

Main Idea: According to Acts 2:14-36, there was preaching at Pentecost. The church’s first sermon involved three ingredients.

- I. The preaching at Pentecost involved clarification (14-21).
 - A. This isn’t spirits (14-15).
 - B. This is The Spirit (16-21).
 1. The Spirit has come as the Scriptures predicted (16).
 2. The Spirit has come because the last days have come (17-19).
 3. The Spirit has come because the day of the Lord is coming (20-21).
- II. The preaching at Pentecost involved confrontation (22-35).
 - A. God endorsed Jesus (22-24).
 1. He accredited Him (22a).
 2. He did miracles through Him (22b).
 3. He handed Him over to die (23).
 4. He raised Him from the dead (24).
 - B. The Scriptures endorsed Jesus (25-35).
 1. They spoke of His resurrection (25-32).
 2. They spoke of His ascension (33a, 34-35).
 3. They spoke of His sending the Holy Spirit (33b).
- III. The preaching at Pentecost involved a challenge (36).
 - A. Your assessment of Jesus was wrong.
 - B. God’s assessment of Jesus is what matters.
 1. You blew it before.
 2. Don’t blow it again!

Make It Personal: In light of what God says...

1. Will you submit to the Lordship of Jesus?
2. Will you acknowledge that He is the Christ?

Scripture Reading: Psalm 16

Every Sunday all over the world a similar event will occur. A man will stand up before a group of people, open his mouth, and preach a sermon. It happens week after week after week.

Have you ever asked the question, *why?* Why do churches give so much attention to preaching? The fact is, in recent years some are saying we *shouldn’t*.

“Preaching is outdated,” they say. “You can’t expect people in this video age to sit and listen to some person talk for forty minutes. If the church is going to be relevant, it must update its methodology. Sermons are out.”

If the sermon is “out,” what’s taken its place? John MacArthur comments on this mentality, “In an effort to appeal to people’s interest, the church today emphasizes a great many different programs, methods, and approaches. Small group activities, sharing, and ‘culturally relevant’ worship services, emphasizing music and drama, have become increasingly popular. Secular psychology, management techniques, and advertising strategies have all made significant inroads into the life of the church. Seminars on everything from how to have a good marriage to how to handle money abound.”²

There’s nothing wrong with devising innovative ways to accomplish the church’s mission. But is that because preaching has run its course?

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For an earlier development of this text, see the Acts series preached at WBC in 2001.

² John MacArthur, *Acts 1-12*, pp. 47-48.

This is a vital question. Throughout the ages, preaching has been held in high regard in the true church. But the question, again, is *why*? Why do churches preach sermons? Is it because we assess all the various modes of communication each year, take a vote to determine the most effective, and decide, “Well, I guess we ought to have sermons again this year?”

No. The primacy of preaching in the church is grounded in the Scriptures themselves. Granted, preaching is not all we do, but it must at the heart of what we do. Preaching is the God-ordained method for evangelism and edification.

What did Paul do whenever he went to a new city? He preached the good news (Acts 14:7; 16:10; etc). Whether to a handful of people or to a multitude, he preached. In the final verse of Acts what do we find Paul doing? *Preaching* the kingdom of God (Acts 28:31).

Yet it wasn’t just Paul. Throughout the book of Acts we find the church engaging in preaching. Stephen. Philip. Apollos. Timothy. Barnabas. And others. Preaching.

And it all started in Acts 2.

What comes to mind when you think of Pentecost? I’m pretty sure that one of the first things that come to mind for many today would be *tongues*, or *baptism* of the Spirit, or perhaps the birthday of the *church*.

And that’s fine. All that did happen at Pentecost. But just let your eyes scan over Acts 2 right now, and what do you see? Luke devotes more ink to the sermon than to the tongues speaking. In Acts 2 we see the first sermon ever preached in the church. And the church has been preaching ever since.

Charles Spurgeon had a Preacher’s College which had a tradition of giving students a text right on the spot and then telling them to preach it to Spurgeon and his staff. On one particular day, as the story goes, a student was given the subject of Zacchaeus. The man stood before his intimidating listeners 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.³

So what makes a sermon a “good” sermon? Opinions abound. Some preachers speak in monotone, others pound pulpits. Some take fifty minutes, others cut it off at twenty.

As a young person I used to hear that if a person had three points and a poem, he could preach anywhere. Three point sermons are pretty common today.

