

The Spirit poured out

Simon Peter preached the first sermon recorded in Acts, remarkable because we remember him denying he knew Christ after the arrest in



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Gethsemane (Luke 22:54-60).

Fifty days had passed since the crucifixion and ascension of Jesus. The 120 followers of Jesus had been praying and waiting when Jesus' promise came true.

The Spirit of God entered their lives and their world, flooding Jerusalem with the good news as 3,000 people committed their lives to Christ (Acts 2:41). Peter was preaching to Jews who believed God's Messiah was coming, so Peter preached a message built on God's promise that his listeners would understand through the Hebrew texts.

Luke's carefully researched writings offer special insight in how the early church interpreted the Hebrew Scriptures from a New Testament context. Jesus' teaching always pushed people to see meaning beyond traditional thinking and accepted ideas to apply the truth to their daily living. Jesus went beyond the letter of the Law and offered evidences that God's plan and purpose of salvation were evident throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.

While dying on the cross Jesus quoted from Psalm 22:1 and 31:5, showing us that his death is the key to salvation. After Jesus' resurrection, he appeared to two very discouraged disciples struggling home to Emmaus, "(interpreting) for them the things written about himself in all the scriptures, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets" (Luke 24:27).

In Peter's Pentecost sermon the apostle takes a similar approach to explain the dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit is God fulfilling his eternal purpose in Jesus Christ. Through the centuries (even in our day) the rabbis studied every detail of a biblical text and concluded with "How do we apply this to our day?"

A psalm is not part of the Law, but

it might help us understand the Law in a new way. A prophet speaks to his immediate situation, but what more could he be saying to us? Keep in mind that the Holy Spirit inspired the writing of all the Scriptures, but he did not dictate the words.

God uses all kinds of things to help us see his truth: creation, circumstances, events, but mostly our relationship with God. The Spirit inspired the written word and is constantly at work in our lives to help us understand and apply that written word.

Examine how carefully Peter lays out the basic truths of the good news in his sermon.

Christ's Credentials (v. 22): Jesus identity is "proved to you through miracles, wonders, and signs, which God performed through him among you. You yourselves know this." For three years Jesus had healed the blind, cured lepers and raised the dead. There is powerful evidence in the life of this man who embodied the love, forgiveness and grace of God like no other!

Christ's Death (v. 23): The Jews were complicit in his death, but the cross was God's plan! God did not merely turn something ghastly to a higher purpose. God took all the ugliness of evil and destroyed its power once and for all!

Christ's Resurrection (vv. 24-32): Peter celebrates the resurrection, using Psalm 16:8-11, voicing a deeper understanding and new meaning of an old text. Everyone understood that David died and God had promised that one of David's descendants would sit on the throne one day. Jesus was a descendant of David, but now we see this promise goes well beyond a worldly king and kingdom. This is about the Kingdom of God, restoration of broken lives, forgiveness and a new heaven and a new earth.

Christ's Spirit (vv. 33-36): "He was exalted to God's right side and received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit...you are seeing and hearing the results." There is a unity here of Father, Son and Spirit, and what is witnessed

Formations

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at Pentecost is God continuing to give himself to us, calling us to experience the gift of new life. The risen Christ continues to be within us and with us.

The power of Pentecost is not defined by an individual exhibiting unusual powers or gifts. The truth and power of the Spirit in your life is exhibited in your faithfulness to Christ, living out his compassion, seeing others through eyes of grace and growing in your relationship with God. Jesus told those early disciples the Spirit would come to empower us as his witnesses (Acts 1:8).

Can you understand the fears of those first disciples after they witnessed Jesus' death, his ascension into heaven? It was like losing him twice! But the Spirit comes to stay with us, to guide and teach us, to empower us to more than survive the challenges of life. One of my favorite scriptures, Romans 8:26, helps me face obstacles in life: "And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weaknesses, for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words..."

After 55 years of following Christ I constantly seek the help Jesus promises his followers: "The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (John 14:26). Just as the Spirit inspired Scripture and urged me to accept God's love in Christ, the Spirit continues to guide us and strengthen us to serve our Savior each day.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was not a standalone event. It is the unfolding of God's purpose for his children, a reassurance that the kingdom of God is coming in all its power and glory. Every day is our opportunity to grow in faith and invite others to join us in the family of God.

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