Pentecost #10-1

 Acts 2:14-23

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and spoke to them, saying, “Fellow Jews, and all you who are residing in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and pay close attention to my words.

 For these are not drunk, as you suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

 But this is that which has been spoken through the prophet Joel:

And it will be in the last days, says God, I will pour out a portion of my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams.

And even on my male servants and on my female servants I will pour out my spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

And I will show wonders in the heavens above, and signs on the earth beneath: blood, and fire, and a cloud of smoke.

The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious Day of the Lord comes.

 And it will be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

You men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man pointed out to you by God by mighty works and wonders and signs, which God did through him in the midst of you, just as you yourselves know,

this man, delivered up by the decreed plan and foreknowledge of God, you, by lawless hands, crucified and killed.

This is one of the boldest speeches in the Bible. It’s right up there with Elijah and the prophets of Baal and Nathan’s reproof of King David. Peter is accusing the multitude in the temple of murdering the Messiah. There would have been priests, Levites, and scribes present. These were some of the same ones who voted to crucify Jesus. Isn’t it amazing that God didn’t put real tongues of fire on the actual murderers? I would be tempted to do that to anyone who participated in my son’s murder, but God’s ways are not our ways. God shows up in the temple on Pentecost with signs and wonders and makes available justification to all – even Jesus’ killers! Jaw-droppingly amazing!

 Acts 2:24-38

But God raised him up, having freed him from the agony of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

For David says concerning him, I saw the Lord always before me, for he is on my right hand so that I would not be moved.

Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced, moreover my flesh also will rest in hope

because you will not abandon my soul to the grave, nor will you allow your Devout One to see corruption.

You made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.

“Men and brothers, I can speak to you with confidence about the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.

Since he was a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body he would seat one of his descendants on his throne,

he, foreseeing this, spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his flesh see corruption.

 God has raised this Jesus; we all are witnesses of this.

Then, being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promised holy spirit, he has poured out this that you see and hear.

For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand,

 until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’

“Therefore, let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him—this Jesus whom you crucified—both Lord and Christ.”

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brothers, what should we do?”

And Peter said to them, “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.

We will spend little time covering this magnificent sermon except where it’s widely misunderstood. Can you believe God offers forgiveness and the same holy spirit to each of the multitude whom Peter accused of being an accessory in Christ’s murder? How could we ever be afraid of God? There will be justice one day, but that day was not on Pentecost, nor has it been since, even 2000 years later. It is still the acceptable time of the Lord. Accept Christ because he accepted the punishment for our sins. Wow!

 Acts 2:39

For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are far off, even to as many as the Lord our God will call.”

This is where us non-Jews get to be a part of God’s family. God originally promised the blessing to Abram’s family, Israel. God surprisingly widened the call to “whosoever will believe”. We Gentiles get in with “as many as the Lord our God will call.” As of Acts 2, Peter didn’t know that God would open the doors that far on Pentecost, but he prophetically hinted of God’s enthusiastic wide-open invitation.

 Acts 2:40,41

And with many other words he testified, and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”

Then those who received his word were baptized, and in that day there were added to their number about 3,000 souls.

Notice the unique use of “souls” in this setting. This changes the usual protocol of enumerating multitudes by counting “men”, in other words, males. This may aggravate some who project 21st century sexist concerns onto the Bible (and almost anything else!), but the ancient biblical culture was sexist. Men ruled and led in almost every social and political way. And this was true not just in ancient Jewish culture, but almost all ancient cultures. Most counting of groups was done by counting the males, usually the male heads of households.

 Ex. 12:37

The children of Israel traveled from Rameses to Succoth, about 600,000 on foot who were men, besides children.

 Ex. 32:28

The sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses, and there fell of the people that day about 3,000 men.

 2 Sam. 24:9,15

Joab gave up the sum of the numbering of the people to the king, and there were in Israel 800,000 valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were 500,000 men.

So Yahweh sent a pestilence on Israel from the morning even to the appointed time; and there died of the people from Dan even to Beer-sheba 70,000 men.

 Matt 14:21 15:38

 And those who ate were about 5,000 men, aside from women and children.

 And those who ate were 4,000 men, besides women and children.

 Acts 4:4

But many of those who heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to be about 5,000.

