



The First Sermon

Kicking It Off

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt called to speak up but were afraid of how people might react? What did you do?

Read

Acts 2:14-21

Summary

We tend to evaluate churches by all these visible things. How many people show up, how good the music is, whether the kids' program is solid. But none of that actually makes a church a church.

At the Tower of Babel everyone was speaking the same language and they got all arrogant about it, thinking they could be like God. Pentecost is basically the opposite of that. Instead of people using one language to brag about how great humanity is, you have all these different languages being used to talk about how great God is. That's where the church really kicks off.

When Peter stands up to preach, some people are mocking the believers, saying they're drunk. But Peter's says, "No, this is what the prophet Joel was talking about hundreds of years ago. The Spirit being poured out, people prophesying, this is that thing coming true right now." His whole point is that we're in the final stretch of history. The end times started at Pentecost, and we're still in them.

Peter doesn't just say, "Hey, the end is coming, be scared." He immediately starts talking about Jesus. He points out that David, the guy everyone in his audience thought was the greatest ever, actually wrote about someone even greater than himself. David died. We know where his grave is. But Jesus? Death couldn't keep him down.

What's powerful about this is that Peter is basically saying, "Look, whatever hero you've got in your life, they're going to die. But Jesus didn't stay dead." That's the difference. Our faith isn't built on some impressive person who will eventually be gone. It's built on someone who beat death.

When the crowd heard all this, they were "cut to the heart." Not just interested, not just impressed, but genuinely broken up about it. They asked, "What do we do now?"

Peter told them: turn back to God, get baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit. And about 3,000 people did exactly that.

The big thing to remember is that the gospel isn't just for certain types of people. It's for anyone God is calling. We don't get a 100% success rate when we share it, and that's okay. Jesus didn't either. Our job is just to share it and let God handle the heart stuff. We're living in the end times, but that's not meant to scare us. It's meant to wake us up, point us to Jesus, and send us out to share the good news with whoever will listen.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. Peter told his audience that they were living in the "last days," even though many signs had not yet been fulfilled. How does the awareness that we are living in the end times change the way you approach your daily decisions and priorities?
3. When the crowd heard Peter's message, they were described as being "cut to the heart" rather than simply agreeing intellectually. Can you recall a time when God's truth moved from your head to your heart in a way that demanded action?
4. The believers at Pentecost were mocked and accused of being drunk, yet they continued proclaiming the glories of God. What fears or past experiences of rejection hold you back from sharing your faith, and how might trusting the Holy Spirit's work change your approach?
5. The early church existed not just to gather together but to be sent out, with some going far away and others going next door. Where do you sense God may be calling you to share the good news, and what is one step you could take this week to respond?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"I am not trying to get you to understand the Bible. I'm trying to get you to understand how little time you have to repent, how little time you have to humble yourselves before a living and awesome God."

"Thank God your faith isn't based on someone who dies, on someone who will die. Even David died, and we know where he's buried. But even David spoke of one who was greater. And who is the one who is greater? His name is Jesus, and he has defeated the grave."

"The sermon should be saying, 'Good, you are insufficient. He is sufficient. The Christ is sufficient. He has forgiven your sins.' And so now your job is to repent. Your job is to receive the forgiveness of the Christ."

"If you do it by your own power, you will fail. But if you do it by the power of the Holy Spirit, by the blood of Jesus Christ, by the will of the Father, you will be incredibly successful. You will come and be mocked and scorned, but you will be successful."

Sermon Notes

Acts 2:14-21

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. 15 For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 16 But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Outline

1. This Is That (vv. 14-21)
 - a. Peter addresses the accusation of drunkenness by explaining the spiritual reality (vv. 14-16)
 - b. Quotes Joel's prophecy: Spirit poured out on all flesh, sons and daughters prophesying (vv. 17-18)
 - c. The signs in Joel (sun darkened, moon to blood) remain future, but the Spirit's outpouring marks the beginning of the last days (vv. 19-20)
 - d. Central promise: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (v. 21)
 - e. Application: Sermons show us our place in redemptive history; we are closer to the end than we realize
2. This Is Him (vv. 22-36)
 - a. Jesus attested by God through mighty works, crucified according to God's plan (vv. 22-23)
 - b. God raised him because death could not hold him (v. 24)
 - c. David spoke prophetically of one greater than himself who would not see corruption (vv. 25-31; Psalm 16)
 - d. The apostles are witnesses to the resurrection (v. 32)
 - e. Jesus exalted at God's right hand, poured out the Spirit (vv. 33-35)
 - f. Conclusion: God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ (v. 36)
 - g. Application: The end times are not merely frightening for believers; Christ has conquered death and we have hope
3. This Is For You (vv. 37-41)
 - a. The crowd is "cut to the heart" and asks what to do (v. 37)
 - b. Peter's response: repent, be baptized for forgiveness, receive the Holy Spirit (v. 38)
 - c. The promise extends to all whom the Lord calls (v. 39)
 - d. Peter continues exhorting: "Save yourselves from this crooked generation" (v. 40)
 - e. About 3,000 souls added that day (v. 41)
 - f. Application: True preaching produces heart conviction, not just intellectual assent; the gospel is for everyone God calls

