, ask for baptism, for forgiveness, and for the Holy Spirit. And when you do, God will give them to you — baptism through His church, and the other two immediately, without the intervention of any man or church.

B. Why to Do It, vv. 39-40

So why did Peter demand that these people repent and accept the Father's gifts? He provides two reasons.

1. Because God Has Promised to Give Himself, v. 39

The first of these reasons is the Father's promise. What is the promise? It is the promise that's been under discussion throughout this whole chapter — the promise of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament frequently refers to the promise of God to save His people and give His Son and pour His Spirit as simply "the promise." It is the whole promise of salvation. That's the promise. You can summarize it as the promise of the Holy Spirit, for to receive the Spirit is to receive everything that God has to give. He can give nothing better or greater than Himself.

a) To the Judeans

Peter lists four groups to whom this promise is directed. The first is his audience of Judeans from many lands, "World Jewry" as we called them a few weeks ago. God's promise is first of all for

them. If you are a descendant of Abraham according to the flesh, this message about salvation in Jesus Christ through repentance and baptism is for you. You are the church's original target audience. That's why Jesus commanded that the message first be preached in Jerusalem and why the church began in Jerusalem.

b) To their children

But the second group is intimately linked to the first. It is the group of all the children of the first group. God's promise is for Jewish children from all over the world. Ultimately, of course, Peter will find out that the promise is for all believers and their children, whatever their ethnicity. But here, on the church's birthday, he emphasizes first the invitation to Israel and Israelite children.

Why does he do this? Because this is how God works. Historically, He has worked in families, calling the parents and children to Himself as a unit. Our evangelism should focus on families as often as possible, because that is where God has announced His preference for working. If you are a child of believers, the promise is yours in a special way.

c) To the geographically distant

But the promise cannot be limited to Jewish folks and their children in Jerusalem. Peter goes on to say that the promise of salvation is for those who are geographically distant, thereby mirroring Jesus' command to be witnesses even at the end of the earth. The rest of Acts will tell how the promise went to the end of the earth. Even now, the good news is proclaimed all over the world, to Jewish communities and non-Jewish communities alike.

d) To everyone He calls

Peter concludes by saying that God's promise is for everyone He calls to Himself. Not all the Jewish people who heard Peter believed. Not all of their children believed. Not all of the geographically distant believed. But all who have been effectually called have believed. Peter is already proclaiming, side-by-side, the free offer of the gospel and the truth of election. The gospel is for everyone, and everyone called to God will come. There is a general call, and not all who hear it will believe. But there is also a special, effective call — and all who hear that rise from spiritual death and follow.

Peter and Paul saw no contradiction between election and evangelism. Neither should we. Indeed, we already saw that most of our response to the gospel message has to be focus on God's gifts that we receive. Here we see further that God's call is universal, but the effectual call is particular. The promise will be realized only by those whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.

2. Because our Generation Is Perverse, v. 40

But Peter provides an additional reason to accept God's promise. That is the character of our generation. It is, or should be, well-known that the time in church history to which our present experience most closely corresponds is the first century. There is tremendous growth, and much of it is ignorant and syncretic. There is tremendous cultural misunderstanding and opposition in the world around us. And there is widespread exhaustion and need for some renewing current to come and spread life to those who are weary of it. The collapse in birthrates alone tells us that our fellow citizens of the Earth see little to live for and less that they would want to share with their children. They are too enervated even to beget and bear children.

Peter's generation was perverse! So is ours. So, indeed, is every generation of fallen human beings. But you do not have to passively accept your generation's fate. Instead, brothers and sisters, save yourselves from this perverse generation! How do you do that? By repenting and accepting God's gifts, especially the supreme gift, the gift of the Spirit.

How does having the Spirit rescue you from our corrupt generation? By giving you an eternal perspective. By giving you something to live for. By giving you an unchanging standard by which to reckon up the perversity of your own culture. When you have Jesus and His Spirit, then you have what you need to evaluate your world. You have deliverance from evil and perversion. Brothers and sisters, repent. Be baptized. And if you've already been baptized, keep repenting, monotonously, every time you sin. Turn away you will; every time, come back. Every time. The Christian life is one of daily repentance. And then embrace the gifts God has given you in your baptism, above all forgiveness and His Spirit. Be saved from this perverse generation! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Sermon 12, The Firstfruits of Church Growth, Acts 2:41-47

Proposition: The Feast of Firstfruits saw the church grow by 26 times; that growth was driven by the power of God and the 14 practices of the church.

