

Outline for the Book of Acts:

SESSION 2: WHAT MAKES THE CHURCH GO

NOTES ON THE TEXT

II. A Sermon Series that Made Things Clear (2:14-4:22)

(2-14-40) Peter's 1st Sermon: an Explanation of Christ's Power

FELLOW JEWS . . . LET ME EXPLAIN . . . (14) - The first Christians were all Jewish and had no desire to separate themselves from the Jewish religion. In Peter's mind he is still a Jew and what he has to share is that Jesus is the fulfillment of every Jewish hope, prayer and religious longing.

The *explanation* is in a form which is consistent throughout Acts,⁴⁹ includes three points: 1) a discussion of what has happened (14-21); 2) a presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ: His death, resurrection and ascension (22-36); and 3) an appeal for repentance and baptism (37-40).

"THESE . . . ARE NOT DRUNK. . ." (15) – Jews did not eat or break their night time fast during festivals such as Pentecost until at least 9:00 a.m. (the third hour after 6:00 a.m. which marked the beginning of the day) and the more pious until 10:00 a.m. Peter is pointing out that this is almost too early to *eat*, let alone *be drunk*!

"NO, THIS IS WHAT WAS SPOKEN BY THE PROPHET JOEL. . ." (16) – The quotation is clearly from Joel 2:28-32, although many of the ancient texts omit his name as was more customary when referring to the minor prophets.⁵⁰

"IN THE LAST DAYS . . ." (17) – What was going to happen in *the last days* is a common theme in the Old Testament.⁵¹ Peter's point is that the last days, as prophesied, begin with the establishment of the Christian Church at Pentecost. This means that not only are we (in the 20th century) *living in the last days*, but all Christians have been since that first outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Now begins the era of Messianic fulfillment.⁵²

⁴⁹ Cf. The sermons and explanations in Acts 3, 10, and 13.

⁵⁰ Cf. Acts 7:42, 8:40, 15:15.

⁵¹ Cf. Isaiah 2:2; Hosea 3:5; Micah 4:1; also see 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1; Hebrews 1:1; 1 Peter 1:20; and 1 John 2:18.

⁵² Cf. Foster, Lewis, *The NIV Study Bible*, *ibid.*, p. 1650.

“I WILL POUR OUT . . . ON ALL PEOPLE.” (17) – The words imply a universal as opposed to a strictly Jewish application and fit with Christ’s commission to go *into all the world*.

“...VISIONS...DREAMS...PROPHECY...WONDERS...SIGNS...SAVED...” (17-21) – Each element in Joel’s prophecy comes true in the days of the early Christians (at least if the phrase ‘*The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood,*’ is taken as an image of catastrophic events – such as the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70).⁵³

“... JESUS . . . WAS . . . ACCREDITED . . . TO YOU . . .” (22) – Peter presents the strongest kind of case: he bases his arguments on their own experience and the testimony of those who were there. The miracles and wonders Jesus performed were too recent and well known to be denied, and they know that much themselves.

“THIS MAN WAS HANDED OVER TO YOU BY GOD’S SET PURPOSE . . .” (23) – The responsibility for hospitality among the Jews and Semitic peoples is well known. Peter is pointing out that whatever happened to Jesus arises out of their own response to a duty to receive such a visitor – especially one sent by God Himself.

He also points out that Jesus’ appearance and ministry was no accident: God had ordained it.

“YOU . . . PUT HIM TO DEATH . . .” (23) – The mention of *wicked men* who helped softens the blow, but Peter makes clear the staggering fact that God’s messenger has been killed by those to whom He is speaking.⁵⁴

“BUT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD . . .” (24) – The distance between God’s will and actions and those of this crowd is becoming clearer.

“... BECAUSE IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR DEATH TO ...HOLD...HIM.” (24) – This too is an important theme in the New Testament,⁵⁵ as the conquest of death as the last enemy⁵⁶

“I SAW THE LORD . . . I WILL NOT BE SHAKEN . . .” (25) – The position of the apostles is made clear in these words.⁵⁷

“... MY HEART IS GLAD . . . BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON ME . . YOU HAVE MADE KNOWN TO ME THE PATHS OF LIFE . . .” (26-28) – Death has lost its awesome hold on those who follow Jesus Christ. He has conquered it. There is victory. The words of this Psalm are almost perfect in this context.

