

The Church Alive

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:3).

The Church Alive – The Awakening (Overview)

Acts 2:14-41

14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: “Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. 15 For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; 16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:

One of the greatest events in American history, an event that has been much neglected by our modern culture, took place in the 1700’s, lasting from about 1730-1740. This event would help shape American religious and moral behavior for decades to come. The catalyst for this event is attributed to one man, one humble, yet gifted preacher; committed to the Word of God and its faithful proclamation. This man is still regarded as the greatest theologian as well as one of the greatest intellectuals that America has ever produced. That man is Jonathan Edwards, a friend and peer of Benjamin Franklin, who served as Princeton University’s third president before dying shortly after assuming that role in 1758 from a smallpox inoculation.

But the great event that Edwards had the privilege of igniting was the first fires of a spiritual revival in the New England colonies that that has never had an equal since. That event is known to us as the Great Awakening. During the years of 1733-1735, Edwards preached messages that God used to awaken the hearts and minds of tens of thousands of people in the American Colonies; awakening them to their spiritual apathy and deadness; awakening them to the realities of sin and the wages of sin; that is death; and awakening them to the grace of God, revealed in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ, who came to provide salvation for all who would believe on Him.

Why was this event called “great”? It was called great because in towns the size of Bentonville, Arkansas, roughly 35,000, some 20,000 of those people would turn out every night in churches to hear the Word of God preached. Do you realize that if 20,000 people wanted to come hear the Word of God preached in Rogers and Bentonville that there is not enough seating capacity in our churches to do this? People were coming to faith in Jesus Christ and the Word of God was spreading rapidly across the land.

So pulled to this working of God and so realizing the need of the people to hear the Word of God, another friend of Edwards made some trips over from England to preach the Word up and down the Eastern seaboard. This man’s name was George Whitefield, the great founder of Calvinistic Methodism. Because of the preaching of Edwards and Whitefield, along with other faithful preachers at the time, thousands were confessing faith; and for those who were already born again, they had received a renewed passion to follow Jesus whole-heartedly. It was truly a time in which this statement was being dramatically lived out among many, **“If Christ be anything, He must be everything.”** This statement is attributed to Charles Spurgeon who said more fully, **“If Christ be anything He must be everything. O rest not till love and faith in Jesus be the master passions of your soul.”** Spurgeon once made another similar statement, **“If Christ is not all to you, He is nothing to you. He will never go into partnership as a part Savior of men. If He be something, He must be everything, and if He be not everything, He is nothing to you.”**

As Edwards, Whitefield and others were preaching such truths, it shook people to their very core as they began to realize that they were not the center of the universe, but rather that there is a Holy and Sovereign God to whom we all must give an account. One of the defining characteristics of the preaching of this time was an emphasis upon people’s active rebellion

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against God and of people's apathy toward the things of God. In otherwise stoic churches, people were weeping and wailing, bemoaning their sinful state and crying out to God for mercy and grace. One of the most famous sermons from this time, a sermon that captures the essence of both the preaching and the receiving of the Word of God is Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”

Now do not misunderstand. These preachers of the Great Awakening were not seeking to scare people out of hell. Nor were they seeking to work people up into emotional frenzies of despair or panic. All they were seeking to do was to speak to the people regarding their need of Jesus as Lord and Savior. All they desired was to make Jesus known and they only knew how to make Him known through the faithful proclamation of God's Word. From this, it was the working of the Spirit of God that opened the eyes of the people to see themselves as sinners in need of the great grace of salvation as provided by Jesus; to see God as the great grace giver, enabling them by faith to say no to sin and to turn to the pursuit of righteousness and Christlikeness. Oh that we might have times such as this again; for such we can and must pray.

But times such as the Great Awakening are not normative in our experience. There are times in history in which we see God do extraordinary things, times like this awakening or times like that of the Protestant Reformation of the 1500's where the truth of the gospel was recovered and given back to the church; but ordinarily, we see God's changing hearts on smaller scales; as we, being faithful Christians simply talk to others about who Jesus is and what He has accomplished according to the Scriptures. But I can say this, if a new reformation or revival is to come, if there is to be yet another great awakening to be experienced by the Church, it will come on the back of faithful, biblical preaching and teaching. As Steve Lawson, pastor of Christ Fellowship Baptist Church rightly noted, *“If a reformation is to come to the church, it must be preceded by a reformation of the pulpit. As the pulpit goes, so goes the church.”*

With all this said, we find the first true Great Awakening, the first instance in the church of thousands coming to faith in Christ here in Acts 2 and it is solely due to the Spirit of God working powerfully through Biblical preaching and teaching. For after the Spirit filled some 120 disciples and they began to preach the Word of God, it can be rightly said that a spiritual revival took place among them there in Jerusalem.

