

Loyal To Jesus: Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:1-41)

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Note: This morning we will be studying a somewhat large passage, Acts 2:1-41. Because of its length we won't read the entire passage word for word (as we normally do). And I am sure I will leave a few things that you are curious about unexplained. My hope is that you will find what I do talk about edifying, and anything you wish I'd given more attention to, I encourage you to follow up with in your own personal study, with your life group, and in conversation with folks from our church community.

A few years ago I was at a conference in Washington DC, and two women sat at a table across from me. They introduced themselves, and one of them – Jenny Yang, whose name sounded vaguely familiar – asked me what had brought me all the way from Kansas to DC.

I told her I had been invited by one of the organizers of the event after we had connected by discussing a book he had written. I then proceeded to describe the book and say very nice things about the author – the ONE author.

As I began telling these women more about the book, the one who had sat down with Jenny Yang kept giving me an odd look that seemed to be saying, in the nicest way possible, “oh my gosh, please stop talking, you are making a huge mistake.” I couldn't understand why she seemed so agitated. I started thinking about everything I had been saying, searching for some way I could have caused either woman offense.

All of a sudden I remembered that the book I'd been referring to – the one that I was explaining Jenny Yang as she nodded along with an amused and knowing smile on her face – had not one, but TWO authors.

One was a guy named Matthew Soerens, who had invited me to the event.

The other author was, of course, none other than...Jenny Yang. So not only had I gone on and on about how great the book and its ONE author was, I'd also now wasted 5 minutes of this the co-author's life, explaining (poorly) concepts to her that SHE HAD LITERALLY WRITTEN THE BOOK ON.

I have never been so ready for the Lord to drop me dead and take me away as I was right then.

It can be very easy to assume you've got the right perspective on things, can it not? There is an assurance and security in the knowledge of being right. But when we're confronted with evidence that reveals to us that instead of being right, we've actually been very, very wrong...that can be very unsettling. It can leave us unsure of what to do next.

This morning, as we continue our study in the Book of Acts, we'll see how the first Christians dealt with breaking the news to people that they had in fact been wrong about Jesus. He wasn't just some guy who had been a good teacher, capable of some very impressive tricks, but was now dead no longer of any concern.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus, as we will see the Apostle Peter and his fellow Christians proclaim, was and is more than anyone assumed or even imagined. Jesus is the resurrected Son of God. He is the Messiah

the world needs. But since the world reacted to his arrival with hatred, fear, and murderous intent... what hope could there be of His still being willing to help us? To forgive us? To save us from our sins?

Praise be to God, the answer ends up being: there is more hope than we ever could have imagined or deserved.

We begin in Acts 2:1 on the day of Pentecost. It is about 9 days after Jesus had ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9), and around 50 days since his resurrection from death. We're told all who were part of the believing community at this time – probably around 120 people (1:15) – were gathered in one place. They weren't sure what was supposed to happen, what exactly they should be doing, or what was going to come next. All they knew for sure was that they needed to follow the last command Jesus had given them:

“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 1:4-5 (NIV)

Then, exactly as Jesus had promised, their patient, obedient waiting paid off. What happens next would change not only their lives, but the lives of everyone, everywhere, all over the world and throughout the rest of time.

2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Acts 2:2-4 (NIV)

A wild, loud noise “like the blowing of a violent wind” fills the room. “Tongues of fire” – maybe long, swirling flames or bits of burning embers, or something simply unimaginable but definitely supernatural – come to rest harmlessly (yet transformatively) on each and every person there. The Holy Spirit fills everyone. Not just the disciples that were closest to Jesus, not just the strongest, or the smartest, or a few righteous elite. Everyone in that house who believes receives the Holy Spirit. Throughout Scripture, wind and fire often signal the powerful, manifest presence of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. But nothing like this had ever happened before. The Holy Spirit filling and remaining with each and every member of God's people was something entirely new and wonderful.

Before his crucifixion Jesus had promised his disciples that a “helper” would come, and that this helper would enable them to do wondrous, amazing things (John 15:26-27). Here in Acts 2 the helper has arrived. And with His arrival, the followers of Jesus, and indeed the entire world, would never be the same again.

Those that the Spirit fell on and filled that day were blessed with the ability to “speak in other tongues.” This should not be confused with the ability to “speak in tongues” found in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. That gift involves the need for interpreters to discern the meaning behind supernatural utterances.

But what happened here is that the believers who were gathered in that room were suddenly able to speak many different languages other than their own. And because of this gift, the Jews and converts to Judaism from all over the Roman Empire who had packed the city of Jerusalem for the celebration of Pentecost were “utterly amazed”,

“bewildered” and “perplexed” as to how this odd gathering of Galileans (a people and region not commonly associated with education or cosmopolitan skills) were now “declaring the wonders of God” in the native languages of everyone who could hear. (Acts 2:12)

Let’s pause for just a moment and consider just how unique and truly special this is. In fulfillment of the promise of Jesus, the Holy Spirit falls on and fills the people of God with the power of God. And what is it that this power is meant to accomplish?