Notes

The birth of the church at Pentecost represents one of the most significant moments in human history, and at its center stands what might be called the first sermon of the Christian church. When Peter stood up before the crowds in Jerusalem, he did something that would establish a pattern for Christian preaching for millennia to come. Understanding what he did, and why, reveals something essential about what the church is and what it is called to do.

When the Holy Spirit descended on the believers at Pentecost, enabling them to speak in various languages and declare the glories of God, observers on the outside had mixed reactions. Some believed, but others mocked, assuming these people were simply drunk. Peter seized this moment to explain what was actually happening.

What strikes me as remarkable about Peter's approach is that he immediately connected the events unfolding before everyone's eyes to Scripture. He quoted the prophet Joel, explaining that what the crowd was witnessing was the fulfillment of ancient prophecy. The pouring out of the Spirit, the prophesying of sons and daughters, the visions and dreams, all of this had been foretold. Peter was essentially saying, "This is that," connecting the present moment to the promises of God.

This connection matters because it establishes something fundamental about Christian preaching. A sermon is not merely a lecture about ancient texts or a motivational speech about self improvement. It is an act of showing people where they stand in the story God has been telling since the beginning of time. Peter was declaring to his audience that they were living in the last days, the period leading up to the great and magnificent day of the Lord.

The prophecy Joel spoke included dramatic imagery: signs in the heavens, the sun turning to darkness, the moon to blood. Peter acknowledged that not all of this had been fulfilled yet. But his point was not that Joel was partially wrong. His point was that the process had begun. The Spirit had been poured out, which meant the end times had commenced. Everything that followed would unfold according to God's timing.

This understanding should shape how we hear sermons today. The purpose is not primarily to make us biblical scholars or to fill our heads with information about ancient near eastern history. The purpose is to awaken us to the reality that we are living in the end times, that Christ's return draws nearer with each passing day, and that this reality demands a response. When you look at the world around you and see that things are not as they should be, that sin and brokenness pervade human society, you are seeing evidence that we live in a fallen world approaching its culmination.

If Peter had stopped with the message that the end is near, his sermon would have been incomplete, even terrifying. What good is knowing that judgment approaches

if there is no hope of salvation? This is where the genius of Peter's sermon becomes apparent. He immediately pivots from warning to hope, from judgment to grace, from the end of all things to the one who holds all things together.

Peter begins to speak about Jesus of Nazareth, and he does something remarkable. He gives what amounts to a compressed biography of Christ's ministry, death, and resurrection in just a few sentences. Jesus performed mighty works and wonders. Jesus was delivered up according to God's definite plan. Jesus was crucified by lawless men. And God raised Jesus from the dead because death could not hold him.

Then Peter does something rhetorically brilliant, understanding his audience of Jewish men who revered King David above almost any other figure in their history. He quotes David's own words from the Psalms, showing that David himself spoke of someone greater than himself, someone David called "my Lord." Peter points out the obvious: David died. We know where he is buried. But the one David prophesied about, the one whose flesh would not see corruption, has risen from the grave.

This is what theologians call a high Christology, placing Christ in his proper position of honor and authority. Peter was not merely presenting Jesus as a good teacher or a wise rabbi. He was declaring that Jesus is Lord, that Jesus is the Messiah, that Jesus sits at the right hand of God the Father. The very man whom these listeners knew had been crucified was, in fact, the fulfillment of everything David had longed for and prophesied about.

The application for us is direct. We all have people we admire, figures we look up to, individuals we consider examples worth following. There is nothing wrong with this. But thank God our faith is not based on any human being who will eventually die. Our faith rests on one who conquered death, who rose again, and who lives forever. No matter how eloquent a preacher, how brilliant a theologian, how admirable a Christian leader, none of them is the foundation of our hope. Only Christ holds that position.

