

Acts Series Part 5

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Date: 05 April 2009

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[0 : 00] Let's open our Bibles in the book of Acts and chapter 2 and as we continue to consider the sermon that Peter preaches to the crowd on the day of Pentecost, we'll read from verse 22 of Acts chapter 2 and we'll read through to the end of verse 36. Acts chapter 2 from verse 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. 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 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. David said about him, I saw the Lord always before me because he has met my right hand I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices. My body also will live in hope because you will not abandon me to the grave nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life. You will fill me with joy in your presence. Brothers, 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 ahead he 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. 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.

For 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 crucify of both Lord and Christ. The Word of God.

[2 : 48] So in the midst of the extraordinary manifestations that accompanied the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Peter takes full advantage of the captive audience to explain what they have seen.

And we were reminded last week of the manner in which Peter uses that language of explaining to the audience. In verse 14, let me explain this to you.

In the first part of the sermon that we considered last week, Peter has argued convincingly on the basis of the fulfilling of Joel's prophecy that a new age has dawned.

What he calls, or what the prophet Joel calls, and Peter quotes, the last days. Now, for the Jews who were listening to him, the expectation of a new age revolved around the coming of a Messiah.

A king in David's line who would bring salvation and prosperity to his people. And so we come to the crucial part of the address of Peter's sermon.

[4 : 06] If the new age has dawned, who is the Messiah? Would be the reasonable question that his audience could pose to him. So far, he has said, on the basis of the prophet Joel, I can affirm, and you are witness to what is going on, this new age has dawned.

And so, many might say, well, very well, and what about the Messiah? So where is the Messiah? If you say that a new age is dawn, where is the awaited Messiah? A reasonable question some might pose to Peter.

And Peter responds to that question as he continues with his message. Where is the king? Where is David's greater son? And Peter begins what we might call this the second part of the sermon.

It's all one sermon. But this second part of the sermon, presenting, as it were, his candidate for Messiah. There in verse 22. He says, a new age is dawned.

You are witnesses. You can see the manifestations of it. You can see how the prophecy has been fulfilled. And now, listen to this. Men of Israel, listen to this. Jesus of Nazareth.

[5 : 16] And then he goes on to speak to him. But as he simply announces the name, Jesus of Nazareth, Peter is setting out his stall. He is saying, this is my candidate.

You want to know who the Messiah is? You want to know who this king is? Well, here it is. Jesus of Nazareth. That's how he begins, by presenting, as it were, his candidate.

But he concludes the sermon in verse 36. And he does so claiming to have proved that his candidate is indeed the Messiah.

Listen to what he says in verse 36. Therefore, on the basis of all that I have said, on the basis of the evidence presented, therefore, let all Israel be assured of this.

God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah, both Lord and Christ. And so he begins this part of his sermon saying, I want to present to you Jesus of Nazareth.

[6 : 18] You want to know who the Messiah is? Well, I say to you it is Jesus of Nazareth. And then he presents the evidence. He brings the witnesses who would back up his claims.

And he concludes by saying, well, there it is. There it is. Be assured. The evidence has been presented. Who can quibble? Who can question? Who can deny that this Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah?

That this Jesus is both Lord and Christ? So in between presenting the candidate in verse 22 and boldly assuring his audience in verse 36 that his claim is an altogether reasonable one, in between Peter presents his evidence.

And his evidence, as in any good court case, is based on witnesses. And essentially Peter has three witnesses that he presents to establish his claim, to back up, to substantiate this astonishing claim that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the promised Messiah.

And as we consider these three witnesses, and that is what we will devote ourselves to this evening, as we consider these three witnesses, we would do well to pay heed to Peter's words as he began his sermon.

[7 : 40] Listen carefully to what I say. Well, who are these three witnesses? Well, the three witnesses that I find in this part of the sermon are as follows.

First of all, the disciples themselves are presented to the audience as witnesses. And indeed his very audience, the men of Israel, are drawn in as witnesses to Jesus as Messiah.

And I'll explain why I make that statement in a moment. I just want to mention who they are, and then we can develop them one by one. First of all, the disciples and the very audience, the men of Israel, are witnesses.

But also the prophets are presented as witnesses to this claim that Jesus is the Messiah. And this is really what occupies the majority of Peter's attention in this portion of his sermon.

But then thirdly, we have another witness, and the third witness is the Holy Spirit himself. He also is presented as a witness that would substantiate and back up Peter's claim that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah.

[8 : 50] There is a new age that has dawned. They are indeed in the last days. That requires a Messiah. And Peter, on the basis of these witnesses, is able to conclude his sermon, be assured that Jesus is indeed this Messiah.

Amen. The first witness then, the disciples and the men of Israel. Let's notice what Peter says in verse 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.

So Peter says the miracles, the signs, the wonders, are evidence in favor of the claim that he is making on behalf of Jesus that he is the Messiah.

He says here is some evidence. You want evidence? Well, here is the first evidence I present to you. Jesus of Nazareth, he was accredited by God. How? By miracles, wonders, and signs.

[9 : 56] These miracles are evidence in favor of his case for Jesus as the promised Messiah. And who are witnesses of these things that Jesus did indeed perform these miracles?

Well, the disciples themselves. But also, crucially, the very people he is addressing. Very wisely. Anyway, Peter draws in his audience who could potentially be, certainly some of them may be hostile to his case.

And he says, you yourselves are witnesses. I'm not speaking about others. You yourselves, these miracles were done among you. And I think he deliberately makes this point.

These signs and wonders, they were done in the dark or in a hidden place. They were done among you. You yourselves know that what I say is true. He doesn't need to persuade them that Jesus had performed these miracles.

