

Acts 2:1-41

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Date: 28 May 2023

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[0 : 00] Well, this is a great day for us as a church, isn't it? Pentecost 2023, that's why there's red banners behind me. And all of you who wore red today, congratulations.

And this Pentecost, it's a great day to welcome into the body of Christ by baptism a number of precious brothers and sisters, even though some of them resisted.

They join us as heirs of eternal life and the precious promises of God.

They call Jesus Lord and God Father. And they have the same spirit who builds us into a holy temple, giving us gifts to build each other up.

It's a great day. And we couldn't have a better passage, a more exciting or relevant passage, than Acts chapter 2, which ends with 3,000 people being baptized in Jerusalem in the response to the sermon on that day, the first Christian sermon.

[1 : 06] If I was Jordan, I would say it proves it was an Anglican baptism because there's not enough water for 3,000 to get immersed. So it must have been by sprinkling.

And then at the end, the promises to you and to your children. That's what Jordan would say, but I don't dare say that. And most of the chapter, as you heard it, is a cracker sermon from the Apostle Peter.

The actual events take place and they're done with by the end of verse 4. And if you look down at chapter 2, verse 1, Luke signals how important this is, how this coming, this day of Pentecost is like an international airport where many journeys end and many journeys begin.

Verse 1, when the day of Pentecost, the word is not arrived, the word is was fulfilled. In other words, this is the day that divides the Old Testament from the New Testament.

This is the day when God fulfills all that he's been doing since the Garden of Eden. It's the start of the last stage of human history before the great and terrible day of the Lord.

[2 : 24] The world has been waiting for this day. In a sense, God has been waiting for this day. And now it happens. And just as Jesus was taken up into heaven in chapter 1, so we read verse 2.

Now the Holy Spirit is poured out. There came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind.

And it's interesting, this word wind isn't the usual breath word, spirit word.

It's the word used in the creation narrative when God breathed into the nostril of man and woman and made them a living creature. It's a creation word. So the first thing that happens, the first signal we have is not only is it fulfillment, but it's the beginning of a new creation, a new humanity filled with the Holy Spirit.

And then there are tongues as of fire, which is always a picture of the personal presence of God. Instead of bringing judgment, bringing purifying and serving, and not just for a select class, but for all of them.

Verse 4. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

[3 : 34] And for just a moment, the curse of Babel is reversed. And all the confusion and misunderstanding. I can't believe how many people misunderstand me.

All of that is, that was a joke. All of that is set aside with the gift of the Holy Spirit, just temporarily. As people in the crowd hear the disciples, who are mostly from Galilee, speaking in their own native languages.

Wouldn't that be great? And then verses 5 to 13, we read that the crowd is made up from people from all over the world. And Luke does a clock face of the world from every nation under heaven.

They all hear the glory of God and the story of Jesus being told by these disciples in their own tongue, which means it's the beginning of the great mission. And before we hit the sermon in verse 14, the first mark of the coming of the Holy Spirit is communication.

It's speech. And it's very interesting, as you go through the book of Acts, the story moves forward by speeches. 25% of the book of Acts is speeches, 19 of them.

[4 : 41] And it's not the speeches just explain what's going on. The speeches are the action as God draws people to himself. And the crowd is amazed.

They're not converted. They're amazed. And in verse 12, they ask the right question. What does this mean? Please ask that of the preacher. What does this mean? And so Peter begins the first sermon.

And as I say, it's not just explanation. Peter's sermon causes something to happen so that by the end of the sermon, people are receiving life and the spirit and conversion and a new relation with God and a new start.

And like every good sermon, it's a three-pointer. And each point is about an astonishing reversal that is taking place before their eyes, where God turns things on their head, bringing restoration to his broken world, the great and climactic work of salvation.

So here is the three-point sermon. Three changes. Number one, verses 14 to 21, is a change in time itself.

[5 : 54] They've been waiting in Jerusalem for the promise of the Holy Spirit. And this day, the coming of the Holy Spirit changes everything. And now the world tips over into the last days.

Sometimes you hear Christians say the last days are coming. Not true. The last days began with Pentecost. So look at the long quote from the prophet Joel in the Old Testament.

Verse 17. In the last days, God declares, I'll pour out my spirit on all flesh. And verse 18. In those days, I'll pour out my spirit and they shall prophesy.

So the day before Pentecost, the Holy Spirit had not come. It was one kind of time. But now that the spirit is poured out of the day of Pentecost, history has reached a decisive turning point.

Now the world is in its last days. Now God will work differently than he ever has before in his world to restore his people and his creation to himself.

[6 : 57] This is the change in time itself. No longer is the Holy Spirit confined to kings and prophets and special people. He pours himself out into all his people.