Interestingly, in Spurgeon’s day, one hundred plus years ago, four-point sermons were common. People used to talk about a great “four-pointer.” If you keep going back to the time of the Puritans you’ll discover that preachers could go on to eight, nine, ten, twelve, or even more points. And James Boice clarifies, “These were not just little items either. They were developed at length over a long period of time. People knew how to listen then. They could think. So there was a time when there were sermons with many, many points.”⁴

So what makes a sermon a “good” one? We need to give careful attention to the sermon Peter preached in Acts 2. Not only does this sermon help us make sense of what happened on the day of Pentecost, it also gives us valuable standard by which to test our preaching and teaching today.

According to Acts 2:14-36, there was preaching at Pentecost, and the church’s first sermon involved three things.

³ As told by Kent Hughes, *Acts*, p. 37.

⁴ James Boice, *Acts*, p. 47.

I. The preaching at Pentecost involved clarification (14-21).

Notice verse 14, “Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd.”

Peter is in Jerusalem. It’s the Jewish holy day called Pentecost, which means that nearly 180,000 Jews have assembled from all over the world to celebrate.

As the chapter begins, the followers of Jesus are doing exactly what He told them to do. *Waiting*. They’ve been meeting together for ten days now, since Jesus ascended to heaven, waiting for the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

Then, in verses 1-4, the Holy Spirit came as promised. His arrival was accompanied by a unique sound (like the blowing of a violent wind), a unique sight (tongues of fire that entered the room from heaven and came to rest on each of the disciples), and unique speaking (the disciples began to speak in foreign *glossa*, or languages).

The effect was powerful. Jews from every nation heard their own languages being spoken and asked, “Aren’t these men Galileans? How can this be (7-8)?”

Many were amazed (12). Some were just amused, made fun of the disciples, and accused them of being drunk (13).

At that point, verse 14 says that Peter stood up, assuming the position of a spokesman of God. He had something to say. And he wasn’t alone, for the Eleven were there too (indicating Matthias had taken the place of Judas Iscariot).

The author of Acts, Dr. Luke, states that Peter “raised his voice.” With a crowd of thousands and no electronic sound amplification, we can understand why. A sermon does little good if it’s not *heard*.

In a sermon, the goal is to take people from where they are to where they need to be. That’s exactly what Peter does here. He begins his sermon with *clarification*.

“These people are drunk!” said some in the crowd. Peter begins by addressing that accusation head-on in verses 14-15:

“Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning!”

Notice how Peter addresses his audience. “Fellow Jews [‘men of Judea’ in the KJV] and all you who live in Jerusalem.”⁵

Then he tells them to “listen carefully.” Too often, we assume something that Peter didn’t assume. When preaching God’s Word we must exhort people to listen. What they’re about to hear is not human opinion, but divine truth. It’s vital to learn *how* to listen to a sermon in a God-honoring way.

“What’s going on?” the people wanted to know. So Peter told them. First, he clarified what this *wasn’t*, then what it *was*.

A. This isn’t spirits (14-15). “These men are not drunk. It’s only 9:00 a.m.”—not the time you would expect to see someone drunk. Maybe a hangover, but not drunk.

Why did they accuse them of being drunk? Because of the unusual behavior. It wasn’t natural. And as Peter will clarify, no, it wasn’t natural. It was supernatural.

So, this isn’t spirits. Rather...

⁵ Peter himself didn’t live in Jerusalem, at least not yet. He was from Galilee, although from this time forward he seems to change his residence to Jerusalem.

B. This is *The Spirit* (16-21)! What you are seeing today, Peter told them, is the evidence that God the Holy Spirit has come.

The sermon probably occurred in the outer court of the temple. There is no indication that Peter was still speaking in an unknown language at this point. Rather he addressed his fellow Jews in the everyday Aramaic they understood. In so doing he clarified for them three things regarding the Holy Spirit.

1. *The Spirit has come as the Scriptures predicted (16).* “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.” What you’re seeing is not drunken men. It’s what Joel said would happen.

Joel was a ninth century BC prophet of God in Israel. He ministered in the area of Judea, Jerusalem specifically. If we read the book of Joel, we would quickly see the predominant theme of Joel’s message. *The day of the Lord.* Joel warned God’s wayward people that the day of the Lord was coming, a day that would involve punishment for unfaithful Israel. He also told them that restoration and blessing would come only after judgment and repentance.

This is the prophet Peter quoted. He quotes Joel to clarify that the Holy Spirit has come just as the Scriptures predicted. A second clarification...

2. *The Spirit has come because the last days have come (17-19).* Listen to the first part of Peter’s quotation of Joel 2:28-32:⁶

Verses 17-19, “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke.”

