Peter’s Exciting Witness

Second in the Series: Catch the Easter Excitement (2019)

# Scripture: Acts 2:22-41

# Key thought: Peter's Pentecost sermon explains the Christian's excitement at Easter.

# Intro:

Did you ever wonder what kind of sermon one of the original twelve disciples would have preached on an Easter Sunday in the first century? Suppose that you and I were living in those first few years after the resurrection happened, and we were attending an Easter service at which the preacher of the morning was to be the apostle Peter himself. What do you think he would say? It sure would be fascinating to know, wouldn't it? Actually, in the book of Acts we have a written record of part of one of Peter's sermons in which he does speak about the Easter story. It was originally given in Jerusalem just seven weeks after the very first Easter. It was his sermon on the first Pentecost. It was given to explain the events of Pentecost but in order to do so, Peter had to also explain the events of the very first Easter. His key points in that sermon help us to catch his excitement regarding the events of Easter. Let’s look at Peter’s sermon. What excited Peter about the Easter happenings? What amazed him! What gripped him! What did it mean to him! Let's catch his Easter excitement together.

# The Excitement of Scripture fulfilled

## Our liking for predictions

In our day, perhaps more than ever, we give credence to people whose predictions come true. In fact, there are several professions in our world today of whom we expect accurate predictions. Most of us check the weather at least once a day looking for accurate predictions in things like temperature, precipitation and anticipated storms. When we are ill, we look to doctors and nurses to give us indications of what the future holds for us, how long it will take for the medicine to kick in, how long it will take us to recover, etc. Often we expect more of them than is reasonable. Think about car mechanics. They make a repair for us and we asked them if it will hold up. How do they know? But we expect them to give a reasonable guess. And we could talk about things like stock market predictions, or even gamblers odds for sport fantasy networks. If someone’s predictions in a particular area are good, that is they prove to be true repeatedly, then we give more and more credence to what that person says. It is only natural.

## Peter points to Scripture fulfillments

In the first Pentecost sermon, one of the things that Peter emphasizes is the way that what happened to Jesus fulfilled Scripture. Things that the OT prophets had predicted came true in the life of Jesus.

Peter makes the point that what happened to Jesus was not an accident of some sort; it was not a surprise to God or to Jesus; rather it was a deliberate part of God’s plan. Jesus had told the disciples ahead what was going to happen; that he would be mocked, flogged and crucified; and that he would be raised to life on the third day (Matt. 20:19); but they had not really taken it in. Now, however, after it happened, such teaching came back to them and made them certain that God was at work through it all. Peter exclaims;

[Jesus of Nazareth] … was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. Acts 2:23 NIV

Notice especially the words, “deliberate plan and foreknowledge.” These words are really a triply redundant emphasis on Peter’s part that God knew ahead what was going to happen. Those of us who been studying in John understand why Peter knew this. Jesus made a point to teach the disciples that what was happening to him was not a surprise; it was included in the Father’s plan.

In our John study we also noted that the apostle John was also fascinated with how the life of Jesus and especially the passion of Jesus fulfilled Scripture. This last week we studied the crucifixion narrative in John 19. In the space of about 20 verses describing the crucifixion itself, John lists four different Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled during Jesus time on the cross. Here in Peter’s first sermon, he quotes from two separate Old Testament passages, one of them extensively. Why did Peter pick these two passages? Obviously, they fit the theme of his message. But beyond that, allow me to speculate just a little. We are not told in Luke what Scriptures Jesus expounded to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus as he explained his death and resurrection. I have always wondered if perhaps at least the first of these two was among them. It fits the description of Luke 24:26 regarded what Jesus talked about during that walk.

In his message, Peter talks about what happened to Jesus and then quotes Psalm 16:8-11 which contains a specific prediction of the resurrection. Peter points out that the writing could not have applied to David since his tomb was still there. Rather, David, writing as a prophet, was predicting what would happen to the Messiah, the descendant of David.

“Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah.” Acts 2:29-31 NIV

After this, Peter affirms Jesus’ resurrection and ascension to God, quoting Psalm 110:1. This is the verse that Jesus had used in his riddle to the Pharisees (Matt. 22:44). Jesus was challenging the Pharisees to think of him as the Son of God. Peter uses the verse in a similar way to challenge his listeners to exalt Jesus as both their Lord and their Messiah.

David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,
“‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”’
“Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.” Acts 2:34-36 NIV

Peter is using connections with the Scripture that they knew to increase their understanding of and respect for Jesus. Still today, it is amazing to us how the life of Jesus fulfilled so many of the words of the prophets that were spoken 400-1000 years before Jesus lived on earth. The prophecies fulfilled in Jesus are not from just one prophet, but from many different prophets scattered of Israel’s history, evidence that God was weaving one story that was moving toward an apex in Jesus.

# Excitement because Jesus is Living

## Peter confirms the resurrection

At the same time as Peter makes his point about how the events of Jesus life fulfilled the words of Old Testament Scripture, Peter also shows how excited he is to be announcing to the people of Jerusalem once again, that Jesus is alive. Peter tells them directly what happened. He is blunt to say that this same Jesus, the very same man that you handed over to be crucified, is now alive!

