

Lesson 4: Acts 2:22-47 Pentecost and Witness to Jesus

Introduction

Some crazy stuff is going on. Fire is resting on people without burning them up. The roaring sound of heavy wind blows through the building. Everyone talking at once in unharmonized cacophony. Men and women spilling out into the streets like an ecstatic drunken mob.

Except, not at all like an ecstatic drunken mob. There is no violence. There is no staggering around. What is going on? And as a crowd begins to gather at the scene, each individual begins to make sense of the noise. The speech is not unintelligible as it might have appeared at first. Each one hears a particular voice speaking directly to his heart or her heart in their own dialect, their mother tongue.

And they begin asking, what is this? What are they saying? They are speaking about the mighty works of God, and they're doing it in Greek, in Aramaic, in Persian, in Latin, in Egyptian which is weird, because they're all from Galilee. What does this mean? And then one voice rises above the crowd.

"Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is *only* the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel...(Acts 2:14b-16)"

Peter quotes from Joel to declare a new era. We have crossed from the Old to the New. These are the last days. What you are seeing is both a sign of the last days and an essential aspect of the New Covenant. This is the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the people of God to give us new hearts that we might live for God. Moses spoke of this new heart of New Covenant that the people of God might love the Lord with all their heart and soul (Deuteronomy 30:6). Jeremiah spoke of God putting his law in our hearts that the people of God might live for him (Jeremiah 31:33). And in John 14:16-31 Jesus connected the coming of the Holy Spirit with loving obedience of God.

All three prophecies promise that the Holy Spirit will have a powerful impact on the behavior of God's people. The Spirit motivates the heart out of love, enables a recognition of God's truth, and empowers the people of God to put that truth into practice.

That internal work of individual transformation comes into focus as we consider the new community that comes into being. There is another work of the Holy Spirit initially in focus at Pentecost. According to Joel, the Spirit will empower the members of the new community to prophesy. And according to Jesus the Spirit will empower them to prophesy about him. They will become his witnesses.

In the middle of the miraculous, the flames, the many languages, the people of God are proclaiming the mighty deeds of God. What mighty deeds are they talking about? If Peter's speech is an example, they are speaking of God's mighty deeds of salvation through the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. They are speaking of Old Testament promises being fulfilled in Jesus. Those are the mighty deeds Peter proclaims.

Jesus, in his teaching that night before his crucifixion, did not limit the work of the Spirit to the internal transformation of believers. That was the emphasis in John 14. But in John 16 the emphasis was on the Spirit's work in witness to the world. I am going to read a little longer section from that chapter in John because I believe Pentecost is an initial fulfillment of that promise. Listen to this. This is John 16:7-15.

⁷ "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. [That right there is amazing, isn't it? It is better for us that Jesus leaves earth, so that the Spirit might come work inside of us and empower witness to the world. It is better that he goes, so that the Spirit can come.] ⁸ And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; ¹⁰ and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; ¹¹ and concerning

judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. [The Spirit convicts the world, not us. We witness. The Spirit convicts.] ¹² I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. ¹³ But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. ¹⁵ All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose *it* to you.

In the mystery of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit willingly submits to the Son, just as the Son willingly submits to the Father. The Spirit does not come to bring focus onto himself but onto Jesus. While on earth, the miracles of Jesus led many to a false belief. They saw Jesus simply as a means to meet their needs. Jesus healed. Jesus fed. Jesus entertained. Jesus amazed. Sometimes the signs lead to a deeper knowledge of Jesus, to true faith. Sometimes not.

It is the same with the miraculous manifestation of the Spirit. The obvious problem is with the skeptics who scoff that these people are all drunk. That is clear unbelief. The more subtle problem comes with those who believe in the miraculous but are not led to faith in Jesus. If faith is all about what the Spirit can do for me or how the Spirit can make me feel, without challenging my moral behavior and pointing me to Jesus as my Savior, then my belief is not saving belief. Jesus said, “the Spirit will glorify me.” The Spirit points us to Jesus. That is the first test whether manifestations are from the Spirit. Do the miraculous signs serve to glorify Jesus, to quickly point us to the truth of who Jesus is?

