

Peter's Speech

Sermon at Pentecost: Acts 2: 14-41

In our homework we learned that Peter's audience is comprised of Jews. Jews from all over the known world made pilgrimage to Jerusalem to present themselves before the temple with their first fruit offerings (as well as burnt offerings and drink offerings –See Leviticus 23:15-22 for more details on the Pentecost holy day). As it was a Jewish holy day, it would not have been likely that many Gentiles would have been near the temple where it is believed this event took place.

In Peter we have a good view of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Not just a few weeks prior to this event he publicly denied not only knowing Jesus, but being one of his followers *three times*. Now here he stands before this crowd proclaiming that Jesus of Nazareth is the messiah and that all Jews must accept him as God's messiah, the next appropriate and logical step of faith in Judaism.

Break down of Peter's Speech:

1. Joel prophesy – Detailed in homework this week(2:14-21)
2. Proof of Jesus' Messiahship (2:22-24 , 36-41)
3. David's prophetic Psalms – Detailed in homework this week (Acts 2:25-35)

The focus of our lesson today will be on this second point, the proofs of Jesus' Messiahship. In verses 22-24, Peter gives a summary of God's action in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus:

²² "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³ This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. [Emphasis mine]

It was by God's plan and ordination that these events transpired, and by God's power that Jesus was raised from the dead, freed from death as additional testimony to Jesus' identity.

“Accredited” (v.22) means one who either already holds office or who has received appointment to an office but has yet to enter service of that office. Peter depicts Jesus in his earthly ministry as being designated by God as Messiah but only entering into the function of that role upon his death and resurrection. Upon his death and resurrection Jesus becomes, or fulfills, the role of Messiah as planned and ordained by God. He was appointed and anointed for this role from the beginning. And God made it known that Jesus was the chosen messiah throughout his ministry.

The proof that Jesus was God's appointed Messiah is in the miracles, signs and wonders he performed during his ministry, as well as the supernatural events surrounding his death and resurrection. The word “miracle” is translated from the Greek work *dynameis* or “mighty works” and is derived from the word for power that we encountered in Acts 1:8 when Jesus promised His power would come upon them. Throughout Acts the term “wonder” is used only in conjunction with “signs” testifying to the fact

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that these wonders have no value of their own except as they point beyond themselves to the divine power behind them.

Jesus had thousands of followers at the height of his ministry. Everyone knew who he was and the stories of healings, feedings, and miracles attributed to him. Many of his miracles were performed in Jerusalem itself and before crowds of people. He was known to the ruling religious elite who maligned and persecuted by them. They used fear tactics to persuade the Jewish people not to follow him or acknowledge Jesus as a man sent from God. Jesus was a known entity in Jerusalem and even those of the Diaspora present to hear Peter's speech and witness the miraculous presence of the Holy Spirit empowering the disciples to speak in all the languages of the Diaspora, would have been present previously at Passover. They would have also heard and witnessed Jesus' activities at the Feast of Lights when he proclaimed himself the Light of the World and the Living Water – both bold claims of being the awaited Messiah. The Jews to whom Peter is speaking at Pentecost knew all about Jesus. They knew his teaching, his miracles, and his claims to be the Messiah. They knew of his death and resurrection. Thousands knew of Jesus, had heard stories, witnessed miracles and heard his teachings.

Even at his death supernatural events took place that would have stood out in the memory of anyone in Jerusalem, even if they were not at the crucifixion. Remember the crowds lining the streets to jeer and mock Jesus as he approached Golgotha? Jerusalem was filled to overflowing with people who witnessed these supernatural events. In Matthew 27: 45 it says, *“From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land.”* We are told (according to the Roman measurement of time the sixth hour to the ninth equates to about 12 noon to three in the afternoon) there was darkness. There was a solar eclipse. We recently had a partial solar eclipse a few months ago. From 3-6 in the evening it was like twilight and the temperature dropped so as you could feel that temperature change. That was a partial eclipse. What scripture is telling us is that at the moment of Jesus' death there was a solar eclipse, there was darkness in the middle of the day. In the ancient world a solar eclipse was a herald of bad tidings, it was an omen of displeasure from the Gods. The Gods were not happy, whether Roman or Jewish, God was not happy. Of, course God was not happy his son was nailed to a cross dying an agonizing death. It would be remembered by all who were in Jerusalem as the Passover that the sky went dark and it turned cold. Of course it went dark, the Light of the World had departed.

