

## **“Apostolic Preaching”**

**Acts 2:14-41**

**March 14, 2021**

---

### **INTRODUCTION:**

How did the first apostles understand the mission Jesus had given them? The book of Acts provides us with an answer. Luke, the author of this book, records nineteen specific Christian speeches here. He records these apostolic sermons because he intends that we take instruction from this Spirit-filled preaching. We plan to conclude our study on the mission of the church by looking at four of these sermons: two by Peter and two by Paul.

We’re going to begin today by looking at the very first sermon recorded in the book of Acts, the one preached by Peter on the day of Pentecost. This day was one of three harvest festivals on the ancient Jewish calendar every year. The winter grains began to be harvested right after Passover, and the harvests were usually completed within fifty days. The name Pentecost means fiftieth, because it occurred fifty days after Passover. Jesus was crucified on Passover because he was the ultimate Passover lamb, sacrificed for the atonement of God’s people. He was raised on Easter Sunday and then appeared to many of his followers over the coming days until his ascension into heaven. From his place of rule in heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to his church, and this is the first sermon preached after that sending. As was fitting at a harvest festival, there was a great harvest on this day, not of agricultural crops, but of souls. Three-thousand souls passed from death to life through faith in Jesus. Though God doesn’t guarantee to us such equally large results, our aim is that men, women and children would enter into life through faith in Jesus. We want our gospel efforts to yield fruit. I note three features of the fruit-bearing gospel-preaching Peter engaged in on this day.

### **I. The Manner of Gospel Preaching**

The first feature of Peter’s preaching that I notice is that it was not done alone. The text tells us that Peter was **“standing with the eleven”** (v. 14). The old saying that it takes a village to raise a child is also true in evangelism. It is often the case that a person who comes to faith in Christ has been influenced by many different Christians. Maybe your role with someone might simply be to sow a seed, while another person may be designated to harvest the fruit of that seed, sometimes years later.

Second, Peter’s preaching is filled with Scripture. He quotes from three different Old Testament passages. While sharing the gospel with people almost always requires more than quoting the Scriptures to them, it never requires less. The reason is that God promises that his word comes with the power of the Holy

Spirit (Heb. 4:12). In the first creation, God spoke the universe into existence. In the new creation, when God creates new men and women, he also does by speaking his word. The difference is that now we have a role to play as we speak gospel words. We must do this with the combination of the boldness and gentleness Peter exhibits here.

The feature of his preaching I want to spend a little more time examining is the great confidence he exhibited. Luke tells us that there were varied responses to the tongues-speaking brought by the Holy Spirit. There was amazement, curiosity and mocking. The mockers said, **“They are filled with new wine”** (v. 13). People who witness the work of God but who don’t want to submit to God can always find some alternative explanation, even if it happens to be a weak one. This was certainly a weak explanation. I’ve seen people who are drunk before, but I’ve never seen drunkenness impart upon a person the ability to speak a foreign language they had not learned. Clearly, the hearts of this group of people were hardened against God. Notice who Peter targeted in his preaching. He addressed these mockers, telling them, **“These people are not drunk, as you suppose”** (v. 15). He went after the hardest group because he had confidence that gospel proclamation, accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit, can change even the hardest heart.

Where did Peter get this confidence? He got it from the promised Holy Spirit, as prophesied in the prophet Joel. That prophetic utterance was that a day would come when God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh. This language of pouring evokes the image of a downpouring of rain. It is similar to another common image in the Old Testament of God sending streams of water into a dry, lifeless desert (Is. 35:6). When the Spirit of God is poured out, life abounds, softening even the hardest of human hearts. We need to remember that no one is beyond the power of God’s Spirit to bring to new life, regardless of how strong their opposition may appear to be. The coming of the Spirit was based on Jesus’ victory, which becomes the primary theme of Peter’s preaching. Let’s look at that now.

## **II. The Theme of Gospel Preaching**

The heart of Peter’s sermon was the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. He begins with the life of Jesus, pointing out a truth of which all of Peter’s hearers were aware. Jesus did many mighty works and miracles, which attested to the fact that God was with him. But that raises a question. If God was with him, why did he die? Verse 23 is an important verse in the Bible, claiming that Jesus died through both human agency and divine agency. **“This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”** So why did Jesus die? There are two answers to that question. He died because evil, lawless men crucified him. They saw him as an impediment to their own selfish agenda and said that he must be permanently silenced. But there’s a second reason as well.