That happened to this multitude gathered at Pentecost. They were initially attracted by wonders. As they crowded in, their ears began to hear a witness to the mighty deeds of God in their own language. Then Peter took his stand. He started by explaining the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit and immediately, with the prophecy of Joel, he turns attention from the Holy Spirit to Jesus.

In fact, Joel makes the transition for Peter. Here is the last verse from Joel in Acts 2:21, after speaking of the outpouring out of the Holy Spirit, “AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.” The Spirit of God is poured out and the people of God prophesy, so that people will see Jesus, turn to him in faith, and be saved.

Let’s look at how Peter develops this message in the rest of his speech and then we’ll consider the kind of community that begins to form in Jerusalem. The rest of the speech is in Acts 2:22-40.

Witness to Jesus

²² “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— ²³ 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. ²⁴ “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. ²⁵ “For David says of Him, ‘I SAW THE LORD ALWAYS IN MY PRESENCE; FOR HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND, SO THAT I WILL NOT BE SHAKEN. ²⁶ ‘THEREFORE MY HEART WAS GLAD AND MY TONGUE EXULTED; MOREOVER MY FLESH ALSO WILL LIVE IN HOPE; ²⁷ BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES, NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY. ²⁸ ‘YOU HAVE MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE; YOU WILL MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH YOUR PRESENCE.’ ²⁹ “Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ “And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT *one* OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, ³¹ he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. ³² “This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. ³³ “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. ³⁴ “For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, “SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, ³⁵

UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.”³⁶ “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”³⁷ 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?”³⁸ 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.”³⁹ “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.”⁴⁰ And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!”

Peter begins his witness with a set of claims. He then supports those claims with two Old Testament quotations, and he concludes by addressing the response of the crowd. Let’s break down the initial claims in verses 22-24.

Initial Claims (2:22-24)

First Peter identifies Jesus as a real man who is known by this generation of Jews and who was affirmed by God through miracles.

²² “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—

They had seen what Jesus had done. Peter is probably implying that God attested Jesus as Messiah, but he does not say that directly but that’s probably what he has meant, that God attested him. Peter then accuses this generation of crucifying Jesus, even though he had been affirmed by God. Peter brings together three players in the crucifixion in a very succinct sentence. God was involved, bringing good out of evil. You Jews present here right now were responsible. And you pressured the godless Romans, who became complicit by carrying out the crucifixion.

²³ 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.

That’s not the end, though.

²⁴ “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.

So, we have these claims. Jesus, the man, was put to death by you, the current generation of Jews in Jerusalem. And God raised Jesus from the dead. Those are the facts. Peter then quotes Psalm 16:8-11a to provide a biblical interpretation of the facts.

Supporting text #1 (2:25-33)

Luke uses the standard Greek translation for the quote, so it does not appear that Peter added or changed any of the phrasing. The context of this Psalm is a choice for life. That choice is set up as a choice between the God of Israel and the gods of the nations. That context fits great with this present moment as the Gospel of Peter will require the Jews present to choose between the God of Jesus Christ and a false Jewish god that would reject Jesus Christ. They are going to have to make a choice who is really God. In the Psalm, David chooses God, declaring, “Yahweh is the portion of my inheritance...I have set Yahweh before me continually.” Peter’s quote picks up with this desire to always be with God.

²⁵ For David says of Him, “I SAW THE LORD ALWAYS IN MY PRESENCE; FOR HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND, SO THAT I WILL NOT BE SHAKEN.”²⁶ THEREFORE MY HEART WAS GLAD AND MY TONGUE EXULTED; MOREOVER MY FLESH ALSO WILL LIVE IN HOPE;²⁷ BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES, NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.”²⁸ YOU HAVE MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE; YOU WILL MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH YOUR PRESENCE.”

