

Sunday 12th June 2022 – Peter addresses the crowd – Acts 2:14-41

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. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ “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. ¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. ²¹ And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

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 baptised, 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 baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

This is a long passage where we get the first of the apostles’ speeches to crowds willing to listen. It starts with Peter responding to the jeers that the people speaking in all the different languages were drunk. It was 9 am in the morning that Holy Spirit came upon the people.

Next, because he was speaking to Jews, he builds his case using the Scriptures to prove who Jesus was. He makes 6 points:

- What was prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures has come to pass. The kingdom of God is imminent, indeed, is here.
- The ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus has made all this possible and is proved from the Scriptures.
- The resurrected Jesus Christ is at God's right hand, as the messianic head of a spiritual Israel.
- The sign of Christ's power and guidance is the presence of the Holy Spirit in that new congregation or church of Israel.
- The consummation of the messianic age is imminent and will be brought about by Christ's return.
- The proper response to this information is repentance and baptism. God forgives sins, gives the Holy Spirit, and makes salvation possible.

Peter's audience would be familiar with the psalms, which were at that time believed to be mainly by King David who wrote under the influence of the Holy Spirit and was a prophet in the same way that Joel was considered a prophet who spoke under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Turning first to Joel, Peter believed that the last days had arrived and that the evidence was what had just happened, and what the people witnessed for themselves but didn't understand. When Joel says "your sons and daughters will prophesy", we need to understand that prophesying was not just about foretelling the future, but also telling people what God is saying in the present. Simply praising and glorifying God under the influence of the Holy Spirit is as much prophesying as speaking about the future. The people in the upper room were speaking of the mighty works of God (verse 11). Joel's prophecy was describing what happened that morning. There came a promise from God – *all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved*. The crowd knew that people needed to be saved... saved from hellfire. Since the exile and break-up of Israel, Jews had been longing for the Messiah to restore Israel. Peter explains that the Messiah is Jesus, and some of the crowd would have been among those who shouted for him to be crucified. Many among the crowd would have been in Jerusalem when the sky darkened during the crucifixion. Most of the Jewish crowd would have considered themselves pious and obedient to the Law of Moses so that they felt that they themselves were leading blameless lives, without the need for being saved, just like the rich young man or Nicodemus, and of course those smug Pharisees.

Peter moves on to his quote from the psalms to correct the misconception that David was referring to himself in Psalm 110:1 but was actually speaking about Jesus when this psalm begins "*The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand³⁵ until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.*" But after having explained that Jesus is the Messiah, he makes this accusation: *God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah*. That hit home and the righteous among the crowd realised the enormity of the mistake made in killing the Messiah. Many of Peter's listeners had a deep emotional reaction. The responsive Jewish listeners were "cut to the heart" (2:37). The enormity of what had happened crashed into their consciousness. The man they had spit on and crucified was their Messiah, and he was now sitting in power at God's right hand. Moved by the Holy Spirit and their own participation in the persecution and death of Jesus, they were humbled and teachable. It was natural for them to ask, in wonderment and trepidation: "What shall we do?" (2:37).

To this day, the majority of God fearing Jews refuse to accept Jesus as Messiah, but then they haven't witnessed the miracles, nor seen the physical presence of the resurrected Christ. Many of those in the upper room had witnessed the resurrected Jesus in the 40 days before He ascended into

heaven – they were the 120. The crowd outside was over 3,000 as this was just the number who repented and accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour... many others among the scoffers would not have been touched by Peter’s speech. So the commotion which the Holy Spirit’s arrival caused seems to have attracted thousands of people to see what was happening... and have given Peter a great opportunity to explain things while the Holy Spirit convicted those listeners that they needed to respond.

As an aside I’ll read these passages by Lee Strobel who wrote a book trying to disprove the accounts of Jesus’s life which resulted in him writing a book to prove the truth of the accounts of the life of Jesus.

