

The Book of Acts, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 4: Peter's Sermon and the Birth of the Church

Acts 2:14-41

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Acts 2:14-41 is the doctrinal heart of the book and arguably of the entire New Testament's account of how the church began and how people are saved. An enormous amount is at stake here, so this lesson carries the heaviest doctrinal weight. Two great truths must be taught with clarity. First, that the kingdom was established at Pentecost with Christ now reigning at God's right hand as both Lord and Christ (vv. 33-36), which guards against premillennialism. Second, that the plan of salvation is exactly what Peter preached: convicted believers were told to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (v. 38), which refutes salvation by faith only and the so-called sinner's prayer.

Resist every temptation to soften or reframe Peter's answer. When the people asked what they must do, Peter did not tell them to pray a prayer or simply believe; he told believing, convicted people to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, with the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the apostolic pattern, and it is normative.

Yet aim at the heart as well as the head. This is a sermon that cut people to the heart and changed three thousand lives in a day. Help students feel the weight of their own sin, the wonder of the risen and reigning Christ, and the joy of belonging to the church He purchased. Send them home both doctrinally sure and personally moved.

Question 1

Student Question:

Peter began by declaring that the outpouring of the Spirit was the fulfillment of what God spoke through the prophet Joel about the last days (vv. 16-21). What does Peter's use of Joel teach us about where we now stand in God's plan, and what does it mean that we live in the last days?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter's first move is to anchor the present moment in prophecy. What you are seeing, he says, is what God promised long ago through Joel: in the last days I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. The age the prophets longed for has arrived.

The phrase the last days does not mean the final few years before the end of the world. In biblical usage it refers to the whole messianic age, the era inaugurated by Christ's coming, death, resurrection, and the outpouring of the Spirit (Hebrews 1:1-2). We have been living in the last days since Pentecost.

This matters because it tells us where we stand. We are not waiting for the messianic age to begin; we are living in it. The Spirit has been poured out, the gospel is going to all flesh, and the invitation stands: everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (v. 21). That promise, Peter will go on to show, is answered in his closing instructions.

Help students see the urgency and the privilege. We live in the age of fulfillment, the age of the open door, when the gospel goes to all people and salvation is available to all who will respond. There is no further age to wait for before we act.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The outpouring of the Spirit as fulfillment of Joel's prophecy
- The last days as the whole messianic age inaugurated at Pentecost (Hebrews 1:1-2)
- The present availability of salvation to all who call on the Lord (v. 21)
- Living in the age of fulfillment rather than waiting for it
- The reliability of prophecy fulfilled in Christ and His church

Discussion Prompts

- What does the New Testament mean by the last days?
- How does it change your outlook to know we live in the age of fulfillment?
- Why is there urgency in the promise that all who call on the Lord will be saved?

Question 2

Student Question:

The Peter who once denied Christ three times now preaches Him fearlessly before thousands (vv. 14, 22-24). What changed him, and where do you need that same Spirit-given courage to speak or act for Christ despite your past failures?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The contrast is stunning. The same Peter who wilted before a servant girl now stands before a hostile crowd and boldly accuses them of crucifying the Lord. What accounts for the change? He has met the risen Christ, been forgiven and restored, and been filled with the promised Spirit.

This is enormously encouraging for anyone who has failed. Peter's denial did not disqualify him; the grace of Christ restored him and God used him mightily. Our worst moments are not the end of our usefulness when we bring them to the Lord.

Invite students to consider their own failures and fears. Many of us hang back from speaking or acting for Christ because we feel disqualified by our past or paralyzed by fear of what others will think. Peter shows another way.

The courage Peter displayed was not natural bravado; it was Spirit-given boldness flowing from forgiveness and from a clear vision of the risen Lord. As we draw near to the same Christ, the same Spirit strengthens us to live and speak with courage.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Restoration and usefulness after failure through Christ's grace
- Spirit-given boldness for witness
- Forgiveness as the foundation of courage
- God using imperfect, restored people for His purposes

Discussion Prompts

- What past failure makes you feel disqualified from serving or speaking for Christ?
- How does Peter's restoration speak to that feeling?
- Where do you most need Spirit-given courage right now?

Question 3

Student Question:

Peter preached that Jesus was crucified according to God's plan, but that God raised Him up because death could not hold Him, just as David foretold (vv. 22-32). How does Peter present the death and resurrection of Jesus, and why is the resurrection the center of his message?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter presents the cross and resurrection as the heart of the gospel. Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, yet crucified by lawless hands. The cross was no accident; it was God's purpose. And then God raised Him, because it was not possible for death to hold Him.