- I. How Growth Starts: Word, Sacrament, Church Membership, v. 41
- II. How Growth Grows, vv. 42-47
 - A. Teaching, Fellowship, Eucharist, Prayer, v. 42
 - B. Awe, v. 43a
 - C. Miracles, v. 43b
 - D. Radical Voluntary Sharing, vv. 44-45
 - E. Unity, v. 46a
 - F. Corporate Worship, v. 46a
 - G. Eating Together in Homes, v. 46b
 - H. Praise, v. 47a
 - I. Favor, v. 47b
 - J. Divine Agency, v. 47c
 - K. Church Membership, v. 47

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have been looking together at this second chapter of Acts for six weeks now. We have seen some fascinating stuff together. This morning, we begin a two-week look at Luke's summary statement at the end of the chapter. As is our habit, we will take the larger chunk first, looking at this mega-summary of the early church (seven verses long) before we look next Sunday at the most basic summary, v. 42 with its four habits that marked the early church and should continue to mark our church today. What we see in the mega-summary is that church growth is driven by the power of God and the practices of the church. Growth starts with word, sacrament, and membership; growth grows with eleven different elements that Luke specifies. That totals fourteen elements (surprise, surprise): The church grows numerically and spiritually when it practices the fourteen elements of growth in which the early church engaged.

I. How Growth Starts: Word, Sacrament, Church Membership, v. 41

Luke foregrounds three significant practices at the beginning of his summary. Again, we see a key number for the early church — 3! These practices are absolutely crucial. In one sense, we can say that these three at the beginning are necessary to the being of the church. Without word, sacrament, and membership, there is no church. The other eleven practices are necessary to the well-being of the church, and woe to the very sick body that does not engage in most or all of them! But a body that doesn't do word, sacrament, and membership does not even exist. These three are the ones that the Reformers identified as the marks of the true church. That means that

their presence constitutes a church, while their absence demonstrates that a particular entity is not a church at all.

So let's discuss each of them. Luke first informs us that there was a group there that accepted Peter's message. They listened to the word of God from the mouth of the apostles. This, the proclamation of the word of God to an audience that accepts it, is the greatest and most important mark of the church. Luke puts it first. And if you'll notice, of course, it is from the word of God as written that we derive all of the other marks and practices of the church. If something calling itself a church is not proclaiming the word of God, then even it displays the other thirteen marks and practices here, it is missing the most crucial one. The Bible clearly tells us that in the beginning, the Word of God created the heavens and the earth. It is just as clear that the Word of God created the church. That's because the church is the assembly of all those throughout the world who profess faith in Christ, along with their children. The church is created by rational appeal to our human intelligence — i.e., by the word.

We've looked at length at the form and content of what Peter preached. Now we see that he did not merely preach to the air. He preached to people with the stated purpose of convincing them — and he was successful. There was group that accepted his word. That is the church. That group, the group that accepted Peter's word, that then proceeded to engage in the other thirteen practices here. Had they not accepted his word, they would not have done any of this. And so it is today. The first thing we want to do is get our message out there. We want people to hear the word! That means, of course, that what we need to make our top priority at church is the hearing of the word.

The first thing the word instructed them to do was to get baptized, as we talked about last week. As soon as you have repented, you need to be baptized. What is baptism? It is a washing with water in the Triune name that signifies and seals our engrafting in Christ, partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's. A church that does not baptize, again, is a church that is never going to grow.

Finally, in this first summary, Luke mentions church membership. They got saved, we would say. And yes, Luke uses that word in the previous verse — "save yourselves from this perverse generation." But his focus is not on the individual dimension, but on the corporate one. The New Testament knows nothing of an unchurched Christian! To be saved and to be added to the church is the same thing. Now, if we press this too far, we get the idea that so long as you can get someone to say the words and externally join the church, you've made a Christian. We know that's not too. There always have been unbelievers in the church — e.g., Simon Magus later in the book of Acts. But though we know that the internal and external do not always correspond to each other like they should, that does not absolve us from the responsibility to follow the word of God here, which tells us that to believe in Jesus as Savior automatically demands church membership. Belief entails membership. If you are a Christian this morning but not a member of any local church, then you can and should quit expecting to grow spiritually. It ain't gonna happen. If you think that you can make disciples without teaching them the word of God and

baptizing them into Jesus, then you should also think that you can be a disciple of Jesus without being added to a local church. I'm not the one saying this; Luke is!

What about when there are no good local churches? Then I repeat what I said: You can forget about spiritual growth. The Lord knows about genuinely extraordinary situations. He knows how much of your “needs” are real and how much are an excuse. But He is abundantly clear that the Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved. The Lord didn’t save them and let them hang out, church-free, for weeks or years at a stretch.

I’m not saying that church membership has to be formal. The passage doesn’t say either way, any more than the Bible says that membership in Abraham’s flock of sheep was formal. But to say that formal membership, where you are written down on an official list and counted as one of the body, is unbiblical — well, that’s absurd.

So those three practices are foundational. Growth starts with word, sacrament, and membership.

II. How Growth Grows, vv. 42-47

But growth, of course, does not end there. It continues with eleven other practices that Luke lists here. To say “I accepted Jesus, I’ve been baptized, and I’ve joined the church, so I can now go resume living just like I did before I got saved” is a catastrophic mistake! Look with me at the all things these early Christians engaged in as a result of Pentecost.

