

Peter's Sermon about Jesus

Acts 2:22-41

Pastor Chris Sicks

Sermon for July 23, 2023

Today we will be looking at what might be the most-important sermon in church history.

It happened during Pentecost, a Jewish festival celebrated every summer.

Pentecost was a busy time in Jerusalem, when Jewish people from all over the world came to celebrate together.

In Acts 2:5 we read that “there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.”

When the visitors arrived for this Pentecost, they didn't know that 120 disciples of Jesus were also there.

They were praying and waiting for the Holy Spirit.

Jesus made them wait for 10 days, until thousands of Jews from many nations arrived.

And that was when God the Father, and God the Son, sent God the Holy Spirit.

Filled with the Spirit, the apostles began to preach about Jesus in the different languages of the visitors.

These foreigners were amazed and confused, because they heard wonderful things about the work of God, in their own languages.

Listen to how Peter responded to their confusion in Acts 2:14:

14 "Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd:

“Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you;

listen carefully to what I say.”

That was how Peter began his sermon.

We looked at the first part of his sermon two weeks ago.

Today we will continue looking at what Peter said.

So please give your attention now to the Word of God in Acts 2:22-41.

22 “Fellow Israelites, 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 deliberate plan 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.

25 David said about him:

“ ‘I saw the Lord always before me.

Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

26 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;

my body also will rest in hope,

27 because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,

you will not let your holy one see decay.

28 You have made known to me the paths of life;

you will fill me with joy in your presence.’

29 "Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day.
30 But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.
31 Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah--
that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay.
32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.
33 Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.
34 For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,
" 'The Lord said to my Lord:
"Sit at my right hand
35 until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'"'
36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this:
God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."
37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"
38 Peter replied, "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.
39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call."
40 With many other words he warned them;
and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."
41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Together we read Isaiah 40:8:

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Please pray with me.

Father in heaven, we come to you because you are the source of life and truth.

Jesus, we worship you because you are full of mercy and love.

Holy Spirit, please open our hearts and minds to be transformed by the word of God, amen.

The main point of my message tonight will be the main point of Peter's message.

Peter's sermon was focused on the identity of Jesus.

Look with me at how Peter began to explain to the people who Jesus is, in verse 22:

22 "Fellow Israelites, 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.

What does Peter mean that Jesus was "accredited by God?"

When someone is accredited, it means they have been qualified or certified.

If you want to be accredited as an electrician, you must perform certain tasks.

You demonstrate your knowledge and ability.

Then you can receive the title Electrician.

In verse 22, Peter says that Jesus was accredited "by miracles, wonders, and signs."

Jesus cured the sick and healed the blind.

Jesus fed thousands of people and calmed a stormy sea.

Jesus even resurrected a young man in Luke 7:14-17.

14 "Then [Jesus] went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still.

He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!"

15 The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

16 They were all filled with awe and praised God.

"A great prophet has appeared among us," they said.

"God has come to help his people."

17 This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country."

Notice how the crowd responded after Jesus raised the boy from the dead.

The miracle communicated two facts to the people:

First, Jesus was "a great prophet."

Second, God had arrived on earth, to help his people.

Jesus proved through his sinless life and many miracles that he was the Son of God.

Maybe you have read in John 3:2 what Nicodemus said to Jesus:

2 "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God;

for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

The miracles and signs performed by Jesus affirmed his identity.

That's why Peter said in verse 22 that Jesus was "accredited by God."

Now let's see what Peter said next in verse 23:

23 "This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge;
and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."

Ouch!

Peter is very direct.

He says: "YOU, with the help of wicked men, killed Jesus.

Your hands are covered in his blood.

You are responsible for his death."

The religious leaders in Jerusalem killed Jesus because he threatened their grip on power.

But at the same time, their actions were a part of God's plan.

Peter said everything happened according to "God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge."

Wicked men planned to kill Jesus, but their plan was a part of God's plan.

We see this same combination in the first book of the Bible.

Joseph's brothers hated him and sold their brother into slavery.

But God had a plan to save Joseph's family and millions of other people.

Joseph understood that and said this in Genesis 50:20.

20 "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good--

to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

Peter reminds the people that they intended to harm Jesus when they crucified him.

But God intended it for good, for the saving of many lives--people from many places.

At Pentecost, God brought to Jerusalem people from all over Europe, Asia, and Africa.

He brought them there to hear Peter's sermon, so they could understand the true identity of Christ and be saved.

Look at what Peter says next in verse 24 of today's passage:

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."

On Easter morning, God the Father raised God the Son from the dead.

Many people have said that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most-important event in human history.

Why?

Because the resurrection proved the innocence and identity of Christ.

"It was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."

Why?