It does not raise an army.

It does not destroy the enemies of Israel.

It is not power that can be wielded for the purposes of war, ruin, vengeance, or personal gain.

The Holy Spirit gives God’s people the power to *speaking truth* in such a way that anyone in earshot would *hear the Gospel proclaimed*. They’d hear heralding of a new age. They would be invited to accept the invitation to their redemption through Christ.

You and I may not have this same exact gift. To the best of my knowledge the only language I will speak today is English, and unless someone wants to hear “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” sung in Latin, it’s the only language I will be capable of speaking today.

What we do have, as followers of Jesus, is the same Holy Spirit that was united with these original 120 believers. Our mission is the same as theirs. *Our responsibility and privilege as people who have experienced the Holy Spirit’s arrival into our lives, into our hearts, into all the depths of who we are is to find a way to proclaim the same message of hope and salvation that they proclaimed that day – to every tribe, tongue, and nation, to the ends of the earth, until Jesus returns or calls us home.*

We’re going to talk a lot about sharing the gospel as we work our way through the Book of Acts. And we hope to equip you with some ideas and tools and methods that will help you tell others about Jesus along the way. But this morning, I want you to start with a simple question:

Do you believe that as a follower of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will bless you with both ability and opportunity to share what you know to be true with the people around you?

If your answer is “yes” – then my challenge for you this week is, “so what are you going to do about it?” *What is one definitive, specific, tangible way you can seek to engage someone who doesn’t know Jesus in a conversation about the Gospel?*

If your answer is “no” – if you really aren’t sure you’re cut out for telling others about Jesus – I want you to know you’re not alone. To be honest, I often feel like I’m not very good at sharing the Gospel. But I hope you’ll trust me when I say it is worth it to try and grow, get better, and even find delight in sharing all the amazing things Christ has done in your life, and could do in others lives too.

So my challenge for you this week is to simply **Begin with Prayer**. Spend some time humbly seeking God and asking the Holy Spirit to help you see opportunities to speak to others about your faith. Pray for the courage to

start a spiritual conversation with someone. Trust that the same Holy Spirit that gave the first Christians the ability to tell others the Good News wants to help you share what is in your heart, too.

The people of Jerusalem have no idea what to think about this bizarre scene. Some mock these suspiciously chatty Galileans, accusing them of being drunk. Others realize that somehow these strange men and women are managing to hold conversations with people from no fewer than 15 of the surrounding regions, all with different languages and dialects.

Eventually the obvious question is asked: *“What does this mean?” What in the world is going on here?*

In response, Peter stands to address the crowd. After lightheartedly dismissing the idea that he and his companions were all drunk (it’s only 9am, after all!), he then begins to unpack the miracle they are all experiencing. And what he has to say is nothing short of incredible.

16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

*17 “In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.*

*18 Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.*

*19 I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.*

*20 The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.*

21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

Acts 2:16-21 (NIV)

There is a lot we could unpack here, but for our purposes this morning I want to draw your attention to three key details about what Peter just said to the crowds in Jerusalem:

- **First**, he connected what was happening (the 120 believers being able to speak in many different languages in order to declare “the wonders of God”) to a prophecy given by God through the prophet Joel. That prophecy contained wisdom and insight for identifying “the last days” – the final era of human history that would occur before God’s judgment on “the day of the Lord”.
- **Second**, Joel’s prophecy contains two distinct periods of unidentified and indeterminate lengths of time.
 - The first period occurs when the people of God receive His Holy Spirit and begin to prophesy.

- Men and women, young and old, free and servant or slave, will all gain the God-given ability to speak the truth.
- This is where things often get a little fuzzy, because we too often mistakenly assume prophecy means predicting the future.
- In Scripture, however, the ability “to prophesy” *is the ability to speak a true message that is from God*. It may, or may not, have anything to do with the future. It will absolutely have everything to do with God’s will, God’s plans, and God’s desire to redeem his beloved lost creation (aka, you and me).
- Peter is pretty clearly indicating that this first period of Joel’s original prophecy has arrived and is being fulfilled at that moment by the 120 believers receiving the Holy Spirit and declaring the wonders of God in a miraculous way. And it will continue to be fulfilled by the Church until “the day of the Lord”.
- But Joel’s prophecy has more to say. There is also a promise to “show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below”, which will include wild (and quite honestly frightening) stuff like the sun being blocked out and the chaos of blood, fire and smoke being everywhere.
 - This period of “the last days” is, to the best of our knowledge, still yet to come.
 - It is not for us to know when it will arrive or how long it will be. The only thing we can know for sure is that it will precede the final “coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.”
 - That day will be the day of final judgment, of the end of this world as we know it, and the remaking of all creation to be the place where God and humanity can dwell in peace together, forever.
- That leads us to our **third** key detail of this prophecy. The day of the Lord is not something you want to experience without some assurance of salvation.
 - This is, of course, where the Good News comes in: *“everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

So, the question that surely must have been burning in the hearts and minds of the crowd at this point was: *“If we need to call on the name of the Lord to be saved...who is that Lord? Who must we turn to? Who must we follow?”*

And here Peter delivers his first public proclamation of the life, death, and resurrection of this Lord: Jesus Christ:

22 “Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. 23 This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Acts 2:22-24 (NIV)

The one we must rely on for our salvation...the Lord we must call out to in order to be saved from judgment...is the one who was sent by God, verified by the power of God, and knowingly handed over by the plan of God...to be brutally, wrongfully, and wickedly put to death on a cross by the very people who need him the most.