The Psalm is spoken from the voice of David, but there is an indication that this Psalm is about someone other than David. Jewish interpretation recognized this as a Messianic Psalm looking ahead to the promised descendant of David. Peter agrees. In his speech, Peter explains the problem with seeing this Psalm as only about David. Verses 29-31,

²⁹ Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT *one* OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, ³¹ he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID HIS FLESH SUFFER DECAY.

David does not fulfill the promise of the Psalm. We all know it because we know he is buried. His tomb is here. David is dead. Who is the Holy One that overcomes death? In verse 30 Peter quoted 2 Samuel 7:12 that God would “seat one of [David’s] descendants on his throne.” That’s a prophecy about the Messiah, the Son of David. The Holy One of Psalm 16 is that greater Son of David. And Peter identifies him as Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one whom death could not hold. Verses 32 and 33,

³² This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. ³³ 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.

Peter says very directly what he is a witness to. He is a witness to the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead.

Peter has supported his initial claim that Jesus, the man, crucified by you, the people of this generation, was raised from the dead by God. Psalm 16 helps us understand those claims. Peter has also added three more claims. He has directly declared Jesus to be the Christ, which is the Greek word for, “Messiah.” He has declared that Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God. So not only raised but exalted. And he has declared that Jesus is the one who poured forth the Holy Spirit who is the source of these signs the crowd is now witnessing.

Peter then quotes a second supporting text. It’s the 1st verse of Psalm 110.

Supporting text #2 (2:34-36)

This is the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament. Peter simply follows Jesus’ own application of the text to himself. Here is how Jesus quoted the Psalm in Matthew 22:41-46.

⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question: ⁴² “What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?” They said to Him, “*The son of David.*” ⁴³ He said to them, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying, ⁴⁴ ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, “SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET”’? ⁴⁵ “If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?” ⁴⁶ No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question.

Peter quotes the same text - Psalm 110:1 - that Jesus used to affirm that Jesus is Lord over David. This is how Peter said it. Verses 34-36,

³⁴ “For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, “SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, ³⁵ UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.”’” ³⁶ “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”

This passage supports claim already made that Jesus is the Messiah and adds that he is more than Messiah. He is Lord, sitting in Heaven at the right hand of God.

Peter follows up these claims by coming back to the accusation he made in his opening statement. “This Jesus whom you crucified.”

Now if that is not bold, I don’t know what is. Just think about whom Peter is talking to. When Jesus told a crowd gathered in Jerusalem that they were slaves to sin, they picked up stones to kill him.

Eventually, they crucified him. I mean, just fifty days ago at the last feast in Jerusalem, a crowd just like the one Peter is talking to was crying out, “Crucify him. Crucify him.” And Peter stands up and tells them, “The one you crucified is the Messiah.” How is that going to end for Peter?

I will tell you what I think Peter is doing here with this accusation, “You crucified him,” why Peter doesn’t hold back. Peter is not inserting this accusation into his speech because he is getting back at the people for killing his Lord and friend Jesus. This is not stored-up hatred for these Jews in Jerusalem. He ended the Joel quote, “All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

They need to be saved. Saved from what? From the wrath of God. The penalty of sin is death. God is just. We are under a penalty of death because of sin. How can they be saved? By calling on the name of the Lord. But for this specific group of people, they have a very specific sin that prevents them from calling on the name of the Lord. We do not just go around telling every that they have crucified Jesus. And if we do, we don’t mean it literally. That is not one of the main points of our Gospel message. We tell them that they have sinned. And because of that sin they need a Savior. But this group of people is actually responsible for the crucifying Jesus. They crucified the Savior. They cannot be saved without repenting of that particular sin. Because if they don’t repent of that particular sin, they will not call on Jesus as Savior.

Peter is pointing to the heart of the matter for this particular generation of Jews in Jerusalem. You have got to change your mind about Jesus whom you crucified.

He is not shying away from their sin. You crucified the Messiah. Now, how are they going to respond? Are they going to pick up stones? Are they going to angrily reject Peter for shining light onto their sin? Are they going to reject him like they rejected Jesus? Are they going to crucify him? What is going to be the response of this crowd on this particular day in this particular place? Acts 2:37-41,

Response of the Crowd

³⁷ 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?”

