

Preparing While Waiting For God

Peter's Pentecost Sermon

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Given 18-May-13; Sermon #1158

What is the longest you have had to wait for something? Anything come to mind? Was it an hour or perhaps a month? Maybe you waited for years. What did you do while you waited? Did it frustrate you? Did you try to hurry it up? Were you patient?

Waiting on God is a biblical virtue. It is associated with patience and resignation, submission, dependence, and contentment with a less than ideal current state. For example in Psalm 27, as the psalmist contemplates his vindication from God against his enemies, he directs himself to wait for the Lord.

Psalm 27:12-14 Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and such as breathe out violence. I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait I say, on the Lord.

Psalm 37:7 Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.

Lamentations 3:26 It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

Are we just chilling out and kicking back and doing nothing? Is that what we should do? Or should we be doing something in waiting? Waiting gives us the feeling that we should not be doing anything, that we should be relaxing and not worrying about anything, but that is not what waiting for God is all about.

In my last sermon, I talked to you concerning the book of Acts, up until the ascension of Christ, but this sermon is going to pick up where I left off in one sense, but it is not a Part 2. It is chronologically in order with the last one, but it is a different subject and emphasis.

The second half of Acts 1, deals with the disciples' waiting period prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit, and while they were waiting for the Spirit coming in a few days, all they

would have known was that Jesus Christ had been taken away from them into heaven and they were to wait for His second coming.

Acts is similar to the book of Joshua in that it is a bridge book. It is a bridge between the gospels, which describe the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and the epistles which unfold the life and nature of the church. Just as the book of Joshua bridges the period between the time of preparation in the wilderness and the time of settling down in the land.

At the beginning of Acts, we find a striking parallel to Joshua. After the Israelites had crossed the Jordan River into Palestine, we would have thought that it was time for them to immediately move against the fortified cities of the land when the citizens of the land were still unsettled by the Israelites unexpected passage over the Jordan.

You would think they would want to keep the momentum going. Is that not what a secular general would do? He would keep pushing ahead. Instead we find that God told them to wait and consecrate, that is dedicate, themselves. This took four days, and to cross the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they waited in Gilgal, where they observed the Passover, circumcised those who were born in the wilderness, and did a number of other things until the fourteenth.

This is similar to what we find in Acts. Instead of moving on directly to Pentecost, we find a waiting period in which God worked in the disciples to accomplish several important things. Today we are a people of action so we expect action. I think that is almost a banner that can be waved over this nation's head.

We expect action immediately. We would want the Holy Spirit to come at once if we were those people with a secular attitude. Keep in mind they did not have the Holy Spirit yet, but they did have the anticipation. The gospel should be preached right away but instead we find delay.

Sometime we find periods like this in our lives and they make going very tough. These are often the hardest periods for us to live through. We want to do something or, what is even more significant, we want God to do something. We find ourselves very impatient, especially if we have a disease or injury or some major trial that we are going through.

When God does not do anything we think things have gone wrong. That is usually what we think, things should be happening if I really am a Christian. Am I really on track with God? But that is not necessarily the case, as we find the longer we are in God's church and the more trials that have come and gone, or come and not gone.

This period of waiting was not however a period utter inactivity for those disciples after the ascension, it was a period of preparation, which is what waiting times are for. Sometimes in a period of waiting we can see preparation. Other times we cannot and God is doing things in our lives that we cannot see, or at least which we are unaware of, but God is always working in our lives whether we see it or not.

Perhaps He is developing our character. We seldom see that, either in others or ourselves. Sometimes we do and are encouraged by that.

The second half of Acts 1 shows the early Christians practicing obedience and fellowship, praying, studying the Scriptures, and choosing leaders in preparation for the ministry as their support of God's work.

This period was a time to practice obedience, and if we compare verse 12 with verse 4 of Acts 1, we find that what the disciples did in verse 12 was a direct response to what Christ earlier told them they were to do. Earlier Christ had said:

Acts 1:4 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "You have heard from Me."

We find in verse 12, this is precisely what they were doing. We begin to see the upper room prayer meetings, so to speak. At least that is what the caption in my Bible says.

Acts 1:12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey.

