

Series: A Study of the Book of Acts – Sermon 4
Title: Principles in Presenting the Gospel
Text: Acts 2:14-38
February 7, 2016

I. Introduction

In our sermon last week we dealt with the first 13 verses of Acts 2, the account of the disciples in the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost. We saw the Holy Spirit had come on them with power, His presence was indicated by the sound of a great wind, the tongues of fire and the gift of tongues. As we ended last week a huge crowd was gathering in amazement trying to understand this strange phenomenon of each witnessing the disciples proclaiming the Word of God in his own language (2:13).

The noise that came from the Upper Room, had attracted a large crowd to the Temple courtyard. Very likely there were hundreds and hundreds of people crowding around the disciples hearing what the prophet Joel described as one of the most significant workings of God -- the initiation of the "last days" -- the pouring out of God's Spirit Himself. We saw how this created a great commotion, and the Jews were astonished to hear Galileans speaking to them in their own native languages. The Jews were "amazed and perplexed (v. 13)," some even accusing the disciples of being drunk. "They have had too much wine." The accusation was made that this was the result of too much alcohol.

There are any number of ways to go about studying this passage, all of which would be beneficial, but I want to use Peter's response to serve as a model for us in PRINCIPLES IN SHARING THE GOSPEL. There is much we can learn from how the Holy Spirit worked through Peter in laying before this crowd of curious listeners, the truth of how salvation is through Christ alone.

Before we begin we must realize that these principles are of value if they are applied, not simply written down somewhere and forgotten. Each one of us from time to time finds ourselves in situations where we were surrounded by a group of curious listeners. Some were more ready to listen than others. Peter's presentation of the gospel will help you, if you make it a point to apply what you learn.

"But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. (15) For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. (16) But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

II. There Will Always Be Those Who Ridicule What They Do Not Understand!

Whenever things get too serious, some try to avoid the reality by making fun. "This is just the result of too much wine." Can you see how what is done in the guise of a

mocking joke, is actually an expression of contempt for the things of God? You can see this kind of scene played out in any number of situations today.

- ❖ A high school student is explaining to some of his peers the implications of Jesus' life, death and resurrection after a thought-provoking sociology class when a few of them -- becoming uncomfortable -- verbally ridicule and make fun of him in order to squelch the discussion.
- ❖ A young nurse is told she has no compassion and is sarcastically taunted when she tries to give a Scriptural perspective on euthanasia to some fellow nurses working in a rotation in the geriatric ward.
- ❖ An auto mechanic in the car with three buddies going out for pizza after work is laughed into silence when he tries to share with them what God has done in his life.

This kind of mocking laughter could easily have crushed the enthusiasm of the disciples if it were not for the confidence they had through the Holy Spirit. Have you been the one who was laughed at? ... taunted? ... made fun of? ... shamed into silence? Then Peter's response to those who mocked him, will be of great help to you as you, seek to give a faithful testimony about your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

III. Questions Can Be One Of Our Greatest Sources Of Opportunity To Present The Gospel.

Certainly not every mocking comment is worthy of a response, but when there are ideas or explanations being made of some clear working of God that are false or misleading, it presents the believer with an opportunity to speak the truth!

The idea that what was going on here at Pentecost was the result of sinful drunkenness, was not only irreverent, it was foolish. The idea that 120 believers would all be drunk at 9 o'clock in the morning is rather absurd, particularly when drunkenness was a violation of God's commands.

Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, Peter the apostle, and former coward, is now speaking as an inspired prophet, and gives his first sermon to a huge crowd that had gathered. Peter's first sermon is notable; for its place in history (the first sermon in the age of grace post Jesus), for its results (3000 responded) and for its application (it is a model for gospel presentations today).

Peter begins by pointing out that which was prophesied by Joel is coming to pass, right before their very eyes through the events that were now transpiring with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

In Greek, the phrase translated by some of the modern translations as "this is what" was spoken, is literally "this is that," which was spoken (KJV), which is a technical formula used to describe fulfilled prophecy. This which the hearers had witnessed, the tongues of fire, the sound of a violent wind, the speaking in tongues, was "that" which was prophesied by the prophet Joel some 900 years earlier.

In verses 17-18, Peter states,

"In these Last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people"

Thus, with the fulfillment of Joel's prophesy in the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, the "last days" began. We have been living in the last days for two-thousand years, and we are now two thousand years closer to the end.

IV. We Must Know Our Audience.

These were devout Jews who knew God's Word. He takes his listeners from their level of knowledge and begins to expand upon it.

V. The Word Of God Is Our Only Authority.

In order to use Scripture to back up what we say we need to know it. Peter did not have the New Testament to draw from when he preached on Pentecost, but he did have the Old Testament. And not only did he have it, he knew it. Peter was able to share what the Bible said because he knew what the Bible said. That is why it is essential to have a working knowledge of the Scriptures. The kind of confidence displayed by Peter comes from being sure of the truth not from being able to predict what an opponent will say next.

Peter's audience knew the Scripture and so he used it to explain the current situation. The resurrection of Jesus needed to be explained in the light of prophecy. Peter first quotes Joel because Joel prophesied that there would be a pouring out of God's Spirit on the great day of the Lord. Peter then uses this to explain that these individuals were living in the "last days". What they were witnessing was a sign that God had begun His final acts of salvation!

