

“The First Post-Easter Sermon”
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It is always interesting to hear the first speech after something momentous happens. These first speeches seem to set the tone for what to expect ahead, for what the priorities would be going forward. It could be the first speech of a coach with a team as they begin the season. E.g., I recall one of the first speeches Tony Dungy, who coached the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the Indianapolis Colts, gave his teams as they began the season, as a way of introducing himself, was to say that they would only hear him speak to them in the tone of voice in which they now heard him— i.e. they would not hear him yelling at them and causing all kinds of chaos! Sometimes this can be done in relationships that begin with people. E.g., I recall when Elena and I moved to Scotland we lived for a month or two with a kindly Scottish gentleman named John Campbell, and he sat us down the first day we arrived and set the ground rules for how we were to interact— he said, we can talk about anything except for two subjects, religion and politics. It is interesting to hear the first speeches on momentous occasions. And in our passage today we will see the first recorded sermon given after Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection which sets the tone for the message of Christianity.

READ Acts 2:22-38 (pp. 119-120)

CONTEXT: Jesus has just ascended into heaven and the disciples are meeting in Jerusalem and choose the replacement for Judas Iscariot— Matthias. On the day of Pentecost, about seven weeks after the resurrection, the disciples were in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit came on them in tongues of flames of fire and rested on them and they spoke in tongues, languages which others from around the Roman Empire knew. Peter gets up to explain what was happening here, and refers to a text from Joel where God’s Spirit would rest on His people. And he continues his sermon.

READ v 22. “Peter reminds his listeners of the historical Jesus and His power, which they themselves knew.” It is of interest that the historical Jesus of Nazareth did not get lost in the Jesus exalted to the right hand of God the Father. They remained one and the same. But not all scholars see the situation like this. E.g., I know of one New Testament scholar who believes it was the religious charismatic experiences of the early church that brought them to new truths about Jesus that did not go back to Jesus Himself— like the view of Him as divine. I think it is significant that when we can check the early church’s view on keeping Jesus’ words faithfully, we find the church did exactly that. E.g., in 1 Cor 7 and 11 we have quotes of Jesus by Paul on divorce and the Lord’s Supper, and the wording is very similar to what we have in the gospels. And what Peter reminds his hearers about Jesus is that Jesus was a man of miracles— “power, wonders and signs”. E.g, I recall the great skeptical New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann stating in one of his works that in the age of the electric lightbulb it is basically not possible to believe in miracles. But the early Jewish rabbis writing in the second century and beyond did not doubt that Jesus did miracles— they just ascribed them to Satan! Jesus was well-known by reputation as someone who did the miraculous. We need to decide whether to have a “hermeneutic of skepticism” (an interpretation method where much of the Bible is questioned, where we sit as

the Bible's judge) or a "hermeneutic of trust" (where we may question the Bible at times, but ultimately we trust it as God's Word to us).

READ v 23 and v 36. "Peter pulls no punches, but lays the blame for Jesus' death, albeit a horrendous death within the will of God, on them!" For the early audience of Peter, this must have been a hard message to hear! But of course it depends on the audience— are they receptive to the message? E.g., I recall hearing a sermon given by a white man who was from a Scandinavian country from what I recall when I was in Ghana; in the message he pointed to some fake, plastic flower they had on the altar at the church, and he told them not to be plastic Christians, who give the appearance of being like Christ on the outside, but on the inside were dead spiritually— a rather convicting message. But their reaction after the sermon was to ask this man if he would stay in Ghana and preach some more to them— they wanted someone like him to disciple them! We will see later in our passage that Peter's crowd largely resembled such an audience.

READ vv 24-36. "Peter proclaims that this was not the whole story, but God raised Him from the dead to a position of glory/authority! Cf. 2 Samuel 7:10-16; Psalm 132:11." Peter saw Psalm 16:8-11, a psalm by David, was not David talking about himself, but about one to come from his line, since David's tomb was known to them. Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 16.179-183. And Peter quotes from Psalm 110:1, another psalm of David, where Yahweh says to David's lord— whom Peter, and Jesus (Matthew 22:41-46), took to mean Jesus. What Peter is saying in essence is that the Jewish scriptures themselves give witness not only to Jesus' death but also to His resurrection and His now coming to authority! Jesus was down and out for all they knew, but that was not the end of the story. We all love such a story— someone beating the odds and overcoming seeming defeat. E.g., I recall one of my favorite quarterbacks growing up was Roger Staubach, and he would take the Dallas Cowboys from certain defeat to victory— like the so-called "Hail Mary" pass in the playoffs against the Minnesota Vikings,

which led Dallas to getting to the Super Bowl— and be beaten by the Pittsburgh Steelers. In a somewhat similar way, the Jewish audience listening to Peter about a month and a half after the crucifixion of Jesus are now hearing that Jesus is raised from the dead— and v 32, “of that all of us are witnesses”. What would the reaction of the people be?

READ vv 37-38. “Peter emphasizes that appropriate response to this Jesus: repent, be baptized, and receive.” It is amazing that the crowd was cut to the heart the verb *κατανύσσομαι* meaning “to be stabbed”, a striking verb to use to show how deeply they were moved by Peter’s message. Herein is the last part of the basic gospel message, and let’s pause and look at what it is. First, repent— to change your direction in life. Have you ever seen someone repent? E.g., I recall a man I knew who had become a Christian as an adult, and God changed his heart in a remarkable way— specifically in the area of his language and his marriage. The second, be baptized. Baptism is an outward show of an inner reality. It is as though the person takes a spiritual bath. E.g., I recall once when I finished the Crescent City Classic I eventually got home after going to the after-party, and I mentioned that I was thinking about taking a bath, and then one of my relative said, “Yes, you really need a bath Woody!” That is what happens when we are baptized— we really do need a bath, and the Lord is just the One to cleanse us from our sins from the inside-out! The third is receive-- the Holy Spirit. We discussed this a bit last week. The Holy Spirit is a Parakletos, our defense attorney, our advocate, our helper, the Spirit of Truth, and the One who will be with us forever. This Holy Spirit is a gift to us. Isn’t it great to receive gifts? E.g., I believe God recently gave me a gift— to have the ability and opportunity to be in the Top 500 of the Crescent City Classic race held last weekend— Saturday, Sunday, and Monday— for the virtual running of the race; my son Nathan talked me into running it last Sunday evening because since not many were signed up for the virtual race, the times were really bad— so I had a great opportunity to get in

the Top 500 and get a free race poster; so I ran it even though I had a sore knee which prevented me from preparing for the race and I got in the Top 500 with my name in the paper today—I was in 422nd place, and Nathan was in 402nd place! And to think that I have run the Crescent City Classic race about 15 times, always wanting to get in the Top 500 and never achieving that! God wants to give us gifts; He really cares about us. And Peter mentions God's gift to us—the Holy Spirit living in believers, the best gift of all!

“Do our lives show that we need this message now on a daily basis?” In many ways this basic message of the gospel—repent, be baptized and receive forgiveness of sins, and receive the Holy Spirit—we need to do every day. Let's live our this week in this way beloved.