I do not think it was easy for them. We might say not knowing a great deal about the situation, "What else could they do?" They *had* to wait. Actually there were many things they could have done and had been doing before Jesus gave His commandment. After the crucifixion they had scattered each to his or her own home.

When Jesus did not drive out the Romans, well, that was the end of the dream, as far as they were concerned. The Emmaus disciples were going back to Emmaus. And the others were on their way back to Galilee, and why not? There was nothing there to hold them together. Keep in mind they were still people without God's Holy Spirit.

Another thing they might have done was to get on about their various business

obligations. Some of them had been fishermen, one was a tax collector, and during the prior forty days some of them went back to Galilee and began to take up fishing once again.

The disciples could have said, "Jesus has left us and He said He's going to come back but we don't know when that's going to be, and right now we have to get on with the business of living." That is the carnal side of them, and probably was what they were thinking. If they had been thinking on a spiritual level they might have said, "There are people to witness to, there is work to do, there are cities to announce the coming of God's Kingdom to." It may have seemed utterly pointless for them to wait inactively in Jerusalem. I do not know this is exactly what went through their minds but no doubt there were some conflicting thoughts that they had.

The situations in which we learn most about obedience are those in which we cannot see why we are called to do what we are doing. If we can give a reason for what we are doing, then we are not necessarily learning obedience, at least not simple obedience, which was part of what they were to learn before the Day of Pentecost.

What we are really doing is trusting our ability to reason things out, we are doing what we are doing because we think it is the best thing to do. There is nothing wrong with thinking things out, of course, but it is quite another thing to learn obedience when the prescribed course does not seem to be the best option. I am talking here about waiting. Waiting does not always seem to be the best thing to do.

If you were going through a period like that in your life, when you know what you should do but do not know why you need to do it, or if your experiencing a delay in God's dealings with you and it seems that you are stuck in one spot and cannot get out of it, learn that there is valuable preparation for future work involved just in remaining where God has put you. The action will come later.

There is another way, a second way in which the disciples prepared for what was coming. They gathered together for fellowship. We read about it continuing here in Acts.

Acts 1:13-14 And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. Theses all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

There were eleven disciples mentioned in verse 13, also Judas son of James, not Judas Iscariot, another Judas. There had been two Judas' among the apostles: Judas Iscariot had committed suicide, and this was the other one.

There were also women, and Jesus brothers in attendance, and as we go on to verse 15, we find that by the time Peter stood to give his speech about the need to choose a twelfth person to complete the apostle's leadership, there were a hundred and twenty gathered. We do not know who the hundred and twenty were, but we can imagine whom some of them might have been.

Acts 1:15-26 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, "Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry." (Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.) For it is written in the Book of Psalms, 'Let his habitation be desolate, and let no one live in it'; and, 'let another take his office.' "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." And they proposed two, Joseph call Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two you have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Now keep in mind the hundred and twenty that were gathered together. Nicodemus had shown an interest in Christ, he may have been there; Joseph of Arimathea may have been present; how about the Emmaus disciples, but they had to return to Jerusalem earlier according to Luke 24, and probably stayed once they knew that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

What about Mary and Martha and Lazarus of Bethany? What about people Jesus had

healed? These and many others would have been present, the nucleus of the emerging church. People need people, and this need is part of what it means to be a human being. One of the worst things that can happen to a person is to be totally isolated from other people. The converse of this is that we are to grow intellectually, socially, and spiritually, and in order to do that we need others.

Christians need other Christians and when God calls you, you do not become a Christian in isolation, rather you enter into the body of Christ of those who are also Christ disciples and you find fellowship with them.

Verse 14 indicates a third item in the disciples' preparation. Not only did they practice obedience and fellowship by joining together in Jerusalem during those pre-Pentecost Days, they also joined together continually in prayer.

Acts 1:14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.

This does not mean they all knelt down in the same room together, but that they prayed for the same things, they had the same goals in mind. They may very well have prayed together, just as we pray together before and after services, but this is not narrowed to that focus. It means they were in one accord praying in unity; they did not have to be together all at one time to do that.

What do you suppose they prayed for? Certainly they gave adoration toward Jesus Christ and God the Father. God had worked among them in a great way and God had sent Jesus to die for their sins and then rise again from the dead. When they prayed in those days they must have praised God for the wisdom, the love, power, grace, and knowledge by which He had accomplished such a great plan of salvation in their time.

