

Acts 2:41-42a

Introduction

The Jesus whom God attested in *life* by miracles and wonders and signs, and who was delivered over to *death* by God's predetermined plan and foreknowledge, and whom God *raised up* from the dead, is now the one whom God has made both Lord and Christ and who—having *ascended* to the right hand of the Father and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit—has *poured out* His Spirit upon His people in order that they might receive all the blessings of His present rule and reign in fulfillment of the Scriptures. This is the summary of Peter's sermon on Pentecost. Last week we came to Peter's exhortation to the people as to how they should respond to this message that he preached:

- Acts 2:38-39 — “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”

This week we come to the result of Peter's preaching.

I. Acts 2:41a — So then, those who had received [Peter's] word were baptized...

What does it mean to “receive” Peter's word? Maybe we could paraphrase: “Those who took Peter's word to heart and acted upon it.” In the first place, they believed that Peter's message about Jesus the Messiah was true—that this was not ultimately the word of Peter, but the very word of God (cf. 4:31; 6:2, 7; 8:14, 11:1; 13:5, 46; 17:13; 18:11). The Apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians:

- 1 Thessalonians 2:13 — And for this reason we also thank God without ceasing that when you were taught the word of God which you heard from us, you received it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also is at work in you who believe.

Having believed that Peter's message about Jesus the Messiah was true (that it was the very word of God), the people were repenting and turning to God by being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. James exhorts us to “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save [our] souls” (Js. 1:21). Paul recalls how the Thessalonians had “received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 1:6; Acts 17:11). Here, then, is another way to describe this New Covenant community—we are those who have *received* the word that has been preached to us for what it really is—the word of God—with meekness and with joy (contrast 3 Jn. 9).

In light of what we've seen so far, we can say that there's definitely an active sense to this “receiving” since we're the ones who do the receiving. But there's also a passive sense to this “receiving.” We receive the word of God only insofar as that word has “come to [us],” Paul says, not “in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full assurance”—as to those who are the “beloved” and “elect” of God (1 Thess. 1:4-6). We receive the word of God only

insofar as God sends that word to us and effectually applies that word in us. We see the sovereignty of this divine activity (and our own “passivity” even in our active “receiving”) in the second half of this verse:

II. Acts 2:41b — So then, those who had received [Peter’s] word were baptized; and that day there were added [passive] about three thousand souls.

This isn’t just a statement about addition and numbers. There’s so much more, here, than we might initially see. In the first place, who does the adding? In verse 47, Luke will say that the disciples were “praising *God* and having favor with all the people,” and then he will say, “And *the Lord* was adding to their number daily those who were being saved.” Peter has already proclaimed that it’s Jesus whom “God has made... both Lord and Christ” (2:36), and so it’s Jesus Himself who, as the risen “Lord and Christ,” is now adding these men and women (cf. 5:14; 8:12) who are “being saved.” The picture here is not that Jesus is “reacting” to what the people are doing. He’s not observing the people repenting and being baptized and then “adding” them because of what He sees. Instead, it was as the people were receiving the word that God had sent to them and that God was effectually working in them, that Jesus Himself was at work “adding” them.

But now the next question is, “Adding them to what?” In Acts chapter five, Luke will say:

➤ Acts 5:14 — And more than ever *believers in the Lord* [in Jesus as the Messiah] were added, multitudes of men and women...

And later, in Acts 11, Luke says:

➤ Acts 11:24 — And a considerable crowd was added *to the Lord*.

If we put these three passages together, we can say that those believing *in* the Lord were being added *by* the Lord, *to* the Lord. It’s the risen Lord and Messiah Himself who is adding those who are believing in Him, to Himself through the Spirit that He pours out. What we have here is the fulfillment of Jesus’ word to Peter in Matthew 16. Peter had just confessed Jesus to be “the Christ [the Messiah], the Son of the living God [God’s anointed King]” (Mat. 16:16; cf. Ps. 2); and Jesus responded by saying to Peter:

➤ Matthew 16:17–18 — “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter [*petros*], and upon this rock [*petra*] I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”

