

A Pentecostal Sermon

Acts 2:22-28

One of the things I did when I was a prison chaplain during my years in seminary was to schedule visiting preachers to come into the prison unit in order to lead worship services. Since I generally attended those services, I heard a lot of sermons that might well be described as pentecostal sermons. I would guess you might know what I'm talking about, referring to a great emphasis on the outward experience—the intensity and the volume of the preacher, even the elements of repetition of words and verbal interaction with the people listening. There was a lot of moving around, even running around; a lot of yelling and even screaming, a heavy influence of the emotions rather than the intellect, and a repeated and passionate call for an energetic response throughout the sermon. It was typically loud, rather unorganized, and deeply passionate in words and tempo and volume, all with the goal and objective of causing you to feel the presence and power of the Holy Spirit himself.

With that introduction this morning, I want you to notice the title of my sermon, as I will preach a pentecostal sermon. But it won't be like what I just described, with that huge emphasis upon style. Rather, this morning will be a sermon about a sermon, my sermon preached upon the text of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost.

Remember where we are in this book. God has poured out his spirit upon his church, so that all the nations of the world will hear the gospel in their own language. That great event happened on the 50th day following the passover, hence the name Pentecost, and it came in fulfillment of the great prophecy of Joel, quoted by Peter in...

v.17 “And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,

That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams.”

And the great emphasis is found in verse 21, namely the universal reception of the gospel. No longer did you have to become a Jew, a citizen of Israel, in order to be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. Rather, now, after Pentecost,

v.21 “And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved.”

And what we will see in the weeks to come is the great result of Peter's pentecostal sermon, by the blessing of God.

v.40 “And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” 41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.”

So what makes a true Pentecostal sermon? First,

I. A PENTECOSTAL SERMON FOCUSES UPON JESUS.

There has just been a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit. There are all sorts of people prophesying, and the gospel is being proclaimed in all sorts of foreign languages. And Peter begins to preach, quoting from the Old Testament prophet Joel. And this morning, we come to the focus of his sermon. His theme. His main point. His thesis, as we were taught in preaching class in seminary, to always have a thesis statement that summarizes the whole sermon. That's easy to identify here. It begins with these words,

v.22 “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know...”

It's all about Jesus, the focus is always upon Jesus. That's what a sermon is all about, any sermon. And that is certainly what Peter's pentecostal sermon is all about. The Apostle Paul would later emphasize the same thing,

1 Cor. 1:20 "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

In the very next chapter,

1 Cor. 2:1 "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

That's what pentecostal preaching is all about. That's what Christian preaching is all about, biblical preaching. It's not about the wisdom of the preacher, nor his gifts or abilities. It's about Jesus, and what Peter makes plain is the doctrine that would later be established and defined by the church in the early ecumenical councils beginning with Nicea in 325 AD. A focus upon Jesus means that you have to know something about Jesus, and above all else, you have to know two things. Two things that lay the foundation for all that Jesus came to do. First, that he is fully human. And second, that he is fully God. He is the God-man. Look at how Peter expresses that. He begins,

v.22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth..."

Why the reference to Nazareth? Because that is where he was from. He was born in Bethlehem, while Joseph was being counted in the census. But he grew up in Nazareth, and so he is identified by his hometown. That was very common and understandable. And the emphasis of that is rather obvious—it is a reference to his humanity, to his human existence and identity.

A. Jesus is fully human.

Remember what Mary and Joseph were told about their son?

Mat. 2:19 "Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." 21 Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. 23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

And so the reference in,

Mark 1:9 "It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan."

And of course,

Luke 1:26 "Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"

Luke 2:39 "So when they had performed all things according

to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. 40 And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.”

So Mary and Joseph were from a city of Galilee named Nazareth. Thus that city emphasizes Jesus’ human origin and identity. And Peter emphasizes that as he preaches the gospel on the day of Pentecost. Jesus was a man. But also,

B. Jesus is fully God.

He is a man, but is a man shown to be God, attested by miracles, signs and wonders!
v.22

So there is much doctrinal content to Jesus’ identity, and when Paul “determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified,” that didn’t mean there wasn’t content to be proclaimed and explained as he preached. Preaching Jesus must include both proclaiming his humanity and his deity, and as we read in our Shorter Catechism answer to question 21: “The only redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continues to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever.”

We read of Jesus’ identity frequently in the New Testament, never with more emphasis than in the book of Hebrews, which begins with these words,

Heb. 1:1 “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had

by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”

But not only is Jesus “the brightness of [God’s] glory and the express image of His person,” he is also a man sympathetic to our human weakness. So we read,

Heb. 4:14 “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. 5:1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness.”

Jesus was both God and man. Faithful, biblical, apostolic and pentecostal preaching must begin with that focus. And then, there must be a focus upon Jesus’ death.

II. A PENTECOSTAL SERMON FOCUSES UPON THE DEATH OF JESUS.

Jesus died! That’s the point of his incarnation. That’s the foundation of the whole gospel—Jesus died, he died for my sins. He died as the atoning sacrifice for my sins. So we have Peter’s words here,

v.23

When Paul would later express the gospel, he writes this, 1 Cor. 15:3 “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also

received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures...”

That’s the gospel. “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” Christ died to satisfy the penalty and punishment which our sins had earned, for the wages of sin is death. Jesus died to fulfill the requirements of justice, to satisfy the demands of the law. And the expression of that idea is never clearly than when Isaiah prophesied,

Is. 53:3 “He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

Note what Peter says about Jesus’ death. First, clearly, it was the sinful act of sinful men. It was evil and wicked, in a sense more wicked than any other act ever in history. So Peter says to his Jewish audience on this day of Pentecost, verse 23, “you have taken [Jesus] by lawless hands, have crucified [him], and put [him] to death.” You did it. You are guilty and therefore worthy of condemnation. Later, in Acts 5:30, Peter even proclaims to his Jewish audience this about Jesus, “whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.”

