

Acts 2, Peter's Pentecostal Sermon

Overview

The passage falls into two parts: Peter's sermon, and his instructions afterward to the hearers.

The sermon itself is organized around four distinctive titles for his hearers (Table 1, chart), which show how Peter draws closer to his hearers as he proceeds.

Verses	Address	Name of the Savior	Scripture
14-21	Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem		Joel 2:28-32
22-28	Ye men of Israel	22 Jesus of Nazareth	Psa 16:8-11
29-35	Men and brethren	30-31 Christ 32 This Jesus 34 My Lord	Psa 16:10 Psa 110:1
36	All the house of Israel	This Jesus Lord Christ	

Table 1: Sections in Peter's Sermon

- 22, Men of Judaea and dwellers in Jerusalem: He starts with people in their current physical situation, and explains the phenomenon that has arrested their interest (the disciples' speaking in other languages) as a sign of the approach of the Day of the Lord.
- 29, Men of Israel: He moves to their spiritual identity, and in this context points their attention to Jesus, highlighting both our Lord's character as a righteous Israelite, and their wickedness in crucifying him.
- 33, Men and Brethren: Now the appeal becomes personal, as he identifies with them. Based on the Psalms, he shows that Jesus is Christ and also Lord
- 36, All the House of Israel: The message is not just for those present in AD 33, but for the entire nation.

Perhaps the main application we should draw from this sermon is an example of how to confront people with the Gospel. We should emulate three things about Peter's approach (chart):

1. Focus on the Lord Jesus. Peter emphasizes his righteous life, his death, his resurrection. It's all about him. Luke summarizes the activity of the early apostles:

Acts 5:42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and **preach Jesus Christ**.

And Paul summarized his work,

2 Cor 4:5 **we preach** not ourselves, but **Christ Jesus the Lord**.

He tried a philosophical sermon in Athens (Acts 17:22-32) with limited results, then moved on to Corinth (Acts 18). Later, he told the Corinthians his frame of mind at this point:

1Co 2:1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know any thing among you, save **Jesus Christ, and him crucified**.

2. Confront people with their sin. In this emphasis, he is following the example and command of the Lord. His message follows the Lord's pattern:

Mar 1:14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: **repent** ye, and believe the gospel.

Luke, with his focus on the Gentile churches, captures the Lord's commission this way:

Luk 24:47 **repentance** and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Our Lord came to save his people from their sins. If we don't confront them with their sin and the need to turn from it, we are missing the whole point.

3. Start with the Scriptures. Peter backs up everything he says with the Word of God, and later writes that we are

1Pe 1:23 born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, **by the word of God**, which liveth and abideth for ever.

14-21, Men of Judaea: The Kingdom has Come

Peter begins by explaining the unusual events that the people have seen, working-class Jews speaking articulately in every language under heaven. He traces it back to the prophecy of Joel in Joel 2:28-32.

15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is *but* the third hour of the day. 16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; 17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon 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 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:--Joel promised that "in the last days" God's Spirit would be poured out on his people, who would give evidence of this influence by their speech. The behavior they have seen fits this prophecy.

19 And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: 20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come:--These signs were probably associated with the Lord's crucifixion. Luke tells us,

Luk 23:44 there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. 45 And the sun was darkened,

And when the moon rose on 3 April AD 33, the most likely date for the Lord's crucifixion, there was an eclipse of the moon visible in Jerusalem that would have appeared as a reddish color.¹ So Joel's prophecy aligns not only with the speaking in tongues, but also with the unusual astronomical signs associated with the crucifixion.

21 And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.--Joel's prophecy ends with an invitation to action.

The bottom line is that Peter and his hearers are now "in the last days," on the eve of "that great and notable day of the Lord" anticipated by all the OT prophets, when God would intervene in history to set up his kingdom on earth. In the words of Mark 1:15, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand."