This “church” that the Messiah will build is specifically His eschatological (“end-times”) kingdom community. So often, when we think of the “church,” we fail to think of it in its full redemptive-historical context; we fail to give the church its full redemptive-historical significance—to our own detriment and loss. When Luke says, “So then, those who had received [Peter’s] word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls,” his emphasis is not simply on a localized example of “church growth,” neither is it simply on the

response of the people who were “receiving” Peter’s word (*ordo salutis*). What Luke is emphasizing (and what he’s rejoicing in) is the redemptive-historical fulfillment—the “flowering,” as it were—of all God’s promises (*historia salutis*). The risen “Lord and Christ” has just added three thousand souls to His messianic “end-times” (eschatological) people. Here in the growth of this new, “kingdom people” is nothing less than what one commentator calls the “final drama” of redemptive history prior to the consummation (Peterson on 2:43)—or what another commentator calls “the dawn of the new age” (Bruce on 2:43). It’s because of this that Luke tells us “fear [an overwhelming sense of awe and wonder and even of trembling] came upon every soul” (2:43). The people were witnessing the “end”—the *telos*; the culmination and fulfillment—of all God’s redemptive promises and of all redemptive history.

There’s one other important way for us to see that Luke’s focus, here, is “redemptive-historical” (not on individual subjective responses or “church growth”). Here, on this day of Pentecost, it’s specifically the Jews who received Peter’s word, who were baptized, and who received the Holy Spirit. The next time Luke speaks of people who “received the word” is in Acts 8.

- Acts 8:5, 12, 14–15 — Now Philip went down to the city of *Samaria* and began preaching Christ to them... [W]hen they believed Philip proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, both men and women... Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that *Samaria* had *received the word of God*, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

This isn’t a “second Pentecost” (as if Pentecost was an event meant to be repeated over and over again). Instead, it was a sign that the original redemptive-historical event of Pentecost had application not only to Jews, but also to Samaritans. Even Samaritans have now “received the word of God” and so even Samaritans are now being “added” to this end-times community of Jesus the Messiah. Apart from Acts 17:11, there’s only one other place where Luke speaks of people who “received the word,” and that’s in chapter ten.

- Acts 10:44–11:1 — While Peter was still speaking these things [to the Gentile Cornelius and those who were gathered in his house], the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the word... Then Peter answered, “Can anyone refuse water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?” And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ... Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that *the Gentiles* also had *received the word of God*.

This isn’t a “third” Pentecost. Instead, it’s a sign that the original redemptive-historical event of Pentecost had application not only to Jews, and not only to Samaritans, but also to Gentiles. Even the Gentiles have now “received the word of God” (because God has sent that word to them and effectually worked that word in them) and so even the Gentiles are now being “added” to this end-times community of Jesus the Messiah. We’re reminded of Jesus’ earlier word to the apostles:

- Acts 1:8 — “[Y]ou will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea [Jews] and Samaria [Samaritans], and even to the end of the earth [Gentiles].”

“So then, those who had received [Peter’s] word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.” Do you see, now, the full redemptive-historical significance of these words? By virtue of being added by the risen Lord and Messiah to His own eschatological end-times community, these people are now participants in the “final drama” of redemptive history—the messianic age of the Spirit. It was because the people understood this (even to the point that fear [a trembling awe] came upon them all), that Luke can go on to tell us in verse 42:

III. Acts 2:42 — And they were continually devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.

Do you see the powerful connection between, on the one hand, the salvation-historical reality that the people were experiencing and, on the other hand, the things to which they were now continually devoting themselves? The first thing Luke mentions (and the thing we’ll focus on this morning) is the teaching of the apostles.

We first need to understand that this “teaching of the apostles” wasn’t a “replacement” for the Jewish/Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament); it wasn’t a replacement for the Law and the Prophets. It wasn’t as if the people who used to be committed to the teaching of Moses were now committed to the teaching of the apostles, though this was the accusation that many people made. Steven’s accusers said:

- Acts 6:11 (cf. 6:14) — “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.”

The elders of the Jerusalem church told Paul:

- Acts 21:21 — [T]hey [the Jews who have believed and are zealous for the law] have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.

But none of these things were true (cf. Acts 16:3; 21:23-27). Instead, it was the teaching of the apostles that enabled the people to read the Law and the Prophets aright—according to their truest and fullest meaning. It was the teaching of the apostles that enabled the people to see Jesus *in* the Law and the Prophets insofar as He is the one *in whom* the Law and the Prophets are fulfilled (filled up). We’ve seen this already in Peter’s sermon, when he quoted from Joel 2, Psalm 16, and Psalm 110, showing how these Scriptures were all “filled up” in Christ. In Acts chapter three, in the midst of quoting from Deuteronomy 18 and Genesis 22 (the Law of Moses), Peter will say:

- Acts 3:24 — “[L]ikewise, all the *prophets* who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, *also* proclaimed these days.”