If you read through Peter's sermon, which runs from verses 14-36 and is more than likely only a synopsis or sampling of a much longer sermon; you will read of incredible prophetic statements, most of which simply point to Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. But, if we are to have a right understanding of the church and of God's intentions for the church, we need to understand what it is that Peter is communicating to this highly charged and essentially Jewish audience. Remember that Peter is speaking to the **“Men of Judea”** (2:14); to the **“Men of Israel”** (2:22); and to Peter's **“brethren”** according to the flesh (2:29). Peter is out to prove something; he is out to prove Biblically who Jesus is as the one true Jewish Messiah; the one true Savior, who, as we come to see in the progression of the book of Acts, saves not only Jews who believe, but also Gentiles who believe.

I wish to address this text with you a bit differently this morning as I intend to give you first an overview of the entire sermon of Peter, verses 14-36 and then, for the next few weeks to follow, we will take this sermon in three sections and look at it more closely. But for this morning my basic premise and reminder to you is this, that from Peter's sermon, *we discover the necessity of solid, biblical preaching in order for the church to experience revival.* In other words, we must be praying for not only a clearer proclamation of the truths of God from our pulpits, but, additionally, we must also be praying for a clearer practice of those truths among God's people. There is a correlation between solid, Biblical preaching and the steadfastness of the believer's

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practice. They go hand in hand. Again, quoting from Steve Lawson, *"It is the man of God opening the Word of God and expounding its truths so that the voice of God may be heard, the glory of God seen, and the will of God obeyed."*

I submit to you that in our overall view of Peter's sermon, this is what we find; Peter the man of God, opening up and expounding upon the Word of God so that the voice of God was heard, the glory of God seen and the will of God obeyed. Biblical teaching both preached and received accomplishes these very things. To this end then I offer you three points of consideration as we look at Acts 2:14-36. I wish to demonstrate to you that...

1. Biblical Preaching Encourages a correct Christian Worldview
2. Biblical Preaching Explains the Word of God
3. Biblical Preaching Elicits a Response

I. Biblical Preaching Encourages a correct Christian Worldview (2:14-16)

14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. 15 For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; 16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:

Let me remind you that the book of **Acts** is filled with many speeches and sermons. It could be called Luke's sermon diary for in Acts there are at least nineteen prominent speeches or sermons: eight by Peter, nine by Paul, one by James, and one by Stephen. Nearly one-quarter of Luke's text is devoted to this.

Our text beginning here in Acts 2:14 is the first sermon by Peter. Do not forget that it follows the account of the coming of the Holy Spirit in **Acts 2:1-13**. And so we are to know that what Peter is about to do and say is prompted by the Spirit of God. As we noted last week, when the people heard the Spirit-filled disciples praising God for His mighty deeds in their own languages, some, according to **verse 13**, falsely accused them of being drunk. So get the scene, all kinds of preaching of the Word of God is taking place and some, in order to disparage and undermine the teaching, yelled out that they were all drunk. Well, this got the attention of Peter and the text shifts from this varied scene of people here and there hearing the word of God to all focusing their attention on Peter as he gives this first sermon.

In response to their accusation, our text tells us that Peter immediately takes his stand and beginning with **verse 14**, explains that they were not drunk and proceeded to show to them both what was happening and why it was happening.

But what made Peter take his stand? What made him so resolute as to defend not only the honor of these faithful proclaimers of the word of God, but also of God Himself? I submit to you that Peter, having been regularly exposed to the faithful preaching of Jesus and having spent time in the word of God with the other disciples, had begun to see things through the lens of Scripture. The biblical teaching that he had received allowed him to have a correct Christian worldview. The world around him looked up the events of Pentecost with wonder, amazement, astonishment, bewilderment and some even with disdain, but Peter, this burly, outspoken, sometimes rash fisherman, was enabled by God to see all of these events in biblical terms. As we will see when we get there in our study, Peter draws from a little OT book, just three chapters long, the book of Joel, to give explanation as to both what was happening as well as to why it was happening. Beloved, Peter was seeing things from the view point of God and His Word. And so I say to you, the more we are exposed to biblical preaching and teaching, the better we will be at seeing how God is at work in our own lives.

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Notice in our text that Peter first defends the disciples and then turns all attention to the Word of God saying, *"...but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel..."* Peter appealed not merely to reason, but to revelation, to the Word of God. He saw things in Biblical terms and this beloved, is what it means to have a Christian worldview.