1 Humphries and Waddington, Nature 306 (1983) 743ff; <https://www.eclipsewise.com/extra/LEhistory.html>
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22-28, This Jesus, whom you crucified

22 Ye men of Israel, hear these words;--Now Peter turns from their immediate physical circumstance (Judaean, physically present in Jerusalem) to their national identity ("men of Israel.") He invokes the spiritual significance of this people whom God redeemed out of Egypt.

Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:--He presents Jesus as a perfect Israelite, "approved of God." The specific mechanism that God used was "miracles and wonders and signs."

This verse helps us understand the role of miracles. They do not prove that Jesus is God; otherwise Moses and Elijah, who also did miracles, must also be God. Rather, they are a way for God to single out an individual for special attention. Consider our Lord's response to the disciples of John in Matt. 11:2-6. They asked Jesus whether he were the Christ. In response, he cited his miracles, which fulfill the promises of Isa. 35:5,6; 61:1. By giving him the miracles prophesied of the Messiah, God was approving him to the attention of the Jews.

23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:--In contrast, they have been wicked, because they slew this just person. Compare how he characterizes the Lord in his later remarks in Solomon's porch,

Act 3:14 But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;

Yet, while condemning them, Peter insists that God remains in control. The role of their sin in achieving God's purposes was a common observation of the apostles:

Act 4:27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, 28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

If God's sovereignty extends to the death of Christ, certainly he can work together for good all the events of our lives, disheartening as they may seem. Will we view misfortune as the Jews did, a sign of God's displeasure, or as Peter did, the very means of his sovereign love toward us?

24 Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.--God's control is seen in the resurrection of the Lord. Peter's language is picturesque: "loosed the pains of death" describes labor pains. The grave could no more hold Jesus in after he had completed his redemptive work, than a woman can keep a baby from coming into the world.

25 For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved:--Now he turns to his second text, Psalm 16. He begins in the middle of the Psalm, with David's interesting statement about two positions in which the Lord stands with relation to himself.

First, the Lord is "always before my face," to guide him. The Hebrew actually says, "I have set the Lord always before me," and the verb form of the Greek (the middle voice) suggests that in the LXX also, the point is not foreseeing the future, but paying constant attention to the Lord in front of him. David focused his attention on the Lord in seeking to follow him. Jesus of Nazareth, a righteous Israelite, did the same.

Because David keeps the Lord “always before my face,” the Lord is “on my right hand,” to defend him. If this is true of righteous David, how much more must it be true of Jesus. Therefore the confidence that David expresses in Psalm 16 must be applicable to the Lord:

26 Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: 27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. 28 Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.--Peter omits the last phrase, “at thy right hand *there are* pleasures for evermore.” In the Psalm, the final result of the Lord being at David’s right hand (v. 8) is that David expects to be at the Lord’s right hand (v. 11). Peter wants to save this point for Ps 110, which allows him to introduce the title “Lord.” For now, he focuses on the Lord’s defense of his righteous servant as explanation for the resurrection of Jesus.

29-32, God has made him Christ

Peter now makes two points about Jesus, based on empirical evidence. The first is that, based on the resurrection, Jesus is the Messiah.

29 Men and brethren,--Now Peter moves even closer to his hearers. They are not only people who happen to be in Judaea and Jerusalem, or even members of the covenant nation, but they are his brethren.

let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.--Peter challenges his hearers with a paradox. He has just quoted David’s confident assurance in the Lord’s protection to explain the resurrection of Jesus. But David couldn’t have been speaking of himself. A thousand years after he died, he still lies in the grave. (Even to this day, three thousand years later, his grave is still shown in Jerusalem.)

30 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne;--He bases his explanation two facts that his hearers would not challenge: that David was a prophet (2 Sam 23:1-2), and that he is the ancestor of Messiah (2 Samuel 7).

31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.--So if the promise of no corruption is inapplicable to David, it must refer to his descendant, the Messiah.

The English translation of both Psalm 16 and Acts 2 is misleading. The English suggests that the speaker expects to be in hell (Sheol, the place of the dead), but then to come out. But both the Hebrew and Greek verbs are more accurately rendered, “abandon to.” The point is not that he will be delivered from Sheol, but that he will never enter it, just as he will never experience corruption.

