

### ***This Jesus Whom You Crucified***

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, dear friends in Christ: I'm curious; has anyone been watching the NBC television series called "A.D. *The Bible Continues*"? They've been airing episodes on Sunday evenings since Easter. The twelve part series supposedly follows the events that took place after the resurrection of Jesus as they are recorded in the Book of Acts. Anyone? I've tried to watch it a couple times but found the experience almost painful. It's so frustrating: a large portion of the storyline that's in the Bible they get wrong, and they make up and add a bunch of stuff that isn't in the Bible. I mean the actual account is good all by itself. All you got to do is tell it. But no. Trust me when I say this is definitely a case in which the book is better than the movie.

Now, we're a little behind the series in telling the story, but following the biblical account as it's recorded in the Book of Acts is what we've been doing for the past several weeks. We started a couple Sundays back. Then we heard about how the disciples returned to Jerusalem after seeing Jesus ascend into heaven. There they continued together in worship, prayer, Bible study, and fellowship. In the first recorded church council meeting they also chose a man named Matthias to fill the apostolic office left vacant by Judas. This Matthias became one of the twelve. Then last week we had the account of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. As Jesus had promised, he sent from heaven the Spirit who came upon them with great power to enable them to boldly speak the Gospel – in a wide array foreign languages no less. It created quite a stir that drew a large crowd. Seeing and hearing the strange goings on, the amazed onlookers asked that most Lutheran of questions, "What does this mean?"

Peter stood up to explain to them that what they were witnessing was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy about how in the last days the Lord would pour out his Holy Spirit on all flesh. In former times the Spirit came briefly upon the occasional prophet enabling him to speak God's Word; but Joel foresaw the day when the Spirit would come and dwell with the people's sons, their daughters, and even their slaves. It was going to be a whole new era of God's saving grace in the world. And no one would be exempt: everyone who called upon the name of the Lord would be saved. At Pentecost the day the prophet foretold had arrived.

This morning's text picks up right where we left off last week. Peter is still addressing the crowd. And having explained to them that what they're seeing is the manifestation of the Spirit having been poured out upon the Apostles, Peter, under the influence of the same Spirit, immediately proceeds to get about the main business of the Spirit, which is to testify of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's important that we understand this. The Holy Spirit isn't into self-promotion. His work is always to reveal the truths of Jesus and to create faith in Jesus in peoples' hearts. And the spiritual gifts he brings to those who believe the Gospel aren't for the purpose of elevating them – "Oh, look at me! I've got the Spirit! See what I can do!" – no, the gifts are to enable them to witness of Jesus and his saving work. This is what so many who are involved in Pentecostal and Holiness churches do not understand. They are forever seeking the gift of tongues and healing miracles and other sometimes very strange manifestations such as being slain in the Spirit (by which they mean being knocked down the power of God) or uncontrollable laughter, or even barking like dogs. They seek these supposed signs in order to prove the extent and genuineness of their faith. But none of it has anything to do with Jesus, which proves that none

of it is actually from the Spirit of God. As Peter demonstrates, the work of the Spirit is always to point to Christ.

The obstacle Peter is faced with is that his hearers have a complete misunderstanding of what the Lord's Christ is supposed to be. The widespread view of Jews of that time was that the Christ would be an earthly king who would, with the power of God Almighty, restore the fortunes of the nation of Israel. So in proclaiming Jesus to them, Peter's task is twofold. He must disavow them of their false notions about what the Christ is and is supposed to do, and he must show that Jesus is the true Christ they are looking for.

He begins with what they know. It's not possible that anyone in Jerusalem had not at least heard of Jesus. The events surrounding his life and death were still quite recent. Even the visitors who had come to celebrate Pentecost who weren't here for Passover, they would know all about it. Thus Peter begins, "Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him ..." No one could deny any of that. Jerusalem was full of people who had witnessed many miracles of Jesus. Some of them had been directly healed by him. There was that guy named Lazarus living in Bethany, just two miles away. Jesus raised him to life after he'd been dead four days. Even the enemies of Jesus acknowledged it. These miracles proved that Jesus was an agent of God.

"This Jesus", Peter continues, "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." This too was common knowledge. No one could deny that Jesus had been crucified. And clearly, since he was a true agent of God as his miraculous signs proved, those who killed him did so without the law of God on their side. They had to cook up a false case against him. More problematic from Peter's hearers' point of view was that this had been God's plan all along. Why would God plan to have one of his true prophets killed? And in such a horrible way?

The answer, as Peter goes on to explain, is God did not intend to leave him dead. "God raised him up, loosing him from the agony of death, for it was not possible for him to be held by it." To prove this startling assertion, Peter quotes David who wrote in the 16<sup>th</sup> Psalm "For you will not abandon my soul to Hades (that is, the grave), or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; and you will make me full of gladness with your presence."