It must have been a time of confession for them too. They were getting ready to do the work Jesus had for them and they must have been conscious of their inadequacy and sin. Peter was there and he had denied Christ on the night of Jesus' arrest in Gethsemane. He had begun by following Jesus at a distance and then he had hung out around the campfire of Christ's enemies.

One of them said to him, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," and he said, "I do not know what you are talking about." They noticed his accent and they began to press him, "surely you are one of them, for you accent gives you away," but Peter denied that he was Christ's disciple. Certainly that was something Peter was continuing to pray about, that that would never happen again.

Luke records the words that Jesus spoke just before His transfiguration on the mount, regarding not being ashamed of His teachings and to follow Him. Peter would have remembered these requirements for being Jesus disciple.

Luke 9:23-26 Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what advantage is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels."

As Peter gathered together with the others on this occasion, he was probably acknowledging his earlier sin and he must have been praying fervently that God would strengthen his faith so that he would never again deny Christ. Prayer would have been especially important to him since he had fallen asleep in the garden of Gethsemane while waiting for Christ to finish His prayers.

He had not prayed for protection from Satan's influence. The others had not denied Jesus in the same overt way, but they had scattered and when Jesus was arrested they must have fled away from Jerusalem in the direction of Bethany, where they had been staying each night of that final week.

They knew that Jesus enemies had come from Jerusalem and He was being taken for trial. They would not have fled *toward* Jerusalem. They were not even in Jerusalem when Jesus was brought to trial and crucified, at least as far as we know.

These men must have had their cowardice to acknowledge before God. "We can hardly believe that at the crucial moment we were so fearful that we ran away to save our own skins." This might have been what they said, or thought. Nevertheless Jesus had chosen them to be apostles.

He said, "You are going to be my witnesses in this very city of Jerusalem to those very men who arrested and crucified Me." They must have wondered how they could be Christ's witnesses, especially since they had failed Him so grievously the first time. They must have also given thanks for the forgiveness that they had received, thanks to the Father for what He had done, and to Jesus Christ for all He had accomplished and taught them during the previous forty days.

They would have prayed thankfully for forgiveness, restoration, work to do, each other, life, health, and many other things. They must have made abundant supplications asking God for the necessary faithfulness and strength to do the task before them.

They must have even prayed for the coming of the Holy Spirit which Jesus had told them to expect. Sometimes people get hung up on situations like this and they say, "If God is going to do something, if it's in His sovereign will for Him to accomplish a certain thing, why pray for it? Why bother?" That would be a carnal to look at it; they may think He is going to do it anyway.

This is a terrible misunderstanding of how God works. It is true that God is sovereign and God does what He wills to do, and God accomplishes His purposes. The disobedience of a man does not frustrate Him, and if He calls someone He usually does it by leading them to prayer. Prayer is not unnecessary! The disciples knew this and Jesus had taught them, so they must have prayed for the coming of the Holy Spirit and for blessing when the Holy Spirit came. So, they had a lot of preparing ahead of time for the Day of Pentecost, and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Luke records that when Peter spoke about the need to replace Judas, he began to quote Scripture.

Acts 1:16-17 Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry.

Later Peter quoted two specific passages. One was Psalm 69, one in Psalm 109, where it says,

Psalm 69:25 Let their habitation be desolate; let no one dwell In their tents.

Psalm 109:8 Let his days be few, and let another take his office. [speaking of Judas Iscariot].

This must mean that Peter was studying the Old Testament scriptures in those days and probably that the other disciples had been studying them as well. So not only were they praying but they were also studying scriptures you would certainly expect and we know

that the scriptures that they had to study were the Old Testament scriptures.

The apostle Paul later emphasized that studying Scripture was important in order for a Christian to be approved to God.

II Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Two things come together in a Christian's life, they are a natural marriage, so to speak: prayer in which we talk to God, and Bible study in which God talks to us. Prayer is of great importance and it makes sense that when we are talking to God, and God is talking to us we had better let God do most of the talking. If that is true, then we should spend at least much of our time, if not more, in Bible study as we do in prayer.

What did the apostles study in those days? They began to search the Old Testament for prophecies that concern the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Presumably this is what Jesus Himself had been sharing with them and we have a clue to what He did in the account of His ministry to the Emmaus disciples.