Peter knew his audience. They were Jews. He was a Jew. Which means he knew how they thought. He knew the Jews divided time into two periods. There was the *present age*, and there was the *age to come* (or the Kingdom age). The connection between these two ages was what the OT prophets called “the Day of the Lord.”

Peter began his quotation, “In the *last days*.” This common Old Testament expression referred to the coming time when the Messiah would set up his kingdom. What the prophets didn’t spell out clearly was that the Messiah would come, not once, but *twice*—the first time as a sacrificial lamb, the second time as a conquering king.

So this means, in a very real sense, we now are living in the *last days*. Because the Messiah has come. “The ‘last days’ began with Christ’s first advent and will end with His second advent; they are the days during which the age to come overlaps the present age.”⁷

By quoting the Joel passage Peter was saying, “You want an explanation for what you’ve seen and heard. Here it is. What’s happening today is happening because the last days have come. And the last days have come because the Messiah has come. And the evidence that the Messiah has come is that the Spirit has come. God has poured out His Spirit just as He promised He would. The Spirit has come because the last days have come.”

But that’s not all. Thirdly...

⁶ Peter actually quotes from the LXX version rather than the Hebrew Old Testament.

⁷ F. F. Bruce, *Acts*, p. 68.

3. *The Spirit has come because the day of the Lord is coming (20-21).* “The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Notice the time indicators in Joel’s prophecy. Verses 17-19 speak of what will happen in “the last days.” But verse 20 mentions what will follow the last days, that is, “the great and glorious day of the Lord.”

In my estimation, Peter isn’t saying that Pentecost was the final fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy. Yes, God sent His Spirit as Joel predicted, but what about the other phenomena? Joel said that your sons and daughters will prophesy, that your young men would dream dreams, and that God would show wonders in the heavens and on earth—like blood and fire and billows of smoke. In fact, he prophesied that before the day of the Lord the sun would turn dark and the moon to blood.

Did that happen at Pentecost? No. In fact, in the Apocalypse recorded by the apostle John, the Spirit revealed that these cosmic signs will occur in the tribulation period.

Listen to Revelation 6:12, “I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red.” And John states that similar phenomena will occur when the fifth trumpet sounds (Rev 9:1-19).

Granted, when the Messiah came the first time God gave the world a preview and sample of all this. Joseph and Mary both had visions. The magi saw the star of Bethlehem. When Jesus hung on the cross, darkness covered the land for three hours. Indeed, in his gospel Luke himself records that the sun stopped shining at high noon (Luke 23:44-45).

But what happened in conjunction with Jesus’ first coming was merely a warm up for the spectacular, cosmic events that will occur in conjunction with His second coming. And God gave the world a foretaste at Pentecost.

That’s Peter’s point. The same Spirit that Joel wrote about has come. And the reason He has come is because the last days have come, and indeed, the day of the Lord is coming. The time for getting ready is now. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (24).

This is a good time to point out something in Peter’s sermon. It’s *full of Scripture*.

I read this sermon aloud this week and timed it. It takes about three minutes to recite. Yet in this three minute message, Peter packed in four Old Testament quotations. In verses 17-21 he quoted from Joel 2:28-32, in verses 25-28 from Psalm 16:8-11, in verse 30 from Psalm 132:11, and in verse 35 from Psalm 110:1.

May I remind you that Peter was not preaching with notes? He didn’t even know he was going to preach. Yet he quotes Old Testament text after text, by memory.

There are a lot of preachers in our day who preach *about* the Bible. There are far less who actually preach the *Bible*.

Several years ago I went to visit a couple at their apartment. I’d heard they were upset about something and wanted to help them. They told me they were leaving the church, and one of the reasons had to do with my sermons.

“You don’t preach,” they said. “You teach. We want to hear *preaching*.” And so they went elsewhere.

Let me ask you something. What did Peter do in Acts 2? Did he preach or teach? It seems to me that he preached by teaching! Take a close look at his sermon and here's what you'll find. Peter's sermon is full of Old Testament quotations. In his sermon, Peter devoted thirteen verses to citations of the Old Testament, eleven verses to exposition, and two verses to application at the end.

And as a result 3000 people got saved.

Friends, let's not miss this. This sermon has thirteen verses quoting Scripture and thirteen verses interpreting and applying Scripture. What a balance!