⁵³ One of the arguments for an early dating of Acts is the failure to allude to this disaster in A.D. 70. If anything, it can be argued that the quotation from Joel serves to support this. No connection is made by Luke (through Peter or anyone else) with the destruction of Jerusalem and this passage; if he had known about it, he most likely would have provided some hint that the prophecy was related.

⁵⁴ To fail to protect one’s guest in the Semitic tribes was to be guilty of whatever should happen to him.

⁵⁵ Cf. 1Corinthians 15:55

⁵⁶ Cf. 1 orinthians 15:26.

⁵⁷ Cf. Psalm 16:8-11.

“ . . . I CAN TELL YOU CONFIDENTLY THAT. . . DAVID DIED . . . ” (29) – An important point since the words cannot refer to David as the one who will not be *abandoned to the grave* or *see decay*.⁵⁸ Peter will insist the words refer to the Messiah and, more to the point, to Jesus Himself.

“HE SPOKE OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST . . . GOD HAS RAISED. . . ” (31-32) – The argument makes perfect sense if Jesus is risen. In fact the crux of the Christian faith lies in His Resurrection.⁵⁹

“THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD: SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND. . . ” (33-36) – Peter’s brilliant argument seems far too sophisticated for a fisherman who has not been filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The words of Psalm 110:1, argue for an ascension into Heaven, and since the apostles have seen with their own eyes Jesus do this, *“Everyone . . . can be assured!”*

“WHEN THE PEOPLE HEARD . . . CUT TO THE HEART . . . ” (37) – There is no response without hearing and no hearing without proclamation (witness).⁶⁰ The response is both in response to their sudden recognition of Who Jesus really is, and their shock at realizing their guilt in rejecting Him.

“REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED . . . ” (38) – Repentance is the response required by John the Baptist,⁶¹ proclaimed in the preaching of Jesus,⁶² and proclaimed at the Ascension.⁶³ Repentance means to turn around, alter course, change one’s mind, or attitude. This is not just an emotional feeling; it is a real change. The one who repents does not just *feel sorry* for his/her sins, but moves away from them. Indeed, without that movement, repentance is a vacant concept. In Acts, baptism is a result of personal faith (8:12; 18:8), belief in the Word (2:41), and repentance (as in this verse).

“IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST. . . ” (38) – The triune name of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is not used. This should not be seen as a contradiction to Matthew 28:19, but rather in contrast to being baptized in the name of, for instance, John the Baptist.⁶⁴

“FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF YOUR SINS. . . ” (38) – Baptism does not confer forgiveness, but is its sign. Another translation has it, *“so that your sins may be forgiven,”* the point being that *repentance* leads to forgiveness.

⁵⁸ It would also be rather difficult to conceive of David as the Holy One, considering what he did in his lifetime.

⁵⁹ Paul himself says it (1 Corinthians 15:14): *“If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. . . . An if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. . . . But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.”* The argument is both decisive and worth reading.

⁶⁰ Cf., Romans 10:14-15.

⁶¹ Cf., Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3.

⁶² Cf., Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3.

⁶³ Cf., Luke 24:47.

⁶⁴ Cf. Acts 19:4-5.

“ . . . THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT . . . ” (38) – This is God’s promise to every Christian.⁶⁵

God had placed no...limitation on his offer and gift. On the contrary (39), the promise – or ‘gift’ or ‘baptism – of the Spirit (1:4; 2:33) was for them also (who weere listening to Peter), and for their children (of the next and subsequent generations), and for all who were far off (certainly the Jews of the dispersion and perhaps also prophetically the distant Gentile world⁶⁶), indeed for all (without exception) whom the Lord our God will call. Everyone God calls to himself through Christ receives both gifts. The gifts of God are coextensive with the call of God.⁶⁷

“WITH MANY OTHER WORDS . . . ” (40) – Luke is telling us that Peter had a lot more to say than will be recorded. He is also implying that his quotation of Peter is essentially accurate.