Look what happens next, verse 51 tells us there is an earth quake that splits the rocks and destroys the temple curtain. Again a bad omen. God is not happy. An earthquake, especially one of this magnitude, is a bad omen. It would have been remembered by all in Jerusalem that there was an earthquake that caused the temple curtain to tear at Passover. This alone is a memorable event. As Christians we recognize the spiritual aspect of the torn curtain, but to the Jews, they would have only known that the Lord's displeasure caused the earth to shake, rocks to break apart and the curtain in the Holy of Holies to be torn, the sky to go dark, and the day to suddenly turn cold. Certainly a memorable Passover.

And finally we have one last supernatural event that would mark this Passover as extremely unique in the history of all Passovers. Verse 52 and 53 tell us: *“The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.”* While this statement appears to be chronologically out of place, Matthew is linking it to the supernatural events surrounding Jesus

death and resurrection. We are told that the very gates of Sheol have opened and that the dearly departed are walking the earth and appearing to people. Remember the time line of the Passover festival. People arrived in Jerusalem prior to the actual holy day in order to get settled and prepared for the Passover meal. Then we have Passover, the night Jesus is arrested. The following day is the first day of the Holy Feast of Unleavened Bread. That is a week-long holy celebration of the spring harvest. Taken together these two Holy Festivals, Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread last 8 days, and is collectively called Passover. Jews from around the world make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate this most holy of holidays. Jerusalem is crowded to overflowing with people who are witnessing the fact that their dearly departed are walking the streets and interacting with them. Talk about a memorable Passover!

All Peter has to do is just mention Jesus' name and the events of Passover probably cause each Jew present to shudder at the memory of what happened just a few months prior. It was only 50 days ago that these things happened. If even one of these events happened last Easter, I have no doubt you would remember.

Peter concludes his speech in Acts 2:36-41 by pointing out that the appropriate response of these Jews in Jerusalem should have been to recognize Jesus for who He was and who sent Him by the miracles, signs and wonders they themselves would have seen or heard about during His ministry in and around Jerusalem. Peter was not setting out to create a new religion. Faith in Jesus of Nazareth was the next logical step of faith for these Jews. They were God's chosen people in possession of scriptures that prophesied a messiah to come. Those prophesies included descriptions of the things he would do as well as the heavenly displays to accompany his terrestrial visit. The people knew a messiah would come and they were waiting for him to appear. Instead of accepting Jesus, the Jews in Jerusalem had rejected him. Accepting God's messiah was the next logical step and this is what Peter was calling these Jews in Jerusalem to do.

The signs and portents of Passover combined with the miracle of these Galileans speaking foreign languages fluently would cause many in the crowd to listen to Peter closely and be struck to the quick with guilt. Returning to Acts 2: 36 and 37 Peter says, *"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."* *When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart."* Their rejection of Jesus, God's chosen Messiah, authenticated by all the miraculous signs and wonders, and fulfillment of prophecy, was a rejection of God. That rejection leads to God's judgment being poured out on the guilty. Not only in the eternal sense, but impending judgment would come in Israel. Jesus prophesied, *"But unless you repent, you too will all perish"* (Luke 13:3). And speaking of the temple, and no doubt all Jerusalem, Jesus said: *"I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down"* (Matthew 24:2). These things came to pass in AD 66-70 when war broke out in Judea and culminated with the Romans destroying the temple, burning down Jerusalem and enslaving all who survived in the city. Prior to the fall of Jerusalem, the majority of Christians had already fled the city to the hill country to escape Jewish persecution, and thereby they also escaped God's wrath poured out through the Roman's destruction of the city. Jews would not be allowed back into Jerusalem for nearly 2000 yrs, when the United Nations handed Israel back to the Jews in 1948.