Peter grounds the resurrection in prophecy, quoting David in Psalm 16: you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. David died and was buried, Peter argues, so he was speaking not of himself but of his greater Son, the Messiah, whom God would raise. The empty tomb fulfills ancient prophecy.

The resurrection is the center because it vindicates everything. It proves Jesus is who He claimed to be, demonstrates that His sacrifice was accepted, and guarantees the hope of all who trust Him. Peter and the apostles are eyewitnesses: this Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses (v. 32).

Help students see that the gospel is good news about events, real, historical, prophesied events: Christ died for our sins and was raised (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Our faith rests not on philosophy but on a risen Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cross as God's deliberate plan, not an accident (v. 23)
- The bodily resurrection as the center of the gospel
- Psalm 16 fulfilled in Christ's resurrection (vv. 25-31)
- The apostles as eyewitnesses of the risen Christ (v. 32)
- The gospel as good news about historical, prophesied events (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

Discussion Prompts

- How can the cross be both a wicked act and God's deliberate plan?
- Why does Peter lean so heavily on the resurrection?
- How does prophecy fulfilled strengthen confidence in the gospel?

Question 4

Student Question:

Peter told the crowd plainly, this Jesus whom you crucified (vv. 23, 36), and they were cut to the heart. Scripture teaches that our sins also nailed Christ to the cross. How does honestly facing your own part in the death of Christ shape the way you come to Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter does not let the crowd treat the crucifixion as someone else's crime. You crucified Him, he says. And when they grasped it, they were cut to the heart. There is no coming to Christ without first facing our own sin.

The New Testament teaches that we are all implicated. It was our sins that made the cross necessary; Christ was wounded for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:5), and we like sheep had all gone astray. To face the cross honestly is to say, my sin helped put Him there.

This is not meant to crush us into despair but to break us into repentance. Godly sorrow over our sin is the doorway to grace. The crowd's anguished question, what shall we do, was born from this honest reckoning.

Invite students to resist the comfortable distance we often keep from our own guilt. Coming to Christ rightly begins not with self-justification but with honest confession: I am not a bystander to the cross; I am one for whom and by whose sin He died. And that honesty opens the heart to the mercy that meets it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal ownership of sin rather than blaming others
- Christ wounded for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:5)
- Godly sorrow as the doorway to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10)

- Honest confession as the right approach to Christ

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it important to see your own part in the death of Christ rather than keeping it at a distance?
- What is the difference between worldly regret and godly sorrow?
- How does honest confession change the way you come to Christ?

Question 5

Student Question:

Peter declared that God exalted Jesus to His right hand and made Him both Lord and Christ (vv. 33-36). What does it mean that Jesus is now reigning at God's right hand, and how does this truth show that the kingdom is already established rather than something still future?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is one of the two heaviest doctrinal statements in the lesson, so teach it carefully. Peter declares that Jesus, having been raised and exalted to the right hand of God, has poured out the Spirit, and he concludes: God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified (v. 36). Christ is now enthroned and reigning.

Peter quotes Psalm 110: the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. He applies this directly to the ascended Jesus. The Messiah is not waiting somewhere to begin His reign at a future date; He is already seated and ruling. The kingdom has come.

This is decisive against premillennialism, which teaches that Christ's kingdom is still future and will be an earthly, political reign of a thousand years. Scripture says the opposite: Daniel foretold a kingdom set up in the days of the Roman empire that would never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44); Jesus said the kingdom was at hand and would come with power in that generation (Mark 1:15; 9:1); and here at Pentecost the King is enthroned and His reign begins. Paul says believers have already been transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Colossians 1:13).

So the kingdom of God is not a future earthly empire to anticipate but the present reign of the risen Christ, into which we enter through the new birth. Christ rules now from heaven over all things for His church (Ephesians 1:20-23), and He will reign until the last enemy, death, is destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:25-26).