A. Teaching, Fellowship, Eucharist, Prayer, v. 42

The first set of four things comes here in v. 42. This summary is so important that we are going to spend an entire sermon on it next week. For today, suffice it to say that Luke mentions again in this verse all the things he mentioned in the previous verse, along with prayer. The apostles’ teaching = Peter’s sermon. Church membership = fellowship. And Baptism = Eucharist, in that they are both sacraments (though obviously they are not the same sacrament). Let me say it one more time: Luke lists fourteen items here, but he lists three of them twice: word, sacrament, and church membership. Why do these three get special billing, getting listed twice right at the beginning of the list of fourteen items? Because Luke wants to emphasize them!

I have often wondered why the ordinary habits of our Christian life — going to church, reading the Bible every day, partaking of the Lord’s Supper each week — get so little space in Scripture. You can read the Bible every day for a long time before you will see it saying “Go to church. Read your Bible every day. Eat the Lord’s Supper every Sunday.” Only one of these is even in Scripture as a direct command, and it appears there only one time (in Hebrews 10). I figured the answer was that these things are just wholesome practices. But looking here at the text of Acts I see that they actually have solid Biblical grounding, at least in their basic elements. Your Christian life needs to orbit around word, sacrament, and church. That’s what the life of the earliest Christians, converted on the day of Pentecost, revolved around. And of course, prayer is another element that could be added in here. Your Christian life really needs to include talking to God together with your brothers and sisters.

So how about it? Can you say “Yes, this is what my Christian life majors on: Word, sacrament, church”? If not, you need to examine this text a lot more closely, my friends.

- B. Awe, v. 43a**
- C. Miracles, v. 43b**
- D. Radical Voluntary Sharing, vv. 44-45**
- E. Unity, v. 46a**
- F. Corporate Worship, v. 46a**
- G. Eating Together in Homes, v. 46b**
- H. Praise, v. 47a**
- I. Favor, v. 47b**
- J. Divine Agency, v. 47c**
- K. Church Membership, v. 47**

Sermon 13, The Church in Four Habits, Acts 2:42

Proposition: The four Biblical activities of the church, though larger and more practical than the four creedal characteristics of the church, imply those four characteristics too.

- I. Always Hearing the Apostles' Teaching: One, Holy, Apostolic
- II. Always Fellowshipping: One, Catholic
- III. Always Breaking Bread: One, Holy, Catholic
- IV. Always at the Prayers: Holy

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have confessed together many times that the church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Those sound really good, and indeed, they are really good. But how on earth do we get there? I just want to circle back today and look at the biblical description of the church and compare and contrast it over against the creedal description. Let me say at the outset two things. 1. There is nothing wrong with the creedal description of the church. 2. The biblical language is always going to be richer, fuller, and more practical than the creedal. Always. So in that light, comparing Luke's fourfold account of the church with the Nicene fathers' fourfold account of the church is not some kind of sick exercise in making the Nicene Creed look stupid. Rather, it is a reminder that whenever we are inspired by creedal language but wonder how to put it into practice, we need only go back to the endlessly fecund pages of Scripture, where the light of Christ shines out brightly at the darkest hours. How do we make the church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic? The answer is that God makes it those things. But He makes it those things by, and insofar as, we continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers. So let's just look in detail at these four elements, these four things that a healthy church is always doing.

I. Always Hearing the Apostles' Teaching: One, Holy, Apostolic

The primary element in the life of the church is what the Reformers called the preaching of the word of God and what Luke describes as the apostles' teaching. The text tells us about all four of the items listed here that the early Christians were continually devoting themselves to these things. We would say that they were always doing these things — not in the sense that they were doing them 24/7, but in the sense their default was to return to these things again and again and again. If I go to the gym 8 times each week, it is fair to say that I'm always going to the gym. If I go to the church 3 times per week, I'm always going to church. And if I listen to the apostles' teaching, and learn what it is they are trying to teach me, then I am always going back to the apostolic teaching.

This is the primary element in the life of the church. If our church isn't always doing this, then it isn't like the early church. What does it mean to teach what the apostles taught? Simply to expound their writings accurately; to read the source they were working from — the OT — and explain it as they explained it; and to ensure that everything comes back to Jesus and what He

did, and how that is related to His Father, His Spirit, and us. That is apostolic teaching. In other words, preaching the latest business techniques is not apostolic. Teaching the best practices of psychology or biology is not apostolic. Giving people the latest on politics, economics, financial peace, and so on is not apostolic. Sharing my heart for the Mexican community or my fervent desire to reach the Japanese is not apostolic. No. The church is built on listening to the teaching of the apostles, and it has to be something that we are always doing together. A church that drifts away from vibrant exposition of the apostles' writing is a church that's going to be dead very soon.

Now, obviously the first thing we think of us with this devotion to the apostles' teaching is that it makes the church apostolic. So it does. Apostolicity does not reside in an unbroken chain of ordination, the "apostolic succession" that Rome teaches. It does not reside in an unbroken institutional control or an unbroken location in the same church building. It resides in an honest effort to pay attention to and follow the teachings of

- II. Always Fellowshipping: One, Catholic**
- III. Always Breaking Bread: One, Holy, Catholic**
- IV. Always at the Prayers: Holy**

Sermon 14, , Acts 3:1

Proposition:

III.