The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus – by Lee Strobel (Zondervan 1998)

Peter’s reply is the point the entire account in Acts 2 moves toward: “Repent and be baptized...for the forgiveness of your sins” (2:38). His speech and stir-to-action conclusion fulfil Jesus’ prophecy in the last chapter of Luke. There, Jesus had promised: “repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” ([Luke 24:47](#)). Now, repentance had been taught in his name.

Peter *does not tell* these Jews that they had to change their lives in terms of obeying the Law or Torah. The people listening to Peter are described as “God-fearing Jews” who already worshipped and obeyed God (2:5; 5:9). They are presented as blameless in keeping the laws. These Jews did not need to repent of what we commonly think of as law-breaking. As devout Jews, they had been careful to keep the law. Then to what is Peter referring when he tells these people to repent? Peter tells them to repent by asking them to enter a new relationship with Jesus as their resurrected Saviour. The context makes Peter’s purpose clear. He begins by pointing the people to Jesus, whom they had rejected, and their leaders had killed (2:22). Throughout the sermon, Peter hammers away at a single point: Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour, and people must put their faith in him. This turning to Jesus in faith is summarized as a simple charge: “Repent and be baptized” (2:38).

What are these Jews to repent of? It is their *rejection of Jesus as Messiah and Saviour!* In the context of Peter’s sermon, “to repent” means to *change one’s mind about Jesus* — to experience him — to accept him as Saviour — to place total faith in him. For these Jews, repentance and conversion did not necessarily involve a change of worship practices. In fact, Jewish followers of Jesus continued to worship at synagogue and temple — and they maintained their ancestral traditions. But it did require a new faith toward God and his Messiah.

Peter also speaks of an important act that is associated with receiving the empowering Holy Spirit. That was water baptism, which is an external token of belief in Jesus as Saviour. Peter urges his audience to be baptized, and he promises them the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38). Throughout Acts, when people express faith in Jesus, they are then baptized.

Baptism in water continued to be the visible sign by which those who believed the gospel, repented of their sins, and acknowledged Jesus as Lord were publicly incorporated into the Spirit-baptized fellowship of the new people of God.

The Jews were already familiar with baptism as a ritual required for people who wanted to have their sins forgiven. John the Baptist baptized people who repented ([Matthew 3:6, 11](#); [Luke 3:7, 16](#)). Even Jesus insisted on being baptized ([Matthew 3:15](#)). But, beginning at Pentecost, there are two

new features about baptism. First, it is administered in Jesus' name. It requires faith in Jesus as Saviour. Second, it is associated with the Holy Spirit.

Peter's speech ends with the wonderful promise that his listeners would receive God's Spirit and become part of the people of God. Luke summarizes Peter's plea with a sentence: "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation" (2:40). Peter's phrase is actually in the passive tense, "be saved," but most English translations obscure this important fact. We cannot "save ourselves," whether by repentance or any other action. Salvation is an act of God, not something we can do on our own. Grammarians call this "the divine passive," with God understood to be the one doing the work. A better translation is, "Let God save you from this corrupt generation." He does the work, if we do not reject his call.

The thought of verse 40 ("be saved") picks up the sense of Joel's prophecy mentioned in verse 21: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Peter is not telling his listeners to "do" something, except to respond to what God has already done. He is telling them to take advantage of the promise offered to them by accepting Jesus as the promised Messiah. They were to "be saved" from a corrupt generation in Jerusalem and Judea by becoming part of a remnant people accepted by God.

So what can we learn from Peter's speech? Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it was pitched at its audience with references to Scripture that they would be familiar with. Paul's speeches to Gentiles unfamiliar with Judaism didn't refer to ancient texts none had read, but instead concentrates on who Jesus is, and what he did while on earth. The signs and wonders spoke for themselves as proof of the Holy Spirit's power and existence. However the main point of Peter's message and Paul's message is the same, and is still relevant today for all who hear about Jesus and are touched by what they hear: *'Repent and be baptised, 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.'*

Let's pray