

# The Sermon that Launched the Church

## Devotional

I have read that the number one fear that people have is the fear of speaking in public. It ranks ahead of the fear of death! The fear of speaking in public would increase if a person knew that he would be speaking to a hostile audience.

Add to that the fact that the audience is not just a small group, but at least five to ten thousand hostile people, and you must address them without a public address system! To make matters worse, you have made a fool out of yourself just weeks before in such a manner that many in your audience would have heard about it. And, you have no time to prepare your message. The opportunity presents itself and you're on—without any notes!

Such was the situation facing Peter on the Day of Pentecost. The sound of the rushing wind from heaven had drawn a large crowd, which then heard all the believers speaking of the great deeds of God in the many different native languages of the crowd. This perplexed them as they asked, "What does this mean?" (2:12).

But others in the crowd were mocking and accusing the believers of being drunk. It was to this Jewish crowd in the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus had been killed just over seven weeks ago, that Peter delivered the sermon that launched the church. In terms of results—about 3,000 got saved that day—it was one of the greatest sermons ever preached.

Luke here only gives us the gist of that great sermon (2:40)... Even though you may never be called on to preach to a crowd, you will have opportunities to bear witness for Christ. Studying Peter's sermon can help you be ready.

Peter begins (2:14–21) with the questions that the crowd was asking about the phenomena of Pentecost, linking what they saw and heard to the prophecy of Joel 2:28–32. He then (2:22–36) rather abruptly shifts to the person of Jesus, arguing as his bottom line that God authenticated Jesus as Lord and Christ, "this Jesus whom you crucified" (2:36). But he builds his argument inductively (a good method with hostile audiences), building his case point by point, but not giving the main point until last. When his audience responds with conviction of sin, asking, "What shall we do?" Peter tells them to repent and be baptized, and 3,000 did so. Let's work through his sermon in more detail.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon by Pastor Steve Cole found @ <http://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-5-sermon-launched-church-acts-214-41>

# Open it

1. Besides sharing your fears and phobias in a group setting, which fears or phobias seem to bother you the most and why?

# Read it

**Acts 2:14-41**

# Explore it

2. Who serves as the spokesperson for the disciples?
3. What two Old Testament figures and passages does he quote?
4. How does Luke describe the people's response in verse 37?
5. What two things did Peter command the people to do?

# Apply it

## **WHAT A SERMON!!!**

First sermons or new preaching situations are often memorable experiences. Spurgeon's Preacher's College had a tradition of giving students a text right on the spot and having them preach it to Mr. Spurgeon and the staff. On one particular day a student was given the subject of Zacchaeus. The student stood before them and said, "Zacchaeus was of little stature; so am I. Zacchaeus was up a tree; so am I. Zacchaeus came down; so will I." And he sat down. Smart man! He probably had a great career. Peter's first sermon was probably his best. It is perhaps, aside from our Lord's sermons, the greatest ever preached. Greatest because of the place it occupies in the history of redemption (it is the inaugural sermon of the age of grace), greatest by its pure results (there were 3,000 converts), and greatest by virtue of its being a model for apostolic preaching.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hughes, R. Kent. Acts: The Church Afire (Preaching the Word) (Kindle Locations 589-595). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

6. What makes a sermon memorable to you?

What elements are necessary for a noteworthy sermon?

Are those elements present in Peter's Pentecost message?

Here's Peter the coward, who, three times, before some of these same people, denied knowing Jesus. Flanking him are eleven other guys, who, when the chips were down seven weeks earlier, ran like rabbits to save their own miserable skins, leaving Jesus to face death alone. **But what a difference!**

The "Rock" Peter, finally living up to his name, shouts for the crowd's attention. With good humor he pitches the cynics' joke back at them: "Drunk? It's only nine o'clock in the morning, for heaven's sake! Nobody gets drunk before breakfast." (Laughter.)<sup>3</sup>

7. Peter had been changed and now was using his God-given abilities to spread the message of Christ. What abilities or strengths did he exhibit in Acts 2?

The disciples allowed fear and a lack of faith to keep them from being effective witnesses after Jesus was arrested. What things keep you from using the abilities that God has given you that can be used to change the world?

Notice that twice Peter appeals to his audience to listen carefully to his words (2:14, 22). No matter how dynamic or dull the speaker may be, the audience has a responsibility to listen carefully. Even the Lord Jesus, the most gifted speaker in history, exhorted His audiences to take care how they listened (Luke 8:18). In other words, the responsibility for a good sermon lies not only with the preacher, but also with the hearers. We should always ask God to give us ears to hear what He wants to say to us through His Word.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Girard, Robert C. The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 704–710). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

<sup>4</sup> Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-5-sermon-launched-church-acts-214-41>

8. Much focus on a sermon's effectiveness is placed upon the preacher. What responsibilities do the listeners have when listening to a sermon? What things do listeners do that can cause them to miss a good sermon?

Peter's main point is not the particular form that the outpouring of the Spirit took, but rather that He was poured out "on all flesh." Not just the prophets or rabbis, but even sons and daughters would experience this outpouring of the Spirit (2:17). Not just the older men, but also younger men would know the Lord and His will ("visions"). Not just the wealthy, but even bondslaves would know the fulness of the Spirit. Not just men, but also women would have the Spirit. As the apostle Paul later taught, "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). No believer today lacks the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

9. Read verses 14, 22, 29, 36. Notice that in each verse he declares whom he is speaking to. How might using the combination of Joel's prophecy and the gift of languages have been a rebuke to Israel in "these last days"?