Luke 24:27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scripture the things concerning Himself.

We know that Jesus had been expounding those things about Himself from the Old Testament to the disciples. That is, from each of the three divisions of the Old Testament, the law, prophets, and the writings.

Jesus taught what the Messiah was to do when He came, and Jesus must have begun to explain this to them, and before He was taken back to heaven He had done this. Perhaps they were thinking, "That was fascinating, why don't we look theses things up for ourselves." So they got out their Bibles and began to study them. This is most likely what happened during those few days before Pentecost.

When Peter stood up to preach, as he did on the day of Pentecost, he instinctively spoke about the Old Testament scriptures. This kind of in-depth, meaningful study, would get them in the right frame of mind for what was to come in a few days.

When Jesus sent them back to Jerusalem to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they must have used the time to search the Old Testament for prophecies that

concerned the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit did come and Peter then stood up to preach his first great sermon, he began with the most important text about the coming of the Holy Spirit in all of the Old Testament.

In Joel 2:28-32, Peter must have said to himself, "If Jesus is going to send the Holy Spirit as He has promised, if the Holy Spirit is going to be poured out on the church, we had better find out what this is about." So he and the others went to the Old Testament to study about the Holy Spirit. They did not call it was the Old Testament at the time, but they knew that it was the three sections of the writings, the law, and the prophets.

We as Christians sometimes say, we want God to bless the church, or we want God to bless our family, or our Bible study or nations or whatever it might be, but if we are serious, we must learn that the way God blesses is usually with study of the Bible. It is not the only way, but it is one of the primary ways.

As people come to know what God has written, respond to it, believe it, they proclaim it to other people and the world, as well as in the church. If you find yourself in what seems to be a time of waiting or inactivity, redeem the time as these disciples did. Become a better student, a more knowledgeable student of the Word of God.

The fourth and last thing the disciples did, as mentioned in these verses in Acts 1, is to recognize the need for leadership, and take steps to apply it. In their case it involved an election by lots of Matthias to fill Judas' place.

Casting of lots was actually an Old Testament tradition and a strong one. They were following the Old Testament precedent and more than that since they had just been praying and studying the Scriptures, it is not far-fetched to believe that God directed their choice of a qualified person to fill this place of leadership.

They may have said something like this, "If the Holy Spirit is going to empower us to be Christ's witnesses in the world, we had better get our house in order. We're missing one apostle so we'll ask Jesus whom He wants to choose to fill the twelfth position. We should get to know and begin to work with him, we must prepare and use these days of waiting wisely, believing that if we do, Jesus will send a blessing we desperately need."

Please turn to I Corinthians 1. Today we are still waiting for the return of Jesus Christ, the setting up of God's Kingdom on earth. We are those who are waiting for the revealing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as the apostle Paul points out to the church in Corinth.

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I Corinthians 1:4-9 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

We are those who are waiting for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, as Paul tells Titus.

In his second epistle, Peter speaks of how we wait for new heavens and new earth, and of the need while we are waiting for these things to strive to be found by Him at peace without spot or blemish. It is talking about overcoming there, talking about having peace of mind, and peace of mind comes from faith.

According to Isaiah, waiting on God is so important that it seems that it is synonymous with the covenant itself. He says, from ages past, no one has heard, nor ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides You, who works for those who wait for Him.

Waiting is extremely important but it is not an inactive thing, it is a very active thing, we are to be doing something while waiting, and there is plenty to do.

So far in this sermon I have tried to show you some of the things we must do as we wait for Christ to return. The apostles and other disciples of Christ did not fully understand what they were going to be faced with as they waited on God to provide help for them, as they faced the future.

Our wait is no less important than theirs, but we do have more knowledge and the Holy Spirit to help us which they had not yet received at this time.

Earlier I mentioned Peter's first great sermon on Pentecost, at this point in my sermon I want to move forward in time to that sermon, to the three thousand Jews and residents of Jerusalem on Pentecost.

In Acts 2:14-39, we have the report of a sermon preached within a few days of Christ's ascension, addressed to many people who knew Jesus Christ, all of whom had heard of

His work and His life and His death. In setting forth the apostolic estimate of Christ, His miracles, His teachings, His ascending condition in glory, this is what we find Peter preaching about, in his first sermon to the church.