Pierced to the heart? Calling the Apostles, brethren? But why are they pierced to the heart? It makes no sense. They heard Jesus teach time and time again. They saw Jesus do miracles - miracles that the Messiah was supposed to do. And they nailed him to a cross. They did not feel remorse then. They mocked him. They congratulated themselves.

But here, in this moment, they are the ones who are pierced. How? Is Peter a greater evangelist than Jesus?

Jesus said, “It’s going to be better for you if I go away because then I can send the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes, he will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment.” The Spirit will convict the world of sin: the sin of not believing in Jesus. He will convict the world of righteousness: the righteousness of Jesus affirmed by God through the resurrection. And he will convict the world of judgement because the physical and spiritual rulers of the world are under judgment of falsely condemning Jesus.

The Spirit’s work of conviction in the world does not pierce every heart. But on this day the Spirit pierced thousands of hearts. And they cried out, “What shall we do?”

³⁸ 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. ³⁹ 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.”

Repent and be baptized. Is that what we are to tell all people to do? This is our first Gospel sermon in Acts. We are going to look at several others. Peter’s words bring up the interpretation challenge I mentioned in an earlier lesson. Is this story merely descriptive, telling us what has happened? You know, this is just the way Peter shared the Gospel to these people? Or is it also prescriptive, telling us what we should do? Often the reality is a mix between the two. When we’re reading a narrative,

there are principles in Peter's speech that we should follow. But does that mean we should always do exactly as he did, using the same words? Should we be telling everybody, "You crucified Jesus?" It can't mean the same thing it meant for Peter because they literally crucified Jesus. Even if we mean it spiritually, we are changing what Peter was doing. You know that accusation was specific to his generation. So, do we call everyone to repent and be baptized or does that specific invitation apply only in this specific case?

As we look at more examples in Acts, we will be able to recognize patterns in the Apostle's witness that will help us recognize sound principles to follow in our own witness. I am going to consider here why Peter's words are appropriate for this situation. I'm going to leave the question of what we should do open for the moment until we have moved further through Acts and we get more examples to consider together. Right now, we're just going to consider Peter's call.

Let's consider the two calls to action separately, first repent and then be baptized.

The call to repent is literally a call to "change your mind." That is what the Greek word used here means, "change your mind." In the prophecy of Joel quoted earlier by Peter, the call to change one's mind was a call to change their mind about turning away from God and turning back to God. Change your mind about where you find life. Joel wrote, "Rend your heart and not your garments. Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil." So, for Joel that change of mind was also expressed in the sense of turning back, turn away from that, change your mind about that, and turn to this.

In terms of the Gospel, faith in Jesus and repentance from sin can really be seen as two sides to the same coin. They are not the exact same thing, but they go together. All people have turned astray and go their own way. All people. We universally turn away from God in our heart and will, and we turn to other things to find life. To repent is to reject our false idols of worship and salvation and control - the things we've turned to - and to turn back, in our minds, to God. To turn back in our hearts to him as the one who truly deserves our worship and is able to give us life. We have to change our mind about our sin. But then we also need to believe in Jesus as the solution. You see, those are two slightly different things. Judas seems to have repented. He seems to have changed his mind about sin. He repented of his wicked act of betrayal. He went and threw the money back at the steps of the Temple. He turned from that sin. But he did not turn to Jesus in faith. His repentance led him to despair. Peter, on the other hand, turned from his denial and reaffirmed his faith in Jesus.

We can use either term alone, we can just say, "repent," or we can just say "believe," with the understanding that that single term implies both a change of mind about sin and trusting in Jesus. So, technically, we don't call people simply to repent. We call them to repent and believe. And we do not just call people to believe without having repented. But when we use just one of the words - "repent" or "believe" - the implication is both concepts together, two sides of the same coin in salvation. And we will look at how this works later in examples of Acts. You know, do they always use the word, "repent?" Do they always use the word, "believe?" Or do they sometimes use one word and sometimes the other word, or sometimes both words?

