

Place: Lurgan Baptist 12:11:2006

Reading: Acts 2:14-41

THE CHURCH ABLAZE

5. PETER'S FIRST SERMON AND BEST

A young preacher stepped up to the pulpit of a little country church. This was his first sermon. Years of training and dreaming had finally been realised. He tried to look wise and pastoral, but he still couldn't keep his knees from knocking. He straightened his well-rehearsed notes and opened his gold-edged graduation Bible. But before he could say, “*Let's pray,*” a clatter arose at the back of the church. With a bang, the door sprang open and a herd of goats burst into the church.

His seminary professors had warned him about common sermon distractions, the occasional crying baby, the chronic latecomer, and the note-passing teenager.

But no one had told him about goats. He tried to preach, but the goats were causing too much racket. So he took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and helped wrestle the goats out of the building. Being a shepherd of God's flock took on a whole new meaning for him that day. Needless to say, his first sermon was a disaster.

Spurgeon's Preachers College had a tradition of giving students a text right on the spot and having them preach to Mr. Spurgeon and the staff. On one particular

day a student was given the subject of Zacchaeus. The student stood before them and said, “*Zacchaeus was of little stature, so am I. Zacchaeus was up a tree, so am I.*”

Zacchaeus came down, so will I.” And he sat down. Smart man ! He probably had a great career.

Peter's first sermon was probably his best. It is perhaps, aside from our Lord's sermons the greatest ever preached. Greatest because of the *Place* it occupies in the history of redemption, (it is the first message of the age of grace) greatest by its *Pure Results* (there were 3,000 converts) and greatest by virtue of its being a *Model for Apostolic Preaching*. Now in these wild and weird and wicked times, the work of the preacher is being rethought, and revamped and re-examined. He's been pushed from the centre of the platform in favour of celebrated experts and entertainers. In an effort to appeal to people's interest, the church today emphasizes a great many different programmes, methods and approaches. Small group activities, worship services emphasising music and drama, have become increasingly popular. Musical evenings and Gospel Concerts, seminars on everything from how to have a good marriage to how to handle money abound.

Now not of all these things may be harmful, some in their proper place may even be helpful. But what has been sacrificed in the flurry of activities and programs is what Dr. M .L. Jones called, “*the primacy of preaching.*” While some people may bid it good riddance, such has not been the attitude of the church through history starting with the Early Church.

For the first event of church history, following the coming of the Holy Spirit, was Peter's sermon. It led to 3,000 conversions and ignited a flame that would spread across continents and warm the world to the gospel of Christ. The Book of Acts is largely the record of apostolic preaching. My preaching has always remained central to the church's mission. In (4:2) we have the displeasure of the Jewish officials that the apostles “ *preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.*” Undaunted “ *daily in the temple and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.*” (5:42) After the first great persecution of the church broke out, “ *they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.*” (8:4) (Acts Ch 8) also records the preaching of Philip (8:5) and Peter and John (8:25)

Do you recall what Saul did after his conversion ?
“ *And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.*” (9:20)
And all the way to the very last verse, Acts records how the Early Church “ *continued to preach the gospel.*”
(14:7 13:5 20:25 28:31) And this emphasis on preaching by the Early Church reflected our Lord's ministry. At the very outset of His ministry, “ *Jesus began to preach, and to say, repent for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*” (Matt 4:17) In (Lk 4:43) Christ said, “ *I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, for therefore am I sent.*” He instructed His disciples, “ *And as ye go preach,*” (Matt 10:7) and at the end He said, “ *Go ye into all the world and preach*

the gospel to every creature.” (Mk 16:15)

My preaching has rightly held that central place in the life of the true church throughout the ages. The Protestant Reformation, which recovered the faith, was initiated and spread largely through the revival of preaching by men like Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and Knox. At the very core of the great strength of 17th century Puritanism was its emphasis on sound Biblical preaching. The Great Awakening of the 18th century was led through preaching by men such as George Whitefield, John Wesley, and Jonathan Edward's. The 19th century saw great evangelists such as D. L. Moody, and great preachers, such as Charles Spurgeon, Joseph Parker and Alexander Maclaren.

My a godly man gifted by the Spirit to preach the Word has no equal in the presentation of God's truth. It is the God-ordained method for evangelism and edification. And surely the weakness of the contemporary church is largely due to the decline of powerful biblical preaching. Paul said the standard in contrast when he said, “ *For I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.*” (1 Cor 2:2-4)

Now in case it should be thought that this subject is of greater interest to preachers than to anyone else, we could re-title the study, “ ***What it means to be a***

witness to Christ.” Just 50 days before this event, Peter had committed the greatest denial of Christ in history, but **failure is not final**. Had Christ not promised, “ *but ye shall receive power and ye shall be witnesses unto me.*” (1:8) And the importance of these verses is that they provide a prototype of all true witnessing and preaching.

