



Sermon

3rd Sunday of Easter

4th May, 2014

Apostolic Teaching

Acts 2:14a, 36-42; 1 Peter 1:17-23; Lk 24:13-35

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In the gospel today, we heard that Jesus explained the Old Testament scriptures to those disciples. Have you ever wondered what he said to them? Their hearts burned within them as they walked with him – what a privilege. Well, I think we can know what he taught them. Before the crucifixion they understood very little. But within 50 days, Peter is teaching with confidence drawing on Old Testament scriptures relating to the Messiah.

I have noticed that Peter not only reports what he has seen but clearly teaches what he has heard from Jesus. There are examples from the Book of Acts where as he is quoted we can see he is repeating Jesus' words or even actions as in the raising of Tabitha. There he almost precisely follows the procedure Jesus used in the raising of Jairus' daughter.

So it is significant for us to listen closely to this foremost of the Apostles as he writes what he considers to be important to the young churches of his day. We claim to follow Apostolic teaching, well here is the writing of an apostle for us to consider and align ourselves too.

Today we get two bites at the cherry – we hear a portion of Peter's sermon from the Day of Pentecost as well as a portion from his first letter.

Who Jesus is:

Acts 2:36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Peter boldly proclaimed that Jesus whom they had rejected and crucified had risen from the dead. "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact."¹ That is the great message of Easter – Christ is Risen: *He is risen indeed!* Peter proclaims that Jesus was shown by God to be "both Lord and Christ" Yes, the Christ, but also Lord.

The word, "Lord," is loaded. In Greek it is *Kurios*. It can simply be a respectful term of address, like, "sir." However, it is the way God is referred to in much of the Old Testament. You may know that whenever the name of God was written in the scripture, the Jews developed the custom of saying *Adonai* instead out of respect, lest they wrongly use the name of God. *Adonai* is Hebrew for "Lord." So when the Old Testament was translated into Greek, they used the Greek word for Lord in those places: *Kurios*. Do you see why I say the word is loaded? It was the normal reference to God and now it is being used of Jesus! It wasn't only applied to God, but often was and as they continue to

¹ Acts 2:32

use the word, it becomes more and more obvious that they do mean God. There are Old Testament quotations about Yahweh which are reapplied to Jesus without hesitation or apology. For instance, Paul wrote in Philippians 2:9:

“God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

He is quoting Isaiah 45:

"Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other ... Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear [allegiance]." ²

Is he Lord of your life? Lord means boss or Master. When we went to England for a 6 month adventure, we thought God understood that it was to be a return trip. Imagine our surprise when as we prayed about going home, the reply was “Yes, I told you to come and no, I have not told you to leave.” That put the boot entirely on the other foot. We had said prayers in the past like, “Lord I give you my life” but now it was actually happening. It was in God’s hands when or if we left England and went home to NZ. It was quite a shock. As a consequence 6 months turned into 11 years - then he quite clearly told us it was time to go back home.

Sometimes people flit from church to church looking for one which makes them feel comfortable and leave immediately something goes wrong. But they do not stop and ask God “You instructed me to come here; has that changed?” He is in charge not us.

What has Jesus done?

Peter declared Jesus to be Lord and Christ. He also presents him as Saviour. In his letter, he says to the Christians that they were set free from their old life which had been empty. They were part of a corrupt generation – every generation is corrupt but we see corruption increasing in our day. It used to be that murder was a rare event in NZ, now the papers seem to report it frequently.

They had had evil desires - it is true of all people who are separated from God. We have all known it. Some of us perhaps are still in that place: you search for truth in all sorts of places; you cannot pray; your prayers hit the ceiling; you are so dissatisfied with life – that is separation from God. If that describes your life – there is an answer.

The answer lies in what Jesus has done. His death on the cross was to pay for our sins – the things that separate us from God. That price could not be paid in money. Peter said, “You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers.” ³ How could temporary things be used to buy eternal life? No, we learn from the Old Testament it takes life to ransom a life. In this case the pure life of the Son of God willingly laid down. Before the earth itself was created, God decided that he would pay that terrible price, he would take flesh, he would spill his lifeblood to pay for the offence of mankind. How did Peter know that? Because after the resurrection Jesus explained matters and taught him.