Acts 2:14-15 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. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day”

As you recall the Holy Spirit had come down upon them and then there was a speaking in tongues, which are different languages of the world to the people who were from all over the world. The message was spoken to them in their own language.

I do not know of any other case in which a sermon was so blessed by God through the Holy Spirit that three thousand people—who before it were lost in sin and blinded in their ignorance, far from God, far from faith in Jesus Christ—turn from sin, responded to God's call, and entered the family of God's people within the church. What an amazing miracle this was, this first sermon that Peter preached.

That is what happened at Pentecost, as God blessed the first great sermon of the New Testament church. Sometimes we look at what happened and get very excited about the miracle of speaking in tongues, each one heard the preaching in his or her own language and we long for another great miracle today. I do not mean we long for that specific miracle of speaking in tongues. That is not needed since English is such a widely spoken language. I am talking about a miracle of any type.

Some of you, maybe all of you, perhaps, are wondering if there will be something miraculous happen tomorrow on Pentecost. May God's will be done tomorrow and every day and truly the holy days are a miracle because they reveal the plan of God's salvation to mankind. So who knows when God will perform a great miracle like He did back then? But He is still capable of it and we certainly will see miracles in the future especially with the events that are coming upon the whole world.

We know that the Two Witnesses will be performing miracles especially. Speaking in tongues at Pentecost certainly was a great miracle and an exciting one, one Peter used in a powerful way as an introduction to the sermon he preached about Jesus, but it was not the essence of Pentecost. Some groups have made that the emphasis, the speaking of tongues. That was not the emphasis.

It was an important miracle, but the most important thing is that those who were filled by the Holy Spirit began to be Christ's witnesses as He had told them they would be. Peter's Pentecost sermon is a model sermon, and we would expect it to be since it was the first sermon in the Christian era, so to speak. Preached by the most prominent of apostles and resulted in great blessings; that is, the conversion of and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon three thousand people.

It is a sermon every minister should study, yet more than that it is a sermon all Christians should study because although in a formal sense most Christians do not preach sermons, all nevertheless have many opportunities and they must have them to speak about Jesus Christ or to live Jesus Christ's way of life, thereby witnessing.

The principles that govern the formation of a great sermon must govern a formal witness of the people of God in other circumstances and this sermon was centered on the Bible and centered on Christ, and it was fearless and reasonable. It did not only center on Jesus Christ Himself, it also mainly focused on God the Father. So with the pair of them unified, God the Father and Jesus Christ are the primary focus of Peter's message.

First, this is a great biblical sermon which means that it is centered on the Bible. Peter did not have the New Testament before him when he preached at Pentecost, but he had what we call the Old Testament. Not only did he have it, he knew it. He had been studying it, Christ had taught him about it and out of it, and explained it to them so that he was well-versed in the Old Testament scripture.

Probably Peter had spent the days immediately before Pentecost studying the important Old Testament text, and Christ started them on this track and He had explained the nature of His work by referring to these texts saying that the disciples were foolish and slow to heart to believe because they did not see that which had happened to him had been the fulfillment of prophecy from the Old Testament.

We know that when Jesus met with aimless disciples He began with Moses and all the prophets and explained to them that all the Scriptures, that is in all three sections of the Old Testament, the things that concerned Himself.

Suddenly Pentecost came and Peter, who was never a person to be shy or idle, sees the opportunity to preach from the Old Testament. In the first case Peter quoted from Joel 2:28-32, about God's Spirit being poured out.

Acts 2:16-21 But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And it came to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;

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your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Joel was written on the occasion of a disaster that had come upon Israel—that is the context of it. There had been a locust invasion and the plague had destroyed every green thing in the land. In a rural agriculture economy, this destruction was an extremely serious thing.

It was a matter of life and death for most people, so Joel talks about it, but instead of saying as some of us might say under those circumstances, "Well, every cloud has a silver lining; things will get better; don't worry about it,"—in a way, this is what our nation is telling us today—Joel actually says, "As a matter of fact, things are going to get worse. Judgment by locust is only a foretaste of a greater final judgment to come."

In the middle of this very gloomy book, Joel talks about a blessing that is to come in the latter days, and he says that God is going to restore the years that the locust have eaten, and there was going to be a time when God blesses the people so that they will be satisfied.