Next Peter quotes their well-loved prophet-king, David. Understand that each of these Jews awaited the Messiah of which Scripture spoke. The problem was that their present earth-bound thinking could not see that Jesus was that Messiah. Psalm 16 is used here to let David (whom they respected as an inspired writer of the Psalms) do the convincing! It needed to be pointed out that David was not speaking about Himself but about the Messiah. The Messiah could not be held by death -- a truth readily accepted by the Jews. For the Jews, to be buried was the same thing as to "suffer corruption" and "descend to Sheol". Yet the evidence of David having died and been buried was right before them. Josephus, one of the earliest historians, attests to the fact that in the first century there remained a monument known as "the Tomb of David". This being the case, David was speaking prophetically of the Messiah. Peter points out that what was prophesied was fulfilled in Jesus. David was pointing to His resurrection.

VI. God's Way Is Not Just One Of Many Options Available.

Twice Peter demands that this crowd of Jews "listen". Verse 14, "Men of Judea and Jerusalem, ...give heed to my words!" Again in verse 22, "Men of Israel, listen to these words..."

When we speak the truth of the gospel message -- in whatever form that may take -- people must not get the idea that this is just one of many opinions floating around our society.

VII. We Must Be Willing To Tell People What God Says On The Hard Subjects.

Don't be afraid to call sin, sin!! Peter in v. 23 says that Jesus was "delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God" while at the same time saying that these Jews were responsible for "nailing Him to the cross and putting Him to death." Peter doesn't shy away from it just because it was a hard truth. It was the truth and still is, and as such we needn't be hesitant to say so when it is needed. We don't have to be able to explain all that God does. If we could, He would be a much smaller god than we would care to worship. We simply need to be willing to speak the truth in love.

VIII. We Must Look For Opportunities To Point Out To Others That God Is At Work In The World

We must become accustomed to pointing out to others that, "God is responsible for what you see going on around you." I say "become comfortable saying" ... because we don't have any problem believing it, we just have a problem making it a regular part of our conversation with unbelievers.

Six times, in eight sentences, Peter names God as the One at work in the events being discussed. Verse 22, "It was God who worked miracles and attested Jesus to them." Verse 23, "It was God who delivered Jesus up to death." In verses 24 and 32, "It was God who raised Him from the dead..." Verse 36, "It was God who made Him both Lord and Christ." When the crowds saw something unusual they were ready for an explanation. When questions are being asked as to the meaning and cause of current events in our day, we need to be ready with the answer, "It is God at work."

IX. Our Personal Testimony Is One Of Our Strongest Witnessing Tool.

In this case it is a corporate testimony as Peter represents the other believers, but he makes clear that he and the others were witnesses of Christ's resurrection. He does not attempt here to prove that God raised Jesus from the dead. He simply states it as fact and bears witness to it. He says that the resurrected Christ had appeared to him and the other disciples, Peter implies that if you doubt what I say, you can go and ask them.

"The remarkable thing is that not one voice is lifted in protest in this whole crowd of people. To me, one of the greatest proofs of the resurrection of Jesus is right here – that Peter could stand up in the city where these events had take place, a little over a month earlier, and tell this people that Jesus had risen from the dead and not one voice challenges him! They knew that the authorities could not produce the body of Jesus, thought they would have paid a king's ransom to have done so. The heard the wild rumors that spread through the city the Jesus was alive and appearing to his disciples from time to time. And there is not one voice who challenges what the apostle says."

This is the beauty of our testimony to God's work -- no one can deny it. Whereas we may not be able to always defend each point of doctrine, there is no denying God

has changed us at the core of our being. The key is to be consistent in word and action.

X. The Listener Must Understand The Need For A Personal Application.

Rather than just speak of what God had done in Christ's life, death and resurrection, Peter makes sure to include his listeners in the story. Verse 22 he says, "Jesus the Nazarene was a man attested to you by God..." You were there. You heard about the miracles. That ought to have brought about some positive response. Verse 23, "...but you nailed Him to the cross... and put Him to death." Each person had a hand in putting Christ to death, whether their voice was heard along with the multitudes crying "Crucify Him, crucify Him" or simply their sinful nature required that God's Son should die.

Verse 33, "having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear." Verse 36, "Therefore, let all the house of Israel (of which you are a part) know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ -- this Jesus whom you crucified." It would be hard to miss the point. He was speaking to you and including you in those responsible for Christ's death. As a hearer, you would not be able to leave that place without at least hearing that something was required of you because of your sin. This is something we must include in our message as well. We must leave the hearer with a sense that what they have heard requires action on their part!

XI. Make Sure They Understand What God Requires Of Them.

This was accomplished in part earlier in verse 21 by quoting Joel who had said, "It shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." He did not leave them without hope. When the crowds recognized the part they had played in the crucifixion of God's Messiah they cried out, "Brethren, what must we do? (v.37)" And Peter answered clearly, "Repent and be baptized...(v.38)"

But Peter didn't end there. There was one more factor that this crowd needed to hear and act on, and that was that Jesus is more than just the Messiah who had come to save... He is also Lord! Here Peter quotes Scripture again (v.34) -- this time Psalm 110, where God Himself calls the Messiah, "David's Lord" and invited Him to sit at His right hand. Even the great King David had a Sovereign! And that Sovereign was the same yesterday, ... is the same today, ... and will be the same forever.

Jesus, the Messiah must be recognized by every hearer of the gospel as not simply the One who can save us from our sins, but also as the One who has claim over our lives. We don't place our faith in Him simply because He has something to offer us, we place our faith in Him because we must! We may acknowledge His authority now voluntarily or we will do so involuntarily at the end of our days. Jesus is Lord whether men recognize it or not. It almost funny, if it were not so sad, to hear people dismiss the claims of Christ as though he were an option.

Points to ponder, 10 points to imitate!