

Acts 2: an explanation of events

David Flatt

The disciples of the resurrected Lord had been anxiously waiting in Jerusalem. They were told they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit and bear witness of Jesus to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:7-8). Finally, the day arrived and the Spirit came rushing into Jerusalem on the feast of Pentecost.

The scene Luke describes in Acts chapter two may be vaguely familiar to students of the Bible. The ancestors of the Jews had once come together for a much different purpose. On this occasion, God confounded their language and dispersed them throughout the world (Gen. 11). Now, they had reconvened and became united in language through the Spirit. God was in the process of uniting the world by faith in the Messiah.

Peter began to preach about the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. To do this, Peter put his message in a historic/Scriptural context. First, he explained how this day of the Lord had been prophesied by Joel (Acts 2:14-21). The Jews were aware that they were living in a story that had yet to be finished. The Old Testament pointed to a future fulfillment through the Messiah. The time for fulfillment had arrived.

Second, Peter invoked the name "Jesus of Nazareth." Of course, these strange and unusual events would be connected to Him. Peter told the audience of Jesus's miracles, death, and resurrection. Jesus had conquered death. To prove his point about Jesus defeating death by His resurrection, Peter explained Messianic prophecies given by David in the Psalms (Psa. 16, 110). Also, he connected the resurrection of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7).

Then, Peter levied a biting accusation: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). Jesus of Nazareth was unquestionably the Messiah. He was the One anticipated by the prophets and hoped for by generations of Jews. With this new realization, panic ensued: "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).

This question was asked in desperation. Did the people truly think there was an answer? What hope did they have if they killed the Messiah? Surely, they would incur the wrath of God. Yet, there was good news: a hopeful answer. Peter responded, "...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. 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" (Acts 2:38-39).

By repenting of their sins and being baptized in the name of Jesus the Messiah, they could receive remission: the Spirit's gift of salvation. And there was more. The promise of salvation was not just for them. The promise was for their children and the rest of the non-Jewish world.

Those who received Peter's message were baptized. About 3,000 people were baptized. For any who want to receive the remission of sins today, they must repent and be baptized.

Peter's message was an expository sermon of the highest order. There was not a rabbi in Israel who had ever explained the Scriptures like this. Truly, this sermon was the result of divine inspiration.

The Aftermath

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47).

This was an exciting time for the believing Jews in Jerusalem. Their lives were changing. They received remission of their sins. They were added to the Church. Yet, they did not simply return to life as it was before they obeyed the Gospel. They were devoted to one another. They worshipped together. They were learning together. They were sharing time together. A new forming belief in Jesus was beginning to bond them together as God's family.

We may be tempted to romanticize the church in Jerusalem. While much good was being accomplished, life for these Christians became extremely difficult. Unbelieving Jews persecuted them. One of them was stoned to death (Acts 7). The Sanhedrin Council quietly conspired with a zealous young man to persecute Christians throughout the region (Acts 8:1-4). In time, Christians in Jerusalem would be expelled from the city. As the world began to turn against them, their relationships would become vital to their perseverance.

Building Up One Another

Today, there is a misconception of independence among some Christians. They think they can be Christians alone, without the local church. They do not participate in a local church. Others view the local church as a place to go rather than people to encourage. They do not know the people with whom they worship. They do not know their brothers and sisters in Christ. They do not know their names. They do not know what is happening in their lives. There is little to no relationship.

God formed the local church to bring Christians together to worship Him and encourage one another. Christians need each other. We are to help each other grow in Christ. We are to help each other get to Heaven.

This Wednesday night, we will meet for Bible study at 7 P.M. We will be discussing the subject of “Building Up One Another: pursuing love in the local church.” This study is intended to reinforce Biblical principles regarding our relationships as brethren.

A study like this is always needed in a congregation; however, this subject is especially timely due to the pandemic. We have been impacted by isolation to varying degrees. I hope you will join us as we study how we can build up one another in the hope of Heaven.