Now the situation in Jerusalem at **this time** was **not** an inviting one. Fifty days earlier the Jews had murdered Peter's leader by slow torture and had got away with it. Now a huge, excited crowd that must have exceeded 3,000 had come to see and hear the apostles speaking in their own languages. Some were honestly inquiring, “ *What does this mean ?*” (2:12) Others said, “ *They have had too much wine.*” (2:13) It was not an easy situation and yet Peter did his greatest preaching on this occasion. Have a look at,

(1) THE MANNER OF APOSTOLIC PREACHING

For there is clear, down to earth instruction here for all who would preach the gospel and witness for Christ. Notice for example that Peter's preaching:

(a) It was Direct, Pointed and Personal:

Look at the phrases he uses, in (2:23) “ *Ye have taken,*” and in (2:36) “ *Whom ye crucified.*” My Peter is not reading an essay for the use of men in general, he is not beating the air with philosophical speculations, he is aiming an arrow straight at the mind and conscience of his hearers. He is speaking with

impassioned fervour to those who stand before him, speaking to them of that which concerned them spiritually and eternally. Joseph Parker said of Spurgeon, “ *The only colours Mr. Spurgeon knew were black and white. In all things he was definite. You were either in or out, up or down, alive or dead.*” One of the traits of some modern preaching is to be vague and impersonal, so often we blunt the sword like these, but not Peter for he drives the sword into the sinner's conscience as he cries, “ *Ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.*” (2:23)

(b) It was Simple, Plain and Clear:

First Peter answered their question, (2:15) second, he told them about Christ, third, he enlisted commitment. There was none of the stuffy obscurity that comes so easily to preachers. A. J. Gossip tells how he once heard the great Principal Rainey of New College, Edinburgh enthusiastically discussing a certain preacher's scholarly sermons, when one of his friends asked, “ *Will the simple people to whom he preaches follow him at all ?*” “ Well,” replied Rainey, “ *they will have the comfortable feeling that something very fine is going on.*” My there was none of that with Peter's Pentecostal sermon. It was absolutely clear and simple. Peter uses words everyone can understand. Even children could grasp the uncomplicated, non-technical concepts he presents. He did not make it difficult, he simply laid out the plain truth of the Word of God. My the gospel of which we are stewards is plain enough for a child to understand. Many churches never

make an impact because they do not preach the plain gospel. People can attend some churches for months and years and never know what they must do to have eternal life. Again,

(c) It was Instructive, Educational, and Informative:

This was not “*emotional evangelism.*” For you'll notice that Peter directed his message to the mind giving instruction, (2:14-21) to the heart producing enthusiasm, (2:25-28) to the conscience resulting in conviction, (2:23) and to the will leading to decision, (2:37-38) and in the NT the appeal of the Gospel is always to the mind, heart, conscience, and will. (Is 1:18) Are you beginning to get a picture of how Peter preached ? Is that how you preach ? Is that how you witness ? Look again,

(d) It was Biblical, Scriptural and Historical:

Do you recall Paul's injunction to Timothy ? “*Preach the Word*” (2 Tim 4:2) Peter certainly did that here for his message abounds with God's Word. Look for e.g. at (2:16) and in the following verses he quotes (Joel 2:28-32) or look at (2:25) and then he quotes (Ps 16:8-11) and (Ps 110:1) Do you see what Peter did ? He rooted the Gospel in the familiar Scriptures of the Old Testament. Now let me ask, is your preaching: witnessing, singing, is it Scriptural and Biblical ? For surely a necessary qualification for every preacher of the Gospel is a thorough knowledge of the Word of God. Notice finally,

(e) It was Bold, Fearless and Courageous:

Speaking concerning Christ he say's to this gathered company, “*Whom ye have crucified.*” (2:36) Was this not a distinctive trait of New Testament preaching ? It was done with holy boldness, courage and without apology. When Peter preached to the Jewish Sanhedrin in (Ch 4) we're told, “*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John ,*” (4:13) In that same chapter the early church came before the throne of grace do you remember how they prayed ? Look at (4:29) Oh, that God would raise up preachers in Ulster who, will preach boldly, authoritatively, clearly, fearlessly for as Robert M. McCheyne says, “*There is nothing more indecent than a dead preacher bringing to dead sinners the living truth of the living God.*” (1)

(2) THE MATTER OF APOSTOLIC PREACHING

Not **how** did Peter preach, but **what** did Peter preach ? It's worth noting that Peter did not get caught up with social issues, he didn't get involved politically, rather his message was Christ-centred. (2:22, 32, 36) Peter had been the spokesman for the apostles during Christ's earthly ministry. He now continues in that role. Capturing his audience, he begins with,