Notice that God calls the number of new saints on Pentecost “about 3,000 souls.” Could this departure from the normal way of numbering a multitude by counting males indicate that God looked at this differently? Perhaps. He didn’t look at the newly saved as “men”, “women” or “children”, but instead as “souls”. One of the truly revolutionary changes Pentecost instituted was the de-emphasis of gender (a body distinction) because of the new emphasis on spirit, where there is no distinction.

 Gal. 3:27,28

 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus.

“There is neither male nor female.” Gender is a function God set up to make “lots of people make lots of people”. It will be unnecessary in the next chapter of eternity.

 Mark 12:25

For when they rise out from among the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

God wants hungry souls who want to be more – body, soul, and spirit. There will be no distinctions in gender, race, age, or class because those differences melt away with the new bodies. Pretty wild, huh? Young people, old people, women, men, rich, poor, racially scorned, racially privileged, ugly, beautiful, democrats, republicans, pedestrians… all these differences mean nothing to God. He sees Christ in us via the spirit, not these transitory conditions. And amazingly, He loves us despite our fascination with these eternally irrelevant earthly details. What grace!

Let’s look at a head-scratcher in Peter’s Pentecost preaching. When the mockers said that the apostles were speaking in tongues because they were drunk, Peter said…

 Acts 2:17, 18

 For these are not drunk, as you suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

 But this is that which has been spoken through the prophet Joel:

Here is what Joel wrote hundreds of years before.

 Joel 2:28-32

It will happen afterward that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions.

 And also on my servants and on my servant girls in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

 will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood, fire, and pillars of smoke.

The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes.

It will happen that whoever will call on the name of Yahweh will be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as Yahweh has said, and among the remnant those whom Yahweh calls.”

Was what happened on Pentecost “that which has been spoken through the prophet Joel”? The answer is “No.” If so, where are the “wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood, fire, and pillars of smoke.”? Where are “the sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes.”? Also, where are “your sons and your daughters will prophesy”? None of this happened on the first Pentecost, except perhaps the prophesying later in the day when the about 3000 souls got saved and baptized in the spirit. But no “blood, fire, and pillars of smoke” or “bloody moon”. Not that day or since. Why not?

Was Joel foretelling the events that would happen on Pentecost and thereafter? No, he could not be. Why? Because those events pertaining to the Church of Grace were “hidden in God”, remember? Throughout the Old Testament, this time we live in now was a mystery, a sacred secret. This was not made known until it was revealed to the apostle Paul and others 20-30 years after Pentecost.

Therefore, Joel was foretelling the second coming of Christ for Israel. This will happen well after Christ’s return for his church in the Rapture, as we have discussed previously. So why did Peter quote this verse? Because he sincerely thought that Christ was coming back shortly and establishing his kingdom on earth, as many Old Testament scriptures predicted. He quoted Joel for the same reason that the apostles asked Jesus right before the ascension if he was about to restore the kingdom to Israel. They were ignorant about the “mystery gap” in spiritual history and thought that the spiritual outpouring to the church was the same as the one that will happen to Israel before the millennial kingdom.

 Rev. 6:12-16

 And I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth made of goat hair, and the full moon became like blood,

and the stars of heaven fell to the earth like a fig tree casts its unripe figs when it is shaken by a great wind.

And the heavens were removed like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of their places.

And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the military commanders, and the rich, and the strong, and every slave and free person, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains,

and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb,

This is what Peter thought was about to happen. Why? Because this is what the scripture foretold would happen and Peter assumed that the spiritual chronology from the first to the second coming of Christ would roll on unabated. It was a wrong assumption, but it is certainly understandable. 2000 years later we still don’t know when this Age of Grace in which we live ends, and the biblical timeline of Israel resumes. We know it will, as the Lord showed the apostle John in the book of Revelation. But when…? Could be starting today! Come, Lord!

This aspect of Peter quoting Joel incorrectly could freak some out. “How can Peter misquote the Old Testament at the beginning of so important a preaching?” some might ask. I have a question for us to ponder too. “Why do we think that us humans must do things perfectly for God to work?” The answer is “We shouldn’t”. I learned this lesson once powerfully and in an unforgettable way.

The Twins

Years ago, I was a home fellowship coordinator when one of the attendees was in an auto accident and brought into the local emergency room. As I and some other friends sat in the ER waiting room waiting to bring her home, a woman in her 40’s sat blankly staring into space, occasionally crying. I went over and asked her what was wrong, and she told me she had teenage twin boys who were in a terrible car wreck that night. “Both are in surgery now,” she whimpered. I explained that I and my friends were Christians and asked if she wanted us to pray for her boys. She agreed to prayer and as we all sat together, I began.

