

The Book of Acts

Lesson 4: Peter's Sermon and the Birth of the Church -- Acts 2:14-41

A few weeks earlier, this same man had crumbled in front of a servant girl. Three times Peter had sworn he never knew Jesus, then slipped into the dark to weep. Now he stands up in the heart of Jerusalem, in front of thousands, and lifts his voice. The fear is gone. The risen Christ has met him, the Spirit has filled him, and Peter is about to preach the first gospel sermon the world has ever heard.

He starts where the crowd is, explaining the strange thing they have just witnessed. This is no drunken babbling, he says; this is what the prophet Joel foretold. The last days have begun. God is pouring out His Spirit, and the door of salvation is swinging open to everyone who will call on the name of the Lord. Then Peter turns the corner from the prophet to the Person, and the sermon becomes about Jesus.

He preaches Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God with miracles, handed over and crucified, and then raised from the dead, just as David had foretold. And he does not soften the charge. This Jesus, he tells them, the One God raised and exalted to His right hand as both Lord and Christ, is the very One you crucified. The words land like a hammer. Luke says they were cut to the heart.

And then comes the question that has echoed down through every generation since: Brothers, what shall we do? Peter's answer is plain and unforgettable. 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. That day about three thousand received his word and were baptized, and the Lord added them together. The church was born, not with a slogan but with a Savior, a sermon, and a saving response.

Group Discussion: When the crowd was cut to the heart, they did not merely feel sorry; they asked, what shall we do? (vv. 37). Why is it significant that the first response to the gospel was a question about what action to take, and what does that tell us about how the gospel is meant to be received?

Personal Reflection: Peter, who had denied Jesus three times, now preached Him boldly before thousands. What does Peter's transformation say to you about how God can use a person who has failed Him, and where do you need that same courage?

Read Acts 2:14-41

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Joel 2:28-32, the prophecy of the Spirit poured out that Peter cites; Psalm 110:1, the Lord seated at God's right hand, fulfilled in the reigning Christ; Acts 22:16, Saul told to rise and be baptized and wash away his sins; Romans 6:3-4, baptized into Christ's death and raised to walk in newness of life; Mark 16:16, whoever believes and is baptized will be saved