



# HOW CHRIST BUILDS HIS CHURCH

The Sermons of the Book of Acts

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Text: Acts 2:14-41

**Main point:** Christ's enthronement is evidenced by the ministry of the Spirit and the conversion of the lost.

## ACTS Introduction

The Acts of the Apostles is often called "The Acts" or "Doings" or "History" or the "Gospel of the Holy Spirit." There is no question about the Spirit's work throughout this book, but if we take Luke's own words about the theme of his second letter, we will discover that the book of Acts is nothing less than *the continuation of the work of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the preaching of the Apostles*.

The book of Acts could be entitled *The Sermons of the Apostles*. There is no less than 19 *sermons, discourses, and defenses* recorded in this book. Eight sermons are by Peter. One sermon is by Stephen. One is by James. Nine sermons are by Paul—five of which are *messages* and four are defenses. When you add it all up, 25% of Acts is nothing more or less than *the recorded sermons of the Apostles*. What this means is that one out of every four verses is a sermon. A major portion of the supernatural work of God in the early church, spurring its growth and spreading its advance, was the proclamation of His Word. In this series, we will consider, **How Christ Builds His Church** by looking at *the sermons of the Apostles*.

Our approach will be to examine each sermon with the aim of discovering two central elements:

- Its doctrine—What was its main message? What were its *teaching, theology, and its emphasis*? In particular, *why was it necessary for the progress or maturation of the church*?
- Its duty—What does God require of us and how can we obtain it?

## OUTLINE and KEY POINTS the book

Profile and roadmap of the book of Acts

- The **main subject** is *the promise of the Father (1:4; 2:33)*
- The **main theme** is *the continuance of the work of Christ (1:1-2), through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the Apostles.*
- The **main outline** for the book is given in Acts 1:8.
  1. In chapters 2-8, we see the spread of the Christian church *among the Jews in Jerusalem.*
  2. In chapters 8-9, we see the spread of the Christian church *in all Judea and Samaria.*
  3. In chapters 10-28, we see the spread of the Christian church *among devout/idolatrous Gentiles.*

## What is APOSTOLIC PREACHING?

By **apostolic preaching**, we are merely saying *the kind of preaching which characterized the Apostles, which resulted to the growth of the church (Acts 2:41, 47, 6:7; 12:24; 19:20) and the turning of the world upside down (Acts 17:6).*

The apostolic preaching which fueled the growth of the early church has been described as, "*light and heat.*" It was the *light* of truth and the *heat* of passion for that truth. Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones called it, "*Theology on fire.*"

But specifically, what was it that characterized their preaching? It was biblical preaching. It was expository preaching. It was not subtle, cute, or casual. It was not laid back. It was not mild or glib. Their preaching brought the listeners face-to-face with the living God in Christ. It was passionate, energetic, and full of zeal and fire. It was provocative, penetrating, and it proclaimed the full counsel of God. It *announced* the Lordship of Christ. It *heralded* the necessity of repentance. It *called* for the verdict in the heart of the listener, and it called for the obedience of faith. It *declared* the sovereignty of God and triumph of the cross and the resurrection. If we are to see the church advance in spiritual growth and its mission, then we must pray that God would make the kind of preaching from this pulpit apostolic, authoritative, and truly expository.

## EXPOSITIONAL STUDY of SERMON I: Acts 2:14-41

Let's begin by examining the setting or the immediate context for this sermon. Read Chapter 2:1-11, and let's answer the question: what is happening in the background? Answer—the amazing event of Pentecost (*literally means the fiftieth day; in history, it came to be known as Whitsunday commemorating the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles.*)

### Two important truths about the Pentecost:

1. Pentecost is to be seen as *the continuation of Christ's work* in the unfolding drama of redemption. (*Cf. Acts 1:1; John 14:17, 26; 16:7-15*)
2. Pentecost is evidence of *Christ's enthronement.* (*Acts 2:33; Eph. 4:7-8*)

What is the main question that Peter answers in response to the amazement of the events at Pentecost according to chapter 2:12?

- <sup>12</sup> And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

**In the first sermon of the Christian church, Peter explains that the Spirit's outpouring means four things:**

### **1. Prophecy has been fulfilled. (vv.14-16)**

- <sup>14</sup> But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. <sup>15</sup> For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is *only* the third hour of the day; <sup>16</sup> but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:"

Eight centuries before, the Old Testament prophet, Joel, pointed forward to this very time and event. What is the core principle to remember when interpreting prophecy, according to 1 Peter 1:10-11?

- **1 Peter 1:10-11**—As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful searches and inquiries, <sup>11</sup> seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.

The sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow (resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit) are the central themes of all prophecy (*Cf. Luke 24:25-26; 44-49*). John affirms this in Revelation 19.

- **Revelation 19:10**—Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

This verse tells us that the sum and substance of prophecy are about and from Jesus. The Spirit's outpouring was not a signal that one or more prophecies had now been fulfilled, but rather, the primary prophecy to which all the other types, symbols, and sacrifices had pointed to, had been completed to perfection (*2 Cor.1:20; Col.1:20*).

