Peter’s Sermon at Pentecost
Acts 2:14-41

Acts is the book in which we see Jesus continuing to work through the Spirit in Christians. Jesus sent the Spirit to His disciples as He had promised. This morning I would like us to look at the first sermon that Peter preached. There was a tremendous response as thousands were converted that day. From beginning to end Peter spoke earnestly and with authority. His sermon was not the expression of his opinions, but a message from God through the Spirit. Above all, Peter’s message shows us the preacher’s primary purpose—to connect people with Jesus Christ. Peter does not just tell who Jesus is. His goal is to see people enter a relationship with Jesus and be saved. Jesus is not just a person in a book. He is a living person. We don’t study Jesus like we study Alexander the Great or Caesar. We do not just know about Jesus. We know Him as a living person. Jesus was the One ultimately responsible for this great crowd that had gathered and for the disciples’ speaking in tongues.

First, Peter explains why they are speaking in tongues. (2:14-21)

He explains it first negatively (2:15) and then positively (2:16-21). Why were the disciples speaking in the languages of many nations? They were not drunk but filled with the Spirit. Peter says, “You have forgotten what time it is. Surely we are not drunk at 9 AM! The correct explanation is that this fulfills prophecy.

Peter cites a passage from the book of Joel and relates this to what happened on the day of Pentecost. “What you are seeing is what Joel prophesied. This is the fulfillment of Joel 2.” It was a partial, not total fulfillment. There were signs on the earth, but 2:19b-20 seem to point forward to the day of Jesus’ second coming. (Others think it reflects some of the events of the crucifixion.) The last days in God’s plan of salvation have begun. The gift of the Spirit is a sign that the last days have begun.

The main theme of Joel’s prophecy is that God would pour out His Spirit on all kinds of people, not just on prophets, kings, and priests as in the Old Testament. The Spirit would not be confined to a particular group like the prophets. All would share regardless of sex, age, or rank. And the evidence of this would be seen in that all would prophesy. Speaking in tongues was evidence that the last days had dawned when all would prophesy. (Luke does not make a sharp distinction between tongues and prophecy, but sees tongues as a kind of prophecy.)

Joel’s prophecy ends with a promise of salvation for all who believe in the Lord. Peter begins by explaining what is taking place. In 2:22-36 we have the main theme of Peter’s sermon.

Next, Peter proclaims that Jesus is Lord and Messiah. (2:22-36)

In the early sermons in Acts several themes are seen. First, the announcement that the age of fulfillment has arrived. Second, the story of Jesus’ ministry, death and resurrection. Third, the Old Testament is quoted and shown to be fulfilled in Jesus. Finally, there is a call to repentance. These themes can be clearly seen in Peter’s message in Acts 2. (In 2:25-35 Peter uses several passages from the Old Testament which prophesy about the Messiah.)

Peter preaches about Christ and wants to show that the ultimate cause of the Spirit’s coming is the ministry of Jesus. The best way to understand Pentecost is not through Joel, but through Jesus. Peter centers attention on Jesus’ life in verse 22, His death in v.23, and His resurrection in v.24.
The miracles Jesus did showed that God was with Jesus. In v.23 Peter describes something more important than Jesus’ life—His death. Peter speaks of Jesus’ death as part of the definite plan and will of God. God had decided that Jesus should suffer and die, but at the same time the Jewish leaders were responsible for putting Jesus to death. Peter boldly and clearly tells them what they did. Instead of recognizing Jesus as sent from God, they crucified Him with the help of the Roman authorities. Nothing shows the sinfulness and wickedness of the human heart like the cross of Jesus. Rather than worshipping our Creator and Redeemer, we crucified Him. Peter affirms both God’s sovereignty and at the same time human responsibility. Jesus came not just to reveal God but to die for our sins. This was the purpose of His coming.

The resurrection is the center of preaching and theology in the book of Acts. God reversed the verdict and changed the cross into the sign of life and salvation because of the resurrection. This is the key fact, stressed again and again by the early Christian preachers. God raised Jesus from the dead.

In 2:25-35 Peter used 2 OT prophesies which prove the claims he makes about the resurrected Jesus. Peter was speaking to Jews and others acquainted with the OT who would want to have what he said supported by the OT.

