

Text: Acts 2:14-37

Title: “Our Unstoppable Message”

ILLUSTRATION – Anyone who has ever preached remembers their very first sermon. (And probably everyone who heard them preach their first message remembers it.) There’s a story about the great British preacher Charles Spurgeon who had a preachers’ college in London. They had a tradition where Spurgeon would walk up to a student, give them a text of Scripture and the student would be required to preach a message on the spur of the moment before Spurgeon and the staff of the college. On one such occasion a student was given the text about Zacchaeus, the tax collector Jesus encountered in Luke 19. The student stood before them and preached this message: “Zacchaeus was of little stature; so am I. Zacchaeus was up a tree; so am I. Zacchaeus came down; so will I.” And the student quickly took his seat.

In Acts 2 we have the first sermon preached after the Holy Spirit first came to form the first church. There are nineteen recorded sermons or speeches in Acts ... one-fourth of the book. So we learn from this that preaching is important to the church. Actually what we have here is a team effort. We saw last week that 120 believers were gathered in the Upper Room waiting for Jesus to fulfill His promise of sending the Holy Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit suddenly came upon those believers, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to declare the wonders of God in languages that had never learned. Why? There were people in Jerusalem from all over the world, people who spoke different languages, but, miraculously, they all heard the believers declaring the wonders of God in their own language. Amazing! So this created a stir and people asked, “What does this mean?” Some even thought they were drunk. Then the lead apostle, Peter, stood and preached a powerful message. I want you to look all the way to the end of Peter’s message to Acts 2:37 to see the response. Let me read this verse then work my way back into Peter’s message.

Acts 2:37 - When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

A few verses down we see the incredible results.

Acts 2:41 - Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Remember that Christ is on an unstoppable quest to get the Gospel to the nations through His empowered witnesses.

Acts 1:8 - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

A few weeks ago I challenged us as we move into the future to focus on the kind of REVIVAL PRAYING that will allow us to be freshly filled with the Holy Spirit to have the power we need for GOSPEL PENETRATION. Already many of you have taken up the challenge to commit at least thirty minutes a day in prayer and the Word of God. What a difference that will make as we prepare ourselves to penetrate our city and our world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In a month we will

have our first Evening of Prayer and Praise in preparation for a great opportunity to share the Gospel with our city during the Christmas season. We'll tell you more as those dates draw near.

So what we have here in Acts 2 is the pattern for how the church is going to expand so rapidly to shake their world in about thirty years. Imagine if something were to start today that in thirty years would shake the whole world. This is what it would look like. This is the way God first rocked the world with the Gospel starting with a small group of people, and it will be the way God rocks the world to this day, and until the day when Christ returns. There are four important parts to this plan that we must keep in mind. We'll get through part of this today, and then we'll cover the rest of it next week. There will always be...

1. A TRUTH-SEEKING AUDIENCE

Acts 2:37a - When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart...

Who are these "people" who heard this? They were Jews who came to Jerusalem from various nations to celebrate the festival of Pentecost. When they heard the commotion the crowd was amazed that these ordinary people could do something so extraordinary as to speak their language. God has orchestrated this because He wants to engage this particular audience with the Good News. It was not a coincidence that these hot-hearted witnesses hit the streets when they did. God was going after a group of people.

ILLUSTRATION – I remember one late night I was sitting in a train station in India waiting for an overnight train to the city of Shimoga where we are trying to reach a people group called the Rama Shatriya. I was tired and in a strange place and I found myself asking, "What in the world am I doing here?" It was like the Lord spoke to me in my heart at that moment: "You are here because I am here. You are going to the Rama Shatriya because I am going to them." God will always put His people where there are people He wants to reach.

There was something about the way these disciples of Jesus lived that caused others to ask, "What does this mean?" Is there anything in the way you live your life that causes others to ask, "Why are you different? There's something about your courage, your peace, your countenance, your speech, your love."

Let's go back to v.14. Peter steps up and tells them there's an explanation for the way these people are living and it's found in the Word of God. Read **Acts 2:14-16**.

And Peter knew the audience that was listening to him that day. These were serious Jews who knew the Law and the Prophets. They knew that when the Messiah came there would be a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As religious as these people were, there was something missing in their lives. **Read Acts 2:17-21**.

And to this truth-seeking audience Peter says, "This is that!" The explanation for the way these ordinary people are living extraordinary lives is that they have been invaded by the Holy Spirit of God. And what happened to them can happen for anyone who calls on the name of the Lord to be saved.