Call:

Peter moves on to the call to action: The people were horrified as they realised what they had done in crucifying the Christ. They cried out to the apostles, “What shall we do?” The answer is so simple

² Isaiah 45:22-23. Friberg’s lexicon defines the Septuagint Greek word as “of open expression of allegiance to someone confess, acknowledge” Paul would have been quoting from the Septuagint.

³ 1 Peter 1:18

and yet impossible for the proud: “Repent and be baptised for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”⁴

Repent means change your mind; align your thinking with God’s ways. If you find yourself reading the Bible and passing quickly over some passages – stop and ask yourself why. Perhaps you need to choose to believe that God knows best. That is repentance.

Repentance is a change in behaviour following a change in what we believe. Suppose someone had a habit of taking stationery from work or leaving early – that’s likely to change after he submitted to Christ. The Holy Spirit highlights things that had seemed OK and we see them differently. He might remind that person of the command “Do not steal” and it no longer is acceptable to his conscience.

Perhaps you know that your way of life is immoral - instead of excusing yourself, change your mind and act differently; that is repentance.

As we put our trust in Jesus’ ability to deal with our sins; as we ask his forgiveness and choose to obey him, he gives us new life. It’s what Jesus called being born again. It is a new life inside. Life is changed, transformed. It is exciting and wonderful. Suddenly, the separation from God has gone. Instead of knowing about him, you know him. Instead of your prayers hitting the ceiling with a soggy thud, you know you are getting through and sense his listening presence. You start to be aware of what he is communicating to you.

On Easter Sunday at the 10am service, Helen and I separately sensed there were some words of knowledge to give out to the congregation. During the last song, I paused and asked the Lord if there was something I was to say and sensed simply “headache.” I asked Anne who was near me if she had a word, and to my surprise she immediately responded, “Yes, ‘gastrocnemius’.” Somewhat stunned, I said, “What’s that?” She indicated it was a muscle in the body but she couldn’t remember where.

So I announced both of these, the vague and general, “headache” and the specific “gastrocnemius.” I learnt, afterwards, of two visitors who came forward for prayer. One had been assaulted and suffered from bad concussion. With fractures to the skull, he was still experiencing headaches and peculiar effects and was grateful for the prayer. The other was a visitor who normally goes to another church but had felt she should visit us that Sunday. She had pain in that calf muscle and was worried about coping on holiday – she came forward for prayer as well. Isn’t God good? What an encouragement to those two that He knew their circumstances, concerns and needs.

Peter wrote that this new life is from imperishable seed rather than perishable. Seed and semen is the same word in Greek. He is saying this is not just natural life from a human father and mother but the gift of eternal life (imperishable seed). This is life which lasts, passes through death into eternity. And the seed for this life comes from the Word of God. That is another reason the Bible is so important. It is the recorded, inspired Word of God. It endures, it lives and it gives life. As we explore the Bible today, seed is being sown. Will you allow it to germinate in your heart to bring forth righteous eternal life? Take time to read a bit each day and think about it. Then it will grow within you and bring forth fruit.

Action:

Many of Peter’s hearers on that day of Pentecost responded. “Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”⁵ When a gift is given, you must receive it.

⁴ Acts 2:37

⁵ Acts 2:41

Maybe as I have talked you have realised you are ready to ask for that gift of eternal life. Maybe you heard mention of the gift of the Holy Spirit which is available to believers to enable us to live for Jesus. Maybe you have dismissed the gifts of the Holy Spirit as irrelevant and now realised that was wrong. Maybe you realise that you have devalued God's word to you, or the Bible and you need to receive his spoken life and obey it. Maybe you have wanted to be saved but not to obey God – today is the day to establish that he is Lord as well as Saviour.

The people had to receive the gift that was offered to them. I am going to lead us in prayer now. You can agree in your heart if you want that eternal life, or to repent of the empty life you have led or to receive the Holy Spirit and his gifts.

Lord Jesus, I realise that an a sinner. I have been a rebel against God the Father and I am sorry. I believe you died for me on the cross and rose again. Please forgive me and save me. I choose to follow you as my Lord. Please give me the gift of the Holy Spirit living in me. Thank you. Amen.

If that prayer was significant for you I would like you to come forward for prayer at the end of the service, to the team so they can encourage you. If you have chosen to follow Jesus, I encourage you to make sure you start to read a portion of the Bible each day (start in the gospels), pray to God your father and tell other people of your decision. God bless you.

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