And the mark of the filling of the spirit is this gift of prophecy, which in the broadest sense is speaking about Jesus. This is how it works. When the spirit is poured out into someone's life, the promise of the Old Testament, the promise of the new covenant, is that we will all know God. Each of us will know him. And when we speak out of knowing God to others, that's prophecy. It's a new day, Peter says, a day of salvation.

And the end of that little passage says, where everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And we're about to discover that the name of the Lord is Jesus.

And it's a change in time. Now, before we move into this second point, I need to say this. The second point, the middle point of the sermon is the longest.

[8 : 04] Okay? Very important to know that. It's bad to have the last of three points, a long point when you're preaching. Always good to have the middle point, the longest point, just so as you know.

The big surprise about this second point is that it's not about the Holy Spirit. It's about Jesus. Verse 22, Jesus of Nazareth.

Verse 23, this Jesus. Verse 32, this Jesus. Verse 36, this Jesus. Do you remember in John's Gospel, Jesus promised that when he departs and goes to heaven, he will send another advocate, another helper, another comforter, a person, a personal and relational ministry of the third person of the Trinity.

And the primary role of the Holy Spirit is a spotlight ministry to shine the spotlight on Jesus Christ, to give Jesus glory, to reveal how wonderful Jesus is, to assure us of all the good that Jesus brings us, and to fill us with hope in him.

That's why this long middle point is all about Jesus. And the second point, which runs from verses 22 to 36, is that there has been a change, not just in time, there has been a change for Jesus.

[9 : 31] There are two radically opposite views of Jesus in the world. To God, he is chosen and precious, the most chosen and precious.

He is the living stone, the touchstone of human destiny. But to many, many humans, he is not that important.

Some think he is, he existed, some treat him with respect, but he's certainly not the source of love and life. He's not the key to life. He's not the Lord of all.

He's not the most wonderful and central thing in life. And so he is sidelined and dismissed and rejected. And it's a very lucky thing for God that we agree with him on a whole range of issues. But on this central and most important issue, God and his world are basically at odds. Because not only does God regard Jesus as precious, but he has given him the key role in his plans for the world.

[10:39] Everything that God is doing is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. And the only thing that will stand in our world and the only thing that will stand forever in our lives are those things built on Jesus Christ.

That's the theme of the main point of the sermon. And what delights the Holy Spirit is bearing witness to this massive change that's happened to Jesus. The biggest possible reversal, going from being rejected and abandoned and murdered by his fellow humans to being raised from the dead by God the Father and then exalted to the highest place and seated at the right hand of God. And we read in verse 33, unbelievably, that it's Jesus who now pours out the Holy Spirit. The promise in Joel was that God would, but no, Jesus does it.

And how does this reversal happen? Well, Peter tracks through Jesus' earthly life and ministry and he says, although God was behind every miracle of Jesus, you heard him, but you didn't repent and you didn't turn to him.

And then after three years, when he came to Jerusalem, you rejected him and killed him. Yes, it was not outside the plan of God, but if you look at verse 23, look at how, I can't think of the right word for this.

[12:00] Peter says it quite offensively. He's not afraid to offend his audience. He's not a Canadian and he's not an Anglican. Look at verse 23. He says to the crowd, you crucified him and killed him by the hands of lawless men.

Come on, Peter, that's no way to win friends and influence people. Why is he so direct with them on this? Well, I think the answer is very simple. At its core, all sin is the rejection of Jesus as Lord. This is not just a sin reserved for the high priests in Jerusalem. This is the reality in my heart and this is the reality in your heart. The fundamental struggle with wrong and evil and with sin in our world is this.

We think of ourselves as sovereign island, sovereign islands, making sovereign decisions for ourselves. I'm not going to have someone tell me what to think or what to do or how to feel or how to behave.

And at root, that is the rejection of Jesus Christ as Lord. So anytime I am unloving toward you or greedy or bitter or selfish or angry, it's fundamentally because I am not honoring Jesus Christ as Lord.

[13:13] It's because of the deepest level, I am not treating Jesus in his rightful way. And God loves us so much that he tells us the truth about ourselves.

So Jesus dies despised and rejected and abandoned and brutally murdered. And that brings us to the reversal, which begins in verse 24. And the reversal happens in two steps.

And the first is that God raised him from the dead. Here's the thing. The point of the resurrection of Jesus in the New Testament is not a happy ending for Jesus' life. It's not so much that we'll have life after death.

It's a massive overturning of the verdict that humanity has of Jesus Christ. It is a justification, if you will, where God himself turns human judgment on Jesus on its head.

You put him down, I raise him up. You killed him, I bring him back to life again. And the verses here say that when he was dead, death was pregnant.

[14:17] Death experienced the pains of birth because it was impossible for death to hold him. And it's astonishing to see how Peter goes back to the Old Testament and that long quote from Psalm 16 down there in verses 25 to 28 are taken from inside the thoughts of Jesus as he is dying and even after he has died.