“SAVE YOURSELVES. . . ” (40) – Not just from a wicked and corrupt generation, but from the coming wrath of God against those who have rejected Him.

THOSE WHO ACCEPTED WERE BAPTIZED . . . 3,000 . . . THAT DAY (41) – There was no room in Peter’s preaching for *private* religion. In order to be forgiven, one had to be repentant, and confirm the genuine completeness of this repentance, one had to submit to baptism: a -public sign of faith in Jesus Christ even when such a course might bring retribution from the enemies of Christ and His Way.

The number is impressive, but then, God has been at work. Notice also that everything happens the same day: inspiration (as the Spirit comes upon the disciples), preaching (as Peter is filled with the Spirit), repentance (as the crowd is convicted of sin by the Spirit), and baptism (as the new believers receive the Holy Spirit).

God’s Power at Work: Inside the Church (2:42-47)

THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES . . . (42) – These people are serious about their relationship with God and the need to grow closer to Him. There were not *dabblers* in religious experiences, but devotees of the one true God .

...TEACHING...FELLOWSHIP...BREAKING OF BREAD...PRAYER (42) –

These activities summarize the essence of Christian Community or the core activities of the Church of Jesus Christ: 1) they are learning more; 2) they are caring about each other more; 3) they are worshipping God; and 4) they are communicating with God. This list does not include everything Christians should do (evangelism, for instance), but it does include things every Christian should be a part of.

. . . FILLED WITH AWE . . . WONDERS AND MIRACLES SIGNS . . . (43) – The response is quite understandable: we would be in awe too, if we were to watch *signs & wonder* being done.

⁶⁵ Cf. Romans 8:9-11; 1 Corinthians 12:13.

⁶⁶ As in Isaiah 49:1, 12; 57:19; cf. Ephesians 2:13, 17.

⁶⁷ John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church and the World: the Message of Acts*, Intervarsity Press (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1990), p.78.

ALL THE BELIEVERS WERE TOGETHER . . . EVERYTHING IN COMMON (44-45) – The unity in this group is remarkable; so is the pace of their development as a church. The willingness to share is also a mark of the true Christian.

AND THE LORD ADDED TO THEIR NUMBER DAILY . . . (46-47) – The best engineered evangelism program coupled with the best opportunities for people to get involved is not enough to build the Church of Jesus Christ. Only God can do that. Human beings can build a great organization and achieve significant numbers; God alone has the power to draw people towards Himself and put together the right combination of His followers to successfully build the Church.

God's Power at Work: Through the Church (3:1-11)

. . . PETER AND JOHN WERE GOING TO THE TEMPLE . . . (1) – The miracles in Acts take place as disciples are going about their regular lives. There is no special effort to *find* people to heal, or to *invite* a crowd to watch!

. . . TEMPLE GATE CALLED 'BEAUTIFUL' . . . (2) – This gate consisted of a set of immense double doors seventy-five feet high and made of solid bronze. It led from the court of the Gentiles to the court of the women, on the Temple's east side.

. . . HE ASKED THEM FOR MONEY (3) – The beggar does not know Peter and John – certainly he does not know much about the Christians who have all their possessions in common,⁶⁸ and therefore would have no money to give.

"LOOK AT US!" . . . GAVE THEM HIS ATTENTION. . . (4-5) The condition for some of God's most impressive acts is our attention. He expects to receive something tangible, but certainly not the miracle that's coming.

"IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OF NAZARETH . . . WALK!" (6) – The source of authority behind every miracle Peter does is clearly identified as Jesus Christ.⁶⁹ To say the command requires faith is like saying the ocean requires water! This is a staggering statement which may partially explain why Peter helps the lame man up in verse 7. None the less, as Peter will later testify (v. 16) the lame man's faith is a key ingredient in this incident.