(a) THE WORD OF EXPLANATION:

“*Drunk,*” he said, “*How can these men be drunk ? It is only nine o'clock in the morning.*” Now that was

enough to refute the charge of drunkenness. Now Peter explains what happens. In (2:17-21) Peter quotes from (Joel 2:28-32) The crucial question here is this. Is Peter saying in (2:16) that Joel's prophecy was *fulfilled* at Pentecost ? A closer examination of Peter's exact words will indicate that *he did not say* Joel's prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost ? In fact, he never used the word “*fulfilled*,” or any word to suggest fulfilment. Then what is Peter saying ? Well, the context shows that some Jews were mocking the apostles (who had spoken to the people in their own languages) they supposed that they were drunk at nine o'clock in the morning.

In order to counter the Jewish mockers, Peter says “*this is that*,” (2:16) or in essence, “*stop your mocking for this is similar to what Joel said would happen when God pours out His Spirit in the Millennial Kingdom.*”

(Zech 12:10) There is a second reason why Joel's prophecy was not fulfilled at Pentecost. Joel said that God would pour His Spirit out on “*all flesh.*”

(Joel 2:28) That did not happen at Pentecost. The third reason why Joel's prophecy was not fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost is clearly seen in (2:19-20) Did that happen at Pentecost ? My such signs as these belong to the time of the Second Advent of Christ. You see what Peter was saying was this, “*Pentecost is similar to what Joel said would happen when God pours out His Spirit in the Millennial Kingdom.*” Peter begins with (a) and then he continues with,

(b) THE WORD OF EXPOSITION:

He sets out to prove that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. He presents the truth that Israel's long-awaited Messiah has come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Now can you imagine how disturbing that would have been for a Jew ? Messiah was the central figure in Jewish thought.

Of Him God had revealed, “*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be.*” (Gen 49:10) He was the great descendant of David of whom God had said, “*I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*” (2 Sam 7:13 Lk 1:31) My in light of this for Peter boldly to claim that Jesus was the Christ to the Jew was blasphemy.

That same antipathy toward Jesus Christ persists in our day. I'll never forget talking to a Jew one day in Tel Aviv and when I told him why I was in his country, do you know what he said, “*Jesus Christ was a blasphemer and an impostor.*” My for Peter to proclaim Jesus as Israel's Messiah was to raise the most dynamic, powerful and forceful issue possible. But he did. Peter's message was great because it was *Christ-centred*. Have a look at it for a moment and notice that he highlights six truths about Christ. Peter talks about:

(1) INCARNATION:

Look at (2:22) “*Jesus of Nazareth a man.*” This was the name by which our Lord was known during his

earthly ministry. (Matt 21:11 Mk 10:47 14:67) It identified Him with his home-town of Nazareth. This name for our Lord reflects His wonderful condescension in leaving the glory of heaven to live in a humble Galilean village. My have we grasp the wonder of it all ? That the Saviour who was co-equal, co-eternal and co-creative with the Father made “ *Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.* ” (Phil 2:7-8) That's Incarnation ! But then Peter talks about,

(2) AUTHENTICATION:

For look at (2:22) again. My the many miracles performed by our Lord provide overwhelming evidence that He is who He claimed to be. From His miraculous birth to His miraculous resurrection, to all the miracles He performed during His earthly ministry, the miraculous element was central in our Lord's life. Nicodemus no doubt spoke for many when he said, “ *Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with Him.* ” (Jn 3:2) He was approved of God. He fulfilled all the criteria for the Messiah.

(1) (2)

(3) CRUCIFIXION:

Look at (2:23) Peter thus presents the total sovereignty of God alongside the complete responsibility of man. There was no escaping Israel's

guilt. They had murdered the Messiah, they had slain the very Son of the Living God. There could be no greater guilt than that. But thank God for,

(4) RESURRECTION:

“ *It is not possible,* ” Is this not the cry of the modernist when confronted with the Resurrection of Christ ? “ *It's contrary to nature, it never happened, it is a lie propagated by the disciples who stole the body and faked an empty tomb.* ” My God takes the same position when confronted with the unbelief of men regarding the resurrection. Look at (2:24) Hallelujah, for such a glorious Divine impossibility ! It was impossible for God to leave Jesus in the tomb. What a message to herald to that guilty multitude who stood there on the Day of Pentecost. My what a message to be blazed across the world. (2:25-28 Ps 16:9-11 2:33-35 Ps 110:1) Death could not hold the Saviour. You see, death could not hold Christ because of,

*** Divine Power:**

The Lord Jesus was “ *the resurrection and the life.* ” (Jn 11:25) who died “ *that through death He might destroy Him that had the power of death.* ” (Heb 2:14)

*** Divine Promise:**

Do you recall what He said to the Jews, “ *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.* ” (Jn 2:19)