Peter does not use the word, "believe", here but that does not mean the concept is absent. Peter inserts a call to baptism instead. He gives his listeners an act by which to express their belief in Jesus. Whether baptism is necessary for salvation and whether the call to baptism is a necessary aspect of our Gospel is an idea for us to consider as we go through the book of Acts and see more examples of the Gospel being shared.

In this context, a call to be baptized would not have been the part that challenged these Jews. Baptism was a recognized concept among this generation, and it wasn't solely a Christian idea. The word, "baptism," hasn't yet taken on a particularly Christian meaning. The audience would have heard the word in their own context. They may have thought of the ministry of John the Baptist who employed baptism as a commitment to righteousness. The word literally means, "to be immersed."

That is what they would have heard. They would have heard Peter calling them to be immersed as an act of religious commitment.

And all Jews, for some time, were familiar with the concept of ritual cleansing in pools of water. The idea is not literally taught in the Old Covenant, but it came to be part of Jewish practice. Ritual pools called, “mikveh,” had been used for at least 200 years before Christ and were placed throughout Israel, throughout Jerusalem, especially outside the Temple complex. Mikveh were pools with steps leading down into them. A small one was large enough for an adult to be immersed. They go down the steps and they can go down underwater, and often there is another set of steps to exit. Large public mikveh, such as the pool of Siloam mentioned in John, were also accessible to the people of Jerusalem. Anybody could go there, and enter in and be immersed, and come back out.

When the people ask, “What must we do?” If Peter says only, “Repent and be baptized.” That is not necessarily a significant barrier to these people. The “repent” part is because they have to repent of crucifying Jesus. Being baptized is not that hard. It sounds very similar to what John the Baptist called for. They need to repent, that is, change their mind about their sin, and they need to be ritually immersed. Not too hard.

The greater faith challenge for this audience comes with the words that clarify the call to be baptized. It’s not just, “Be baptized.” “Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” If you want to be forgiven, you must be ritually immersed in the name of Jesus the Messiah. Now, a name is a person’s true character. So, when Peter says, “in the name of Jesus,” he means according to who Jesus really is. According to the witness and teaching we are giving to you, as Peter has already explained briefly: according to Jesus as the Messiah, the Lord, the Holy One, raised from the dead, exalted, seated by the right hand of God. That Jesus. The Jesus David called, “Lord”. That Jesus. Savior. That Jesus. You have to change your mind about Jesus and be immersed in his name. That is, that you accept these truths. You believe who he is so much that you are willing to publicly, ritually enter the water for the forgiveness of your sins. And then you will be forgiven. Not because of the ritual but because of the act of faith. Because you have truly changed your mind about sin - the sin of crucifying Jesus - and have trusted that Jesus is who we are proclaiming him to be, and that he is your only hope.

Of course, there is the possibility that a call to baptism is going to be misunderstood. That someone might be tempted to believe that the ritual of baptism is a work that removes sin. But that potential for misunderstanding does not prevent Peter from using the challenge to be baptized as a powerful call to faith for this particular people who have the potential for understanding baptism as a statement of faith. It fits their cultural context.

Peter adds one more thing. The Gospel is not just about avoiding bad news. There is also good news. Peter goes on to announce, along with forgiveness, that the promise of the Holy Spirit will apply to all who do believe. He does not explain what he means by that, not exactly. Is he saying that they, too, will all speak in foreign tongues prophesying about the mighty deeds of God? Will it look just like for them how it looked for this group at Pentecost? Tongues is going to come up several more times in Acts, so once again I’m going to have to say we are going to pay attention to that as we go. I would say that the main idea behind Peter’s declaration is the internal transformation foreseen by Moses, Jeremiah, and Jesus. That’s what Peter has in mind. When you change your mind about sin and place your faith in Jesus, you will be indwelt by the Spirit of Jesus who will begin a work in you, so that something we didn’t have in the Old Covenant, but he’s going to begin a work in you so that you might love God with your mind and soul, and you will obey him out of gratitude, and you will be transformed. Peter is not promising tongues. He is promising new life. And we will see that in the description of the new community that follows. There is going to be transformation.