### **2. The last days have begun (vv.17-21)**

- <sup>17</sup> 'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says,  
'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND;  
AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHESY,  
AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS,  
AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS;  
<sup>18</sup> EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN,  
I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT  
And they shall prophesy.  
<sup>19</sup> 'AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE  
AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW,  
BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE.  
<sup>20</sup> 'THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS  
AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD,  
BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME.  
<sup>21</sup> 'AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.'

How does Peter define "**the last days**"? As *the advent and outpouring of the Holy Spirit*. Hebrews 1:2 and 1 Peter 1:20 connect the last days, or the beginning of the end, to the appearing of Christ. However, we need to see that *the advent of Christ* was only made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit (*Matt.1:20; Luke 1:35*).

However, their understanding of the "last days" phrase did not create pictures in their minds of the world coming to an end only, but rather, the last days suggested to them that *a train of events had now commenced*, which ushered in, "Gospel times," or the "Gospel blessings" of the people of God! The blessings would include a mission to declare to everyone that by calling upon the name of the Lord, they could escape the wrath to come.

But notice, that the coming of the Holy Spirit was not about *dramatic signs, miracles, or tongues*—as the Pentecostal movement wrongly emphasizes—but rather, Peter explains several things about what the coming of the Holy Spirit means for all mankind.

- 'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND;  
AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY,  
AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS,  
AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS;  
<sup>18</sup> EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN,  
I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT  
And they shall prophesy.
- a. It means that the Spirit could be experienced by all classes of men—not without exception, but without distinction. (All mankind—without distinction to sex, age, rank, or nation; sons and daughters, young and old, bondslaves (servants) and freemen).
- b. The revelation and intimacy of God could now be experienced by all of God's children without mediation. To Joel, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit appears as a general extension of three forms of divine revelation which occurred in the Old Testament.
  - 1) Prophecy—to stand before and say, "Thus saith the Lord."
  - 2) Visions—Isaiah, Ezekiel, Micah, John, Ananias all saw visions.
  - 3) Dreams—God suspended the personal consciousness and made scenes pass before the mind. This was experienced by Jacob, Solomon, Daniel, and Joseph.

The point is, in answering the question, "what does this mean," Peter explains that the coming of the Spirit was not about signs and wonders, but it signaled that God would reveal Himself to *all classes without distinction* and to *all believers without the mediation* of a prophet (*Amos 3:7*). Now in the New Covenant "*...all will know Me, from the least to the greatest of them*" (*Heb.8:11*).

The apocalyptic language of verses 19-20 is vivid.

- <sup>19</sup> 'AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE  
AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW,  
BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE.  
<sup>20</sup> 'THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS  
AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD,  
BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME.

We cannot spend too much time here, but Oh Father, help me and grant me the clarity of words that I might make it understandable. Signs and wonders (*Matt.24:24; Mark 13:22; John 4:48; 3:2*) refer to miracles that are *inexplicable to men*. They are called "signs" because they are tokens of *God's presence* and *seals* or *credentials* of *divine messengers* sent on a *divine mission*. Remember, miracles speak to *God's presence, God's messengers, and God's mission* (*2 Cor.12:12*). Miracles require divine power, so Satan cannot perform miracles in the truest sense, but only false ones in both their aim and character (*2 Thess.2:9*).

In the ancient world, the belief was that wonders in the natural world like *earthquakes, eclipses, plagues, etc.*, were tokens of *divine wrath*. When Peter sought to explain what Pentecost means, he took Joel's prophecy which looked forward to the Second coming of Christ and used language that needs to be interpreted.

- Blood and fire—bloodshed and judgments
- Vapor of smoke—columns of it darkening the sky
- Sun being turned to darkness and moon into blood—figures used by the prophets (*Ezek.32:7; Is.13:10; Amos 5:18-20*) to denote significant and painful changes in governments (*Cf. Rev.8:8*)

This is apocalyptic language meant to describe the dark days and troubling times or the epochal judgments of vast proportions taking place in preparation for that final, universal judgment before the day of the Lord, or the Second Coming of Christ (*Acts 17:31*).

**Application:** This is not something we are looking forward to; these last days have already begun. We are living in the last times!

So, what is to be our mindset and attitude in light of these last days? Peter explains how we should interpret the last days.

<sup>21</sup>'AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.'

It is the day of grace! For who? "*Everyone.*" Regardless of nation or denomination, race or rank. What must one do? "Call upon the name of the Lord," that is, the name revealed by the prophets about the Messiah, the Second Person of the Godhead, the God-Man. Reliance upon His character, His office, and His saving work as Savior must be exercised. Whoever embraces Christ by faith will be saved.

- **Isaiah 45:22**—Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other.
- **Acts 4:12**—And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

What does Pentecost mean? It means prophecy has been fulfilled. The last days has begun.

### 3. Christ has been exalted. (vv.22-36)

In explaining that the coming of the Holy Spirit means that *Christ is enthroned*, Peter proclaims that there are three ways that God has testified about His Son in verses 22-24.

- a. God has affirmed the life of Jesus. (v.22)

<sup>22</sup> "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles (the source or power of the miracles) and wonders (*the effect or human response to the miracle*) and signs (*the message or spiritual intent of the miracle*) which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—"

- b. God has planned the death of Jesus. (v.23)

<sup>23</sup> this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death.