We're not just robots walking around spouting Bible verses and the plan of salvation. We are human beings who have relationships with other human beings. We are people whose hearts have been filled with the love of Jesus for other people. And that makes us look at people and feel about people the way Jesus did.

So the first piece of this plan is that there is a truth-seeking audience. Next we see that there is...

2. A SPIRIT-CONTROLLED WITNESS

Acts 2:37 - When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter has experienced what everyone else experienced when the Holy Spirit came to live in them. He, along with the other 120, received the Holy Spirit's power and they became witnesses. As I said earlier, this was a team effort. There was the witnessing by all the believers declaring the wonders of God, but then there was something in addition to that ... preaching.

So, the power of the Holy Spirit is channeled into witnessing. Look back again to what the prophet Joel said would happen:

Acts 2:17 - "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.

Acts 2:18 - Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

Joel is looking to a day when men and women everywhere will be so filled with God that they catch visions of him in the daytime, dream about him at night and speak of him continually with their mouths. And when their Spirit-inspired speech is combined with all the upheavals in the world, people will need to know what to do. And these hot-hearted witnesses ... men and women, young and old ... will be there, generation after generation, to proclaim that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. We are living in that day.

One little side note here. Remember, saw what these Spirit-filled witnesses were doing and accused them of being drunk. What was judged to be a sinful activity by some very religious people was really an authentic manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Let's be careful about judging or condemning the worship expressions of others. The self-righteous Jews saw the white-hot passion of these Spirit-filled believers and condemned what they did. Peter said, "No, this is in the Bible and it's of the Spirit." You don't know what's in another person's heart. If someone is holding a hymn book when they sing, don't presume they are old-fashioned and have no freedom in their worship. And if someone is lifting their hands don't presume they are just being hyper-emotional in their worship. The only thing that is to judge our worship is the Word of God, and the mind of God who alone knows our hearts.

So there's a truth-seeking audience met by Spirit-controlled witnesses and then there is ...

3. A CHRIST-EXALTING MESSAGE

Acts 2:37 - When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

So what is the “this” that they heard? They heard some very compelling information. Peter tells them exactly what they need to hear and believe in order to be saved. This is the seed of the Gospel that must be sown before there is a harvest of people being saved. There are four important facts to this message:

THE MIRACULOUS LIFE OF CHRIST (v.22)

Acts 2:22 - “Men of Israel, 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.

Peter introduces “Jesus of Nazareth” ... a historical person. Twice in one sentence Peter says that God was the one at work in the miracles of Jesus. You can't look at the life of Jesus and just write it off as a merely good life lived 2000 years ago. He was the God/Man and He proved it by His life. The Jesus of the New Testament is not the Mormon Jesus or the Muslim Jesus.

THE SUBSTITUTING DEATH OF CHRIST (v.23)

Acts 2:23 - This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

The cross was no accident in the life of Jesus; it was purposed by God the Father from the beginning of time. The only way a holy and yet loving God could deal with our sin problem was for His righteous Son Jesus Christ to die in our place and in doing so to pay our sin debt. So there’s something about His life, His death and...

THE POWERFUL RESURRECTION OF CHRIST (vv.24-32)

Acts 2:24 - 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.

Remember, Peter is speaking to Jews, so in vv.25-31 he shows that the resurrection of Jesus fits with prophecies in the Old Testament. So it was the Messiah himself that they had killed. But God raised him up.

Acts 2:32 - God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

The resurrection is historically verifiable. Skeptics may scoff at it, but the fact is that Jesus is alive.

THE EXALTED REIGN OF CHRIST (vv.33-36)

Acts 2:33 - Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

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

Now can you imagine anything more politically incorrect than this statement. When you and I speak this truth today we are called narrow and intolerant. Peter spoke this to fine, upstanding religious people. The radical message of the Cross puts everyone on level ground. We're all sinners in need of grace.

So there's a Christ-exalting message. He's the one that pulls the whole story of the Bible together.

4. THE LIFE-CHANGING RESPONSE

Acts 2:37 - When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Isn't it amazing that this all started with some people who asked “What does this mean?” and it ends with the same people asking, “What shall we do?”

This is where we will pick up next week. But know this: On the day that Jesus comes again, and the curtain is closed on history as we know it, if that day is ten thousand years from now, the plan will still be the same. The message is unstoppable. When there's a truth-seeking audience addressed by a Spirit-controlled witness with a Christ-exalting message there will be a life-changing response.