Help students rest in this. We do not serve a king-in-waiting; we serve a reigning Lord. The kingdom is here, we are its citizens, and our task is to live under His rule and bring others into it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ exalted to God's right hand as both Lord and Christ (v. 36)
- Psalm 110 fulfilled in the reigning Christ (vv. 34-35)
- The kingdom established at Pentecost, not postponed to a future age
- The error of premillennialism and a future earthly political reign
- Daniel 2:44; Mark 9:1; Colossians 1:13 as witnesses to the present kingdom
- Christ reigning now over all things for the church (Ephesians 1:20-23)

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ?
- How does Peter's use of Psalm 110 show that Christ is reigning now?
- How would you lovingly explain to someone that the kingdom is already established, not still future?

Question 6

Student Question:

If Jesus truly reigns as Lord right now (v. 36), then His lordship reaches into every part of daily life. Where are you living as a citizen of His kingdom, and where are you still living as though you were the one in charge?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The reign of Christ is not an abstraction; it is a claim on every corner of life. If He is Lord, then I am not. My time, money, relationships, ambitions, and habits all belong under His rule.

Help students translate the doctrine into daily reality. To call Jesus Lord is to surrender the right to run my own life. Yet most of us keep a firm grip on certain areas, treating Christ as advisor rather than King.

Invite honest reflection. Where am I genuinely submitting to Christ's rule, and where am I still functioning as though I were on the throne, my preferences, my comfort, my will setting the agenda?

Frame surrender as freedom. The One who reigns is the One who loved us and gave Himself for us. To live under His rule is not to lose our lives but to find them. Encourage one specific area to bring under His lordship this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The practical lordship of Christ over all of life
- Surrender to Christ's reign as the mark of true discipleship
- The danger of treating Christ as advisor rather than King
- Citizenship in the kingdom expressed in daily obedience

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you genuinely living under Christ's rule?
- What area are you still trying to run yourself?
- What would it look like to surrender that area to your reigning Lord this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

When the people heard Peter's message, they were cut to the heart and cried out, what shall we do? (v. 37). What does this reaction reveal about the work of the gospel on the human heart, and why is conviction an essential part of coming to Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The gospel, faithfully preached, does something to the heart. These were not entertained listeners; they were cut to the heart, pierced through with the realization of their guilt and their need. Conviction is the Spirit's work through the Word.

Notice that conviction led not to paralysis but to a question of action: what shall we do? True conviction does not merely make us feel bad; it makes us ready to obey. The crowd understood that something was required of them in response.

This corrects a shallow view of conversion that skips over conviction of sin. There is no salvation without first seeing our lostness. The same Spirit who comforts also convicts the world concerning sin (John 16:8). A gospel that never disturbs has not yet been understood.

Help students value conviction rather than fear it. The cutting of the heart is the beginning of healing. God wounds in order to save. The crowd's distress was the doorway to the greatest day of their lives.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Conviction of sin as the Spirit's work through the Word (John 16:8)
- The gospel's power to cut the heart and expose our need
- Conviction leading to a readiness to obey, not mere feeling
- The necessity of seeing our lostness before we can be saved

Discussion Prompts

- Why is conviction of sin necessary before conversion?
- What is the difference between being convicted and merely feeling guilty?
- How does a true sense of need change the way we receive the gospel?

Question 8

Student Question:

The crowd's conviction moved them immediately to ask what they should do, and three thousand acted that very day (vv. 37, 41). When God's Word convicts you, do you tend to respond with prompt obedience, or do you let the feeling fade without acting? What is one area where God is calling you to act now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The crowd at Pentecost did not merely feel something; they did something, and they did it that very day. There is a striking immediacy to genuine conversion in Acts. Conviction that does not lead to action is not yet the obedience God seeks.

Many of us are familiar with the pattern of being moved by a sermon or a Scripture and then letting the impulse fade without ever acting on it. The feeling becomes a substitute for obedience. James warns against being hearers who deceive themselves and not doers (James 1:22).

Invite students to examine their own pattern. When God's Word convicts me, do I respond promptly, or do I file it away and move on? Where is there a known step of obedience I have been delaying?

Encourage one specific, prompt response. Perhaps it is a conversation, a confession, a reconciliation, a habit to break, or for someone who has never obeyed the gospel, the step of repentance and baptism itself. Conviction is a gift meant to be acted on while the heart is soft.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Prompt obedience as the proper response to conviction
- The danger of letting conviction fade without action
- Being doers of the Word, not hearers only (James 1:22)
- The urgency of responding to God while the heart is soft

Discussion Prompts

- Do you tend to act on conviction or let it fade?
- What step of obedience have you been delaying?
- What is one thing God is calling you to do now, not later?