- c. God has raised Jesus. (v.24)

<sup>24</sup> But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

Then Peter uses Scripture to support Scripture. In the entire sermon, there is a direct quotation of 13 verses from the Old Testament. It speaks to us about how saturated with Scripture apostolic preaching is. He quotes Psalm 16:8-11,

- <sup>25</sup> For David says of Him,  
'I SAW THE LORD ALWAYS IN MY PRESENCE;  
FOR HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND, SO THAT I WILL NOT BE SHAKEN.  
<sup>26</sup> 'THEREFORE MY HEART WAS GLAD AND MY TONGUE EXULTED;  
MOREOVER MY FLESH ALSO WILL LIVE IN HOPE;  
<sup>27</sup> BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES,  
NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.  
<sup>28</sup> 'YOU HAVE MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE;  
YOU WILL MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH YOUR PRESENCE.'

Now Peter goes on to show in verse 29-31, the application of this prophetic passage to Christ. Notice, the note of love with which he speaks to his audience. "*Brethren...*" And note the "*confidence*" with which he speaks to them, "I may confidently say to you..." as he goes on to explain that although David is *loved* and *honored*, he is dead and his bones are still in the grave. He respectfully speaks of David by calling him "*the patriarch*,"

<sup>29</sup> "Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day."

In other words, he could not have experienced resurrection because the corruption of his corpse is still with us. But then Peter interprets Scripture by saying, David was a prophet, and God promised that he would have a descendant to sit on this throne and even David knew that this was to be fulfilled in Christ.

<sup>30</sup> And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT *one* OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, <sup>31</sup> he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. <sup>32</sup> This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.

David prophesied it by faith and what was prophesied has now become a reality in history. It is a fact. I am a witness, and there are about 500 more (1 Cor.15:6). It was not a dream. We saw Him. We ate with Him. We touched Him (Cf. 1 John 1:1-4).

<sup>33</sup> Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. <sup>34</sup> For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says:

'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD,

"SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,

<sup>35</sup> UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET."

<sup>36</sup> Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."

He first was *humiliated*, now He is *exalted*. First, He suffered, now He reigns. First, He was crushed, now He is crowned. God has made Him Lord and Christ. Peter explains this outpouring of the Spirit is happening because *Christ is doing it*. It is the *fruit* of His finished work. It is the *evidence* of His glorification. It did not happen while He was here, "*because He was not yet glorified*" (John 7:39). But God raised Him. God exalted Him. God made Him both Lord and Christ. We don't make Jesus Lord; God makes Him Lord. We simply surrender to His Lordship. Notice how *Christ-centered, Scripture-saturated, emphatic, and bold* apostolic preaching is! This is what we need today. This is what you as a church ought to expect and pray for from the pulpit.

REVIEW: What have we discovered thus far?

Peter's first sermon explained *the meaning of Pentecost*. In response to the question, "*what does this mean?*" Peter explained four things:

- Prophecy has been fulfilled.
- The last days have begun.
- Christ has been exalted.

This apostolic preaching was *bold, text-driven, Christ-centered*, and it was *heart-piercing* in which,

#### **4. Salvation is offered. (vv.37-41)**

<sup>37</sup> Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart,

This means they were *wounded in conscience*. They were *opened up* and *flayed* by the Word of God through the Spirit. They were *cut, stabbed* as with a knife, and *made to feel deep pain within*. Only apostolic, biblical, authoritative, Scripture-saturated, Christ-centered preaching gets to the heart. "This," says Calvin, "is the beginning of repentance. Repentance unto life commonly begins with a true sense of one's sins."

Jesus said in John 16:8-11 that this would be the Spirit's revelatory ministry:

<sup>8</sup> And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; <sup>9</sup> concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; <sup>10</sup> and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; <sup>11</sup> and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

And as a result of the Spirit's work, they ask the application question.

and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"

- They saw the dreadful part which they had, in the death of Christ.
- They saw that this Person whom they had crucified, was, in fact, the Messiah.
- They saw that the day of salvation had come upon them.
- They saw that they had displeased God. They were undressed, unveiled, and exposed before God.

And when the Spirit of God is at work in the souls of men, there is no desire to go pray about it. They want to find relief. They are willing to go all the way to Christ. What shall we do? Right now!

<sup>38</sup> Peter *said* to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." <sup>40</sup> And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" <sup>41</sup> So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

Repent. Jesus will not follow you. You must stop, turn around, turn from your unbelief and follow Christ. You must obey Him personally and publicly, now. With loving earnestness, a soft tone of voice, a beaming look of joy, and flowing tears of appeal, Peter kept on saying, "Be saved, be saved, be saved, be saved." The thunderbolt of preaching ignited an army of witnesses who took the Gospel.

## APPLICATION

- What *instruction* does this sermon reinforce?
- What *errors* does this sermon refute?
- What *prohibitions* does this sermon forbid?
- What *commitment* does this sermon declare?
- What *examination* does this sermon call for?
- What *duties* does this sermon require?

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