

First Sermon

Text:

Acts 2: 14 – 36

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. 15 For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 16 But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 17 "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; 18 even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. 19 And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; 20 the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. 21 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know-- 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. 24 God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. 25 For David says concerning him, "'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; :26 therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. 27 For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. 28 You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'

29 "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Being therefore

a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, 31 he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, 35 until I make your enemies your footstool.' 36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Introduction:

The book of Acts, being located as it is on the hinge of history, contains many firsts. The text that we have just read is the first sermon preached by a Christian witness, the Apostle Peter, in the power of the Holy Spirit with the aim of bringing men and women to faith in Jesus Christ. It establishes a pattern that continues to this day. What Peter says is just as relevant for us as it was for the Jews gathered in Jerusalem on that day of Pentecost.

In this sermon Peter makes three points. First he says that the "last days" have arrived, and the proof that they have is in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that his hearers have just witnessed. Secondly, he says that although Israel had rejected Jesus as their Messiah and turned him over to the lawless Romans to be crucified, God had issued another verdict by raising him from the dead. Finally, he says that by virtue of his resurrection from the dead Christ has now been exalted to the right hand of God and has received supreme authority. Peter supports each of these three affirmations with an Old Testament prophecy. Let us examine these three affirmations seeking first to understand what they mean, and then to understand their relevance for us.

I. The Last Days have Arrived

Peter's starting point is the crowd's amazement at the miraculous sign they have just witnessed, the Apostles speaking in languages they have never learned, and the individuals assembled from many nations each hearing in his own language. He first rejects the theory of some in the crowd that those speaking are drunk since it was only 9 A. M. He then says that what they are witnessing is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy concerning the "last days". Quoting Joel 2 he says: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh", implying that the last days have begun. That may surprise some, because we often understand the last days as the days immediately before the second coming of Christ. This, however, is not the way the term is used in the New Testament. In the New Testament the "last days" are the time of salvation initiated by the coming of Christ, by his saving work of death and resurrection and his exaltation to the right hand of the Father. They represent roughly what we represent in our dating system of B.C. and A.D. Before Christ salvation was a promise. God had called Abraham and from Abraham he had made a nation Israel, and to Israel he had promised a Messiah, a Redeemer who would come and bring to all mankind, Jews and Gentiles, God's gift of salvation. What Peter is now declaring, and what Christians have declared since this first preaching of the good news on the day of Pentecost, is that the time of salvation has arrived. It is no longer a promise waiting to be fulfilled, but a present reality.

This idea is clear in the opening to the Epistle to the Hebrews: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things" (Hebrews 1: 1 – 2). The consummation of the last days will be the return of Christ, but they begin with his resurrection, exaltation to the right hand of the Father, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. What that means for us is that we need no longer wait for the gift of salvation. It is a present reality. In fact, another way of speaking of the "last days" is the "day of salvation".

Isaiah uses this term in prophesying of the time when God would make salvation available to all in Isaiah 48:9 when he says: "Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages." Paul makes it clear in II Corinthians 6:2 that Isaiah is speaking of the time of salvation initiated by the coming of Christ. He first quotes the passage from Isaiah: "For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you", and then says:" Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Today is the "day of salvation", because the times of salvation have been initiated by the coming of Christ. We need not wait, as Peter will say later in the chapter: "For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (Acts 2:39).

II. Jesus is Alive

At the center of what Peter says is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The days of salvation have come because that salvation has been accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It has been said that every apostolic sermon was an Easter sermon. This is a true statement. There are at least seven evangelistic sermons recorded in the book of Acts, three by Peter, one by Steven, and three by Paul. The central point of each of them is that Christ has been raised from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the beginning of the Christian message and the source of Christian faith. Had there been no resurrection there would be no Church. When Jesus died his followers were discouraged and defeated ready to return to Galilee and take up their former lives. What transformed them into the powerful witnesses that we now encounter in the book of Acts was the absolute assurance the Jesus Christ was alive forevermore, that he had conquered death, and procured salvation for all who would believe on him.

As with the first point, Peter grounds this second point in the Old Testament Scriptures. He quotes from Psalm 16: “Thou wilt not leave my soul in the grave, thou wilt not suffer thy holy one to see corruption, thou wilt show me the path of life.” He says that this could not be speaking of David because David has been dead for a thousand years and everyone listening to him had seen his tomb in Jerusalem. No, when David wrote these words he was speaking prophetically of his greatest son the Messiah, Jesus Christ who is now risen from the dead and he and all those with him are witnesses of that resurrection.

The great question all of us must consider is: “Did Jesus rise from the dead?” If he did then truly we are living in the last days, the days of salvation, and life means something altogether different than if he did not. None of us can neglect this question.

III. Jesus is Lord

Peter’s final point is the logical conclusion of the first and second. If the times of salvation have been initiated through the work of Christ, and Christ has been raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the Father, then he says: “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” This had special meaning for those present that day, for many of them had been present a few weeks earlier when Jesus had been hung on a cross outside the city. If indeed what Peter is saying is true then they have made a horrible mistake as we will see next week they will say to Peter and the others “brothers what shall we do”. That is the question I leave you with. If indeed Christ is risen from the dead and has been given all authority, If the last days have been initiated and we are living in the times of salvation then the only sane thing to do is what 3000 do on this day. They acknowledged their error and repented of the evil they had done, believed the message that Peter had preached and signified that belief by baptism with the result that they received the gifts of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit.