He died because he was delivered up by God, whose motive in doing so was love for his wayward people. He died as the Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. As proof of God's approval of Jesus, he was raised from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus is a major focus of Peter's sermon. He focuses on Psalm 16, a passage all of his hearers would have known well, since all of them were Jewish. He labors to present this passage to them in a way they had probably not previously considered, showing that it speaks of the resurrection of God's Holy One. Peter points out how this cannot refer to King David, the human author of this psalm, because his body was still residing in its tomb. It refers to Jesus, whose resurrection Peter and the other disciples had all witnessed. Further, he goes on to say that Jesus now reigns, having ascended into heaven where he is sitting in the seat of ultimate power.

The central content of Christian preaching is Christ. But it needs to be pointed out that mere acceptance of these bare facts of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension is not enough. We must know what they mean, and we must know and accept what they mean for us. So let me point out two very significant implications these events have for us. First, it means that we have a powerful weapon in our battle against fear. Some people counsel positive thinking as a way to battle fear. They say that if we can just imagine and somehow make ourselves believe that only good things can happen, then our thinking can actually bring these things into existence. Others take the opposite approach and engage in worst-case scenario reasoning. If they imagine the worst that can happen, then when the outcome is less severe than the worst-case scenario, it doesn't seem so bad. Both of these approaches are sub-Christian. The Christian answer to fear is the recognition that the worst-case scenario has already happened. The Christian has already died, having been crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20). Judgment Day has been moved from the future to the past, our sins having already been judged in Christ. It means that the same pattern we see in the death of Jesus happens in our lives as well. When we are victimized by an evil, fallen world, it means that God has not lost control. His good purposes will somehow emerge from the carnage of brokenness and lead to life for us all. In this way, as you can see, the death of Jesus means something very profound for us. So does the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. It means that the end of the story for us all is new life. And we know that Jesus can bring this about because he is now reigning, having ascended to his throne in heaven.

These truths about Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension not only give us victory over fear, they also give us victory over cynicism and pessimism. Peter lived at a time not unlike our own. Political life was dominated by battles between conservatives and liberals. The liberals were the Sadducees, and they were the ones with the most political influence and power. They were strongly resisted by the conservative Pharisees. About the only thing the two groups could agree upon was that Jesus needed to be silenced. So there was sharp political polarization. Further, the nation was in deep trouble and would cease to exist as a nation within four decades of Peter's sermon here in Acts 2. But Peter was filled with

hope and optimism in the gospel. He knew that God was at work establishing a new kingdom through the church. Nations of this world come and go. They always have and they always will. But God is building a nation of priests, and our mission is to partner with him in this work of erecting a new temple in the form of the church. Many believe that our nation is in serious trouble, and there are certainly many troubling things happening. It's appropriate to grieve for those things, but not to lose hope. God has always been at work to build his people, and he is continuing to do so today.

### III. The Outcome of Gospel Preaching

Peter's preaching about the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus brought his hearers to a place of desperation. They realized that they had crucified God's anointed one. This was literally true. These were the same ones who, fifty days prior to this, had responded to Pilate's question about what he should do with Jesus, with the words **"Let him be crucified"** (Matt. 27:22-23). And then they followed that up by saying, **"His blood be on us and on our children!"** (Matt. 27:25). Now they realize they are guilty of shedding innocent blood. **"Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'"** (Acts 2:37). They were asking, "Is there any hope for us, any remedy for the awful thing we have done in calling for the crucifixion of God's anointed one?" Yes, there is always hope in the gospel. And how does one lay hold of that hope. **"And Peter said to 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.'"**

Gospel preaching leads to repentance. To repent means to change one's mind about God, and Peter's hearers changed their minds from believing that Jesus was a problem to be removed to believing that he is God to be received. To repent is to pivot from going one direction as it relates to God to going another direction. In his latest book on courage, Russell Moore provides us with a good example of a pivot, as told by Oliver Sacks in one of his books. An old man was practicing medicine in a nursing home, treating the many residents suffering from dementia and Alzheimer's. He had decades of treating this disease and had been considered an expert in that field. The problem was that this doctor was afflicted with the same disease himself and was now a resident of the same hospital where he had practiced for many years. But because of his dementia he was unaware that he suffered from this, and the familiar setting led to his doing what he had done for years, which was to do rounds. Every day he would check in with his patients, read their charts and make notes to himself about their progress. The patients didn't know the difference and the rest of the staff decided that it was best just to let him live in his illusion, since he was doing no harm to anyone. It all came to an end, though, when on his rounds one day he went into an empty room and began flipping through the chart beside the bed. He read the diagnosis of

advanced dementia. And then he saw the name at the top of the chart, and it was his own name. “That’s me,” he cried out. “God help me!”

