

The First Easter Sermon

(Acts 2:22-36)

3/28/18; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

For tonight, I wanted us to take a little break from the book of Proverbs...

We will get back on schedule next week and finish up Proverbs 20 and the Road Signs for Life..

I also want to remind yall that we are not having Wednesday night supper next week.

It is spring break for the school system so we are going to give our kitchen workers a break too and let them a week off...

But we will have service next Wednesday night at 7..

Tonight I want us to turn our hearts and minds to the resurrection of Christ.

With Easter approaching this weekend, it is always to refresh our minds on the resurrection of our Lord and Savior..

A frequent question that comes these days in our culture is this....

What makes Christianity distinct in a world full of all sorts of religions and faiths and practices?

In other words, what gives us assurance of the truth of Christianity as we go out and share our faith?

How do we explain to others the difference in Christianity and Islam and Buddhism and all sorts of false religions around the world...

Well, for starters, we point to the nature of our God...

The God of the Bible is unlike the gods of false religions..

He isn't satisfied with our good works...

He isn't far off in a distant place away from his people...

He isn't a God that has to be appeased by our acts of worship...

The God of the Bible is loving and kind and long suffering though he will push evil in its appropriate time...

We also a difference in Christianity in our mission as members of this religion....

WE are called to pray for those of other religions...

WE are told to love our neighbors...

WE are told to turn the other cheek when our enemy hits us...

Now, we also add to the distinctiveness of Christianity through the Scriptures...

In other words, the handbook of Christianity is perfect in every way...

It is historically accurate..

It perfectly portrays people and places and events in history..

It is scientifically accurate.

When it speaks of science, it does so with exact accuracy even if it is beyond the scientific community to understand it...

It is a perfect predictor of future events..

When the Bible predicts something, it comes to pass with exact accuracy...

And so, the nature of Christianity's God is different...

The people of Christianity are different...

The handbook of Christianity is different...

But that is not all the evidence of why Christianity is the only way to God...

In fact, the greatest proof of the truth of Christianity and the lies of all the other religions of the world is seen in the resurrection of Christ...

A few years back, I showed this slide to our kids at the resurrection rally, and I plan to use it this year as well...

So take a look at these folks on the screen...

On the bottom right is Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism and the church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints.

On the bottom left is Buddha, the founder of Buddhism..

On the top right is Charles Tase Russell, the founder of Jehovah's Witnesses in the early 1900s...

And on the top left is the prophet Muhammad...

The founder of Islam in the 7th century AD..

On the next slide, we see these same men and the results of their false religion today...

Mormonism claims 15 million followers today.

Buddhism claims 1.5 billion followers today.

Jehovah's Witnesses number 8 million today.

And Islam claims 1.6 billion followers today.

Those are staggering numbers when you consider that their religions started with the writings of each of these men on the screen...

Now the next slide is equally staggering because what we see on it are the dates of their death and the their graves that you can visit today...

Each of these men who founded their religions died, just like every founder of every religion but one...

And that one religion is Christianity...

You can search the world over and never find the grave of Christ...

Now, you can visit what some say is the tomb where Jesus' body was laid...

But there isn't evidence of decomposition or rotten bones in it, because Christ's body didn't stay there...

Instead, that body was raised by the Lord and in that resurrection is found the key piece of evidence is why Christianity is distinct from all the religions of the world...

Look, the life of Christ is incredible and holy and perfect...

The death of Christ on the cross is glorious in providing atonement for our sins..

But the resurrection of Christ is central to the message of the gospel...

If Jesus had just lived good, he would simply been a good example to follow...

If Jesus had just been crucified, he would have simply been another religious person killed for their beliefs...

But the fact that Jesus was resurrected changes everything...

And we need to hold to that distinction...

And we need to be ready to give of Christianity in a world searching for truth..

And we need to point to all the dead men of false religions while also pointing the world to the resurrected and living founder of the one true religion, and that is biblical Christianity...

And there is no better place to be reminded about the glory of the resurrection than in the first sermon ever preached in the church age...

So, let's turn to Acts 2, and Peter's sermon in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost...

Now, let me just give you a little background on this passage..

Acts 1 describes the ascension of Christ after the resurrection...

And as Christ goes back to heaven, the Holy Spirit descends to earth...

And the picture is quite glorious to consider...

Christ is leaving his disciples behind in Acts 1, but He is not leaving them all alone...

Because as chapter 2 opens, God the Son is gone,
but God the Spirit is very much with the disciples..

Now, the Spirit of God did not always indwell
God's people...

But on this day, a new age has dawned and the Spirit
of God will now indwell His people...

It is called the day of Pentecost because it occurred
50 days after the Passover...

So in Acts, 50 days have passed since the crucifixion
of Christ...

