

The Apostolic Preaching, Part 2 – Acts 2:22-36

Main Idea: The first ministry in the church was an expositional sermon that pointed sinners to the person and work of Christ.

I. The Death of Christ | Acts 2:22-23

The first ministry of the church was an exposition of the Old Testament. Peter's message at Pentecost is the first message containing all elements of the Gospel. Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and exaltation represent the backbone of faithful Gospel proclamation. It was a sermon that cut people to their hearts, not the sound of a mighty rushing wind (v.2) or the divided tongues that rested on the disciples as they proclaimed the mighty works of God at the beginning of that day (v.3). As the Spirit was poured out upon the disciples and people from all nations were drawn to them, Peter stood up with the eleven (v.14) and began to proclaim the Gospel to them. Peter now understood the OT Christologically (Luke 24:27; 44-45), and the focus of his sermon surrounds three major OT passages (Joel 2: 28-32; Psalm 16:8-11; 110:1). **It was a faithful exposition of three OT passages that led a multitude of people to repentance and faith in Christ.** When Peter began to preach, there were 120 Spirit-filled believers in Jerusalem. By the time he finished his sermon, three thousand people had responded in repentance and faith in Christ, were baptized with the Spirit and water, and then added to the church.

The book of Joel was written on the occasion of a disaster that had come upon Israel. There had been a locust invasion, and destruction had come upon the land. In the middle of this gloomy scenario, Joel reminds the people about a blessing that is to come in the latter days when the Messiah would come. Peter referred to this text because it was the clearest OT prophecy of God's judgment on sin and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In light of what was said by the prophet Joel, Peter boldly challenges the crowd to listen to his words (v.22). Peter's sense of urgency and clear understanding of what is at stake shows us that **the Gospel is never fully proclaimed unless it is done against the backdrop of the severe warning that, at the cross, God has judged the world.** All who remain without acknowledging their sin in true repentance and faith in Christ will perish eternally. **The good news of the Gospel is preceded by the bad news of the human condition before God.** Mankind, when given a choice as to what to do with the Messiah, chose to kill Him without having a single legitimate accusation against Him. Without giving the crowd any way out from the subject at hand, Peter takes the audience to the heart of the message, identifying "Jesus of Nazareth" as "a man attested by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him" (v.22) in their midst. Jesus' miraculous birth, the miraculous signs He performed, and His miraculous resurrection all put on display His deity and identity as the promised Messiah (John 3:2; John 11:46-47). **Faithful Gospel proclamation is not based on a series of emotional experiences but on the factual truth that Christ is the Messiah (2 Cor. 4:5).** Therefore, the primary task of a preacher is not to appeal to people's emotions but to hold the facts recorded in Scripture before people explaining to them how Scripture consistently interprets itself.

Peter continues his sermon by emphasizing God's sovereignty over the events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection, "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (v.23). Some theological traditions have the mistaken notion that history unfolds as a co-operative project between God and man—God is waiting to see how our actions will shape history and will then respond accordingly. This view, however, is inconsistent with the whole of Scripture. "Definite" (*horizo*) "plan" (*boūlo*) both refer to what God has planned before the foundation of the world and executed at the time where He already knew would be perfect. **Jesus was not delivered up by Judas for money, or Pilate for fear, or even the Jews for envy, but by God for love (John 10:17-18; Ephesians 5:2).** God used the evil of men to accomplish His perfect will (Luke 6:45). The guilty and cruel hands of "lawless men" (v.23) only knocked in the nails, **but it was by the definite plan and foreknowledge of God that Jesus died.** By exposing the crowd to the truth of Scripture, Peter shows them that the Gospel cannot be evaded by personal experiences or psychology. It is by reading and hearing what Scripture that God speaks to people (John 17:17; Psalm 119:9-11).

To Ponder:

1. Why is a thorough study and understanding of Scripture essential for the sanctification of believers?
2. Does knowing that God is sovereign over all things change the way you respond to situations in life? How so?

