

Acts 2:22-24
2/22/15

Gospel Foundations

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. 24 God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

Tomorrow morning I get on an airplane and fly to New Orleans to speak in chapel at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. It's where I graduated with my Master's in Divinity and also made a few lifelong friends.

One of those friends is a guy named Eric Hankins. Eric is a brilliant guy. He has a doctorate in Theology and he pastors the historic First Baptist Church in Oxford, Miss. But as illustrious as it sounds now, he hasn't always been such a theological powerhouse.

Eric grew up as a preacher's kid. His dad was a prominent preacher at a large church in South Louisiana. In high school, Eric sensed the call to preach and asked his dad if he could preach one Sunday. Eric says that he had been watching W.A. Criswell, Jerry Vines, Adrian Rogers, and Homer Lindsay, and he was going to get up and hammer the church. He had lots to say.

Eric says when he stood up, a wave of sweat appeared on his forehead. He faced the crowd and proceeded to babble for 2 ½ minutes. He sat down on the stage, put his head in his hands, and the associate pastor had to finish the sermon.

That was a fairly ignominious beginning to his preaching. Fortunately, as we look to our story, Peter's first sermon wasn't like that. Here is the first Christian sermon in the Bible and it's empowered by the Spirit of God, it's based in the word of God and centered on Jesus Christ, the son of God. And it's confrontational. It's not caustic, crass or rude, not arrogant or condemning, but it confronts, confronts who we are in light of what Christ has done and calls us to deal with the truth, the truth of Christ.

Jesus Christ Confronts our Life with His Life

Listen to Peter in v. 22 – Men of Israel – “Hear these words!”

His Humility is Our Hope

Here's the scene in v. 16 as Peter takes his stand to preach. He quotes Joel 2:28 after the coming of the Holy Spirit as the fulfillment of that passage. And he immediately confronts men with the life of Jesus. In v. 22, He refers to Jesus of Nazarene or Jesus the Nazarene. It was not a sign of class or culture to be from Nazareth. Remember in John 1 when Philip tried to get Nathaniel to come meet Jesus and Phillip told Nathaniel that Jesus was from Nazareth and Nathaniel said, “Can anything good come out of

Nazareth?" When Pontius Pilate had Jesus crucified he made a sign that said – "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."

Certainly His humility calls us to crucify our pride but there is more here. He's from a nowhere backwater town – Nazareth. He's being crucified between two common criminals, and the women who followed him were of questionable repute.

This is more than His humility. This is Jesus identifying with sinners. In the Gospel, His enemies called him a friend of sinners. [Hebrews 4:15 "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."] Paul says in 2 Cor. 5 – at the cross "He became sin."

All of this is to tell you that Jesus is not just an example of follow. He is our God to be worshipped. And He came for sinners, liars, adulterers, cheaters, speeders, flirts and those with twisted dark secret sins, for those broken, shameful sins. He came to befriend you; to empathize with you; to take punishment for you; to lift guilt from you, to bring grace to you and pour love on you.

Why? Why would you resist and fight and run? Why would you conceal and ignore and pretend? Why would you hide this sin? Why would you keep hugging a barrel of poison when the Nazarene has come to set you free? It's His kindness that leads to repentance. His Humility is our Hope.

His Holiness is Our Goal

Notice what Peter says about Jesus in v. 22: "Men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works, wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst." Peter is saying Jesus had the mark of God and His perfect life made everyone uncomfortable.

You can always find someone with a more debauched and flawed character than your own, but our standard is Jesus, the one who fulfilled every part of God's law and did so in a way that you nor I ever could.

And as believers, His holiness is our goal, but not in the way you might think. We don't believe in a works-based religiousness which says you have to **do** something to get into heaven. We don't believe in works equaling Heaven. We believe in Grace. God gives you eternal life through faith in Jesus, faith in His life, death and resurrection, and one of the haunting phrases that is often overlooked is in v. 22 at the end of the verse when Peter says: "And you, yourselves, know." You Know! Ecclesiastes says, "God has put eternity in the heart of man."

Common grace tells us everyone has a conscience. (Even bad people love their mothers.) And Peter confronts them with their own knowledge of right and wrong of truth and justice. Speaking of the Holy Spirit, Jesus himself said in John 16:8, "And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." What that means is that we are without excuse before a Holy God. We stand guilty and feel the guilt. Christ has come to remove the guilt and to restore you

into the image of God. His holiness is our goal, but it is not reached by trying. It's reached by surrender. He confronts our life and invites our surrender. Humility and Holiness.

His Death is Our Judgment

Let me show you where I get that. In Chapter 2, verse 23 is one of the most theologically-charged verses in the whole book of Acts. As Peter speaks about the crucifixion, notice what he says in v. 23: "Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. There are two important words: *definite plan* from the Greek word "horizo" from which we get the word "horizon." To mark out with a boundary. Definite plan. It's going to happen. *Foreknowledge*, the meaning here not just seeing into the future what people will do and then building around that. (That makes people God.) This means that, from the beginning, the cross was God's irrevocable plan to redeem his people. It was always God's plan. Peter says, "You crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."

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God's purpose started as the necessary fixture behind whatever happens, yet whatever happen occurs through sinful people living in their own freedom. Here's how big our God is: He used evil men to accomplish His purpose yet never violated their ability to choose or remove their guilt. Peter presents the total sovereignty of God beside the complete responsibility of man. Peter confronts them and says they are responsible for the cross.

In one verse, Peter presents Jesus as God's judgment on the world and the means of salvation. You hear what Peter says to that crowd of 3000 souls: "You crucified him." It's not just First Century Jews and Gentiles who are culpable. I did it! Look closely. The hammer is in *your* hand.

Isaiah said we are all like sheep and have gone astray, each to his own way. But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him. His death on the cross is a sobering confrontation of our sinful status.

But that's not all the cross is. The cross is a liberating celebration of our forgiveness. I preach the sovereignty of the cross because, when we actually see the death of our sin and feel the gravity of how our sin separates us from God, then we see the undeserved, unearned, unmerited love and forgiveness we have in Jesus. And then we can sing with John Newton, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me."

That grace can be yours today. Come to the Cross of Christ and put your faith in what He has done. He has taken the punishment for sin and offered you the Love of God. May this be the day of your Liberation.

(Pastor prays)