In Acts 4, the apostles will see Psalms 2 and 118 “filled up” in the opposition of the Jews and the Gentiles to Jesus, and continued opposition to His followers. In Acts 7 and Acts 13, Steven and Paul respectively will see the history of Israel as it’s recorded in the Scriptures “filled up” in Christ. In Acts 15, James will quote the prophet Amos (9:11-12) as representative of all the prophets who spoke of Christ and of the people whom the Christ would call not only from among the Jews, but also from among the Gentiles. When Philip was with the Ethiopian eunuch on the desert road, Luke tells us:

- Acts 8:35 — Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning **from this Scripture** [from the Scripture about the suffering Servant in the prophet Isaiah] he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.

Luke tells us in chapter 17 that:

- Acts 17:2–3 (cf. 17:11; 18:24, 28) — “[A]ccording to Paul’s custom, he went to [the Jews at the synagogue], and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them **from the Scriptures**, explaining and setting before them that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is that Christ.”

Later in Acts, the Apostle Paul will say to King Agrippa:

- Acts 26:22–23 — “Therefore, having obtained help from God to this day, I stand here bearing witness both to small and great, **stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place**; that the Christ was to suffer, and that as the first of the resurrection from the dead, He was going to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”

When Paul arrived as a prisoner in Rome, Luke tells us:

- Acts 28:23 — When they [the Jews] had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both **from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets**.

What is the “teaching of the apostles,” then? In the first place, it’s the proclamation of the crucified, risen, and ascended Jesus from the Scriptures—from the Law of Moses and the Prophets (cf. Acts 4:2, 18; 5:42; 20:20-21; 28:30-31). Even as Jesus Himself had done with the apostles, so now the apostles “interpreted to [the people] the things concerning [Jesus] in all the Scriptures” (cf. Lk. 24:25-27, 44-47; Rom. 16:25-27).

But the “teaching of the apostles” was more than just the Old Testament Scriptures now read in the light of Jesus. Insofar as Jesus is the fulfillment of Scripture—insofar as He is the Messiah who has inaugurated the “end times” (eschatological) kingdom—therefore Jesus is, Himself, the new and final “Law-Giver” – the one greater than Moses (cf. Jn. 1:17; Heb. 3:1-6). So it’s Jesus Himself who must now declare to those whom He has added to His “end-times” messianic community all that life in this community means. Moses and the Prophets, because of their place

in redemptive-history, could never do this, and were never intended to do this. And so we remember Jesus' words to the apostles after His resurrection:

- Matthew 28:18–20 (2 Pet. 3:1-2) — “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep all that I commanded you...”

The apostles were those sent out directly by Jesus the Messiah while He was still on this earth to teach His words—the words that He Himself had spoken to them while He was with them—as His authorized representatives. Jesus said to His disciples on the night before His crucifixion:

- John 14:25–26 — “These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. But the Advocate, 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 15:26–27 — “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about Me, and you will bear witness also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.”

There are two partial exceptions which prove this “apostolic rule.” In chapter one, it was the *risen* and *ascended* Lord who showed which man He had chosen “to take the place of [the] ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place” (1:24-26). But even here we see that the criteria for the one who would fill that office was that he be a man who had “accompanied [the other apostles] all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among [them]—beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from [them]” (Acts 1:21-22). This was necessary because the apostles were to be witnesses of Christ’s resurrection (Acts 1:22)—not just of the bare historical “fact” of His resurrection, but of the eschatological (kingdom) significance and meaning of His resurrection.

And what about Paul, who never walked with Jesus while He was on this earth? Paul himself says that he was the last of those to whom the risen Jesus appeared, even as to one “untimely born” (1 Cor. 15:8). Paul recognized that he was, to a certain extent, an anomaly—an exception to the rule. We can’t explore, this morning, the abundant proof of Paul’s apostleship, but we recall his words to the Galatians:

- Galatians 1:1, 11–12 — Paul, an apostle—not sent from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead... I make known to you, brothers, that the gospel which I am proclaiming as good news is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

We hear Paul saying, therefore, in 1 Corinthians:

- 1 Corinthians 11:23 (cf. 1 Thess. 4:15) — For I *received from the Lord* that which I also *delivered to you*, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was being betrayed took bread...

