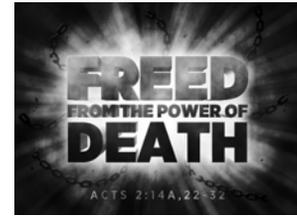


Act 2:14, 22-36 “Freed From the Power of Death”

May 22, 2016



Last week we saw and heard the introduction to Peter’s Pentecost sermon in two parts. Part one ... judgement day is coming. Peter actually says it with a little more colour. *“The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.”* It is a message that comes at you again and again. This world in its present form is passing away. It is the message that God hates sin, wickedness, evil, transgression; it doesn’t matter what you call it.

Romans 1:18-21

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened ... God gave them over.”

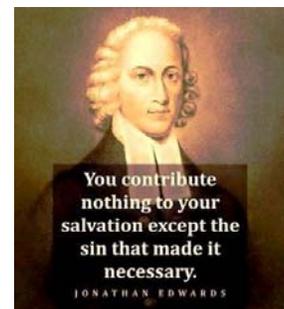
What does that mean? God left them, abandoned them, turned away from them, leaving them to suffer the consequences of their perversions, not just Paul, and not just Romans. It is all over ... from Jesus himself.

Matthew 24:29-31

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

Not just New Testament, but old as well. Thanks be to God, that judgement is not the end of the story. Part 2 of Peter’s sermon: *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* The glorious good news is that God has not abandoned us. In fact, He has provided for us a great salvation.

Jonathan Edwards, a revivalist preacher from the 1,700’s said, “You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary.” The only thing you have contributed to your salvation is this: your sin caused it. God’s holiness and justice demand an accounting for sin. God’s grace and mercy put a plan in place in which His only Son would take your place.



Today we come to part 2 of the sermon. How did God accomplish this great salvation?

First ... Jesus was delivered up to death according to the plan of God.

Then ... you crucified Him by the hands of lawless men.

Finally ... God raised Him ... death could not hold Him.

What does this mean for us now? Read on. *“Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge.”* The words that follow were written by King David in Psalm 16. David wrote it as a prayer for God’s protection in the face of death. It is also a confession of trust in the face of death. *“God help me in my last hour ... God will help me in my last hour.”* He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. My heart is glad, my tongue rejoices. I live in hope, I have seen the path of life. You have filled me with gladness

Here in Acts 2, Peter quotes from Psalm 16. He makes them words of prophecy that David was talking about Jesus. Death would not hold Him. The Christ would rise from the dead. So Peter says, *“Seeing what was ahead, David*

spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact."

Peter goes on to testify to what it all means. Jesus is Lord and Christ. He is who He said He is. Jesus lives and reigns to all eternity. Jesus has poured out the Holy Spirit. That's why you are seeing what you are seeing. So, what really happened at Pentecost? What really changed? We know that the disciples received power from the Holy Spirit. We know that they were able to speak the Word of God with boldness. We know that signs and wonders accompanied what they said, bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel. But there were somethings that didn't change. The early church did not break through into the golden age of Joel Osteen where they all became rich beyond their wildest dreams. They didn't all get vacation properties and move to Florida. They did not become super-sanctified to the point where they didn't sin any more. What would a survey of the future of these disciples and of the church tell us? Did they make great strides in overcoming their sins and weaknesses? Did Peter stay out of trouble after Pentecost? Did the church continue to grow in the unity that Acts 2 introduced? What is the after Pentecost reality? Was there no more temptation and no more sin? If we've been freed from the power of death, everything should be smooth sailing now, right?

Acts 2 *"Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."*

Acts 3 A lame man was healed. A flash mob gathered. Peter preached a similar bad news/good news, law/gospel sermon once again, *"You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this."* And the church grew even more, to about 5,000.

Acts 4 Peter and John were arrested and spent a night in jail. The next morning they were questioned by the authorities. But Peter got to preach again and everything turned out more or less ok. *"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had."*

Maybe those preachers of prosperity are right. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost all their worries were over. They had new boldness, they had put sin behind them. Nothing was going to stop them now. Each time Peter preached his bad news/good news sermon the same thing happened.

Acts 4:10-12 *"Know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."*

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. Yet we know that dark clouds of opposition were gathering on the horizon and Jesus had foretold it, *"You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them."* We also know that the apostles struggled with faith and with the mission many times. Peter had to overcome his personal feelings and the culture of his birth in order to speak that message of sin and forgiveness to Cornelius and all his Gentile friends and family. The unity of the church in Acts 2 was disrupted in Acts 6 when complaints of neglect and favouritism came up. When Peter came up to Antioch from Jerusalem to see the work of Paul and Barnabas, he gave in to the insistence of those who were teaching that

Gentiles had to become Jews and follow all the Old Testament customs. He was compromising the freedom we all have in the Gospel.

John Mark backed out in the middle of the first missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas. At the start of the second trip, Paul didn't want to take him along again, so Paul and Barnabas parted ways. Sometimes we read the book of Acts and the letters of Paul and long for the good old days of the church ... everyone getting along, everyone helping everyone else, the mission going forward in the power of the Holy Spirit, believers growing in faith toward God and fellowship with one another. It wasn't like that. The church in Corinth tolerated open sin and immorality. They neglected the gifts of God and misused the Lord's Supper. They used their spiritual gifts for their own personal gain. The body of Christ was not a well-oiled machine. The church in Galatia let the teaching of salvation by works and not by faith creep in to their theology. "Foolish Galatians," Paul would call them. If salvation could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!

Is there no hope for God's church? Is the bride of Christ doomed? Are we doomed to a life of giving into sin and temptation? We need to come back to the message of Easter, the message of Pentecost, the message of every sermon Peter preached in those early chapters of Acts. Jesus is risen from the dead. He is alive. Paul tells us in Romans 6 that, "*One who has died has been set free from sin.*" He goes on to tell us that, "*If we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*"

The post-resurrection and post-Pentecost reality is this: "*God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*" Set free from the power of death ... that's our new status. Sin no longer has dominion. The power of death has been broken. If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father who intercedes for us. He brings forgiveness. He brings life. He brings the power of the Spirit. He brings freedom from the power of death.