It is at this turn in the prophecy as Joel begins to speak comforting words, which the verses that became Peter's first sermon on Pentecost occur. Peter referred to this text first because it was the clearest and most obvious Old Testament prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and no doubt Jesus Christ had pointed it out to them more than once.

With marvelous clarity and urgency, Peter linked it to what everyone in Jerusalem was noting, namely the clear, powerful proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, to everyone in his or her own language. It was Peter's contention that this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.

Peter did not say that Pentecost was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel 2:8-32, because the signs and wonders predicted had not occurred. When you read Joel's prophecy in context you see that it deals with the nation of Israel in the end times in

connection with the Day of Lord.

Peter was lead by the Spirit to see in the prophecy the application to the church at that time. He said, this is that same Holy Spirit that Joel wrote about. It is here that such an announcement would seem incredible to the Jews because they thought God's Spirit was given only to a few select people such as the patriarchs, or maybe some of the Jewish leaders.

Here were a hundred and twenty fellow Jews, men and women, enjoying the blessing of the same Holy Spirit that had empowered Moses, David, and the prophets. It was indeed the dawning of new age, the church age, in which God would intensify His plan of salvation for mankind, which we see in the beginning with the three thousand who were there.

Peter then repeated his procedure, reviewing what everyone knew of the ministry of Jesus, and explaining it on the basis of a second great text. In Acts 2:25-28, Peter quotes from Psalm 16:8-11, which Paul also referred to on at least one occasion, which is found in Acts 13.

Acts 2:25-28 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. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh will also rest in hope, because You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.

Although it was written by David, and it contained statements that applied quite literally to him, toward the end of the psalm are words that could not apply to that great king of Israel.

Psalm 16:10 You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

Quoted in Acts2:27, this is about the decay of a body in a tomb, a decay that will not happen. How can David say that about himself? David's body did see decay, and as Peter points out here:

Acts 2:29-31 Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch

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David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 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, he, foreseeing this spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.

Any person who doubted it could walk over to the tomb and dig up his bones. What was David talking about when he said, "He will not let Your Holy One see decay"? Peter pointed out, as did the earlier preachers, that David must have been speaking as a prophet looking ahead to the Messiah, who, because He is God and not just a mere man like David, would not see decay or corruption. He would die but His body would be preserved and would be raised incorruptible.

What is Peter's emphasis in his sermon? One way we can answer that question is to count the number of verses given to the quotations of the Old Testament and compare them with the number of verses that are explanation.

If we do that, we have thirteen verses citing passages of the Old Testament, eleven verses of explanation, and two verses of application that comes at the very end. So we have thirteen verses. In other words, the verses of citations and the verses of explanation are about evenly balanced. Perhaps the emphasis even falls on the citations from the Old Testament.

What if a minister was to use the fifty-fifty ratio when he speaks? That would mean that half of what minister preaches would be biblical quotations but there are realistic reasons for not following that example every time.

Quotations usually fails to draw listeners along with the subject matter, or even interest them of and by themselves in a lengthy formal sermon, and that is the reality, so we must be wise in how we use them. Besides, there is no sense quoting verses if those who listening fail to understand them, which is especially likely in our biblically illiterate age.

People today would not even know why one was quoting these verses if we were speaking to the world, just quoting scripture. They need explanation.

The point made by the way Peter's sermon is passed on to us is that the very words of the Bible and the use of the Bible by God's Spirit are far more important in spiritual work

than anything the minister can say, even if he is an apostle.

The words of inspired Scripture always trump what a minister says—everything has to be weighed against what the Bible says. Herbert Armstrong used to say that very thing. He would say, “blow the dust off your Bible and prove whether I’m speaking the truth or not.” That is what we are to do.

It is what God says, and what God does with His Word when it is proclaimed and expounded that is important. I am in no way implying that God's ministers are not needed or important. There is an episode in the eighth chapter of Acts that simply illustrates this important principle that ministers are needed.

Acts 8:27-31 So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot he was reading Isaiah the prophet. Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go near and over take this chariot.” So Philip ran to him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

So this was the Ethiopian’s general acknowledgment of his need for direction. It exhibited a humble state of mind seen in his willingness to receive instruction, even from someone who seemed to be a stranger, although a knowledgeable one of Scripture.