Peter says more than what Luke records for us here. According to verse 40, he kept on going, “And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation!’” Luke has given us the essence of Peter’s witness; his claims about Jesus, his

accusation against this generation, and his call for a response. Peter apparently went on and kept clarifying and kept preaching to the crowd with other words, but we have the essence of it and we have his call for a response.

And respond they did. Jesus prophesied the night before he died that his disciples would do greater works than he did. You know, he connects it to the coming of the Holy Spirit. I believe Jesus was speaking of the new life that would follow as people of every nation came to know Jesus: in number of people saved and in geographical distance, how the scope of the work; what the disciples do is going to go far beyond the ministry of Jesus, that is, in bringing people to saving faith. That's the greater work. Of course, when we think about it, it still is the work of Jesus, because it's Jesus active in these disciples through the Holy Spirit. They can't bring people to the point of conviction. They can't pierce hearts. Jesus, the Spirit of Jesus is doing that. So even these greater works are still the work of Jesus, but not the work of Jesus physically here on earth, but Jesus had to go and send the Holy Spirit so that this work can begin. So, these were the greater works. Jews and proselytes from all over Rome and all over Persia have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. Right here we have the first fruits of the greater work. Verse 41 even gives us the stats, "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls!"

These souls immediately began to form a new community. Remember, the true work of the Spirit quickly focuses on witness to the truth of who Jesus is and then results in life transformation. The Spirit is going to bring us to see Jesus, and in relationship with Jesus, change us. We see that in Luke's summary of what this newly born Church began to look like. This is Acts 2:42-47. We're going to get a brief look at this passage. This is going to be the conclusion of this lesson.

The Newly Formed Community

⁴² They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. ⁴⁶ Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Okay, so the thing that stands out most to me is sharing everything. That's a big idea to introduce at the end of a long lesson. How are we going to unpack that? What is going on? Fortunately, Luke is going to mention again this selling of possessions and this communal sharing, so we're going to wait until we get there at the end of chapter 4 to talk about what this means for us. So, I'm going to leave that part of interpretation for later. I will just point out here, at the beginning of the new community, the spiritual transformation of individuals brings out a change in the way they view material goods and in their concern for one another. Spiritual transformation has material effect. True faith in Jesus hits us where we live.

For now, since we're at the end of this lesson, let's break down this wonderful summary of the Church Luke gives us in verse 42. He recognizes four markers of this new community, and the heart attitude of devotion applies to all four. These early believers were devoted to the Apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. There is energy and commitment in the word, "devotion". They're not just doing these things. They're devoted to these things. Devotion implies an investment of time, a prioritizing. It involves the heart.

The first mark of this new community is a devotion, a prioritizing, a commitment to the Apostles' teaching. They want to learn the truth about Jesus and about the New Covenant. They need to know. How now do we live? What has changed? They don't have a New Testament, yet. So, what standard are they going to use for the theology of the New Covenant? They depended on the teaching

ministry of the Apostles. Jesus' promise in John 16:13, that the Spirit of truth would guide you into all truth, had a very specific application for this inner circle of disciples. Jesus gave the Apostles the responsibility of communicating, developing and recording New Covenant truth.

And how do the Apostles know these things? How does Peter know what he has just communicated to this crowd? Well, a big part of that answer is the Holy Spirit. Peter was led by the Holy Spirit in a very special, authoritative way just as Jesus had promised. But the Holy Spirit is not the only source for Peter's understanding. Remember, Peter spent three years sitting under the teaching ministry of Jesus Christ as he proclaimed truth about the Kingdom of God that had come. And remember what Luke said about one of the post-resurrection meetings Jesus had with the Apostles. Luke 24:44-46,

⁴⁴ Now [Jesus] said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day...