I mean, isn't that amazing? Look at verse 27 for a moment. Jesus is saying, you will not abandon my soul to the place of the dead, to Hades. You will not let your Holy One see corruption even as he dies.

You have made known to me the paths of life. You will make me full of gladness with your presence. I mean, that's how to die.

As we say to God, because of Christ you have made known to me the paths of life. You will make me full of gladness in your presence. Resurrection. But then there's a second step of reversal and it is the exaltation, which is another way of speaking about the ascension.

Verse 33, being therefore exalted to the right hand of God and having received from the Father, the promised Holy Spirit. Here it is.

[15:36] He, Jesus, has poured out that which you are seeing and hearing. Amazing. So full of hope. Peter is declaring on earth something that's taken place in heaven.

He's saying the reason the Holy Spirit's been poured out, the reason we have Pentecost Sunday is that it demonstrates that Jesus Christ now sits at the highest point of authority in the universe. And the way Jesus Christ rules his universe is by filling people with his spirit.

And the way God the Father is going to put his enemies under his feet is by the forgiveness of sins and giving them new life by the same spirit. It's amazing.

And so he comes to the climax, verse 36, Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him, appointed him, announced him, both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

You treated him as worthless. But God has made him Messiah and Lord so that now is the day of salvation and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

[16:53] And the Lord, they call on, is Jesus. That's the point of the passage. So salvation comes as God opens our eyes to seeing how brilliant Jesus is and how he is willing to save us.

There could not be a bigger change in our world, brothers and sisters. Couldn't happen. I mean, this explains every news story that we read or see coming down the pipe.

It explains why the world is the way it is. It explains our sense of homelessness until we go to be with him. It explains our desire to be loved and to love.

It explains the growth of the church throughout history. It explains why those who come for baptism come with reverence and tears. And I say to those of you adults and those of you parents who've had your kids baptized, being baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus is a great and precious gift, but it does mean that you're a deserter.

You're a traitor to the way the world has seen Jesus. And there are some people in the world will not approve of what you've done. What is the third change?

[17:58] Change in time, a change for Jesus. The thirdly and quickly, there is therefore a change in our relation with God. Verses 37 to 41. It's an absolutely brilliant ending to the sermon.

And no wonder they react the way they do. Verse 37, we read, they are cut to their hearts and they say, what shall we do? I would give money for people to say that to me after a sermon.

Not a lot of money, but I, you know. I mean, you can see it, can't you? They suddenly realize, oh no, we've been catastrophically wrong about Jesus Christ.

How could we have been so blind? We have sided against the God of all the world, but God has made him Lord of all. There is no hope for us. What can we, what can possibly could we do?

And then these beautiful words flood down upon them, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Lord Jesus. It's the obvious thing to do. I mean, if you've treated Jesus as irrelevant and on the outskirts of your life, if you've dismissed him and God has given him the highest place, what you need to do is you need to deal with Jesus.

[19:10] That's what repentance is. You need to change your mind and your attitude and to say, there is only one person who rules my life and it's not me. And to be baptized is to identify with the community of people who are trying to do that, who are living out repentance under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Because salvation, although we are all individually saved, it's not individualistic. It's profoundly communal. And those of you who are baptized today were baptized into this body of Jesus Christ. But there's more. And Peter gives this promise. He says, the promise for those who repent and baptized is you will receive forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This is where transformation begins. All our sins removed from us as far as the east is from the west.

God takes them and throws them to the bottom of the ocean. And the point of all those pictures is, although you and I want to keep coming back to our sins and saying, I really am sorry, God. I really

am sorry.

[20 : 16] He says, they're gone. You can't recover them. In his death, Jesus takes our sins into himself and there he cancels the debts.

He does not take revenge upon us. He does not treat us as we mistreated him. He does not hold our sins against us.

Instead, he promises us good, the good of peace and freedom and a fresh start. And that all comes through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And the gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of God giving us himself and all the blessings that come in Jesus Christ. And when he does that, we begin the task of building others up in their faith and prophesying to others about the Lord Jesus and seeking the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

It's a great passage. And I want to say one thing by way of conclusion. The day of Pentecost, I don't know if you noticed this or not, is a day of amazing grace. I mean, only a few weeks ago, this is the city that crucified brutally, unfairly, illegally, unjustly, tortured and murdered Jesus.

[21 : 42] And what a mercy it is that when the fire of the Spirit comes from heaven, it doesn't just consume Jerusalem and every rock in it. The Spirit comes with saving grace and love, offering pardon and peace and forgiveness and new hope and new life and a new relationship with God.

And it is still today the day of salvation. And the way we continue the Christian life is the same way we begin it, by repentance and forgiveness.

And every day through the repentance and forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit binds us to God and binds us to each other in love. Amen.

Amen.