Humility is essential to learning about God's way of life and rightly applying godly principles. You cannot rightly apply the principles—you cannot rightly understand God's truth—unless there is humility, and humility includes repentance as well.

Second, Peter’s sermon is God the Father- and Christ-centered. If the sermon is biblical and if the Bible is about the sovereignty of God the Father, and the Lordship of our Savior, His son Jesus Christ, then a biblical sermon is inevitably a God- and Christ-centered sermon.

Acts 2:22-24 “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 yourself also know—Him, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up,

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having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.

Acts 2:32-36 “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’ Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

So God the Father is acknowledged and praised approximately nine times in these eight verses of Peter's sermon. Verse 33 tells us that Jesus received from the Father the authority to pour out the Holy Spirit upon them.

The Holy Spirit had just come upon the disciples and Peter began to preach, and because the Holy Spirit was guiding Peter, he inevitably preached about God the Father and Jesus Christ. The influence of the Holy Spirit is seen in the fruit that it produces in a Christian's life, so by reading this fruit we begin to see why it is so important for Jesus Christ to pour out that Holy Spirit on His church. Without it these things could not be produced because these are produced by the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-26 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited provoking one another, envying one another.

So Peter preaches about God the Father and Jesus Christ beginning in Acts 2:22, after he has cited the text from Joel about Pentecost and continued nearly to the end.

There are words missing in Peter's sermon that we might have expected Peter to use as one who accompanied Jesus through three years of His earthly ministry. We would have expected them to be in there but they are missing in the words of Peter's sermon. There are doctrines in there but I am speaking of the teachings that Christ uttered having to do with God's way of life.

The teachings of Jesus Christ are certainly of vital importance and that is why we have the gospels. The teachings of Jesus are recorded for our benefit. What Peter does not tell the congregation at this time is what Jesus said regarding what He did for them.

He preaches the death, burial, and resurrection of our Savior as a foundation for the instruction of what Christ taught was to come later, meaning the instruction of how we are to live was to come later. Peter managed to squeeze in, in these few verses, a lot of doctrine concerning Christ work, and here are six things Peter believed were essential to establish as a foundation for the church.

The first is Jesus Christ's ministry. This is described not as much as a ministry of teaching but as a ministry of miracles and signs. The point being that God accredited Jesus by them.

The second is the crucifixion. Peter emphasized that the crucifixion was by the express plan and foreknowledge of God. It was no accident. He also said that those who were responsible for it were guilty of the sin.

The third is the burial. Peter contrasts Jesus' burial with David's burial, which was permanent. Jesus burial was real but temporary.

The fourth is the resurrection. Peter deals with the resurrection at great length quoting Psalm 16:8-11 and then expounding in verse 29-32.

The fifth is ascension. The ascension links the work of Christ to Pentecost to what was the present. It was from His present position with the Father that Jesus has poured out what you now you see and hear, mentioned in verse 33. Of course that is the Holy Spirit.

The sixth is Christ's present ministry. Pentecost is proof that Jesus Christ is still working and that He always works.

We find this core of facts about Christ work throughout the New Testament. These are almost always used by the earlier writers, and here is one example of Paul when he was writing to the church at Corinth.

I Corinthians 15:3-6 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the [Old Testament] Scriptures, and that He was buried and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the

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twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.

You see what Paul was doing there. He is doing exactly what Peter was doing in his first sermon, many years after Pentecost, precisely what Peter did when he preached so powerfully earlier. He is listing the basic gospel facts, the core facts about Christ's work.

Mainstream Christian preaching and witnessing in our time is in a sad state and one main problem with it is that it is man-centered and not God-centered.

Sometimes it is centered on the preacher. The minister will tell cute stories often about himself or his children, and sometimes the preaching is centered on the hearers, it speaks to feelings or emotional needs. There is a certain sense in which that may be quite proper occasionally, of course, but not as a superceding theme as we see in Protestantism and other nondenominational groups.

It is possible to reach people by speaking to their emotional needs, how they feel, but mainstream Christian preaching never gets beyond that. It is psychological and sociological in its emphasis. It looks to the polls and asks, what produces the maximum results? What best increases membership and income? This is why you find such emphasis on emotional love among the Protestant denominations. Everyone wants to be loved and everyone wants to feel good, so it brings more people in if that is what you focus on.