A. Jesus was put to death by lawless and sinful men.

There is no question about the responsibility borne by those who were guilty. “You have taken [him] by lawless hands, [you]

have crucified [him], and [you have] put [him] to death.” But notice what else Peter says about Jesus’ death, and I often refer to this when the whole question of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility is raised, how they fit together. And while I might not be able to fully explain the relationship of those two things in a way that satisfies everyone, I find the example here very satisfying intellectually and even logically. First, Jesus’ death was a sinful act done by sinful men who will bear the responsibility for their sin.

And yet, completely consistent with that, Peter makes it clear that,

B. Jesus was put to death according to the predetermined purpose of God.

There are some helpful explanations for how those two things fit together, namely that God is the ultimate purpose, the ultimate cause of all things, having ordained all things that come to pass. But, in bringing all things to pass, according to his own eternal purpose and decree, he uses means. He brings his eternal purpose to pass according to the decisions and actions of responsible people. Fallen men are responsible for their own actions, and in the immediate sense, things happen according to what we do or don’t do. In an immediate sense, God is the ultimate or first cause of all things. But our actions are the immediate cause, or second cause, of those same things. So if you go out in the rain, you will get wet! If you run out into the street, you will likely get hit by a car. And you are responsible for your own actions.

If you kill someone, you are guilty of sin. And yet, Peter doesn’t hesitate to emphasize,

v.23 “...Him [Jesus], being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless

hands, have crucified, and put to death.”

Are they responsible for their sinful actions? Yes, of course. Were their sinful actions part of God’s eternal purpose, his “determined purpose and foreknowledge.” Why, yes!

The apostle Paul says it plainly when he writes in Ephesians 1 of “the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.” There, Paul is attributing our salvation to that predetermined purpose of God, as the whole verse is this,

Eph. 1:11 “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.”

Just a few verses earlier we read,

Eph. 1:4 “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

So that eternal purpose of God and the good pleasure of his will applies to both our salvation and to those who crucified Jesus. God “works all things according to the counsel of His will.” And clearly, Jesus’ death was not only a part of that predetermined purpose and will, it was the very heart and center of it! Paul speaks of the revelation of the mystery of the gospel to him this way, noting that,

Eph. 3:9 “...[God] created all things through Jesus Christ; 10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, 11 according to the eternal purpose which He

accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

God created the world so that he could and would show the mercy of his grace through the human life and death of his son Jesus.

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

So a pentecostal sermon must focus upon the death of Jesus. But also,

III. A PENTECOSTAL SERMON FOCUSES UPON THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

Jesus’ death, by itself, is not the gospel. Jesus didn’t die as a martyr, nor merely as a good example or motivational encouragement for us to follow. He died to satisfy the demands of God’s justice, but he didn’t remain dead. He died for our sins, “delivered up because of our offenses,” as I read earlier in the service from Romans 4. But that verse goes on, as I read the gospel to you before, that Jesus...

Rom. 4:25 “...was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”

He was raised from the dead! That’s the foundation of the gospel promise, and Peter, in this pentecostal sermon, emphasizes at least three reasons why the resurrection is so important. First,

A. The resurrection demonstrates God’s power over death.

And so we read,

v.24 “...whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.”

It was not possible that death would win the victory of Jesus. Quite the opposite. Jesus wins the victory over death. And remember, death was the sentence pronounced by God upon Adam and Eve for their sin.

Gen. 2:16 "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

And, Rom. 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death."

Thus the promise of the gospel is the removal of that sentence of death in the promise of life! Eternal life.

1 John 5:11 "And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life."

God has given us eternal life, and the resurrection of Jesus is the deposit and guarantee of that great promise, the demonstration of God's power and victory over death itself.

1 Cor. 15:42 "So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. 45 And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit."

And Jesus' resurrection is the promise of the hope of our resurrection.

1 Cor. 15:48 "As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those

who are heavenly. 49 And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man."

Earlier in that great chapter,

1 Cor. 15:20 "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death."

"The last enemy that will be destroyed is death." Death is that last enemy, and Jesus' resurrection is the definitive proof of the death of death, the end of death. So that we who believe in Jesus can expect this great blessing,

Rev. 21:3 "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

Peter also notes that this great promise of the resurrection of Jesus fulfills the promises of the Old Testament.

B. The resurrection fulfills the promises of the Old Testament.

This has always been God's plan and purpose. And as we saw from the quotation from Joel 2 regarding the pouring out of the spirit, all of this was foretold by the prophets that came before

Christ. So Peter quotes Psalm 16.

v.25 “For David says concerning Him: I foresaw the LORD always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. 26 Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. 27 For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”

We’ll study Peter’s own explanation of that question next week, but let me read now,

v.29 “Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, 31 he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.”

Indeed, God did not allow his beloved son to see corruption in his flesh; God did not abandon Jesus in the grave, in Hades. Rather, God would raise him from the dead. And it is that resurrection that gives us hope today.

C. The resurrection establishes the hope of everlasting life.

And so says David, noting the resurrection of Jesus,

v.28 “You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.”

“The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.” And so, for us who believe, the gospel is the way of life. The promise of life is what brings us the fullness of joy, even in this world where death still reigns.

So this is the message of pentecost. This is the message of the gospel, that Jesus “who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised [for the sake of] of our justification.”

So whenever you confront the reality of death, whenever you feel the sting of the pain of suffering in any way, remember the promise of the gospel. And believe it!

1 Cor. 15:54 “So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” 55 “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” 56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 John 5:11 “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has life.”