



Central Peninsula Church

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A Sermon That Won 3,000 Souls

SERIES: *Acts: The Rest of the Story*

About 90 years ago, a 26-year-old college student in Wales named Evan Roberts got permission to leave college and return to his home village of Loughor to preach his first sermon. Seventeen people showed up to listen to his sermon, so one could have predicted the impact. Within three months 100,000 converts had been added to the churches of Wales. Five years later a book was published that tried to debunk the revival. The main point of the book was that of the 100,000 people added to the churches, only 80,000 remained after five years! That same revival also jumped the ocean and spread to America. Many think that was the last national revival we've seen since 1905.

But I am not so sure. In the 1970's something like that was happening in California. It's been called the Jesus Movement. I was a part of that and perhaps some of you were as well. I wasn't raised in a Christian home, but when I was 17 I came under deep conviction of sin. I began to search everywhere for some relief to what felt like a massive spiritual vacuum in my life. One night, the immense weight of guilt that I felt drove me to my knees where I begged Jesus Christ to forgive me. He did and I knew it. A week later, on a Sunday night, someone brought me to a church. The large building, which resembled a gutted Safeway store, was packed to the gills, mostly with people my age. The moment I entered I knew that these people had experienced the same thing I had. People stood up to confess their sins and prayed for one another. I don't know if that was a true revival or not, but it felt like it to me. It was like a giant tsunami wave of the Spirit was passing through, sweeping up everyone that got in its way.

I. On the Day of Pentecost, 3,000 souls were added to the church.

That must have been how the earliest Christians felt on the day of Pentecost. After they got done listening to Peter, Luke reports in v.41 that **"there were added that day three thousand souls."** On a big Sunday, we have 1,500 people here at CPC. So on that day, twice that many people—who formerly were lost in sin, blinded by the enemy, separated from God—turned from sin, put their faith in Christ, and were added to the company of God's people.

Sometimes we look at what happened on that day and get very excited about the miracle of speaking in tongues. And it was an amazing miracle! When the

Spirit of God fell, all of a sudden uneducated Galileans became linguists! They began to speak in real languages formerly unknown to them. Those who had come to Jerusalem from all over the Mediterranean world to celebrate the Jewish feast of Pentecost were stunned to hear them speak of the mighty deeds of God in their own languages. We look at that and we want to duplicate that today. But, as amazing as that was, that wasn't what really convinced those people. There were some other things at work that day that were far more instrumental in the salvation of those 3,000 people.

II. The messengers need to be empowered.

Perhaps the most amazing miracle was the transformation of the messengers. Jesus had told them to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. He promised that when the Spirit came he would empower them to be his witnesses. And they really did need that power. It wasn't much more than a month earlier that those closest to Jesus had completely flopped. Remember in the garden of Gethsemane how Jesus was deeply troubled and he asked his disciples to just stay awake and pray for him? And yet they had fallen asleep. Then when the Roman cohort came with the chief priests to arrest Jesus we're told that **"they all left him and fled"** (Mark 14:50). And then of course just a few hours later, Peter, the one disciple you would think Jesus could count on, denied that he even knew him three times. We think of these men as so sturdy, but they were as self-protective and weak-kneed as any of us.

And here on the day of Pentecost, they're back in the same city of Jerusalem where Jesus was put on trial and crucified as a worthless criminal. They're in just as much danger as Jesus had been. How is it that we see them standing up before this crowd and boldly proclaiming the truth about Jesus, even going so far as pointing the finger and saying, "The One whom God endorsed, YOU nailed to a cross"?

I think that's the greatest miracle that happened on that day. And the answer is not simply that they had seen the risen Christ. Certainly that had blown their minds and gotten them real

excited. But that wasn't enough. That's why the risen Christ told them to wait. It was only the Holy Spirit that could give them this kind of boldness. Luke says in v.14, **"But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: 'Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.'"** We know that these were not courageous men; these were men filled with the Spirit.

If we're going to see the same kind of thing happen today, if we're ever going to see something like revival in our church, or our community, or our nation, it will not be because of our own courage, or ingenious planning, or slick programs, or effective training. It will be because the Holy Spirit has done something in our lives.

I have to tell you I find this to be a hard thing to preach on because people inevitably want to know HOW. How can I catch the wind of the Spirit? And the answer is what I said last week. You can't catch it, but he can catch you. And like a sail boat you can have your sails unleashed and ready so that when the Spirit begins to blow you'll be ready. I think you do that by praying for it, by being in his Word and doing the things he tells us to do, and by cleaning out the gutters in your life.

But that's not the only thing that was going on that day. The messengers needed to be empowered, but I want you to also notice that they utilized a certain method.