- 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 (cf. 1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:13–15; 3:6; Jude 3; 2 Pet. 2:20–21) — For I *delivered to you* as of first importance *what I also received*, that Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

The apostles, then, were those sent out directly by Jesus the Messiah to teach and proclaim His words—the words that He Himself had spoken to them—as His authorized representatives. Not only did they interpret to the people the things concerning Jesus in all the Scriptures (the “Old Testament” Law and Prophets), but insofar as Jesus was the fulfillment of these Scriptures they also delivered to the people His own teaching as the new, eschatological “Law-Giver.” From this fact alone we can see already both the necessity and the guarantee of our New Testament—the apostolic Scriptures! The apostles could show how Moses and the prophets all wrote about Christ (Jn. 1:45; 5:46), but they couldn’t proclaim from Moses and the Prophets all the eschatological realities of life in Messiah’s kingdom. Only the Messiah Himself could make these things known. So the author of Hebrews says:

- Hebrews 3:5–6 — Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later, but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose [end-times] house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope.

In connection with this, Paul says:

- Ephesians 2:19–20 (cf. 3:4–5) — [We] are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and [New Testament] prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone...

We could say, then, that the apostles brought out of their treasure things both new and old (cf. Mat. 13:52), and in so doing we would be saying that the “teaching of the apostles” ultimately encompasses both the New Testament (the apostolic writings themselves) and the Old Testament (the law of Moses and the Prophets). It’s in this light that we can read what Peter wrote some 30 years after Pentecost:

- 1 Peter 1:10–12 — Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, made careful searches and inquiries, inquiring to know what time or what kind of time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He was predicting the sufferings of Christ and the glories [the eschatological, kingdom glories] to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been declared to you through those [through the apostles and NT prophets] who proclaimed the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.

The “teaching of the apostles,” we conclude, is the teaching about Christ—both as the one who “fills up” the “old” (think the Old Testament Law and Prophets) and therefore also as the one who is the source and fountainhead of the new (think the New Testament Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Revelation).

Conclusion

Since it's the risen Lord and Messiah Himself who has "added" us to His eschatological (end-times) community—since we are now participants in the final drama of redemptive-history and the messianic age of the Spirit—we must therefore be continually devoting ourselves to "the teaching of the apostles." Why? Because it's the apostles of Jesus Christ who have delivered to us all that Jesus said to them as our eschatological "Law-Giver." It's the apostles of Jesus Christ who have proclaimed to us all of those new, eschatological realities of life in the Messiah's kingdom (Jesus didn't write any of the New Testament). Indeed, it's only because we've already "received" the word of the apostles not as the word of men, but as what it really is—the word of God—that we've been saved. Should we not, then, be devoting ourselves to the apostles' teaching continually? Should this not, then, be one of our defining marks and characteristics as the eschatological, end-times community that we are?

Though we can no longer go to hear the apostles teach in person, today the New Testament Scriptures form the written deposit of their teaching (cf. Bruce). And it's as we also read the Old Testament in the full light of the New Testament apostolic teaching that we, too, can bring out of our treasure (in a secondary way) things both new and old (not new in the sense of creative and innovative, but redemptive-historically new).

Can you see, now, what should be the nature and essence of all the church's preaching? My calling—and the calling of all those whom Jesus has given to the church as teachers (Eph. 4:11)—is not to be original or novel, but only to adhere steadfastly, week in and week out, to the apostles' teaching (cf. Bruce). What this *means* practically is teaching Jesus Christ both as the one who "fills up" the "old" (the one about whom Moses and the Prophets wrote) and also as the one who is the source and fountainhead of the "new" (the one who has now declared to us all that life in His end-times, messianic community means).

If that's my calling as a teacher and preacher, your calling—and our calling together, as those whom Jesus has "added" to His end-times, messianic community—is to be devoting ourselves continually to the apostles' teaching by our earnest and faithful attendance upon these times. In light of who we've been made to be, and in light of what this time has been appointed to be, what excuse can we have for not earnestly and faithfully attending upon these times—receiving the word that is preached to us not as the word of men, but as the very word of God (cf. 1 Pet. 4:10-11), with meekness and with joy? May this, then, be our truly defining mark as the eschatological, end-times community that we are—as those who are even now participants in the "final drama" of redemptive-history.