. . . INSTANTLY . . . (7) – There is no waiting when God's power is unleashed. This beggar does not *work* himself out of his infirmity; neither does time *take care of things*. This is a miracle!

...JUMPED TO HIS FEET...WALKING & RUNNING & PRAISING... (8) – The picture is certainly realistic (Luke was a doctor): the man is helped up, feels sudden strength, tests it by taking a few careful steps, realizes he's cured and begins *leaping for joy*. Praising God he makes clear where his faith lay, and that he understood in whose power Peter and John worked.

⁶⁸ Cf. Acts 2:44 ff.

⁶⁹ Cf. Acts 3:16, 4:10

. . . ALL THE PEOPLE . . . RECOGNIZED HIM . . . WONDER & AMAZEMENT . . . (9-10) – This is not some *ringer* brought in by the two apostles; he is a well-known person whose condition has changed in a way that is incredible to those around him. This is a miracle.

(3:12-26) Peter’s 2nd Sermon: An Explanation of *Jesus Christ*

...THE PEOPLE CAME RUNNING....“WHY...STARE AT US...?” (11-12) – God acts in miraculous ways to generate interest in Himself, not just to satisfy our desires or change our circumstances. Peter makes sure that all attention is placed on God and His Son Jesus Christ (as in verse 16).

“THE GOD OF ABRAHAM....JESUS...YOU KILLED...” (13-15) – The explanation is very similar to that in Peter’s first speech, at Pentecost.⁷⁰ Peter’s closing words, “*we are witnesses*” emphasize the point that what he says is undeniable.

“...YOU KILLED...GOD RAISED...WE ARE WITNESSES...” (15) – A theme repeated more than once in Acts.⁷¹

“...YOU ACTED IN IGNORANCE....GOD FULFILLED...”(17-18) – There is always an effort to win over his audience in Peter’s approach: it is not simply a statement of condemnation. Peter also makes clear that Jesus’s ministry is a result of God’s plan: His suffering was prophesied.⁷²

“REPENT...TURN TO GOD...SINS...WIPED OUT...TIMES OF REFRESHING...” (19) – Repentance is a change of mind leading to a change of life. Repentance causes us to turn in a new direction; Peter wants to make clear what that direction should be⁷³
The promise is not partial or conditional. Once repentance and faith are real, God *eliminates every trace* of our former guilt. This is how the *times of refreshing* begin.

“...THAT HE MAY SEND JESUS ...” (20-21) – Jesus is in Heaven awaiting the point when the Gospel has been preached *throughout the world*.⁷⁴ When this has happened He will return to restore creation to its intended condition:⁷⁵ without sin, without death, and totally in harmony with God and His will.

⁷⁰ **cf.** Acts 2:22-24; especially see the note on verse 14..

⁷¹ Cf. Acts 2:23-24; f:10; 5:30-32; 10:39-41; 13:28-29; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

⁷² Cf. what Jesus said, Luke 24:26-27. Especially His suffering was prophesied: compare Isaiah 53:7-8 with Acts 8:32-33; Psalm 2:1-2 with Acts 4:25-26; and Psalm 22:1 with Matthew 27:46.Cf. also 1 Peter 1:10-11.

⁷³ It is easy to turn in the wrong direction at a point where we recognize our guilt and need for change: it could be *activity*, or new human relationships, or some form of *self-validation*. None of this will do. We need God.

⁷⁴ Cf. Mark 13:4 and 10.

⁷⁵ Cf. Romans 8:19-22.

“...AS HE PROMISED LONG AGO...MOSES...SAMUEL...ABRAHAM...” (22-25) – It was prophesied that Christ would be a prophet like Moses. His life was foreshadowed in some of Samuel’s statements regarding David.⁷⁶ He is also the fulfillment of God’s promise to bless all nations through the offspring of Abraham.

Peter’s quote from Genesis 12 makes the word *offspring* singular (it is plural in Genesis), and emphasizes the fact that the words ultimately refer to Jesus.