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One of the things the Holy Spirit does is convicts us in our hearts when we have sinned. We feel that twinge of guilt, the flooding blush of shame rising to our cheeks, and the heavy sinking in the center of our being. The Holy Spirit convicted the hearts of many in the crowd that day. In fact we learn at the end of the passage that 3,000 people responded to the Holy Spirit's convicting their heart for their part in rejecting Jesus. The movement of the Holy Spirit is powerful. It prepared and preceded the disciples in the miraculous events of that morning, it empowered Peter to speak boldly with confidence and eloquence, and it broke through the contempt and hard hearts of thousands in the crowd. Peter and the band of Jesus' disciples could not have achieved this harvest by their own strength and ability, only by the empowering and presence of the Holy Spirit could God's will be achieved. Peter and the disciples were the instrument of these miraculous events that brought glory and honor to God.

In verses 38-41 Peter pleads with the crowds to repent. What is it they need to repent of? These Jews were so careful of everything in their religious observances; they had rituals to even guard them against sinning inadvertently. They were afraid of offending God even accidentally. That is why they had these long complicated lists of does and don'ts. But they allowed their man-made traditions to surpass and blind them to God's calling of them. They thought, "If I do this, this and this, I'm good, I'm righteous in the eyes of God. If I do a,b, and c, then I won't be stained with sin, I'll be presentable before God." They believed righteousness was something they could attain themselves, not a gift to be humbly received because no matter how much we try we cannot refrain from sin. Their efforts, no matter how sincerely set forth, led to faith in their own abilities, not in God's grace-filled provision. They were so wrapped up in their own attempts to live righteously they couldn't conceive of the fact that they not only were steeped in sin (the least of which was pride), but that they needed a messiah to atone for that sin. They could not do that for themselves. They had to accept and face their own sinfulness and then accept they needed the divine son of God to pay for those sins. But they had been blind and deaf to what God was calling them to do. In their self righteous pride they rejected The One God sent them despite the fact he fulfilled each and every prophesy about who and what messiah would be. Their rejection of Jesus was rejection of all that God was offering -- the gift of redemption, forgiveness, relationship with God, and their very standing as God's chosen people. They rejected God. The Jews rejected a relationship with God because they believed their way was either good enough, or even better than God's way.

Peter's words struck their hearts. The Holy Spirit was already at work in their hearts. It softened their hearts and made them not only ready to hear Peter's words, but also to accept them as true. They were ready to repent, and 3000 did. That is more souls than Jesus ever reached in his earthly ministry. This is why the Holy Spirit had to come into the world.

How often do we reject God by rejecting our need to repent? How often do we think, "I'm a good person, I have not sinned. I say my prayers, I give to the poor, I do charitable things, I serve in the church." But how often do I *truly* seek God in those things? How blind are we to our need of a messiah because we think we live righteously? How often are our prayers focused on our wants and needs, and not focused on what God wants us to know? Repentance is turning away from sin and towards God. In fact, it is turning away from our self-centered point of view and putting God as our main focus and actively seeking a relationship with him. It is acknowledging we need him. It is entering

into a two way relationship where we seek to know him and chose to do things his way - which just happens to be the better way anyway. Prayer should be two way a conversation. We are to be in relationship with God - that is give and take on both sides, not just presenting our daily catalog of wants. In prayer time try sitting with God, Bible open, and ask him to talk to you about His word. He wants nothing more than to sit a spell with you, sharing that time together. But if you fill that time with your desires and then walk away before he's gotten in a word, that is not communication. That is not a *relationship* with God. Relationships require time spent getting to know the other person. Just as God was calling each one of those Jews on that day of Pentecost to repent and return to him, God calls each one of us to draw closer to him, deeper into a relationship that is nurtured by the Holy Spirit so that we can know God and be children of God that he has chosen us to be.

Repentance happens when we allow the **Holy Spirit**
the *freedom* to move in our hearts, leading us back to God and

We are willing to *face* the unrighteousness that darkens our soul and *turn* to God.