Jesus Himself had already used and applied Psalm 110 to Himself and showed that this Psalm pointed beyond David to Himself. Jesus is the Son of God and the Lord of all. In verse 27 Peter says that Psalm 16:10 also refers to Israel’s promised Messiah. It cannot refer to David, but must refer to Jesus’ resurrection. If David speaks about a person who will not be left in the grave, he could not be speaking of himself. David died. But Jesus is alive. The resurrection shows that Jesus is different from all other religious leaders. You can go and see where other religious leaders are buried. Jesus rose from the dead. David was prophesying about the resurrection of the Messiah in Psalm 16 and about His exaltation in Psalm 110. What was prophesied has been fulfilled in Jesus. Since the Messiah must rise from the dead, and since Jesus rose from the dead, this shows He is the Messiah. The prophets wrote and foretold the resurrection, and the apostles had witnessed it. Peter had seen the resurrected Jesus. His claim could be confirmed.

If Jesus was raised from the dead, where is He now? Peter answers this question and says that Jesus is now at the right hand of the Father. When David spoke about the person at the right hand of God and calls him “my Lord”, David refers not to himself, but to Jesus. Having been triumphantly received into heaven to the position of supreme honor and absolute power, Jesus has given the Spirit to His disciples. “Why are we speaking in these languages? Jesus, the exalted Lord, has sent the Spirit.” The Spirit is the sign of Christ’s present power and glory. What happened on the Day of Pentecost is because of the life, death, and resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit that Jesus has poured out.

Verse 36 is the climax of Peter’s sermon. God’s resurrection and exaltation of Jesus shows that He is Lord of all. Jesus is proclaimed Lord because of His death and resurrection. He has accomplished God’s purposes and now He sits on the throne of highest honor in heaven. Peter has explained what has happened. He has preached Jesus and used the Old Testament to show that Jesus’ death and resurrection show Him to be Lord and Messiah.

Finally, Peter calls people to repentance and gives a promise of blessing. (2:37-41)

Peter’s preaching was effective. He spoke with the power of the Spirit and called people to believe what the Word of God said about Jesus.
In v.37 Luke uses a strong word to describe the people’s feelings. They realized that in crucifying their long-awaited Messiah they had rejected their only hope of salvation. With deep anguish they cried out, “What shall we do?” They realized their need and knew that something must be done.

The joy of every preacher is to tell people that it is not a question of doing, but a question of believing and receiving God’s gift of salvation. This is good news, the best news. It is far better than we deserve or could hope for.

Peter’s answer in verse 38 has been explained in different ways. It is impossible to know from this verse alone if salvation comes from repentance alone or if both repentance and baptism are necessary. In Acts 10 we see people receiving the Spirit before they were baptized. Salvation (which is when we receive the Spirit) depends not on baptism but on repentance and belief. Peter tells them to repent. This is a complete change of heart and a turning from sin to God. They need to confess their sin to God and change their attitude about Jesus. Repentance brings forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit who gives us new life and lives within us. Baptism is a public testimony of repentance. It shows others that we are repenting and breaking with our past sin. The New Testament way to express your faith in Jesus is to be baptized. An outward rite has no value apart from true repentance and inward change. Baptism is the expected response for those who repent. Each person must individually respond in repentance and show the reality of that by being baptized in the name of Jesus. We commit ourselves to and identify with Jesus.

Peter explains that speaking in tongues is the result of the living, exalted Lord pouring out the Spirit. What is necessary is to have a vital relationship with Jesus. Jesus did not say “The truth is everything and I am nothing.” He did not give us a philosophy by which to live. He said “follow Me.” Peter points people to Jesus. He focuses on Christ. Jesus is the way to live.

Do you have Jesus? Have you responded to Him in repentance and faith? We must trust Jesus who died for us on the cross. We don’t need to do anything but trust what He has already done for us. Make a decision to believe on Him, to receive Him as your Savior and Lord. If you have never done that, I pray that God will help you to say in your heart today, “Thank you Lord for dying for me. I put my trust in You and in Your death for my sins.” When you do that God will give you new life and a living relationship with Jesus. That was Peter’s purpose and that is my prayer for each of you—that you will enter a relationship with Christ, and be connected with Him.