This is why genuine Christian preaching always points to Jesus. The goal is not to exalt the speaker or impress the audience with clever rhetoric. The goal is to lift up Christ so that all who hear might see him for who he truly is.

The response of the crowd tells us everything we need to know about what the Holy Spirit was doing through Peter's words. The text says they were "cut to the heart." This phrase describes something far deeper than intellectual agreement or emotional stirring. It speaks to a fundamental breaking, a recognition that something must change.

When the Spirit speaks through Scripture, it does not merely inform the mind. It penetrates the heart. This is the difference between hearing a good talk and hearing a sermon in the fullest sense. Many speakers can offer helpful advice, interesting perspectives, and thought provoking ideas. But a sermon empowered by the Holy Spirit

does something different. It exposes our insufficiency and then points us to the one who is sufficient.

The crowd's question reveals their understanding: "What shall we do?" Peter's answer was simple and direct: repent, be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise, Peter declared, extends to all who are far off, to everyone whom the Lord calls to himself.

This is what makes the gospel truly good news. It is not reserved for a particular ethnicity, social class, or level of education. There is no bias in the gospel. Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. The message is universal in its offer, even if not universal in its reception. Not everyone will accept it. Jesus himself did not have a 100 percent conversion rate. Some people ate with him, talked with him, witnessed his miracles, and still walked away unconvinced.

This reality should liberate us from a particular burden many Christians carry. We are not responsible for converting anyone. We are responsible for faithfully sharing the good news and trusting that the Spirit does the work of cutting hearts. When someone rejects the message, we dust off our feet and move on. We continue to pray for them, because it is the Spirit who melts hearts of stone. But we do not take responsibility for outcomes that are not ours to control.

The church exists not simply to gather but to be sent out. We come together to be reminded that we need Jesus, to have our hearts cut afresh by the Word, to praise God together in song and prayer. But then we go. Some are called to go far, perhaps to distant nations or unreached people groups. Others are called to go next door, to share the hope of Christ with neighbors and coworkers. The location matters less than the obedience.

As we recognize our own insufficiency and the sufficiency of Christ, something changes. Joy wells up, the kind that comes from knowing we have been forgiven. And that joy becomes an overflowing fountain that cannot help but pour out to others. This is the heart of ministry: not a fabricated obligation to share the gospel, but an irrepressible desire born from the reality that our Savior died for us and rose again.

Blog

The Spirit fell. Tongues of fire rested on each believer. They spoke in languages they had never learned. And the crowd gathered, drawn by the commotion, bewildered by what they were witnessing. Some were amazed. Others mocked. "They are filled with new wine," the skeptics said.

Then Peter stood up.

Not because Peter was particularly eloquent or because he had prepared a compelling presentation. Peter stood up because the Spirit who had just filled him gave him something to say. And what he said became the template for every Christian sermon that followed.

We often think of Pentecost as the main event, the spectacular display of God's power that launched the church into existence. But Pentecost without Peter's sermon would have been a phenomenon without meaning. The crowd would have dispersed, shaking their heads at the strange behavior of these Galilean peasants. The Spirit fell so that the Word could go forth. The tongues of fire appeared so that tongues of flesh could proclaim the gospel. Pentecost was not the destination. It was the launching pad. Everything that follows in the book of Acts flows from this moment. The three thousand who believed that day, the devoted community that formed around the apostles' teaching, the bold witness before the Sanhedrin, the spread of the gospel to Samaria and eventually to the ends of the earth, all of it traces back to Peter standing up and opening his mouth.

This is the same Peter who denied Jesus three times. Now he stands before thousands, many of whom had likely called for Jesus' crucifixion just weeks earlier, and he publicly accuses them of killing their Messiah. The difference is the Spirit. Peter didn't become a different person. He became the person he was always meant to be, filled with the power he had always lacked.

Luke uses the same Greek word to describe Peter's speech here that he used for the Spirit-inspired tongues in verse four. Peter isn't just giving a speech. He's prophesying. The Spirit who filled him is now speaking through him. This is what Spirit-filled people do. They speak. They proclaim. They interpret what God is doing in the world.