They are at a loss and are lost because they ignore the fact that love is the fulfillment of God's law. The way to learn how to love is by keeping His commandments—first in the letter of the law, and then in the spirit of the law.

Their method of pulling at the heart strings, and working up emotion may succeed as the world measures success. You can build a big congregation by the same technique you use to build a big corporation or market hamburgers. But that is quite different from doing the work of God.

The third thing that Peter's preaching expresses, very vividly, is that it is fearless. I say fearless because after all, the sermon was being preached in Jerusalem and it was in Jerusalem that Jesus Christ had been crucified. Peter was preaching to the people who probably knew those who had called out not many weeks before, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Also Peter was preaching in the shadow of the Temple and no doubt overlooked by the same religious leaders who had plotted to kill his Master at that time and had

succeeded, humanly speaking.

Peter and the others had cause to be afraid, yet they were not afraid. One of the main reasons was probably the power of the Holy Spirit. Their faith that they had coming up to that gathering, and the receiving of the Holy Spirit, empowered them, it strengthened them, it made them courageous.

The reason they were not afraid is that the risen Jesus Christ was with them in spirit. The Jesus they served was not merely a man who had been crucified, He was also the Son of God who had been raised from the dead, ascended into heaven, and was now seated at the right hand of God, directing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the preaching of the gospel.

The apostles expected results, and they said, that is what the work of Jesus has lead up to. He has died for sin, now it is our task to preach this gospel. They expected Christ through the Holy Spirit to bless their preaching, and He did. This powerful new work of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost brought several beneficial results. I will give you a list of five.

First, it brought more effectiveness in witness and ministry.

Acts 1:8 “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. “

Second, is the effective proclamation of the gospel.

Matthew 28:19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”

Third, was the power for victory over sin.

Romans 8:13-14 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Fourth is power for victory over Satan and demonic forces.

Ephesians 6:10-12 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness the heavenly places.

Fifth is a wide distribution of gifts from ministry. Not just the ministry, it is talking about the work of Christ's ministry.

Acts 2:16-18 But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out 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 on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy.

Acts 2:43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

The disciples likely understood the power in this context—both the power to preach the gospel effectively and also the power through the Holy Spirit to work miracles confirming the message. The same Greek word *dunamis* is used at least seven other times in Acts to refer to power to work miracles in connection with the gospel proclamation.

Peter's sermon was also sound, that is imminently reasonable. Sometimes preaching can be eloquent and moving so that the entire congregation can be swayed by the rhetoric but it can also be unsound in its reasoning when it is used to manipulate the audience, and this was not the case here.

Although originally a fisherman, in a sense Peter was an eloquent man. He preached with strong commitment and was assured also that God blessed his dedication and eloquence, and everything else in his ministry. When we read this sermon we are impressed not so much with his eloquence, but by the fact that he was calling the people to think reasonably.

Paraphrased, he was saying, "You know about Jesus, you know what He did; you know

the miracles that took place through His ministry and by His hands, which was God's way of authenticating Him, of endorsing Him. How could He have done miracles if God had not been with Him? You know how the leaders, your leaders arranged His crucifixion. You saw how He was killed, God raised Him from the dead, and we are witnesses of it. The resurrection is proof that God has accepted Christ and repudiated your denial. It is this Christ who has poured out the Holy Spirit, whose power you can see and witness now."

Peter went on to his conclusion. That was reasonable as well. So paraphrased again, Peter said something like this, "If this Jesus is the Christ, then you have killed your Messiah! What you should do now is repent of this great sin, believe in Christ, and be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and thus identify yourself with God and Christ."

That call was powerful because we are told as we come to the end of Peter's sermon:

Acts 2:37-41 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord God will call." And with many other words he testified and exhorted them saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousands souls were added to them.

We long for the day when we will hear that cry in response to the world's minds being opened to God's truth, "What must we do?" When the answer is given "repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven," that they react the way the three thousand did with great repentance, gladly receiving the Word of God.

We can certainly hope and pray for this time to come but in the meantime we must make sure that while we are waiting for Christ's return we are doing the best we can to pray, study, and to draw closer to God and to one another, as this end time collapses upon us.