Because an innocent man died a criminal's death.

A sinless man suffered the curse of crucifixion.

Death could not maintain its grip on the body of Jesus.

Because it would be morally wrong for God to allow an innocent man to remain dead in a criminal's grave.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ proved he is the Son of God, and the spotless Lamb of God who died as a sacrifice in our place.

Do you believe that your sins were nailed to cross and buried with Jesus?

Do you believe that your shame and guilt were poured out on him as your substitute?

If you do, then his resurrection life is also yours.

His vindication and status as a child of God are also yours.

Peter said this later, in Acts 4:12.

12 "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

There is no other name, there is no other person who can save you.

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father, except through faith in Jesus.

Abraham can't save you, Moses can't save you, and David cannot save you.

The people of Israel expected their Messiah to be a conquering king like David.

But Peter reminded his audience the truth about David, their favorite king.

David was Israel's greatest king, but his body rotted in the grave because he was a sinful man.

Listen again to verses 29-32.

29 "Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day.

30 But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.

31 Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah--

that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay.

32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it."

Peter wants everyone to understand that David's body decayed because he was guilty of sin.

But the resurrection of Jesus proved he was not an ordinary man like David.

Next, Peter quotes one of the psalms of David.

Peter wants his audience to see that David understood the promised Messiah must be a divine Savior.

Listen to verses 34-35:

34 For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

“ ‘The LORD said to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand

35 until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

In this quote from Psalm 110 verse 1, David speaks about two members of the Trinity.

If you look at Psalm 110 in English, you see that "Lord" appears twice.

The first time, LORD is capitalized, because the Hebrew word there is "Yahweh."

The second word for Lord in Psalm 110:1 is "Adonai."

These are two different Hebrew words for God.

Peter quotes David to show that David understood the divinity of the Messiah.

God the Father gave God the Son authority to rule over the world.

David understood this in a limited way, but at Pentecost the Holy Spirit helped Peter understand David's psalm more fully.

Now let's return to Peter's sermon, and see what he says next to the audience in Jerusalem, in verses 36-37:

36 “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this:

God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter makes two concluding statements in his sermon:

First, Jesus is the divine king and Messiah that David was writing about.

Second, Peter tells the people that they put their own Messiah to death.

The Holy Spirit drove Peter's words deeply into the hearts of the people.

They were "cut to the heart" when they understood their guilt and sin.

They were also afraid, because they understood that they had rejected the Messiah who came to save them.

That's why they ask what they should do.

The people wanted to know the escape plan.

If you were a prisoner of war, trapped in a prison with your brothers, you would want to escape.

Imagine that one of the other prisoners told you, "Tonight we will escape from prison."

You would ask him: "Brother, what shall we do?"

What is the escape plan?"

The people asked Peter what they should do, because they understood The Big Problem.

This is The Big Problem: God is up there in heaven, ruling the universe in all his holiness and power.

And I am down here, a sinner who feels shame.

The Big Problem is that I can never be in close relationship with a holy God, because my heart is polluted.

You can try to avoid The Big Problem by pretending God is not real, pretending he doesn't care how you live.

Or you can avoid The Big Problem by making excuses for your behavior, concealing your shame, and denying your sin.

But the truth is, we are all down here, far from God our Creator.

And when we die, we will remain far from Him, forever.

If you don't acknowledge this Big Problem, you can't be saved.

But the Holy Spirit can give you eyes to see yourself honestly, and to see Jesus clearly.

And that is when you realize you need an escape plan.

That is when you ask: "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Listen to how Peter answers the crowd and tells them what to do in verses 38-41:

38 "Peter replied, "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.

39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call."

40 With many other words he warned them;

and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."

Isn't that amazing?

3,000 people repented of their sins and trusted in Jesus as Savior on one day.

Why did Peter's sermon have this dramatic impact on so many people?

Because Peter preached clearly about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Because Peter clearly explained the Big Problem, and how the gospel was the only answer to that Big Problem.

The gospel in three words is this: God saves sinners.

That's the bottom line, the essential gospel truth that every sermon should focus on.

As your pastor I promise to make the gospel the focus of everything we do here, with God's help.

But only the Holy Spirit can apply these truths to your hearts and to mine

Therefore let's pray together now, for the Spirit's power to flow in and through us.

Jesus, thank you for sending the Holy Spirit to that small group of 120 believers 2,000 years ago.

Thank you for opening the minds of those 3,000 visitors to Jerusalem, so they could carry the gospel message back to their homelands.

And thank you for my friends here, who have come from many nations.

Please fill us with the Holy Spirit, so we can be transformed by the gospel.

And so we can go share the good news with everyone around us.

We ask this in your holy name, Jesus, amen.