Initial Reaction to Christ (4:1-3)

“THE PRIESTS...SADDUCEES...GREATLY DISTURBED...” (4:1-2) – The priests were part of an entire group which rotated in serving at the Temple. Each priest was responsible for a week’s service every six months. These priests may be concerned because all the disturbance is occurring during their *watch*!

The Sadducees, on the other hand, are upset by the fact that *resurrection* is being taught – something in which they did not believe. It is not really Jesus who troubles them at this point, but something being taught contrary to their views. This group controlled the temple, and from their ranks the high priest was always chosen.

The captain of the temple guard was always a member of one of the leading priestly families, and was considered next in rank to the high priest.

THEY SEIZED PETER AND JOHN...PUT THEM IN JAIL...” (3) – The motive for imprisoning the two apostles is not punishment, but convenience: the Sadducees do not want to have to look for these men again, yet they are not about to interrupt their evening plans. In addition, Jewish trials of any consequence were not supposed to occur at night (something intentionally disregarded in the case of Jesus).

Response that’s Always There (4:4)

MANY WHO HEARD...BELIEVED...THE NUMBER OF MEN...5,000... (4) – The rapid growth of the community of believers is a key point in Luke’s narrative.⁷⁷ There is always positive response to the Gospel – even when opposition is at work.

(4:5-12) Peter’s 3rd Sermon: Christian Commitment

RULERS, ELDERS AND TEACHERS OF THE LAW... (5) – These three groups made up the Sanhedrin, Israel’s most important and powerful judicial body. It served as more than a court; it was a religious council working on behalf of Jews all over the world.

Peter and John have come from the ranks of fishermen (who would have never had access to such a group) to spokesmen before their people’s most prestigious group.

⁷⁶ Cf. 1 Samuel 16:13; 13:14; 15:28; 28:17.

⁷⁷ Cf. Acts 2:41, 5:14, 6:7.

...ANNAS...CAIAPHAS, JOHN, ALEXANDER...OTHER MEN... (6) – Annas was high priest for A.D. 6-15, before being removed by the Romans and replaced by his son Eleazer, followed by his son-in-law, Caiaphas who served from 18-36. In spite of the official succession, Annas was still considered high priest (an office supposed to be held for life) by most Jews.

John most likely is the son of Annas known as *Jonathon*, although some believe him to be Johanan be Zaccai, who became prominent after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Alexander's background is unknown.

“BY WHAT POWER....FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT...” (7-8) – The question is intended both to intimidate and to elicit information. Peter is undaunted not because of some remarkable personal strength but through the presence and power of God's Spirit. This *filling* was promised by Jesus,⁷⁸ and means that the person involved comes under the control of the Holy Spirit, doing and speaking what He wishes.

“...ON ACCOUNT OF AN ACT OF KINDNESS...THE NAME...” (9-10) – The irony in a situation where someone could actually be on trial for healing a lame man is amply expressed in Peter's short statement.

A great deal of importance was always attached by people in the ancient world to someone's name. So when Jacob's name is changed to Israel, or when God's name is revealed for the first time to Moses these are major events.⁷⁹ It was always believed that knowing someone's name gave one power over or influence with him/her. It was also expected that another person's name, once known, would not be misused – particularly in the case of God.⁸⁰ Jesus name is special.⁸¹

“...THE STONE THE BUILDERS REJECTED...SALVATION...IN NO ONE ELSE...” (11-12) -- The image of the stone rejected is used in Psalm 118:22 and is commonly referred to by Jesus and others.⁸² The appropriateness of the image being applied to Christ is emphasized by the fact that He is uniquely God's provision for the salvation of the world. Peter is unequivocal: there is no one else anywhere who can do what Jesus has done.

Human Stubbornness & Intimidation (4:13-18)

THEY SAW...HAD BEEN WITH JESUS...NOTHING THEY COULD DO. (13-14) – What is seen is three-fold: 1) the amazing courage and communications skills of *ordinary men*, 2) the fact that this has something to do with Jesus and His influence upon them, and 3) the reality that a man had been healed!

⁷⁸ Cf. Luke 24:49 and particularly Matthew 10:18-20.