*** Divine Purpose:**

(3) THE MIRACLE OF APOSTOLIC PREACHING

You see, the Lord has designed that His people be with Him for all eternity, and in order to do that, they need to go through death and out the other side, but Christ had to go first to make the way. “ *Christ the first fruits,*”

(1 Cor 15:23) I say again, what a message for a sin defiled world, Christ lives ! But Peter hadn’t finished. 1,2,3,4,

(5) ASCENSION:

Look at (2:33) For not only did Jesus rise from the dead, but He also was exalted to the place of honour, glory and power. (Phil 2:9-11) And now that Christ was risen and exalted God fulfilled the promise to send the Holy Spirit. (Jn 7:39) My Peter's preaching was full of Christ 1,2,3,4,5. Do you see how he concluded ?

(6) GLORIFICATION:

(2:36) They had crucified Him, God had crowned Him. They had entombed Him, God had enthroned Him. They had cast Him out, God had caught Him up. They had executed Him, God had exalted Him. My “ *the head that once brow.*” Can you see Peter preaching on the Day of Pentecost ? Can you see something of (1) (2) Well, what effect did the preaching of the Word have ?

For 3,000 souls were saved. How ? (1) By the Spirit of God: (2:33) for the new birth is the operation of God the Holy Spirit. (Jn 3:5) (2) Through the Word of God: for the instrument that the Holy Spirit uses is the Word of God. (1 Pet 1:23) (3) As they Repented and exercised Faith in the Saviour. (2:38) You see,

(a) THERE WAS CONVICTION:

The word translated “ *pricked,*” is a rare one and means to pierce, sting sharply, stun, smite. Outside the Scriptures it is used of horses dinging the earth with their hoofs. The hearts of the people had been smitten sharply by the preaching of the Word and this brought the question, “ *what shall we do ?*” (2:37) They had a deep sense of their own guilt and a deep fear of God's wrath. There was conviction ! And such conviction of sin is a part of every genuine conversion. Do you know something ? Much modern preaching is superficial designed to meet “ *felt needs,*” in order to make the hearers feel good. Some preachers boast that people can come to their services and never feel guilty about their lifestyles. They advertise that they are there to “ *make you feel good.*” Well, Peter’s sermon cut his hearers to the heart. There was real conviction ! My could it be that you've stepped into this service this not saved ? I wonder has the Holy Spirit applied the Word of God with such power to your heart that you're disturbed ? That you're crying out, “ *What shall we do ?*” (2:37)

(b) THERE WAS CONVERSION:

Peter said, “ *Repent,* ” (2:38) and in (2:41) we read “ *they that gladly received his word.* ” The word “ *repent,* ” (metaneo) speaks of a change of mind, a change of heart, a change of will. A. Barnes says, “ *False repentance dreads the consequences of sin: true repentance dreads sin itself.* ” Is this not what conversion is ? Its a genuine repentance which forsakes sin and turns in total commitment to Jesus Christ ! Have you done that ? Its interesting to notice here along with
(a) (b)

(c) THERE WAS CONFESSION:

For (2:38) says, “ *Repent Holy Ghost.* ” Now does this mean that we're baptised in order to have our sins forgiven ? No ! It means we're baptised because our sins are remitted. The Greek preposition “ *eis,* ” “ *for,* ” can be translated “ *because of.* ” “ *Be baptised because your sins are forgiven.* ” My *believers baptism is an outward expression of an inward experience.* Baptism is like wearing a wedding ring. Its a symbol that you're saved. Just like a wedding ring is an emblem that you've been married. Now wearing a wedding ring does not make you married. It shows you are married. You could be married and not wear it, but the wedding ring, says “ *Look I belong to someone.* ” And my baptism says, “ *I belong to Christ.* ”

Can you imagine what it meant for these Jews, now

Christians to be baptised ? Baptism would mark a public break with Judaism and identification with the Lord Jesus Christ ! How could Peter expect them to turn their backs publicly on their culture ? How could he ask them to risk becoming outcasts among their families and society ? My it cost them to become followers of the Lamb and (2:41) says they were prepared to pay the price. What about you ? Are you willing to publicly, openly, unashamedly confess your faith in Christ by baptism ? Are you ready through baptism to tell the world that you belong to Him ?

PETER'S FIRST SERMON AND BEST. It was so full of Christ wasn't it ? Peter exalted the Lord Jesus. Is this not to be our purpose *Corporately* ? Oh, that this church will exalt Him ! Is this not to be our purpose *Personally* ? John the Baptist said, “ *He must increase, but I must decrease.* ” (Jn 3:30))

**“ *May this poor self grow less and less
Be Thou my life and aim
Oh, make me daily through Thy grace
More meet to bear Thy name.* ”**