Something similar happened to Peter’s hearers. They were unaware of the tragic lives they were living. They had just been doing the natural thing, but that led them to call for Jesus’ crucifixion. Now the blinders had been peeled away and they saw the ugly truth about themselves. It was a pivotal moment, and that’s what repentance is. It is making a pivot in one’s attitude about God. It is dawning realization that I have had God all wrong, thinking that he was standing in the way of my fulfillment when in fact he is the author of my fulfillment. We repent when we change our minds about God. Repentance also involves a pivot in our thinking about ourselves. Just as happened with Peter’s preaching, we come to see that we too are guilty of crucifying Jesus. Our sins also had a role in putting him on that cross. This realization happens when we first become a Christian, and it happens throughout our lives when we gain fresh insights into the way we still misjudge God and trust ourselves. Why does Peter not mention faith? The assumption of the Bible is that repentance and faith are just two sides of the same coin. So faith is implied in repentance and vice versa.

Peter also calls them to submit to baptism. Jews regarded baptism as necessary for Gentile converts only. For them to be baptized would have been a humbling act. The humbling of our pride always accompanies repentance, because in repentance we have to say the words that are a knife to the heart of human pride— “I was wrong.” And then the promise is given that with such repentance and self-humbling comes forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

## **CONCLUSION:**

We are the stewards of this same gospel that Peter preached. It is the good news of sins forgiven and lives transformed—even lives that have done something as terrible as calling for Jesus’ crucifixion. I want to close with some encouraging gospel words I came across recently, attributed to a PCA pastor named Joe Novenson.

I continue to pray for you in the struggles you face. I’ve been so helped as I’ve thought about some of the following things. I don’t want you to ever forget that Moses stuttered, and David’s armor didn’t fit, and John Mark was rejected by Paul, and Hosea’s wife was a prostitute, and Amos’ only training for being a prophet was as a fig tree pruner. Jeremiah struggled with depression, and Gideon and Thomas doubted, and Jonah ran from God. Abraham lied miserably, and so did his child and his grandchild. These are real people who had real failures and real struggles and real inadequacies and real inabilities, and God shook the earth with them. It is not so much from our strength that He draws, but from His invincible might. I am praying that he will give you courage in this quality of His.

**Small Group Discussion Questions**  
**Acts 2:14-41**

1. The text says that Peter was standing with the eleven when he delivered this sermon. Evangelism is rarely done successfully by just one person. Some will have a large role, while others a small one. Who were some of the people involved in your conversion to faith in Jesus? Can you describe that?
2. Peter's sermon exhibits great confidence in the power of Scripture, seen in his lengthy quotes from the Old Testament. How is our confidence in the Bible strengthened? Are there some steps you can take to strengthen your confidence in the power of God's word?
3. Peter also had great confidence in the power of the gospel, seen in the fact that he addressed those most opposed—the mockers. Who are the most unlikely people to be converted that you have seen converted to faith in Christ?
4. The heart of Peter's sermon was the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. All four of these have great application to us, but the last two are often not given the attention of the first two. Think of as many benefits as you can of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.
5. One of the practical results of the Jesus-centered gospel (which is the only true gospel) is deliverance from fear. What is one thing you fear and how does the gospel help you deal with this fear?
6. The gospel also helps us deal with the cynicism and pessimism many bring to life. People, even many Christians, are very pessimistic about our nation. How does the gospel speak into that? (You may want to refer to the sermon manuscript to help you some with this).
7. Peter tells his desperate hearers to repent and be baptized. Repentance means a change of mind about God. It's to reach a pivotal point where you transition from thinking God is the problem to realizing that God is the solution. Can you think of a recent example in your life of that kind of repentance?