And how that Christ has been resurrected and taken
to heaven, the church age has begun...

Now, the church at this point is only about 120 people...

If can imagine this room about 75% full, you get a
picture of the early church..

So they are all together, but God wants them to get
busy working and serving and spreading the gospel,
so the Helper, the Holy Spirit is sent...

And the church gets busy spreading the good news
of Christ's life, death, and resurrection to the
world...

And the message of the gospel is going to start with preaching....

So if you look at verse 22 of chapter 2, we are going to listen in to Peter's first sermon on the first day of the church age...

And what I want us to notice is simply this...

The majority of his message was centered on the resurrection of Christ...

Yes, Jesus had lived perfectly.

Yes, Jesus had died gruesomely...

But Peter was going to focus on the fact that Jesus had been resurrected gloriously..

The first thing we see here is the life of Christ in verse 22...

I. The Life of Christ (22)

22 “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man [r]attested to you by God with [s]miracles and wonders and [t]signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know

Like any good preacher, Peter calls his congregation to pay attention to what he is saying...

And his first point is quite simple...

The Jews knew about the ministry of Jesus...

Jesus did not hide himself in ministry.

He had a very public ministry of teaching and healing and performing miracles...

And the point of that ministry was to reveal his identity to the world...

The Jew knew that their Messiah would be able to do these signs and wonders...

The OT predicted Him in that way...

And now that Christ had come and fulfilled those miracle working prophecies, Israel should have known better than to do what they did next...

And what they did next gives us the second point of Peter's sermon...

Verse 23 describes the death of Christ...

II. The Death of Christ (23)

23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of [u]godless men and put Him to death.

This is such an incredible verse..

Wish I had time to just preach this verse, but in this verse we see the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man...

For instance, if someone asked you who crucified Jesus Christ, what would you say?

Well, on one hand, the Father crucified the son.

Isaiah 53:10 says this..

10

***But the Lord was pleased
To crush Him, [l]putting Him to grief;***

There is no way around it in Scripture..

The crucifixion was the result of God's sovereign hand.

Jesus was put to death by the plan of God..

God knew what what happen at Calvary because
God planed Calvary...

However, on the other hand, Jesus was crucified by
the Jews and the Romans..

Peter calls them godless men in verse 23, and that is
exactly what they were...

The enemies of Jesus crucified him because they
hated his preaching, his teaching, his destruction of
their false religious system..

So, godless men like Judas betrayed him...

Godless men like the Romans arrested him, and
godless men like the Jewish religious leaders put
him through a phony trial and found him guilty...

But none of those godless men knew that God was
directing their every step...

This is the reality of the world in which we live.

God is fully in control, but man is fully responsible
for his actions.

The same was true in terms of the death of Christ...

Yet the crucifixion would have been just another Roman execution if not for what we read in verse 24, which makes up the 3rd and final part of Peter's message....

III. The Resurrection of Christ (24-36)

Verse 24.

24 [v]But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the [w]agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held [x]in its power.

The testimony of Christ is that God sent him into the world, God sent him to the cross, and God sent him out of the grave...

The truth is that Jesus had to be resurrected because it was impossible for death to keep him in the grave..

#1 - Death has no power over a sinless man.

If you never sin, you never sin.

Death is the consequence of sin, but since no sin was found in Christ, death could not experience victory over him...

#2 - Death has no power of the word of God.

Jesus predicted time and time again that He would rise again...

And when God promises anything, God always delivers.

#3 - Death has no power over the plans of God.

The simple reality is this...

Jesus had to rise to make possible the salvation of all who would call on His name to be saved.

God planned the crucifixion so that guilty sinner could be forgiven...

And if Christ didn't overcome the penalty of sin, there would be no hope of salvation for anyone.

Peter wants his listeners to know that first of all Jesus had to be resurrected....

But Peter also wants his Jewish audience to know that the resurrection of Jesus was predicted long ago in the OT...

You see, the Jews never saw this coming in terms of their Messiah.

They knew the OT.

They knew a Savior was coming.

They were ready for Him to deliver them.

And for many of them, Jesus looked like a great candidate until he was arrested and found guilty and sent to the cross...

When that happened, their hope was dashed.

In their mind, their Christ would not be killed in such a way...

So Peter sets out to change that error in their thinking by taking them to Psalm 16 in the OT..

Now Psalm 16 like many of the psalms was written by David..

And the Jews had elevated David in their minds to a place of prominence in their religion...

David was up there with Moses..

So when Peter tells his listeners in verse 25 that David spoke of the resurrection of Christ, their ears definitely perk up..

So let's see what David said about Messiah in Psalm 16...

Verse 25..