Peter begins by addressing the mockers' accusation. "These people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day." It's nine in the morning. Observant Jews wouldn't eat or drink until after the morning prayers, and this was especially true during a feast day like Pentecost. Peter's response carries a hint of humor. You think we're drunk? It's not even mid-morning yet.

But Peter doesn't linger on the accusation. He has more important things to say. "This is what was uttered through the prophet Joel." With these words, Peter does what the church has been doing ever since. He interprets the present through Scripture. The world sees phenomena it cannot explain. The church explains it. "No, this isn't drunkenness. This is that. This is what Joel prophesied centuries ago."

Peter then quotes Joel 2:28-32, but he makes a significant change. Joel's prophecy begins with "afterward," a somewhat indefinite time reference. Peter changes this to "in the last days." This isn't a minor editorial adjustment. It's a theological declaration. Peter is announcing that the last days have arrived. The messianic age has dawned. The eschatological clock has started ticking.

This matters more than we often realize. We tend to think of "the last days" as referring to some future period of tribulation and upheaval. But the New Testament consistently teaches that the last days began with Jesus' death and resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit. The writer of Hebrews says that "in these last days" God has spoken to us by his Son. We are not waiting for the last days to arrive. We are living in them. We have been living in them for two thousand years. Every generation of the church has lived in the shadow of Christ's return.

The Spirit's outpouring proves it. Joel prophesied that God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh. Not on select individuals for specific tasks, as in the Old Testament. Not on prophets and kings and occasional craftsmen. On all flesh. Sons and daughters would prophesy. Young men would see visions. Old men would dream dreams. Even servants, both male and female, would receive the Spirit and prophesy.

The ground is level at the foot of the cross, and it's level at Pentecost too. The Spirit doesn't check your credentials before filling you. He doesn't ask about your social status or gender or age. Moses once cried out, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them!" At Pentecost, that prayer was answered.

Peter continues quoting Joel, and the tone shifts. "And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day."

This language echoes throughout the prophets. It's Day of the Lord imagery, the language of cosmic upheaval that accompanies God's decisive intervention in history. Some of these signs appeared at the cross, when darkness covered the land for three hours. Others await the return of Christ. Peter includes them because they create urgency. The Day is coming. The Spirit has been poured out. The door is open. But the door will not stay open forever.

Then comes the climax of the Joel quotation, the hinge on which everything turns. "And it shall be that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Everyone. The Greek is emphatic. All, whoever, anyone. No restrictions. No qualifications. No fine print. The Spirit has been poured out on all flesh, and salvation is offered to everyone who calls.

But what does it mean to call on the name of the Lord? This isn't a magic formula. It's not reciting certain words in a certain order. The word "call" here implies desperation, dependence, a cry for help from someone who knows they cannot save themselves. You don't call on someone unless you believe they can help you. You don't call on the Lord unless you believe he is Lord.

And this is where Peter's sermon takes its decisive turn. In Joel's prophecy, "the Lord" refers to Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel. But Peter is about to argue that Jesus is this Lord. The one they crucified is the one they must call upon. The one they rejected is the one who can save them.

Peter will spend the next fifteen verses building this case. He'll appeal to Jesus' miracles, his death according to God's plan, his resurrection, his exaltation to the right hand of God. He'll cite David as a prophet who foresaw the Messiah's resurrection. He'll conclude with the devastating declaration: "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

The crowd will be cut to the heart. "What shall we do?" they'll ask. And Peter will tell them: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

Three thousand will respond that day. The church will be born through proclamation.

This is what the Spirit was poured out for. Not primarily for the experience of being filled, though that matters. Not primarily for the signs and wonders, though they serve a purpose. The Spirit was poured out so that the gospel could be proclaimed. The Spirit was poured out so that Peter could stand up and explain what God had done, proclaim who Jesus is, and invite everyone to call on his name.

The church has been preaching this same sermon ever since. We explain what God is doing in the world. We proclaim that Jesus is Lord. We invite everyone to call on his name and be saved. The language changes. The illustrations update. The cultural context shifts. But the message remains: the last days are here, Jesus is Lord, and everyone who calls on his name will be saved.

This creates an inherent urgency in everything the church does. Not the manufactured urgency of emotional manipulation. Not the panic-driven urgency of end-times speculation. The urgency comes from the message itself. God has acted decisively in history. The Spirit has been poured out. The invitation is open. And the Day is coming when the invitation will close. We don't know when that Day will arrive. But we know it's coming. And so we speak.

That's what Pentecost was for. That's what the church is for. That's what we're for.