Let me explain what a Christian worldview is. A Christian worldview starts with the conviction that God Himself has spoken to us in the Scriptures. *A Christian worldview strives to understand rightly all things in reference to the Word of God, seeing the Word of God as both the foundation and final authority for everything we hold true.* A Christian worldview asks questions like, "How does this relationship line up with the Word of God? How does this attitude or action reflect Christlike qualities? Will the words I am about to speak bring honor to God and encouragement to others? How does my life reveal the precepts and principles of godly living as revealed in the Word of God?" In Acts 2:13-15, we see Peter, sitting back for moment, taking inventory all that had been going on and he heard this accusation that the disciples were all drunk. And so, seeing that the best the world could come up with was this far-fetched and disparaging charge, Peter takes his stand and says in effect, "Listen to me as I tell you from God's perspective what is going on here!" O that we would be so familiar with the word of God as to be able to say to others, "let this be known to you and give heed to my words" as I share with you what all this means according to the Bible. This beloved is a Christian worldview – seeking to understand rightly the Word of God as being both the foundation and final authority for everything we hold true and everything we do.

I believe that Peter summed up this willingness to take stock of what others are saying, relating it back to the Word of God, and then standing up to defend the word of God in 1 Peter 3:15 where we read:

15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; 16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

Let people say your drunk, let them falsely accuse, but as they do, be ready to make a defense, to give a biblical answer; to share with them things from God's perspective.

II. Biblical Preaching Explains the Word of God (2:16ff)

...but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel...

It would stand to reason that if a correct Christian worldview comes from and flows out of solid Biblical teaching and therefore holds to a high view of Scripture, that Biblical preaching itself would of necessity seek to "explain" and give understanding to the Word of God. The purpose of preaching, teaching and proclaiming the Word of God is, in the words of Acts 2:11, to make known "the mighty deeds of God." And what do we see Peter doing in Acts 2:16-36? Notice that this sermon appeals to Scripture, to Joel 2:28-32 (Acts 2:16-21); to Psalm 16:8-11 (Acts 2:25-28); to Psalm 132:11 (Acts 2:30); and to Psalm 110:1 (Acts 2:34-35). In twenty-three verses, thirteen of them are quotes from the OT Scriptures. What is Peter seeking to do? He is first of all explaining the events in light of Scripture; for we will see how he relates these passages to what is taking place; and second, he is explaining the meaning of these passages. He is bringing to light how these passages looked forward and related to Jesus and the church. His preaching is seeking to explain or make known the meaning of God's Word.

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To explain, or to use some fancy words, to exposit or expound the Word of God is the first and foremost task of the preacher, but it is also a responsibility of every believer to seek to know and explain the word of God. Turn with me to one of my favorite stories as found in Nehemiah 8:1-8. The context is this, its about 444 BC, Nehemiah had gathered the people together to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. It has been a great physical and emotional triumph. But now the souls of the people needed to be fed. Read along with me as we see that what takes place here in Nehemiah 8 parallels what we have been saying along with the events of Acts 2.

8 And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. 2 Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. 3 He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. 4 Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam on his left hand. 5 Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. 6 Then Ezra blessed the Lord the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. 7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. 8 They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

Beloved, Biblical preaching explains the Word of God. Ezra and the Levites did it for Israel here in Nehemiah 8; Peter does it in Acts 2 for we read of Peter's final statement of his sermon in verse 36, ***"Therefore, let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified."*** Peter explained to them what all had and was taking place according to the Word of God. And such is to be our desire, to both know for certain the truths of God's Word through faithful, biblical proclamation, but also to proclaim such truths. For again hear the words of 1 Peter 3:15 which says,

15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; 16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

III. Biblical Preaching Elicits a Response (2:37-41)

Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37)

Biblical preaching encourage a correct worldview; that it is gives us a Scriptural filter through which to test all things in our lives; it explains the Word of God; and finally, biblical preaching elicits a response. When preaching, teaching, or speaking the Word of God is done in the power of the Spirit it will seek to move a person to make a decision; to bring them to a

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moment of crisis where they must either knowingly reject the true counsel of God's Word or to receive and repent, turning away from sin and to God as a result of God's Word.

We see this in Peter's sermon in Acts 2:37 [read text]. These peoples consciences were pricked and they knew they must respond or be left to wallow and suffer for their sins. The point is that they responded to Peter's preaching. We see the same thing back in our Nehemiah text; for after Ezra and the others had faithfully preached and explained God's Word, notice what we read in verses 8:9-12;

9 Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law. 10 Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." 11 So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." 12 All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.

The people responded to the preaching of Ezra. The people responded to the preaching of Peter. The people responded to the proclamation of the disciples in Acts 2:12-13. Let us pray that we would proclaim the Word of God in such a manner that people would be forced to respond. It may be against the Word; it may be for the Word; for the response is left to that person and the working of the Holy Spirit; but will we be faithful heralds of the Word of God? Will you commit anew to knowing God's Word and making God's Word known? This was the commitment of Peter and the early church. For they knew that through the proclamation of the Word a correct Christian worldview would be established, the Word of God would be explained; and people would be brought to a place of response. May that be true of us as well to the glory of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

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