

Acts 2

The First Resurrection Sermon

Does the resurrection of Jesus Christ *really make a difference? In your life? In your family? In our church? Does it?*

I sure hope that it does. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15, if Christ hasn't been raised, then our faith is in vain, and we Christians are to be pitied more than anyone in the world. Because if Christ hasn't been raised, everything's meaningless.

The great historian, Jaroslav Pelikan, understood this. Pelikan died in 2006. And his last recorded words were these: "*If Christ is risen, nothing else matters. If Christ is not risen, nothing else matters.*"

Well this morning, we're looking at the 2nd chapter of the book of Acts. And I know, this isn't a resurrection story *per se*. But we're looking at it today because the resurrection of Jesus really is the central point.

And that is what I want to focus on—how Acts 2 presents the significance of Jesus' resurrection. So, we'll look briefly at the first 21 verses. But I want to spend most of our time focusing on Peter's preaching of the resurrection in verses 22-36, and the results we see verses 37-47.

1. The Context (verses 1-21)

Now, this whole scene in Acts 2 happened on the *Day of Pentecost*, which is also known as the *Feast of Firstfruits*. *Pentecost* was one of the regular feasts of Israel. It took place every year, *7 weeks following* the day after the *Sabbath Day* of the *Feast of Passover*. So, it always fell on a Sunday—the first day of the week.

And in the context of the events of the New Testament, this is 50 days *after* the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week. He remained on earth 40 days, and then ascended into heaven. And we're now 10 days after his ascension.

And right before he ascended into heaven, Jesus told the apostles to stay in Jerusalem until they received "*power*"—Acts 1.4-9:

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." ⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

And so, here in chapter 2, the apostles are in Jerusalem, *waiting* for this promise of the Holy Spirit to come upon them as Jesus promised.

They're all together in the same place during the Feast of Pentecost, *And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.*

Tongues of fire came upon the apostles. And a whole bunch of people—at least 3000—heard it and came flocking to where they were. And everyone who was there who spoke all these different languages heard them speaking in their native tongue.

Remember, John the Baptist said that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and Fire. And Jesus just told the Apostles in chapter 1 that they'd be baptized with the Holy Spirit. And here we see the fulfillment of both of those things. As the Spirit comes upon them in the form of fiery tongues.

And not surprisingly, the people who heard and saw this were amazed. Some of them even mocked and said they were drunk. But Peter gets up and starts talking to them. And he essentially says, *"Come on people, We're not drunk—it's only 9:00 in the morning!"*

And then he goes on to quote this passage from Joel 2.28-32, about the Spirit of God being poured out on all people, and the sons and

daughters prophesying, and the young and the old seeing visions and having dreams.

And the end of that passage from Joel sets up the rest of what Peter's about to say, "*And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*"

Now, the basic point of applying that passage from Joel to what happened on Pentecost was that this coming of the Holy Spirit marked the beginning of the last days—the days of fulfillment and of calling on the name of the Lord for salvation. *But why? What did it all mean?* Well that brings us to the part of this passage that I really want to focus in on.

2. The Argument (verses 22-36)

In verses 22-36 Peter turns from explaining the phenomenon of the Holy Spirit the people witnessed, to telling them that the reason for it all was because Jesus of Nazareth is the *risen Lord and Messiah!* And so the central focus of Peter's sermon is really the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And Peter starts his argument about Jesus' resurrection in verse 22 by addressing the people directly, "*Men of Israel, Hear these words.*" And then he goes on to tell them about *3 basic historical events.*

1. Verse 22: Jesus of Nazareth was attested to them by God himself, who worked signs and wonders through him. In other words, God himself *bore testimony* to them about who Jesus was. Because they all knew about his miracles and his teaching.

2. Verse 23: They nevertheless rejected this Jesus and delivered him up to be crucified. And notice how Peter puts this: "*This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*"

So, according to Peter, there were 3 parties involved in the death of Christ. There's "You"—that is, the *Jews*. Then there's "lawless men" who actually instituted the crucifixion. By that he means the *Roman authorities.*

But then underlying all that there's God—*“according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.”* You see, the death of Jesus the Messiah was no accident.

And so, Jesus' resurrection wasn't just a response to his death. It wasn't God just saying *“O, they killed my Son and he didn't deserve it, so I'll respond by raising him from the dead and showing them they were wrong about him.”* No, it was his redemptive plan all along.

Now, think about the implications of this. Peter says the *most horrific act* in the history of humankind was planned out by God. But at the same time, that doesn't cancel out the responsibility of those who willingly did what they did.

It's just like when Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. In Genesis 50.20, Joseph, said to his brothers, *“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”*

See: Here we have *one and the same event*. In the hearts of men—evil. In God's great purpose—supreme and perfect good—*so that many people would be saved*.