Now, I am not a skilled healer as some are in the church. All of us are gifted in various ways. Those of you who know me, know my giftings and few people call requesting healing from me. That night though was amazing starting when I prayed. I “saw” one of the twin boy’s skeletal systems like I would a full body x-ray. There were a few broken vertebrae, and I commanded their healing. Then I saw some busted organs and ordered their wholeness one by one. Then I directed the circulatory system to work correctly and repaired some torn muscles as I remember. This ministering took 5-10 minutes because the damage caused by the car wreck was extensive. Even though the kid was a mess, God healed him.

This degree of revelation and healing was not a regular occurrence for me, so I was truly in awe and excited. When I finished ministering to the one brother, I got ready to minister to the other one when the revelation ended. It just stopped. I was confused so I started praying for the boy – not ministering healing – just general prayer. I figured the revelation would come, but it never did. Then I pivoted to the mother and prayed for her too. We prayed for our friend of whom we had heard that she was fine and would be out soon.

The mother was thankful for the ministering and prayer and thanked us. We comforted her and got our friend who was released from the ER and headed home. Some of the saints were asking me why I said what I said during the prayer/ministering for the first boy, so I told them about the vision revelation and subsequent healing. It was a high time for them because they had never been a part of something like that before. And frankly, it was a rare occurrence for me too.

The next morning a few of us went to eat at a local restaurant and someone read in the newspaper about the twins in the car wreck the night before. One boy lived and the other died. One of the saints asked why it happened like that. Even though I said I didn’t know, God was slowly filling me in on what had happened behind the scenes.

For healing like that to happen, it took the mother’s desire and trust toward God because the boys were both unconscious. The reason one lived and one died was simple – she loved one a lot more than the other. That’s why God supplied the revelation, trust, miracles and healing for one but not the other. This may surprise you, but as excited as I was for seeing one boy healed – right before my revelation “eyes” - I was also devastated at the other one dying. It was like a part of me died too. My heart was wrecked that a mother could love one twin and discard the other one. “We had just saved one miraculously, so why can’t we save another?” I wondered. So, I had prayed to God and asked Him also, “How can you save the son of a woman who hates her other son?”

I remember what God said to me then like it was yesterday. He said “Sin and imperfection are like sand on the beach or leaves in the fall – it’s abundant everywhere… and worthless. What’s priceless is trust and when I see it and have an opportunity to bless, I will.”

 3 John 2 KJV

Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

God continued, “Steve, you will achieve little if you focus on sand and leaves and miss the diamonds. When I see desire and trust toward Me, I will bless anyway I can. This is who I am and what I do.”

This exchange floored me. Up until this point I still thought we earned God’s blessing. In this situation I felt that the mother had not only not earned God’s blessing, but I felt she deserved His condemnation. God ignored the common human failings just as if they were sand and reached for the diamond of her heart toward Him and her one son and healed him. It was utterly amazing grace!

This idea that God will bless us when we are perfect, deserve it, or earn it, is ridiculous. It didn’t stop God from blessing us when we were unsaved maniacs, so why should it stop Him later? OK… Peter misquoted Joel on Pentecost. Should God stop Pentecost? Shut down the tongues and send the multitude away? How nuts! Man falling short is like “sand on the beach and leaves in the fall”, common and worthless. But Peter filled with the spirit and finally gelling his confidence was a time like no other. He stared down thousands of hard-hearted Jews and evil spirits who less than two months before allowed and caused the crucifixion of God’s son. He witnessed to the resurrection with astounding power and about 3000 souls were saved!

Do you think God cared that the twin’s mom didn’t like one of her sons? I’m sure God cared but He sure didn’t care enough to miss saving the one she did care about! Do you think God cared that Peter didn’t understand the difference between the Old and New Covenant? I’m sure God cared but He sure didn’t care enough to miss having one new child, much less about 3000!

This is who God is and what He does. He blesses anyone, anytime, for any possible reason without even making sure He gets adequate – or sometimes even any – credit! God doesn’t really bless because of us. He blesses in spite of us. But He still needs us to trust Him and walk out with Him on His promises.

Jesus asked…

1. Stay in Jerusalem.
2. Get the spirit.
3. Witness for me.

Peter did that and started a story that still unfolds and a family that is still being filled. Was Peter perfect? No, but guess what? God didn’t let the sand distract Him from the diamonds. Jesus carried Peter and He carries us too!