Question 9**Student Question:**

To the convicted crowd who asked what they must do, Peter answered, repent and be baptized 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 (v. 38). What does Peter's inspired answer teach us about how a person is saved, and how does it correct the idea that we are saved by faith only or by praying a prayer?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and one of the most important verses in all of Scripture for understanding salvation. Give it ample time and teach it plainly. The crowd already believed; Peter's preaching had convinced them that Jesus is Lord and Christ, and they were cut to the heart. Their question was, what shall we do? Peter, speaking by inspiration as the first to use the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:19), told these believing, convicted people exactly what to do: repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

Notice carefully what Peter did not say. He did not tell them they were already saved the moment they believed. He did not tell them to pray a sinner's prayer or to simply accept Jesus into their hearts. To believing people he commanded two things, repentance and baptism, and he connected both to the forgiveness of their sins. The little phrase for the forgiveness of your sins states the purpose: baptism is for, that is, in order to receive, the remission of sins.

This is the consistent pattern throughout Acts and the New Testament. Saul, who already believed and had prayed for three days, was still told, rise and be baptized and wash away your sins (Acts 22:16). Jesus said whoever believes and is baptized will be saved (Mark 16:16). Peter later writes that baptism now saves you (1 Peter 3:21). Paul teaches that we are baptized into Christ and into His death, rising to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4), and that we are baptized into Christ and clothed with Him (Galatians 3:27). Baptism is not an optional add-on after salvation; it is the God-appointed point at which the penitent believer, by faith, contacts the saving blood of Christ.

This refutes the popular teaching of salvation by faith only. Faith is essential, but Scripture never says faith alone saves; in fact the only place the phrase faith only appears, it is denied: a person is justified by works and not by faith alone (James 2:24). Saving faith is an obedient faith that repents, confesses Christ, and is baptized into Him. The sinner's prayer, by contrast, is found nowhere in the conversions of Acts. Not one person in the New Testament was ever told to pray a prayer to be saved; they were told to repent and be baptized.

So the plan of salvation is exactly what Peter preached and what the rest of Acts confirms: hear the gospel, believe in Jesus as Lord and Christ, repent of sin, confess Him before others, and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sins, after which one lives a faithful Christian life. And notice the result on that day: those who received his word were baptized, about three thousand souls, and the Lord added them to the church (vv. 41, 47). Baptism is also the point at which the Lord adds the saved to His church. Teach this with confidence and love; it is the apostolic answer to the most important question a person can ask.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Baptism for the forgiveness of sins as Peter's inspired answer (Acts 2:38)
- The phrase for the forgiveness of your sins stating the purpose of repentance and baptism
- The consistent pattern: hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized (Acts 22:16; Mark 16:16)
- Baptism as the point of contact with Christ's saving death (Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27)
- The refutation of salvation by faith only (James 2:24)
- The absence of any sinner's prayer in the conversions of Acts
- The Lord adding the baptized to His church (Acts 2:41, 47)

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it significant that Peter spoke these words to people who already believed and were convicted?
- What does the phrase for the forgiveness of your sins tell us about the purpose of baptism?
- How would you lovingly help someone see that the New Testament teaches more than faith only?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Peter's sermon and its outcome: a crucified and risen Lord, a kingdom established, a convicted crowd, and a saving response. Name one specific way this passage is calling you to respond to the reigning Christ, and what is one step you will take this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone draws the whole lesson to a point of decision. Peter's sermon was never meant to be merely admired; it demanded a response, and three thousand gave one that day.

Invite each person to name a concrete response. For a believer, it may be to submit a new area to Christ's lordship, to act promptly on a conviction, or to share this gospel clearly with someone. For anyone who has never obeyed the gospel as Peter preached it, the step is the most important one of all: to repent and be baptized into Christ.

Keep the focus on the reigning Christ. The point of the sermon is that Jesus is Lord, and a Lord is meant to be obeyed, not merely acknowledged. Transformation flows from surrender to Him.

Close by reminding students that the same gospel that birthed the church and changed three thousand lives in a day is at work among us still, and the same Lord is ready to receive and form everyone who responds to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel as a call to decision and response
- Obedience to Christ as Lord, not mere acknowledgment
- The continuing power of the apostolic gospel today

- Transformation flowing from surrender to the reigning Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What truth from Peter's sermon most challenged or moved you?
- What specific step will you take this week in response to the reigning Christ?
- How can this group encourage and pray for you?