James Boice suggests, "The point made by the way Peter's sermon is passed on to us is that the very words of the Bible and the use of the Bible by God's Spirit are far more important in spiritual work than anything the preacher can say—even if he is an apostle. It is what God says, and what God does with his Word when it is proclaimed or expounded, that is important."⁸

There's not one personal story in Peter's sermon—though after three years with Jesus he surely had stories to tell! He knew what his audience needed, the straightforward presentation of the Scriptures.

Peter had a high view of the power of God's written Word, something many have lost in our day. He didn't share clever stories. He didn't tell "tear jerkers" to get some sort of emotional response. He simply expounded the Scriptures.

Where did he learn that method? From the Master Teacher. In Luke 24:44-45 Peter heard Jesus tell His followers these words, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms [the threefold breakdown of the Hebrew Scriptures]." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures."

I believe that during the ten day waiting period between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost, Peter and the others were studying the Scriptures, just like the Master taught them. And then when the opportunity to preach came, Peter proclaimed the Scriptures, again, just like the Master taught him.

My heart is grieved when I ponder the sad state of much preaching today. So much of it is man-centered. Ministers ignore the Word and tell cute anecdotes. They don't preach God's Word. They simply share human ideas.

Some are very good at it. And some attract large crowds by doing it. But James Boice is right, "You can build a big congregation by the same technique you use to build a big corporation or market hamburgers. But that is quite different from doing the work of God."⁹

Peter did the work of God by proclaiming the Word of God. And so must we. The preaching at Pentecost involved clarification. Secondly...

II. The preaching at Pentecost involved confrontation (22-35).

What kind of confrontation? Peter confronted his hearers with a subject they didn't want to hear about, but desperately needed to hear about. *Jesus*.

You have to admit, this was not an easy message to preach. Just fifty days before Peter preached it, he was so petrified that he denied even knowing the Lord. And if there was danger then, there was just as much danger now.

⁸ James Boice, *Acts*, p. 50.

⁹ James Boice, p. 52.

The very people that murdered Jesus by slow torture were still in town. And their opinion of Jesus and His followers had not changed.

Yet something had changed. *Peter!* He's not lying and hiding any longer. Now he's standing in the middle of a potential lynch mob and telling them to be quiet and pay attention as he confronts them about the subject of *Jesus*.

Obviously, the people in the crowd had strong opinions about this subject, at least some of whom had shouted, "Crucify Him!" But with great boldness Peter now tells them they were flat out wrong. But he does more than that. He gives reasons. He presents them with two witnesses who endorse Jesus as the Messiah.

A. God endorsed Jesus (22-24). "'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. 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. 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.'"

Notice Peter's emphasis on God in this section. He mentions that God did four activities involving Jesus.

1. *He accredited Him (22a).* The KJV uses the word "approved."
2. *He did miracles through Him (22b).* In one sense, Jesus did the miracles, but Peter emphasizes that God validated the ministry of Jesus by doing miracles, wonders, and signs through Him.
3. *He handed Him over to die (23).* It's been well said, "We are not saved by the murder of a Man. We are saved by the death of the One Who was delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God."¹⁰

Think about it. The fact that someone died—even Jesus—would save no one. It's the fact that He died according to the plan of God as established in the Scriptures. It was God's predetermined will that Jesus die as a substitute for sinners.

Peter said, "You put him to death, and you're responsible for wicked actions. But you didn't catch God off guard. God orchestrated the whole thing. God handed Jesus over to you so you could nail Him to the Cross.

4. *He raised Him from the dead (24).* God freed Jesus from what Peter calls "the agony ['pains' in the KJV] of death."

Those words make it clear that death is not natural. Elsewhere the Bible teaches that death is the terrible consequence of man's rebellion against God.¹¹ But God freed this man, Jesus, from death's agony, just like He will free all who will place their faith in Him.

So God accredited Jesus. God did miracles through Jesus. God handed Jesus over to die. And God raised Jesus from the dead.

Do you see what Peter is doing? He is setting the record straight about the subject of Jesus. Who was Jesus? He wasn't some religious fanatic. He was a real person that God sent. He was God's chosen, anointed One. Jesus was God's Man, indeed, the God-man.

Dear friend, this is what sets Jesus apart from Mohammed and Confucius and every other religious leader. It's why you and I must get to know this person. *God* endorsed Him.

¹⁰ G. C. Morgan, in William LaSor, *Church Alive*, p. 50.

¹¹ See Romans 5

Yet there's a second witness that Peter presents.

B. The Scriptures endorsed Jesus (25-35). Beginning in verse 25 Peter again quotes from the Old Testament, this time from the Psalms:

“David said about him: “I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.”