32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.--Peter and the others are there to bear witness to the resurrection. In fact, this is the function of an apostle, as Peter reminds the believers when they select a successor to Judas:

Act 1:21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

And Paul notes as one of his qualifications to be recognized as an apostle,

1Co 9:1 Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?

So the argument is:

- Jesus rose from the dead (because we saw it)
- David predicted that Messiah would rise from the dead
- Therefore Jesus is the Messiah.

Peter's point is not to prove that Jesus rose from the dead, but to state the fact upon his own testimony, and persuade his hearers of its implications: Jesus is Christ.

33-35, God has made him Lord

Now Peter moves to his second point. Again he refers to an empirically verifiable event, and again he explains it with a text from the Psalms, though this time the order is inverted (Table 2, chart).

33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted,--

The reference is instrumental, not local. We know that he is referring to the ascension of the Lord, but at this point his hearers need only grant the argument thus far, that God has exalted Jesus to the position of Christ.

	Jesus is Christ		Jesus is Lord
Text	31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.		34 For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, 35 Until I make thy foes thy footstool.
Event	32 This Jesus hath God raised up,		33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this,
Evidence	whereof we all are witnesses.		which ye now see and hear.

Table 2: Peter's Twofold Argument

and having received of the

Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this,--From Joel, he has showed that that the pouring out of the Spirit is a sign of the last days, which the Jews would understand as the time when Messiah would come. Joel said that the last days, the time of the Messiah, would be marked by the pouring out of the Spirit. The resurrection shows that the Messiah has come. So the hearers should recognize the events of Pentecost as fitting into the overall picture.

which ye now see and hear.--The event that shows Jesus as the Messiah is the resurrection, for which Peter and the other apostles are witnesses. The event that shows him as Lord is the pouring out of the Spirit, for which the pilgrims in Jerusalem are witnesses.

34 For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, 35 Until I make thy foes thy footstool.--Now he repeats the argument from Psalm 110 that our Lord used to such effect with the Jewish leaders.

Mat 22:41 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 42 Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, *The Son* of David. 43 He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, 44 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? 45 If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?

David prophesied of one who would not see corruption. That can't be David himself, so it must be the Messiah. Similarly, he prophesied of one who would ascend into the heavens and be called Lord. That also can't be David. It must be the Messiah, and the coming of the Spirit shows that he is indeed there.

Note the phrase, "on my right hand." In Psalm 16, David rejoices that because of his devotion to the Lord, the Lord is at his (David's) right hand, defending him. Psalm 16 concludes with the Psalmist's desire to be at the Lord's right hand. Peter skipped that allusion, but now completes it with Psalm 110.

36, Conclusion

36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.--Here Peter pulls together all the threads in his sermon, in chiasmic order (literally, "God has made both Lord and Christ, that Jesus..."). "That Jesus" was the theme of 22-28, "Christ" was in focus in 29-32, and "Lord" in 33-35.

This is how Paul summarizes his message as well:

2Co 4:5 we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord

This is the central fact of our faith: the man Jesus is the Jewish Messiah and the Lord of all.

37-38, Repent and Believe

37 Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, what shall we do? 38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.--In keeping with the Lord's pattern of preaching the gospel, Peter now confronts his hearers with the divine demand: they must repent of their sin, and receive the forgiveness that God has provided through the Messiah.

Too often, we focus on a message that calls people to believe facts. But John the baptist called people to repent. Our Lord called people to repent. When he sent his disciples out to preach to all nations, he declared,

Luk 24:47 repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

People must face the fact of their sin, and reject it, if they are ever to profit from the salvation that our Lord offers.

So let us carry on the message, remembering the pattern that the Spirit has preserved for us in Peter's sermon:

- Preach Christ Jesus the Lord—not philosophy, not apologetics. Tell people about our wonderful Lord. Demonstrate his virtues to them in your life.
- Confront people with their sin. He came to save his people from their sin. This is what we have to offer.
- Use the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.