III. The method needs to be utilized.

I want you try to imagine this scene today. The 120 disciples are aware that a huge crowd has gathered round them. Some of them are amazed and asking all the right questions, while others are mocking them and accusing them of being drunk. Most of them are total strangers, many from out of town. I could see someone today saying, "You know, we really shouldn't preach to these people. I mean, they're not going to listen to us. We really don't know them well enough. We ought to really try to build a friendship with them first. We ought to really get to know them. And they're all so different. What will work for one may not work for another. Let's divide up and disperse among the crowd and find people we really relate to. Let's invite them to our homes and get to know them before we give them the message. No one likes to be preached at, especially by a total stranger. Let's not rush things."

But that's not what they did, is it? The method that was used by the Holy Spirit to convert these 3,000 souls was simply what we call preaching. "Preaching." How do you feel about that word? It's not a very post modern word, is it? It's not very cool.

Perhaps part of it is that many of us are afraid of it. I've heard that the number one reason people don't graduate from college is that they cannot muster up the courage to take the required speech class. But it's more than that. It's the idea that someone should presume to tell us what to do; to tell us what is right and wrong, true and false. We feel that there is a kind of latent hypocrisy in anyone speaking like that. Who gives them the right to speak with that kind authority? Who gives anyone the right to tell me what to do?

But if you read through the book of Acts you'll see that Luke includes at least 19 major speeches, what we call preaching. That's about 25 percent of the book of Acts! Most of them are given by either Peter or Paul, but there is also a rather long one by Stephen, and another by James. Most scholars agree that Luke didn't record these speeches verbatim, but rather gave a kind of condensed summary of what was said. This particular sermon by Peter would have taken only three minutes. Now as much as we might welcome a three minute sermon, I can't believe that more wasn't said! I'm encouraged that Luke adds later in v.40 that with many other words (Peter) testified.

But the point is not the length, the point is the method. Regardless of the length, a good speech can turn us inside out. We ought to know that as Americans: Lincoln's Gettysburg Address; Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream." And so it is that God uses preaching. Not everyone is gifted and called to preach, as Peter did here. Few believers will ever get up in front of this many people and preach the gospel, but it's still the way God works. Most of you will do your preaching in snippets, you WILL build relationships, you WILL earn the right to be heard. But whatever you do, don't underestimate the power of the spoken gospel in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Paul said it in the book of Romans, **"How will they believe in him whom they have not heard? How will they hear without a preacher?....So faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"** (Rom.10:14b,17).

For some, that strikes fear in your bones because you don't know what to say. This brings me to the third thing that was instrumental that day in bringing these 3,000 to faith. Not only were the messengers empowered and the method utilized, but these Spirit-empowered messengers proclaimed a life-changing message.

IV. The message needs to be recovered.

What we have here is the first ever sermon of the Christian era. If we ever wondered what the earliest Christians preached, we have it right here in Peter's speech. In a nut shell you could say that the message Peter preached and the one we're to preach is the gospel. But I want you to notice that there are four things that this includes.

A. Gospel witnesses: First, the message includes gospel witnesses. The witnesses are the writings of the Old

Testament. I studied preaching and one of the things they always tell you is not to include too many long quotations because they're often boring and hard to follow. Well, Peter breaks that rule with great abandon! One thing you can't miss about this sermon is that more than half of it is quotation from the Old Testament. He starts out and quotes from the prophet Joel in order to explain what was happening with the gift of tongues. He even brings in a little humor in v.15, "These men are not drunk as you think; why it's only 9:00 in the morning. They haven't had time to get drunk!" And from there he shows how Joel predicted that a time would come in the last days when God would pour forth his Spirit on all mankind.

"But this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: "AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS," God says, "THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT and they shall prophesy AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW, BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE. THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME. AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED"" (vv. 16–21).

Notice how Peter assumes that they were in the last days. The "last days" was a term that referred to the time when the Messiah came. So for us they extend from the time of his first coming to the time of his second coming. Some of these things Joel talked about would take place at the *start* of the last days, like the Spirit being poured out. But some of them would take place at the *end* of the last days, like the sun being turned into darkness and the moon to blood. But the point of all of this is that for these Jews at Pentecost the outpouring of the Spirit was powerful proof that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

B. Gospel events: Second, the message includes gospel events. And the focus here is on the life of Jesus.

1. His life: In v.22 he talks about the life and ministry of Jesus. **"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know--"** He was attested by God through his miracles. These acts were God's way of saying, "This is the One. This is my Son. This is the Messiah. Listen to him!"

2. His death: Then in v.23 he talks about the death of Christ. **"...this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death."** He attributes the death of Christ both to the

wickedness of men and to the purpose of God. He wants them to know that "the One God attested to, you killed."