It's a passage of Scripture those hearing Peter would have been familiar with. The psalms were their hymnbook. And this is a passage they may have stumbled over because it didn't seem to be accurate. After all, King David died a thousand years earlier. His grave was in the city. Everyone knew where it was. David's body was still in there. And after a thousand years, there couldn't be much left of it. So, while it might be said that in some broad sense David was speaking of himself, that is, on the Last Day he'd be raised up in an immortal body, it's awfully hard to explain how David could say that his body would not see corruption, meaning decay.

The solution to the seeming contradiction is that David wasn't talking about himself. Peter explains that David was a prophet inspired by God when he wrote this. And he was speaking of his descendant, the Holy One God promised him, who would rule over his house forever. David was foretelling the resurrection of the Christ – that his body was going to be raised from the dead before decay could set in; in other words, within three days.

And that's what happened. Peter declares, "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses." And the Apostles are witnesses in two senses. First that they saw, spoke with, and spent 40 days with the risen Lord Jesus; and also that they were now testifying to the truth of his resurrection – indeed, as the Holy Spirit is directing and empowering them to do.

So now, if you're in the crowd listening to Peter, you're probably wondering, "Okay, if what you're saying is right, that Jesus actually is the Christ and he's been raised from the dead, where is he now?"

Thus Peter proclaims to them the ascension of Jesus. "Being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing." Again recall that the crowd has gathered precisely because they heard the sound of the Spirit's coming, and they are observing a group of former Galilean fishermen speak fluently in at least a dozen different languages. They are astonished by all this. So, anticipating their question concerning where Jesus is now, Peter is demonstrating that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that they witnessing is evidence that Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of the Father. In other words, you want to know where Jesus is? He's in heaven where he's ruling. How do we know? Because it's from there that he's sent the Holy Spirit.

And again to make his point, Peter quotes another psalm of David (the 110<sup>th</sup>), where he says, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool'." It's a passage that Jesus himself had once used to show that the Christ, David's descendant, had to be something more than a mere man. David, the head of his dynasty, would never call a distant descendant "Lord" unless that descendant hugely outranked him. And that's not the way things work in a line of kings—unless, unless that descendant of David, the Christ, is both man and God. Then it made sense. And that was Jesus' point.

Now Peter is using the same passage to show the same truth, that the Christ is human and divine – and also to show that the Scriptures point to the exaltation of the Christ to the right hand of the Father from whence he came in the first place.

It's all there. Under the influence of the Spirit Peter has given the crowd a whole new understanding of who the Christ is and what he came to do. He's preached Jesus, God's Son, crucified, raised, and exalted. He's proven his points from Scripture and with sound reason. And now he brings his Pentecost sermon to its thundering climax with these words, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom *you* crucified."

Note that he doesn't let anyone off the hook. I mean, while it's likely there were in the crowd some of those who actually called for the death of Jesus at his trial, there were many others who weren't there. Many weren't even in Jerusalem when Jesus died. But Peter puts the blame on all of them – nor would he have excluded himself or any of the Apostles. Peter understood that Jesus died for sinners. That means if you sin, you have a hand in his death. *You* crucified the Lord Jesus. With every sin you commit, you nail him to the cross.

And while that's absolutely true, it's a terrible way to end a sermon. Fortunately for us there's more to it. The people who heard Peter were convinced. The Holy Spirit working through Peter's words persuaded them in their hearts of the truth about Jesus, that he is both Lord and Christ. The Spirit also convicted them of their part in his death – and they were terrified. What would a righteous and holy God do to those who rejected and so cruelly crucified

his Son? They were right to imagine the worst. In despair they cried out to Peter and the other Apostles, "What shall we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you too will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and for your children and for all whom the Lord our God will call to himself."

They were already repentant. The Holy Spirit had them convinced of their guilt and caused them to fear the wrath of God. So then to hear those sweet words of comfort: you don't do anything. You receive – not God's judgment as you so richly deserve – but you receive baptism, union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. You receive the forgiveness of sin. You receive the Holy Spirit with his gifts of faith, understanding, and the assurance of salvation. You receive everlasting life. That's what the Lord God desires to give you through this Jesus whom you crucified.

If everything they had seen and heard up to this point astounded them, then this good news completely blew their minds. Unbelievable – and yet so wondrously true. The Scriptures inform us that three thousand of those who heard Peter that day were added to the Christian Church. By the preaching of Christ crucified for sinners, by the work of the Holy Spirit, and by baptism they received what God desires to give to all people – indeed, the same gifts that we have and that we continue to receive. Though we are far off in both terms of distance and of time from that first Pentecost of the Christian era, the promises of God are also for us and for our children through this Jesus whom you crucified. Still unbelievable – and yet so wondrously true. So may the Lord God in his love preserve us in repentance and this holy faith, which are the gifts we received in our baptisms in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

***Soli Deo Gloria!***