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.
Acts 2:24 NIV

Then in a commentary on the quote from the Psalm that he had given, Peter continues;

[David]… spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Acts 2:31-32 NIV

So, one of the exciting facts that all the Pentecost disciples had in common is that they were witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They had seen him alive.

Witnessing to the resurrection was one of the basic tasks of the early followers of Jesus Christ. It is still one of our tasks today. The Apostle Paul preserves for us a creedal statement that includes a list of the appearances of Jesus after his resurrection. This list is preceded by the comment that it was a list he had received. We know that Paul talked with the early apostles shortly after his conversion. Perhaps that is when he received this listing. He was careful to pass it on as part of the basic data for Christian faith.

What I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. 1 Cor 15:3-8 NIV

Since one of the appearances was to a large number of the early disciples, we can understand how Peter says that those who were in the upper room and who are now speaking out at Pentecost were all witnesses that Jesus was alive. It was the basic transforming fact.

## Skeptics should just believe the eye-witnesses

Those today who would deny the literal resurrection of Jesus must contend with the stumbling block of history itself. They must figure out how to dismiss multiple accounts of multiple appearances of a man who was supposedly dead. They must figure out how to dismiss the fact that even his enemies had to make an alibi to cover up the fact that his tomb was empty. They must dismiss the amazing and documented transformation that happened to eleven fleeing and confused disciples after the crucifixion of their leader. They went from hiding to speaking out boldly even when called before the same courts that had condemned Jesus. Many are those who have started investigating with the purpose of disproving the resurrection, only to be convinced by their own historical research that Jesus is in fact risen from the dead. We can save ourselves the trouble if we just believe the testimony of the witnesses that is given to us in Holy Scripture. That is why it has been preserved for us.

# Excitement because Jesus is Exalted

## Peter points out that Jesus is exalted

But there is further reason for excitement, according to Peter. Jesus has not only risen from the dead, but he has been exalted. Peter names him as both Lord and Christ. Lord was the word that Jewish people used in their reading of Scripture when they came the sacred tetragrammaton that represented the name of God in the OT Hebrew Scriptures. Christ was the Greek title meaning Messiah – the expected King of Israel. Interestingly, this combined tile “Lord and Christ” is very similar to the one you will remember from the angel announcement to the shepherds at the time of Jesus’ birth, identifying the one who had been born as “Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11 ESV).

Now Peter exclaims that Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of God. Peter was just beginning to understand the cosmic significance of the resurrection. The kingship of Jesus had indeed begun. It was an eternal Lordship far beyond the kingship Peter had previously envisioned. It was the heavenly kingship. This exaltation makes possible what Peter is now explaining to the crowd, the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

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 2:33 NIV

Jesus has ascended to a position of authority and power at least as high, if not higher than that which he had before he was incarnated, before his journey as a human being began. The writer of the book of Hebrews spoke of this majesty.

The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. Heb 1:3 NIV

## Paul and John also speak of the exalted Christ

Paul also spoke of the exalted Christ;

God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. Phil 2:9-11 NIV

John, the writer of the book of Revelation had a glimpse of the exalted Christ in the first of the visions recorded in that book. In John’s vision, the exalted Christ spoke to him;

Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. Rev 1:17-18 NIV

Because Jesus has been exalted, Peter says, he has poured out upon his disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit. And we know from other passages (Eph. 4:8-12; Rom. 12:6-8), that with the gift of the Holy Spirit, come many other giftings and blessings. Peter encourages those who are listening to look at what is happening at Pentecost as part of the evidence that Jesus has been exalted.

# The Excitement of Transformed Disciples

## Peter was a changed man

Peter was a transformed man. That was obvious. When he was asked by those hearing how they should respond to the message, he answered in keeping with the amazing effects that Easter had upon his own life. He spoke about becoming transformed people.

## People asked Peter how to respond to the resurrection of Jesus

The people who heard Peter’s first sermon were convicted in their hearts and they asked Peter how they should respond. Many people today, by the prevenient grace of God, the calling grace of God that goes ahead of us, have come to the same point in their own spiritual journeys, the place where they are seeking the answer to their own spiritual search.

I read recently the Christian testimony of Steve Largent, for many years all-pro quarterback of the Seattle Seahawks. He wrote:

 As a sophomore in high school, I was one of 150 guys who tried out for the football team. I was so intimidated I actually quit. Fortunately, my parents encouraged me to stick with it. I did. That season I made varsity, and my life appeared so fulfilling. I was popular, and successful. And yet I felt so empty inside. I really had no sense of purpose in life, no peace or contentment.

Then I made the discovery that changed everything. I attended a meeting in Oklahoma City where I heard clearly the gospel of Christ…. The speaker explained it like this: imagine a room divided in half by a wall. On one side is God. On the other side is mankind. Throughout history, mankind has attempt to reached God, but because of the wall they couldn’t. However, God loved us so much he provided a door you and I could pass through. This way to God is through Jesus Christ who says, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”
(John 14:6).