But even death was no match for the sovereign will of God. Its power was broken and could not hold one such as Jesus. The grave had no true claim on the only begotten Son of God.

In vv25-35, Peter crafts a fantastic argument from Scripture that proves Jesus is the long awaited Messiah that King David himself prophesied would one day come. It's worthy of far more study than we can give it this morning, and I truly am sorry about that. But I want to draw your attention to what Peter says next:

36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

Acts 2:36 (NIV)

Peter had told his listeners that in order to be saved, they must call on the Lord. He then broke the news to them that the Lord they needed to call on was Jesus of Nazareth – a man they had unjustly murdered just a few weeks earlier. He then made it clear that Jesus was not just some guy, but that he was in fact the long awaited Messiah, the Son of God, and that their foolish attempt to kill him hadn't worked because God has raised him from the dead and given him full power, authority, dominion, and control over all creation. Including over the people who had, you know, contributed to his death.

They had all been so, so sure they were right. That Jesus was just a mortal nuisance. That he was a problem, here today, gone tomorrow, dead and buried and yesterday's old news.

But now they learn that they had all been so very, very wrong. *"God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."*

37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Acts 2:37 (NIV)

What could they do? What can any of us do? Are there sacrifices enough to even the scales on a debt like this? They tried to kill the Son of God. They know they are in trouble. They scramble, desperately hoping there is something within their power to make things right. The question they ask is not one of curiosity. They are *cut to the heart*. Their voices crack, their bodies tremble. Because whatever the answer to this question is, the one thing they are so, so sure of now is that if there is a way back from this, certainly it must be costly.

And then Peter responds with the grace and mercy and unbelievable scandal of the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Acts 2:38-39 (NIV)

What could they do? What can any of us do? Repent, be baptized, and receive from Jesus Christ, the Lord of our Salvation, forgiveness of your sins and the gift of the indwelling, life changing, eternity-securing Holy Spirit.

Somehow, despite doing nothing to deserve it and everything to disqualify themselves from it, what God has to offer sinners like these is grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation that paves the way to salvation. This was, and has always been, the free gift of God: *call on Jesus as Lord, repent, be baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit.*

The final verses of our passage tell us that many who heard that day did indeed accept this offer – some three thousand people became Christians that day. They chose to follow Jesus. Their lives became forever changed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is the same offer of grace, forgiveness, and salvation made by God and given to us today. Whether it is for the first time or the 5,000th time, I beg you to accept God’s invitation: call on Jesus, repent and turn away from the wrong you have done. Receive the Holy Spirit. Be changed forever.

How do we do this? What might our first steps toward calling on Jesus and receiving the Holy Spirit look like?

The fact that the Jews in Jerusalem had contributed to the crucifixion of their Messiah shocked and shook them to their core. It forced them to consider the depth of their wrongdoing and their desperate need for a power greater than themselves to save them.

I wonder how we might also come to terms with how we’ve been wrong. How have we misunderstood and mistreated Jesus in our own ways? What might we need to realize in order for us to be “cut to the heart” and seek our own reconciliation with God?

As a way to explore our own need for calling on the Lord, I invite you to try doing this: take out the word “crucified” in v36. Replace it with a word that describes your own wrong attitude, actions, and sinful habits.

*“God has made this Jesus, **whom you tend to ignore until you need something from him, both Lord and Messiah.**”*

*“God has made this Jesus, **whom you misrepresent to the world through your selfishness and sin, both Lord and Messiah.**”*

*“God has made this Jesus, **whom you wilfully disobey, both Lord and Messiah.**”*

*“God has made this Jesus, **whom you tend to keep a safe distance from your heart so he can’t mess up anything you really enjoy, or make demands of you that are too great, both Lord and Messiah.**”*

Just like those who first heard Peter’s words on that day of Pentecost, we too must come to terms with the ways in which we’ve been wrong about Jesus. The ways in which we’ve disobeyed him, rejected him, and failed to truly turn to him and away from sin.

But, thanks be to God, the same remedy for our sinful ways that was offered to this crowd over 2000 years ago is offered to you and me today. Brothers and sisters, what shall we do?

Call on the name of the Lord.

Call out to Jesus. Call out to the Savior of the world.

If it is your first time to do so, please let me know. I'd love to celebrate with you and pray for you. If you're already a believer and call out today like you've done so many times before, I'd be thrilled to celebrate and pray with you, too.

Let us all call out, let us all repent, and let us all be filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit and be changed for the better, forever.