3. His resurrection: Then he goes on and starting in v.24 talks about his resurrection. **"But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power."** That word "agony" means birth pangs. The idea seems to be that like a mother who just had to give birth, death couldn't hold Jesus; he had to be birthed in resurrection. He goes on and in vv.25–28 he quotes from Psalm 16 to show that this had been prophesied in the Old Testament through David. Peter says David wrote things that couldn't have been about himself. David said, "You will not abandon my soul to Hades (the grave); nor allow your Holy One to undergo decay." This is about the decay of a body in a tomb; decay that won't happen. But how could David say that about himself? David's body did see decay. Peter says in v.29, "His tomb is here to this day. You can walk right over and dig up a few of his bones if you want." So what was David talking about? He must have been speaking as a prophet, looking ahead to the Messiah, whose body would be raised up.

4. His exaltation: And then the last gospel event he refers to is the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God.

"Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: "THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, 'SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.'" Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified." (vv.33–36).

I love how straight he shoots. He says in v.36, **"The one that God has exalted as Lord and Christ, that's the same one YOU crucified."**

Do not miss the radical Jesus-centeredness of this sermon. At the heart of it, it's about him; his life, death, resurrection and exaltation.

C. Gospel conditions: Third, the message includes gospel conditions. After Peter is finished preaching, listen to how the crowd responds. **"Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of**

the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" (v.37). That's what happens when Spirit empowered messengers proclaim a life changing message. People's hearts get pierced. They're convicted of their own sin. Their conscience is stricken with guilt. That's why we say you have to get the bad news before you can use the good news. The gospel means nothing until you know how desperately you need it. They knew they needed it and they asked what they must do. Peter responds, **"Peter said to them, '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'"** (vv. 38–39). Do you see the conditions? There's repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ.

1. *Repentance:* What is repentance? It means to turn around; to change your mind about yourself and about God; it means to change the whole direction of your life. You turn away from one way of thinking and living and you turn towards the Living God. That's the first thing.

2. *Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ:* The second condition is baptism. Now we know from other Scriptures that water baptism in and of itself doesn't save us. But baptism is symbolic of putting your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. It's a very important thing to do. For these Jews it would have been humiliating because they thought of baptism as only for gentiles who wanted to convert to Judaism. Why should they be baptized? But it was an important symbol of their faith in Christ. I meet Christians all the time, even in this church, who have not been baptized. I want you to know, that the idea of an unbaptized believer was basically an unknown thing in the New Testament. We demonstrate our faith by our actions, the first of which is being baptized.

D. Gospel promises: Fourth, the message includes gospel promises. In v.38 he talks about two promises of the gospel: the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Isn't that what we need? We talk about the importance of addressing "felt needs" in our preaching. I think these are two of the greatest needs in our culture today.

1. *Forgiveness:* People desperately want the forgiveness of sins. We have things in our past that we want to get rid of; things we've done that we're ashamed of; things we've said, hurtful things; things that aren't true; things that have wreaked havoc that we wish we could just erase from our lives. We still live with many of the consequences of these

things. The worst thing of all is that they keep us separated from God. But the promise of the gospel is that God removes these things. This was the whole reason he sent his Son. He bore all of our sins and took our judgment upon himself so that nothing could come between us.

2. *The Holy Spirit:* But that's not the only promise. He also promises the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the promise of new life. This is the promise that he will make us into new people. This is the promise that we can change. Isn't that what we all want? We want to become the people we were meant to be. That's what the Spirit of God does. It says in Romans 2:7 that we all seek glory, honor and immortality. We belittle "glory-hogs:" but we all want glory. We all want honor. There is nothing wrong with wanting those things. Those are real needs. But how do we get them? Do we try to get them on our own? Or do we get them through the gospel?

CONCLUSION

Well, that day 3,000 people decided that they would receive those promises by faith. Luke writes in v.41. **"So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls."** Can you imagine what that was like? How long would it have taken to baptize all 3,000 of those folks? One by one. But that's the kind of thing that can happen when Spirit empowered messengers proclaim the life changing message of the gospel.

So let me ask you, have you taken hold of this message for yourself? Have you repented? Have you put your faith in Jesus Christ, symbolized by water baptism? Do you know that your sins are forgiven because of what Christ did for you on the cross? Has the Holy Spirit invaded your life and begun to change you and empower you? If not, let me encourage you to express your faith in Christ by praying this prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner. I believe You died for my sins and rose again from the dead. Right now, I turn from my sins and open the door of my heart and life. I confess You as my personal Lord and Savior. Thank You for saving me.

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