That night I passed through the wall by committing my life to Jesus Christ. For the first time I began to sense that God did have a purpose for me. The key to that process is knowing God more fully by reading his Word, the Bible. It’s not a list of do’s and don’ts, but rather a story of God’s love and acceptance. No matter where you are in life, no matter how deep your need is, God cares about you too.”
(Good News Publishers)

Steve Largent reached that place in his spiritual life where he was searching for an answer to his spiritual quest. The speaker that he heard directed him and told him how to find the answer in Jesus Christ.

At the end of Peter’s sermon on Pentecost, he faced a crowd of people seeking the answer to their own spiritual quest. They said, “Brothers, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Peter opened his heart to them and in reply he spoke from his own experience.

### First he urges them to repent.

It had only been a short time since Peter’s own bitter experience with repentance. On the night that Jesus was crucified, Peter had denied that he knew him three times. But it had no sooner happened, then the rooster crowed. Jesus had predicted that Peter would deny him three times before the rooster would crow. When it actually happened, Peter was shaken, and deeply convicted. The Bible says he went outside and wept bitterly. He knew what repentance was about – sorrow for sin, and determination to turn back toward the right way. So, when the people asked him what way to go, it was his first recommendation. He understood that sin was the roadblock that needs to be removed. Jesus had done the heavy lifting. Repentance is a sign of our cooperation with God’s work in us.

### Be baptized

Peter’s second recommendation was also a page from the experience of the early disciples, perhaps also from his own experience. Peter tells the new seekers to be baptized. In Peter’s day, and in the early church, baptism was the way to confirm repentance and witness publicly to the fact that one had made a decision to follow Jesus. Baptism is still a crucial and commanded means to witness to our decision to follow Christ. Jesus told his church in the Great commission to go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. In many churches today, children are baptized as infants. So, we also use other opportunities to affirm and testify to our commitment to follow Jesus. The liturgy for confirmation and the liturgy for becoming a church member specifically review and confirm both our repentance and our confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

### You will receive the Holy Spirit

The third recommendation of Peter for those who were seeking and asking what to do is also from his experience. After, Jesus died, the timid disciples met behind locked doors in the upper room on Easter and the resurrected Christ appeared among them. During one of his subsequent appearances he told them to remain in Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4). Peter and the other disciples had done that. Now what was happening on Pentecost was a testimony to the power that Jesus had unleashed upon them. Peter now promises that to all who commit their lives to Christ and are baptized in testimony of their commitment to Jesus, God will give the Holy Spirit. This is one of the passages that help us understand that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ and becomes his follower receives the Holy Spirit.

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”
Acts 2:38, 39 NIV

And Peter makes it crystal clear that his advice, his answer, his admonition is not just for those who are listening to them in that day but also for us who read his comments, and who hear today from preachers and other witnesses of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In my first church, in Bentley Creek, PA, there were two teenage girls who attended regularly, but their parents never came. The oldest, named Desiree, Des for short, went off to college at a Christian school college in Canada, quite a long way from home. After she had been there a little while, she wrote back on how well it was going in college and how she was growing in her faith there at the Christian college.

Then she wrote a note about why she was writing. It included a little bit of her testimony in poetry form and included also how her local church had helped her in her Christian journey. I saved it all these years. Here’s the little poem she wrote about her home church. She titled it, “A Little Stone Church.”

It’s been almost 9 years since I first walked in those doors,
and His love through you first touched my soul.
And it was at this altar where I first found Jesus
And he touched my life and made me whole.
Though many times I’ve fallen, you always helped me to see
that Jesus was the way to reach my goals.

Just a little stone church
With a warm heart
Where the Spirit of the Lord is strong
And with Jesus is my rock
And you as my anchor
I know that I can’t go wrong.

So, it’s with a touch of sadness that I must leave here.
But the Lord has called me to go
But I will take the memories of the good times that we shared
The love and guidance that helped me to grow
I won’t be gone long but I hope you will still pray for me
For there’s one thing I want you to know

I thank God for this
Little stone church
With a warm heart
Where the Spirit of the Lord is strong
And with Jesus is my rock
And you as my anchor
I know I can’t go wrong.

Signed - Des

Desiree’s life was touched by the Holy Spirit’s presence and she was never the same. Her church family had helped her get the message of God’s love and forgiveness, of commitment to Jesus and openness of God’s Spirit. It filled her life with meaning, hope and joy.

The resurrected and exalted Jesus will do the same for you!

# Conclusion

 The Easter excitement is not just a curiosity to be studied. Easter is not just a season to be enjoyed. It is much more than just a fine religious doctrine that brings hope to the needy. It is the understanding by faith of the most basic fact that underlies and defines spiritual reality. That fact is the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ. Because in accordance with the divine plan, he was raised from the dead on that first Easter morning, he has now been given all authority in heaven and on earth. He is now the coming King of Kings! That is the truth of Easter! When we understand and believe that truth, then we can catch the Easter Excitement. And when we really do catch it, the truth of Easter will transform us too. It will bring repentance where it is needed. It will open the way for the infilling and empowering of the Holy Spirit and it will not allow us to be silent. That is the Easter Excitement!