That's just what we saw last week from John 12, *isn't it?* *“When I am lifted up from the earth,”* the Lord Jesus said, speaking of his crucifixion, *“I'll draw all people to myself.”*

It's precisely in this horrific death and victorious resurrection that God *all along* planned to bring about the greatest good of all—the *redemption of the world*.

3. And then there's the 3rd historical point Peter gives, in Verse 24: God raised this Jesus whom you crucified up from the dead.

Now, the first two things were well known. That Jesus performed miracles was widely recognized. And of course, that he was executed by crucifixion was also a known fact. But that last one about the resurrection will take some arguing.

And so, Peter points everyone to Psalm 16, verses 8-11, where King David talks about his hope in the resurrection: *You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.*¹¹ *You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

Basically, what David's saying there is that *although* he was going to die, he trusted that the Lord would raise him up from the dead.

But, there's *of course* a problem. When David died he stayed in the grave! He never rose from the dead. The fact of the matter is that David was buried and in his tomb, and *everybody knew it*.

So, in verses 30 and 31, Peter says David must have been writing this about *somebody else*. He must have foreseen by faith the fulfillment of the promise God made to him that one of his descendants would sit on his throne forever.

What he's talking about is 2 Samuel 7.12-13: *When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.*¹³ *He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*

And since Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of David, and since he rose from the dead, Peter declares that this passage from Psalm 16 was fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus. And so he tells them, verse 32, *"This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses."*

In other words: *"Hey, we're not just dreaming this stuff up off the top of our heads. We saw him risen from the dead! We went to the tomb and he wasn't there! And then he appeared to us! Even Thomas the skeptic believed after he saw and touched the wounds in his hands and side!"*

Now, here's what you have to understand: the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah isn't just a matter of speculation or imagination. It was *prophesied* in the Old Testament. And it was *confirmed* by eyewitnesses.

The tomb was empty, a body never produced, and more than 500 people saw him alive after he was crucified and dead. And what's more, those who said they saw him alive, risen from the dead, willingly gave their lives to spread that message.

People at times will give their lives for something that's false. But not for something they *know* is false. And the fact that the Christian Church is still around today confirms and further witnesses to the power of Jesus' resurrection.

Through centuries and persecution, we're here in this room as part of the *generations upon generations* of God's people whose lives testify to one simple *but world-changing reality*—A perfect man in the first century died the horrible death of a criminal, and *rose victorious* from the dead!

And so Peter goes on in verse 33: "*Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.*"

This is really the central point Peter's been working toward. The people, remember, were amazed and perplexed at this outpouring of the Spirit. And so Peter declares to them that it's this crucified and resurrected Jesus who was the reason for what they were seeing that day with *their own eyes*.

In other words—The apostles and many others were all witnesses of Jesus' resurrection. And now these people Peter's talking to were witnesses of its effect—the last days outpouring of the Holy Spirit!

Now, in the Western church, we can tend to focus on Jesus' crucifixion. And that's *not necessarily* bad. But what we have to see is that the events from the resurrection of Jesus to Pentecost *aren't* just add-ons to the crucifixion—just a sort of proof to what Jesus did on the cross.

No, the resurrection of Jesus was *also* an essential part of our salvation. For, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15.20-22 that *Christ's resurrection* is the basis for *our own resurrection*:

“Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”

And what happened on Pentecost was that Jesus baptized his body with the Holy Spirit and applied to them the *resurrection power* of the New Creation. That’s why Paul goes on in 1 Corinthians 15 to tell us in verse 45, that in his resurrection, Christ *became life-giving Spirit*.

You see, the resurrection of Jesus *leads to* our resurrection because since he lives in heaven for us, and we’re united to him by the Holy Spirit and seated in heaven with him, *his very resurrection life* is at work within us who believe.

And in addition to the resurrection of the Messiah, foretold in Psalm 16, and the pouring out of the Spirit, foretold in Joel 2, the *ascension* of Christ was *also foretold* by Old Testament prophecy.

And to prove that Peter cites Psalm 110.1 in verses 34-35: *“The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”* And he basically does the same thing with Psalm 110 that he did with Psalm 16.

Because he says in verse 34, *“David did not ascend into the heavens.”* *The point?* Once again, David had to have been saying this about someone else, because David never ascended into heaven.

And all this leads to Peter’s concluding statement in verse 36, *“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”*

Now, remember, when he first mentioned Jesus’ crucifixion in verse 23, Peter pointed out God’s plan and the part the Romans played. But here in verse 36, he narrows the focus entirely on “You.” *“This Jesus whom you crucified.”*

He wants there to be no mistake about it — *You* are guilty. *You* are in a *precarious position*. And *You* need to *do something* about it! And so this leads right into the peoples' response in verse 37.