II. The Resurrection of Christ | Acts 2:24-32

The resurrection of Christ was not only the central theme of apostolic preaching but also the climax of redemptive history. The resurrection is the crowning proof that God accepted the sacrifice of Christ (Rom. 4:25). Apart from

rising from the dead on the third day, Jesus' death becomes only the heroic death of a martyr. Jesus died not as a martyr but as a Savior, and because He is a Savior, He is also King of kings and Lord of lords (v.36; Rev. 17:14; 19:16). The resurrection of Christ comes as the central theme of the first sermon preached by an Apostle because those who executed Him needed to know that, "God raised Him up again, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it" (v.24). By raising Christ from the dead, God put an end to the agony of death for all who come to faith in Him (John 14:19; Rom. 6:4-5; 2 Cor. 5:21). To further confirm that the resurrection was God's plan for the Messiah, Peter quotes and explains a prophetic passage from Psalm 16:8-11 where David speaks pointing to what the Messiah would accomplish. To confirm that the OT passage used pointed to Jesus, Peter provides visible evidence that it was not David who would fulfill the prophecy of Psalm 16 but Christ, "I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day" (v.29). David spoke as a prophet, however, not of himself but of Christ (2 Sam. 7:11-16). By explaining the prophecy revealed through David, Peter explains to the crowd of Jews and non-Jews the core of God's redemptive plan.

The preaching and teaching of Scripture were never intended to be therapeutic but transformational; not attractive but confrontational; not trended but transcendent. The goal of studying the Bible is not to find you in it but Christ everywhere. Adrian Rogers once said: "It is better to speak the truth that hurts but then heals than to speak falsehood that comforts but then kills. It is better to be hated for telling the truth than to be loved for telling a lie." Faithful preaching of the Gospel is designed to convict the hearers of their condition before God contrasted with God's holiness (2 Tim. 4:2-4). It is not a church gathering where the Bible is not read, explained, and used to convict people of their sins. As Peter prepares to deliver his powerful conclusion, he exclaims: "this Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses" (v.32). The argument is conclusive: Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah.

To Ponder:

1. What preachers/Bible-teachers should be avoided due to their lack of faithfulness to the text of Scripture?
2. What are some ways you can be discerning regarding Biblical teaching?

III. The Exaltation of Christ | Acts 2:33-36

Not only did Jesus rise from the dead, but He was also exalted to the place of honor, glory, and power (Phil. 2:9-11) sitting at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19; Luke 22:69; Acts 5:31; Heb. 10:12). At the end of his sermon, Peter brings the hearers back to the miraculous manifestation of God at Pentecost telling them that what they had seen resulted from God's promise to send the Holy Spirit to begin His ministry of building and empowering the body of Christ, "having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing" (v.33). With Christ risen, glorified, and exalted, the ministry of the Holy Spirit had finally been inaugurated (John 7:39). Peter concludes his sermon by quoting and explaining another Psalm (110:1), proving from His ascension and exaltation that Christ is the Messiah. Once again, a prophetic Psalm that referred to Jesus (not David), "The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool" (v.35). David was not exalted to God's right hand, but Jesus was (Acts 1:9-11), and the proof of that was the outpouring of the Spirit that the crowd had just witnessed.

Peter provides overwhelming evidence from Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and exaltation that He is indeed the long-awaited Messiah. He concludes his sermon with a decisive, emphatic, and straight-forward statement, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (v.36). Peter leaves no room for doubt that the same Jesus whom God attested as Messiah through His miraculous birth, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation is the same Jesus whom they had crucified. The verdict was in, and the crowd was on the guilty side: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" (Acts 4:11). Peter does not give an invitation at the end of his sermon. Rather, he leaves the results of his message to the power of the Holy Spirit "to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). As a preacher, Peter gives the crowd nothing but Scripture, and that is the call of not only those who preach and teach the Bible but for all who are in Christ. In his sermon, Peter teaches us that a preacher has no authority outside the Word of God being expositied to people. Salvation has no effect on anyone outside of being confronted with the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ. Peter did not blame the Romans for killing Jesus, but all who rejected Him. Whoever rejects the true Gospel of Jesus Christ joins the crucifiers. **The Gospel message does not merely tell sinners that they are sinners; it proves it.**

To Ponder:

1. How could you use the structure of Peter's Gospel outline to communicate to a non-Christian the Gospel?