

THE CHURCH'S FIRST SERMON

Turn with me to Acts 2 and let's read verses 14-47 together....

Note, Peter begins by pointing out the fulfilment of prophecy in the gift of the Spirit (verse 14-21). He then declares the Resurrection of Jesus as foretold by prophecy, and witnessed to by the whole body of believers (Verses 22-32), and he ends by bringing together both these two facts. Observe the significant alternation of the names of 'Christ' and 'Jesus' in **verse 31** and **32**. The former verse establishes that prophecy had foretold the Resurrection of the Messiah; the latter asserts that, "This Jesus," has fulfilled the prophetic conditions. A thing not to be argued about, but to be certified by verifiable witnesses. This truth was presented to the multitude on Pentecost, as it is to us, as a plain matter of fact, on which the whole fabric of Christianity is built; and which itself securely rests on the consistent testimony of those who knew Him alive, saw Him dead, and were familiar with Him having risen.

In **verse 34** Peter stays for a moment to establish by prophecy that the Ascension, of which he had for the first time spoken in **verse 33**, is part of the prophetic characteristics of the Messiah. He quotes Psalm 68, which he had probably learnt to do from Jesus, and sets out an argument out about the prediction of Resurrection; that the dead Psalmist's words could not apply to himself, and must therefore apply to the Messiah. He concludes that it was not David who was called by Jehovah to sit as 'Lord' at His right hand. If not David, it could only be the Messiah who was therefore invested with Lordship, and exalted as participator of the throne of the Most High. That person, the Christ, would sit at the right hand of God in heavenly places with His enemies under His feet. A position of power, authority and strength.

Then comes the final thrust of the sermon, for which Peter's dialogue has been preparing the listener. The Apostle rises to the full height of his great commission, and sets the trumpet to his mouth, summoning "all the house of Israel" - priests, rulers, and all the people - to acknowledge his Master. He proclaims Christ's supreme divinity and Messiahship. He is the "Lord" of whom the Psalmist sang, and the prophet declared that whoever "called on His name" would be saved; and He is the Christ for whom all Israel was waiting.

Last of all, Peter sets in sharp contrast with what God had done with Jesus, and what Israel had done, and the piercing of the heart lies in his last words, "whom you crucified." This bold champion of Jesus, this undaunted prosecutor of a nation's crimes, was the man who a few weeks before, had rejected Jesus three times! What made the change? Could anything but the Resurrection and Pentecost account for the profound transformation effected in him and the other Apostles? It's no wonder that, "They were pierced in their heart!" Such a thrust must have gone deep, even where the armour of prejudice was thick. The scene they had witnessed, and the fiery words preached, taken together, produced deep conviction, and the conviction produced alarm. How surely does the first glimpse of Jesus as Christ and Lord set the conscience to work! The question, "What shall we do?" is the beginning of their conversion.

Peter's then lays down two conditions: repentance and baptism. The former is often taken in too narrow a sense as meaning sorrow for sin, whereas it means a change of disposition or mind, which will be accompanied, no doubt, with 'godly sorrow,' but is in itself deeper than sorrow. It is the turning away of heart and will from the past love and practice of evil.

The second, baptism, is “in the name of Jesus Christ,” or more accurately, “upon the name,” that is, on the ground of the revealed truth and character of Jesus. That clearly implies faith in that Name; for, without such faith, the baptism would not be on the ground of the Name. The two things are regarded as inseparable, manifesting both on the inside and the outside of a true disciple of Christ. Repentance, faith, baptism, these three, are called for or demanded by Peter.

Notice how the Peter was eager to share the ‘gift’. The more we have of the Spirit, the more we shall desire that others may have Him too, and the more sure we will be that He is meant for all. Peter went on to base his assurance, that his hearers might all possess the Spirit, on the universal destination of the promise that Joel brought, ***“I will pour My Spirit on all flesh.”*** Swift conviction followed these Spirit-inspired words, as it does when any speaker is filled with the Holy Spirit and has therefore a tongue of fire. Three thousand new disciples were made that day, and not only were three thousand ‘names’ added to the hundred and twenty, but three thousand souls.

The narrative tells how the new converts were incorporated into the community and integrated into its character. In this regard, four points are illuminated: ‘teaching,’ which would principally be instruction in the life of Jesus (as proved by prophecy); ‘fellowship,’ which implies oneness of heart manifested in outward association; ‘breaking of bread,’ that is, the observance of the Lord’s Supper; and, ‘the prayers,’ which were the very life-breath of the infant Church. Hence, oneness in faith and love and participation in holy communion and in devotional acts, bound the new converts to the original believers, and trained them towards maturity. These are still the methods by which a sudden influx of new converts is best dealt with, and babes in Christ nurtured to full growth. Often churches do not know what to do with novices when they come in numbers.

A wider view of the state of the community (as a whole) closes the chapter. The Church can only be affective in proportion as it is manifestly “filled” with the Spirit. Do we? We need the Spirit in greater measure if we are to make an impact in our community. But this should never offend those we are trying to reach. It was not God’s will that the new spirit should violently break with the old customs. Divisions are not His way, except as second-best. The disciples had to stay within the fold of Israel, if they were to influence Israel. The time of outward parting between the Temple and the Church was still to come.

Observe, the truest life of the infant Church was not nourished in the Temple, but in the privacy of their homes. They were one family, and lived as such. Their ‘breaking bread at home’ includes both their ordinary meals and the Lord’s Supper; for in these first days every meal, at least the evening meal of every day, was hallowed by having the Supper as a part of it. Each meal was thus a religious act, a token of brotherhood, and accompanied by praise. The ideal of human fellowship was realised, be it but for a moment and on a small scale. It was inevitable that divergences should arise, but it was not inevitable that the Church should depart so far from these customs.

No wonder such a Church won favour with all the people! We hear nothing of its evangelising activity, but its life was such that, multitudes were drawn into so sweet a fellowship. If we were like the Pentecostal Christians, we should attract wearied souls out of the world system and into the calm home where love and brotherhood reigns; then God would ‘add’ to us “day by day those that are being saved.”