Jesus was Peter's Old Testament seminary professor. Now, Peter was inspired by the Spirit in his references to quote Joel and to quote the Psalms. But he also sat under Jesus as Jesus explained Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms. How does Peter know about this quote from Joel? How does he understand it? Well, Jesus taught it to him. Peter learned about the Old Testament's witness of Jesus from Jesus.

And we're going to see in Acts 6 the Apostles, when there's all this more work to do, they're going to stay committed to their unique ministry of the Word. They have learned from Jesus to be faithful to the Old Testament word and they have received from Jesus this responsibility to pass on the theology of the New. Their Apostolic teaching has been authoritatively preserved for us in the New Testament. Just like this early church, we are to continue to express devotion to Apostolic teaching. What that looks like for us is not listening to Peter and James and John preach. Our devotion is devotion to the teaching of the Bible.

The next mark of the new community, fellowship, seems best interpreted by the other three elements in the list. The Apostles' teaching is the ground of fellowship. So, fellowship is connected to the teaching. Jesus prayed in John 17 for a oneness among his followers. What kind of oneness? It's a oneness that would come as they are sanctified in the truth of his name. The unity of Christian fellowship depends on a shared devotion to Biblical truth.

We also connect fellowship to breaking of bread and to prayer. Breaking of bread here refers to more than enjoying dinner together. They enjoyed dinner together, we get that in the full quote, day by day they were breaking bread house to house, they are taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart. So that fellowship is enjoyed by eating meals together but that phrase, "breaking of bread," here includes something else also. As with the Passover, the symbolism of the Lord's supper takes place in a home around a meal. And as the believers are enjoying the meal, they break the bread and pass it around, and remember that they are unified through their faith in Jesus who was broken for them. And they also take a cup of wine and they pass that around, and they remember his blood poured out for the forgiveness of sin. So, the Lord's Supper, this remembrance, took place in the context of the fellowship of the meal. And which also included hangout time in one another's homes.

So, they experienced fellowship through the breaking of bread, and also through prayer. In Acts 3:1 we are going to encounter Peter and John going into the temple at the designated time for evening prayer. These new believers are going to pray together with other Jews at the culturally accepted time and place for prayer. They'll keep that up. The connection here in this list with the breaking of bread and fellowship suggest that we are talking about prayer beyond the normal Jewish custom times for prayer. So, this would be for us beyond Sunday morning. But they are praying together in their homes. And in fact, we have already seen this in Acts. In chapter 1 when Luke described the

Apostles, and the women disciples, and the family of Jesus all gathered together, what were they doing? They were gathered together devoted to prayer.

This is the story of Pentecost. On the day the people of God celebrated the birth of the nation Israel, God gave birth to a new people that we call, the Church. The Church was born through the witness of Jesus Christ empowered by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit worked to pierce hearts and change lives. The resulting community began to form in devotion to Apostolic teaching, fellowship, sharing the Lord's supper, and prayer. These are essential markers of a New Covenant community.

The enthusiasm and commitment of this new community will be sorely tested in the days ahead. Persecution is going to come. It's not that far off. And false teachers are going to follow. We see that through the letters. Division is going to happen. Christian communities have struggled with all this through history. Our Christian communities in our towns, in our cities, they are struggling. So, we ask, what should our commitment be to the pattern described here by Luke? Is this devotion and this commitment to teaching, and fellowship, and prayer, and breaking of bread, is this just an unachievable ideal? Or is this a vision toward which we ought to give our devotion?

Reflection questions

1. Read Acts 2:22-47. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What questions come to mind?
2. What claims does Peter make about Jesus?
 - a. List the initial claims in 2:22-24.
 - b. List additional claims in 2:25-33.
 - c. List additional claims in 2:34-36.
3. How does Peter use Psalm 16:8-11 to support his additional claims?
4. How does Peter use Psalm 110:1 to support his claims?
5. Pierced to the heart, members of the crowd asked, "What must we do?" How do you understand Peter's requirement for forgiveness of "repent and be baptized"? Is faith not enough? (Consider Jesus' response to "What must we do?" in John 6:28-40.)
6. How have you personally experienced the attributes of Christian community described in Acts 2:43-47?