***25 For David says of Him,
‘I saw the Lord always in my presence;
For He is at my right hand, so that I will not be
shaken.***

26

***‘Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue ex-
ulted;
Moreover my flesh also will live in hope;***

27

***Because You will not abandon my soul to Hades,
Nor [y]allow Your [z]Holy One to [aa]undergo de-
cay.***

28

***‘You have made known to me the ways of life;
You will make me full of gladness with Your pres-
ence.’***

When a Jewish person read Psalm 16, they simply saw this as a slam about David...

Verse 25...

David was always in the Lord's presence.

Verse 26...

David was filled with joy...

Verse 28..

God made know to David the ways of life...

In the Jewish mind, everything about this psalm spoke of David and his God...

But then there is the problem of verse 27..

David seems to say that God would not allow him to go to the place of the dead...

On and on top of that, that God would not allow his body to rot in a grave...

The Jews had read that verse for years, and never quite understood it...

And the reality is that this portion of Psalm 16 was written by David but it was not written about David..

Instead, David was speaking of the coming Messiah who would not be over by death nor see his body rot in a the grave...

How do we know that?

Well, Peter tells us in verse 29-31...

29 “[ab]Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and

*was buried, and his tomb is [ac]with us to this day.
 30 And so, because he was a prophet and knew
 that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat
 one [ad]of his descendants on his throne, 31 he
 looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of
 [ae]the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to
 Hades, nor did His flesh [af]suffer decay.*

Long story short, Peter cuts right to the chase...

People, David couldn't have been talking about himself because he died and was buried and you can visit his grave today..

And if you dig it up, you are going to find a very decayed and rotted body..

Here's a picture of David's tomb today, almost 2000 years after Peter preached this message...

Now, this is simply tradition, since David's actual burial place is disputed..

Regardless of where David was actually buried, it makes no difference...

David's body has undergone incredible decay since his death around 970 BC..

And so Peter's point is that Psalm 16 is not about David, but about the King who will be coming from the line of David..

In fact, Peter tells us in verse 30 that David was acting as a prophet here and looking to the future death and resurrection of David's ultimate descendant, who is Jesus Christ..

And the reality of Christ is that he wasn't abandoned to Hades and his flesh did not suffer decay because death had no power over Him..

And the point of the this first Christian sermon by Peter is simple.

Jesus is that descendant of David, who came and lived perfectly, died gruesomely, and was resurrected gloriously...

And Peter was a witness of the resurrection along with many others...

Vere 32..

32 This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.

And then to add one more convincing proof to the fact that Psalm 16 wasn't about David, Peter turns to another Psalm in which the Jews were confused about its meaning..

Verse 33..

33 Therefore having been exalted [ag]to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. 34 For it was not David who ascended into [ah]heaven, but he himself says:

'The Lord said to my Lord,

"Sit at My right hand,

35

Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."

Here, Peter closes out his message by quoting Psalm 110..

Where David writes that the LORD said to my Lord...

In other words, David has not been exalted to the right hand of God...

David's soul is with the Lord, but he is not there in his resurrected body just yet...

The only One in a resurrected body beside the Father's right hand is the resurrected and ascended Christ..

Once again, Peter stresses that Psalm 110 was not about David but simply another example of the resurrection and then ascension of Christ to heaven..

This is the model of good Spirit filled preaching...

No need to stomp and shout and tell a lot of stories..

Take people to the Bible.

Point to the life of Christ.

Point to the death of Christ.

Point to the resurrection of Christ..

Point to the ascension of Christ...

Provide the biblical evidence for all those things.

Explain the Scriptures to them...

And then bring it all to a close...

Which Peter does perfectly in verse 36....

36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and [ai]Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”

All good perching leads people to make a decision of the person of Christ...

Conclusion

Now notice that all of Peter's sermon points to the person of Christ, but most of its points to what?

The resurrection of Christ...

One verse on his life.

One verse on his death.

One verse on his ascension to heaven.

NINE verses on his resurrection...

And the reason for that?

The truth of the resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith.

We are people of the resurrection of Christ...

This is what sets us apart from all the religions of the world...

Now, let us all be reminded of what the effects of a powerful message on the resurrection of Christ are..

Look back at the book of Acts...

Vere 37..

37 Now when they heard this, they were [aj]pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “[ak]Brethren, [al]what shall we do?” 38 Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” 40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “[am]Be saved from this perverse generation!” 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand [an]souls. 42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and [ao]to prayer.

Sunday, we will celebrate Easter...

And it is a great family tradition...

New clothes, nice weather, family gatherings, but all of that misses the point if we aren't preaching and teaching the resurrection of Christ...

Unless Jesus rises from the dead and we believe that, all the new clothes, nice weather, and family

gatherings are just nice decorations on a very empty and hopeless world.

But thanks be to God for the resurrection of Christ, which fills us with certainty on who Jesus is...

And fills us with hope of salvation in Jesus' name.

Let us pray.