That's taken from the LXX version of Psalm 16:8-11. David said he had confidence beyond the grave. He knew he would die one day, but he also knew he wouldn't stay dead. Why not? Because the Messiah was coming, and God wouldn't allow the Messiah to see decay.

And Peter says that David said this about Jesus. Remember, David lived ten centuries earlier, but Peter explains in verses 29-30, “Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. 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.”

Peter took that final statement from Psalm 132:11. Then he elaborated by explaining David's intent in verses 31-35:

“Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. 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. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, ‘The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’”

That final quotation comes from Psalm 110:1. It's the verse from the Old Testament most quoted in the New Testament. It's quoted directly or referred to indirectly about twenty-five or thirty times.

We could easily get lost in the details and miss Peter's obvious intent here. He's making the point that not only did God endorse Jesus, but the Scriptures do as well. The Old Testament Scriptures predicted the ministry of Jesus.

1. *They spoke of His resurrection (25-32).* David spoke of His resurrection (31).
2. *They spoke of His ascension (33a, 34-35).* David did not ascend to heaven, yet prophesied that the Messiah would (34).

3. *They spoke of His sending the Holy Spirit (33b).*

Why believe in Jesus? Because He's endorsed by God, and by the Scriptures.

Now notice something. What happened to Peter according to verse 4? He was “filled with the Spirit.” What came out of his mouth when he began to preach? God's Word did.

Do you see the connection? There's a strong relationship in the New Testament between being filled with the Spirit and being filled with the Word.

Ephesians 5:18 exhorts us. “*Be filled with the Spirit,*” with the result being that we will “speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.”

In the parallel text of Colossians 3:16 Paul gives this charge, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*”

For all practical purposes, the two are synonymous. As we fill ourselves with God's Word, we are preparing ourselves to experience the Spirit's filling.

I'm intrigued that Peter doesn't refer directly to the tongues-speaking anywhere in his sermon. After all, the question that prompted his message was, "How can these Galileans be speaking in foreign languages?" If you look carefully you'll notice that Peter said very little about the Holy Spirit in this sermon, but he said a whole lot about *Christ*. For Peter, the tongues-speaking was merely a springboard for him to tell people about Jesus.

Are tongues for today? I don't think so. Certainly, God can do whatever He so desires to do. But Hebrews 2:3-4 seems to indicate that what He intended to accomplish with tongues-speaking was to confirm the message of salvation which the apostles preached and handed down to us. When the apostolic age passed, so did the need for tongues. In 1 Corinthians 13:8 Paul speaks of the time when tongues would be "stilled."

This brings us to Peter's final point. First, clarification. Then, confrontation.

III. The preaching at Pentecost involved a challenge (36).

Here it was. "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Peter says, "Therefore." Here's the bottom line. You can't ignore this. The facts lead to this conclusion, the facts of what God did and the Scriptures substantiated.

A. Your assessment of Jesus was wrong. You said Jesus was an imposter, a fraud. So you killed Him. But it's not what you think that matters, ultimately. Indeed...

B. God's assessment of Jesus is what matters. And what is God's assessment of Jesus? Be assured of this. God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

God says Jesus is *Lord*—the sovereign One, the ruler, the One worthy of all honor and obedience. And God says Jesus is the *Christ*—the Messiah, the Anointed One.

Do you see what Peter is doing? He's offering a straightforward challenge. To those in this crowd who called for and consent to His crucifixion seven weeks prior, He says...

1. *You blew it before.* You rejected the Messiah once.
2. *Don't blow it again!* Don't reject Jesus today.

It's tough to admit, isn't it? To say, "I was wrong." But they needed to do so. And so do we, for we are all sinners.

Perhaps you, too, have ignored Jesus and refused to acknowledge the truth about Him. But today, in His mercy, God has allowed you to hear the truth again, to hear the truth about His Son again whom He sent to save you.

The question is this. Will you agree with God's assessment? God says Jesus is Lord and Christ. Will you agree with Him?

Make It Personal: In light of what God says...two questions.

1. *Will you submit to the Lordship of Jesus?* God says that His Son is *Lord*. Not one option, but the only saving option. And to be saved, you must submit and surrender your life to Him.

2. *Will you acknowledge that He is the Christ?* The Anointed One God sent to rescue us from sin, death, divine judgment, and eternal hell. Some 3,000 people who heard Peter at Pentecost did just that, as we'll see next time. Will you join them?

Communion