⁷⁹ Cf. Genesis 32:28, and Exodus 3:13-14.

⁸⁰ Cf. Exodus 20:7.

⁸¹ Cf. Acts 10:43; John 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5.

⁸² Cf. Matthew 21:42, 1 Peter 2:7, and cf. Romans 9:33 and Isaiah 28:16.

...ORDERED THEM TO WITHDRAW...WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO? (15-18) – The religious enemies Jesus’ followers do not want them to realize how strong their position is. It is quite amazing that having believed a miracle took place their concern is not to reconsider their opinion of or actions towards Jesus, but to try and keep things quiet – by *quieting* His followers.

Since these Jews believed only God could work miracles, He had to have been involved in some way; yet they refuse to even think about that!

Christian Integrity & Commitment (4:19-20)

“...JUDGE FOR YOURSELVES...WE CANNOT...” (19-20) – Peter is not fooled by the negative disposition of his audience: he knows they have seen the proof of his position. So he challenges their integrity: they have *seen* for themselves; they should also *judge* for themselves. He then draws a contrast which must have cut through some of the arrogance of his listeners: while they may be able to ignore the clear truth in front of them, he and John are unwilling to run from or reject truth; so they will continue to speak out.

The Undeniable Facts of Salvation (4:21-22)

AFTER FURTHER THREATS...THEY COULD NOT DECIDE... (21) – The religious leaders refuse either to listen or to change their course, so the threats continue. They will not be in such an uncertain state for long.⁸³

THE MAN...HEALED WAS OVER FORTY YEARS OLD... (22) – Once again Luke emphasizes that this has been a miracle.

⁸³ Cf. Acts 5:40; 7:54-60.

Questions for the Week:

Day 1: Read Acts 2:15-47

1. God's purpose and plan for Jesus' life is clear in these verses. Do you believe He has a purpose and plan for you? List 3 reasons why that might be encouraging.
2. Identify the basic aspects of life among the believers in Acts 2:42-47. Do you do all these things (hint: selling all our possessions or performing signs and wonders are not requirements in the Christian life)? Would you be comfortable living in such a congregation? Why or why not?

Day 2: Read Acts 3:1-10

1. What happens in this miracle: identify the steps involved. Do you ever look for God's miracles in the ordinary events of your life? What has God done for you this week?
2. Are we ever filled with awe and wonder at what God can do and is doing in our lives? Do you ever think about how truly powerful and great He really is and that He knows your name and cares about you?

Day 3: Read Acts 3:11-26

1. Do Christians ever forget to give credit to God? Do you? Do your friends know Who you thank for your blessings?
2. Is there any need for repentance in your life? Which way do you *turn* when you decide to change course?
3. Do you believe your sins have been forgiven? Have you let go of past failings or do you continue to remember, reexamine and relive bad experiences. Since God's promise is *complete* forgiveness, take Him at His word and give Him all the past guilt you have. Then let His Spirit refresh you.

Day 4: Read Acts 4:1-12

1. Have you ever been unfairly treated? Do you hear any complaints about their treatment from Peter and John? They use every occasion as an opportunity to serve Christ. Do you? In that regard, on what could you work this week?
2. Do you believe that Jesus is the only way to God? What other way can you personally vouch for? Lots of things might be theoretically possible and we live in a society which loves to restrict all moral and ethical activity to the theoretical. However, the only Way to salvation we know ourselves is Jesus Christ and that is the only Way we have the right to share. To tell someone else it is OK to disregard Jesus Christ in favor of Buddha or Mohammed or someone else is not in our power to do. What we can do we should do: are you telling others about the difference Christ makes in your life. Make a commitment to *put in a good word* for Jesus with someone this week, then ask God to help you do it.

Day 5: Read Acts 4:13-22

1. Is it not amazing the difference Christ makes in our lives. How much time are you spending in communication with Him (reading the Bible or praying)? Would those who know you say, "S/he's been with Jesus"?
2. What have you *seen and heard*? Are you able to keep it to yourself? Ask God to give you the opportunity, wisdom, courage and patience to witness to His presence in your life today.