10. What encouragement and confidence can we have knowing that "God is pouring His Spirit on all flesh" in these last days?

Up to this point, Peter has been rather generic. He has linked the phenomena of Pentecost to Joel's prophecy about the outpouring of God's Spirit in the last days. This hints that the day of Messiah has dawned, inaugurating the last days, but he hasn't yet said that clearly. He has also brought up the subject of God's judgment at the final Day of the Lord, but he hasn't stated yet that his audience (good religious Jews) needs to fear that judgment. And he has set forth the offer of God's mercy for anyone who will take it. But now he shifts from preaching to meddling! He gets specific about just who this Lord is that a person must call upon to be saved. He shows them that they had crucified their Messiah!<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

11. Had Peter's sermon stopped at verse 21, what would the hearers' takeaways have been?

12. While Peter would continue to preach the whole gospel during his message, many Christians are tempted to shortchange the gospel. What are some ways we can stop short of presenting the whole gospel story? How can this adversely affect our hearers?

In verses 22–24 Peter lays the charge against the people of this city, the people who stand before him. Jesus the Nazarene presented Himself to His people in Jerusalem, even as the prophets had foretold. Jesus came not only with the claim to be the Messiah, but God Himself testified to His identity and authority through the signs and wonders He performed through the Holy Spirit.

In spite of this, Israel rejected Jesus as the Messiah. And not "Israel" in some general sense; those hearing Peter rejected His claim to be Messiah. The One whom God accredited, they rejected. Worse yet, they nailed Him to a cross. This was all within the sovereign plan and purpose of God, but they put Him to death in an evil conspiracy which involved the Gentiles as well. God's purposes were not overthrown in all of this, for He raised Jesus from the dead.<sup>7</sup>

13. Peter confronts the listeners in his day and rebukes them for what they did to Jesus. Why is such a direct approach necessary in preaching?

**at·test**<sup>8</sup> /ə'test/

*verb*

past tense: **attested**; past participle: **attested**

- **provide or serve as clear evidence of.**  
"his status is attested by his recent promotion"
- **declare that something exists or is the case.**  
"I can **attest to** his tremendous energy"
- **be a witness to; certify formally.**  
"the witnesses must attest and sign the will in the testator's presence"

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<sup>7</sup> Sermon by Bob Deffinbaugh found @ <https://seriespage/putting-pentecost-perspective-part-3-peter%E2%80%99s-interpretation-pentecost-acts-21-40>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.dictionary.com/>

14. Acts 2:22 says that Jesus “was attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs.” In what ways is God “attesting you to the world” as his follower?

Jesus’ death at first glance may have seemed like something that invalidated His messianic claims. But Peter shows that Jesus was not killed because He was a victim of His enemies. He was killed because God predetermined before the world began that Jesus would die as the Savior of His people. Isaiah 53:10 prophesied, “But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief.” And so rather than invalidating Jesus as Lord and Messiah, His death actually validated Him, since it was a fulfillment of God’s eternal decree.

Does this mean that since God determined it, men are not responsible? No, Peter says, “you nailed [Him] to a cross by the hands of lawless [lit.] men [the Romans] and put Him to death.” Without violating their will, God used evil men to accomplish His eternal purpose, but those evil men were responsible for their crime. No one can blame God for his own sin.<sup>9</sup>

15. How are we to balance our culpability and responsibility for our sin with God’s sovereignty to use those sinful decisions to fulfill His plans and purposes?

Peter wraps up his speech with a whack across the head with a spiritual two-by-four. All of this—the prophecies, Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, the Holy Spirit’s coming to the disciples, the disturbances of Pentecost—proves one great fact: Jesus (the man you crucified) is Lord (Yahweh-God) and Christ (Messiah King). The foremost fact of Christian faith is this: Jesus, who died for our sins, rose from the dead, is alive today, and may be known personally as Lord and Savior.<sup>10</sup>

16. Why is the Resurrection so important to Peter’s message? How does it validate our own faith in Jesus Christ?

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<sup>9</sup>Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-5-sermon-launched-church-acts-214-41>

<sup>10</sup> Girard, Robert C. The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 761–766). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

17. Peter references the Old Testament twice in his sermon. What can we learn from his example when it comes to our use of the Old Testament today?

Call 911! This is an emergency! The sense of urgency that gripped people as Peter nailed home point after point was a result of the Spirit quietly doing His job. Peter's logic was flawless. The Spirit's power energized him as he spoke. They knew about the Crucifixion. They knew who was responsible. They knew Jesus's tomb was empty. They saw what they hadn't seen before: Jesus's death and resurrection fulfilled prophecies they'd read Sabbath after Sabbath in their synagogues. The light dawned. Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah! "What shall we do?" they cried.<sup>11</sup>

18. Luke tells us that people were "cut to the heart." Peter calls them to repent. What does it mean to repent, and how is it different from simply regretting something (2 Corinthians 7:10)?

19. Every one of the people who accepted the message was baptized. What does this say about the importance of baptism? What would you say to a Christian who is delaying baptism?

20. In what ways and to whom does the message of Jesus Christ need to be shared? What can you be doing to create unique opportunities to share in the days to come?

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.