3. The Result (verses 37-47)

"They were cut to the heart." Why? ... Because they *knew* they crucified the Lord of Glory! The Jesus of Nazareth they were guilty of killing is their King and Messiah. And they knew that *whether or not* they were the ones to physically drive in the nails, it was *their sin* that led to Jesus' death.

And that might have led to despair. If it weren't for the fact of the *resurrection*. If Jesus had just remained dead, like David, Peter would be telling them it's all hopeless. It's over. Satan and sin and death have won.

But thanks be to God, friends, his crucifixion wasn't the end of the story. And *because he was raised*, there's hope!

And so, these people ask the Apostles, *"Brothers, what shall we do?"* And what does Peter say?

Verses 38-39: *"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.³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."*

There's hope! This was *God's purpose!* *Repent and be baptized* and you can have *your sins forgiven* and *you'll receive* the gift of the *Holy Spirit!*

And so, they were awakened to the reality of who Jesus is and what he did. And 3000 of them were baptized in one day.

And that promise wasn't just for the people present there that day. But note well verse 39, it was also for their children, as well as all those afar off whom the Lord would call to himself.

And you, sitting here today, are in that last category—*all who are far off*. Your sins led to Christ's crucifixion. Because it was the sin of all mankind that was embodied that day as the Jews and the Romans conspired to put the very Son of God to death.

Have you repented and been baptized? Have you resolved to live your life for Jesus out of thanks for what he's done for you?

You see, if you want to have your sins forgiven and eternal life, there's *only one thing* you can do—repent of your sins and believe the *wonderful news* that Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead to forgive your sins, and is now both Lord and Savior.

And then in verses 42-47, we see the sort of community that's created by God's word and Spirit—the community of the New Creation. These are the same people who received Peter's message about Jesus' resurrection and were baptized.

They've believed in Jesus, they've been baptized in his name. And now we see that their new faith isn't just an individualistic thing. It's not just believing one day and then going your merry way.

Because part of what it means to be a Christian is to be a member of the body of Christ. To be united to Christ is to be united to his people.

And in verse 42 we see that the life of this infant church consisted of 4 specific and quite unextraordinary things. Devotion to 1. The Apostles' teaching, 2. The fellowship, 3. The breaking of bread, and 4. The prayers.

1. The Apostles' teaching. They devoted themselves to the word of God—to being taught the doctrine of the Apostles, and studying the Scriptures together.

It's no mistake that this is first on the list. It's the word and Spirit of God—*specifically* this message about Jesus' death and resurrection—that creates the church.

2. The fellowship. As the community *created* by God's word and Spirit working through the teaching of the apostles, they lived lives of mutual love and generosity with one another.

3. The breaking of bread. This is specifically a reference to the Lord's Supper. But it goes hand in hand with fellowship. Because the *hospitality* the Lord shows us at *His Table leads to* our hospitality to one another.

Because notice that verse 46 says that they also broke bread together in their homes and received their food with glad and generous hearts.

4. The prayers. They were united together in prayer. And set times of prayer were part of the regular rhythm of their lives.

These four things formed the basis for the life of this New Creation community we call the church. They aren't necessarily extraordinary. In fact, they're really quite ordinary. But these people gave up *everything* in order to *devote* themselves to them.

But then the ordinary *led to* to the extraordinary. Verses 43-45: *And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.*⁴⁴ *And all who believed were together and had all things in common.*⁴⁵ *And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.*

People were in awe. Signs and wonders were done by the Apostles. People were *dramatically changed*. And the Lord added to their number daily. This was the result of their devotion to Christ, which *at its core* is pretty simple—devotion to the Word, fellowship, and worship.

Now, we don't have Apostles anymore. But we do still have all those basic things the Lord gave us for our growth in grace and in the community he established. We have the word, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers.

And so, the question we need to ask is, *where are we* as a church in our *devotion* to those things? Are we *devoted* to *God's word*? Are we *giving generously*? *Breaking bread* here and in our homes with glad and generous hearts? Are we living our lives for the good of each other?

If we are, then we can be confident that the Lord will bless us in his appointed time. Sure, there aren't any apostles among us, so we likely *won't see* all kinds of signs and wonders.

But let us devote ourselves to the ordinary means of grace. And let us receive our food with glad and generous hearts. And let us live *self-*

sacrificial lives for the good of our neighbors and for each other. And our lives will bring glory to God, and favor with people. And *as that happens*, we can have confidence that the Lord will bring the increase.

And so, *brothers and sisters*, as the Lord Jesus works his resurrection life *in and among us*, to make us more like him, let us strive and hope and pray that that life would overflow to all those with whom we come in contact. So that when people see us they might have a foretaste of what the *resurrection life* of the New Creation is all about.