It is something that is recognized and accepted by his audience. And they would say, they would nod and would say, well, yes, indeed, this man Jesus, he did indeed do these things.

[11 : 00] We did indeed witness these things. And some of them at first hand and others by reliable first hand accounts. And so he presents this as evidence, thought his claim, that this Jesus was accredited by God by the miracles, signs and wonders that he performed.

And as he concludes that verse, as you yourselves know. You know what I'm saying is true. So the reality and the authenticity of the miracles are beyond dispute.

No evidence needs to be presented other than stating that it is so and inviting his audience to recognize as they themselves were witnesses of these things.

The miracles then are evidence in favor of identifying Jesus as the Messiah, but by no means conclusive evidence. Standing opposed to the evidence of the miracles, there appears to be the seemingly insurmountable problem of his ignominious death.

You see, as audio might say, well, yes, we did hear about Jesus. And some of them might say, yes, we saw how he healed the blind man. And we saw these things. But Peter, don't you remember what just happened a few weeks ago?

[12 : 21] This Jesus that you're speaking of, he was hanging from a tree. He was accursed. How can you possibly imagine that such a man would be the Messiah? It's inconceivable. And so there's this great problem, as Peter would seek to convince them, that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

How could a man who ended up hanging on an accursed cross be the Messiah? And yet this seemingly insurmountable barrier is swiftly removed by Peter in two ways as he continues his address.

The first way in which he removes the cross as a barrier to recognizing Jesus as Messiah is by affirming that this death, horrendous as it was, far from being evidence of the defeat of Jesus, was part of God's great plan.

There we see that in verse 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. Peter says, yes, it's true.

It's true. It's true. He did indeed die a sinner's death. Yes, he did indeed end up on that cursed tree. But it was by God's set foreknowledge. You see, this was part of God's plan.

[13 : 38] So don't consider the cross as something that is an obstacle to belief in Jesus as the Messiah. Quite the contrary. This was part of God's purpose. And so he fights against the cross as being an obstacle.

And he says, no, not at all. God planned it so. And there's so much we could say concerning this verse. But it's not our purpose today to consider the matter of God's sovereignty and foreordination of all things and how that comes together with human responsibility.

That is not our concern this evening. Our concern simply is to say that in the face of this seeming obstacle to Jesus being presented as the Messiah, Peter says, no, his death was part of God's purpose.

But of course, the primary manner in which he removes the death of Jesus as an obstacle to belief is by presenting to them the truth of the resurrection. And in verse 24, he goes on, But, yes, he died on Calvary Street, but, the glorious but that we have so often in the Gospel, but God raised him from the death, freeing him from the agony of death because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

If the death of Jesus appears to be a problem to his credentials as Messiah, his resurrection not only removes the problem, it also provides further powerful argument in favor of Peter's claim.

[15 : 13] And it was not just any resurrection. Peter implies, more than implies, states categorically that there was a necessity about his resurrection.

Jesus was not the first man who had risen from the dead or who had been raised from the dead. But in this, there is a difference because Peter says, in the case of Jesus, there could have been no other outcome.

There was no other possible outcome. It was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. So the resurrection serves as this great argument in favor of Jesus as Messiah.

Yes, he died a seemingly ignominious death, but not only seemingly, but he rose again. He was raised by the Father. He was freed from the agony of death or the birth pangs of death in a wonderfully suggestive phrase in the original language.

God raised him from the dead. And so Peter continues to work with his audience and to respond to their unvoiced questions, but that he knows are very much to the fore as they listen to him.

[16 : 30] But then, of course, some in the audience might have responded to this astonishing claim of Peter that Jesus had risen from the dead. They might have responded in this way, but how can we actually know that he did rise again?

You say that he rose again. Well, Peter will, in due course, again resort to his first witness, the disciples themselves, and in a measure even to the men of Israel.

Notice in verse 32, we're jumping a little bit, but in order to follow the pattern of these witnesses, and the first witnesses were still, I hope you're following my line of thought, we're still considering the first witnesses who are the disciples themselves, and the people who had witnessed the miracles.

But now, not only is he presenting to them witnesses of the miracles, but now he presents to them witnesses of the resurrection. Then in verse 32, God has raised this Jesus to life.

And then what does he say? And we are all witnesses of the fact. See, this is the case he is making. He's saying, I'm not just saying that Jesus rose from the dead. Yes, I am saying that, but there are witnesses.

[17 : 40] We are witnesses. We are all witnesses of the fact. Now, the we there in verse 32 would seem to refer primarily to the disciples, to the 120 upon whom the Holy Spirit had been poured out, and who have been declaring the wonders of God in other tongues.

And Peter stands up, and we notice at the beginning of the sermon, he stood up as it were in representation of the other apostles, and he says, we are witnesses. We, the disciples, we are witnesses of this fact.

But might it not be, or might it not be reasonable to presume that in his audience there were also witnesses? We're told by Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 that on one occasion, Jesus presented himself to more than 500 brothers.

And so, in the audience, might there not have been some of those, or certainly some who had heard from other first-hand witnesses concerning this claim that Jesus had risen from the dead.

And so, the resurrection can be presented by Peter on the basis of the witnesses that he is bringing before his audience can be presented as a fact.

[18 : 57] That's the way he considers it in verse 32. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Why can it be considered a fact?

Because there are many incredible witnesses. So again, as we consider the question that would have been on the mind of his audience, is Jesus the Messiah?

You say that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. Well, Peter says, the first witnesses in favor of this claim are the disciples and the very crowds themselves, witnesses of the miracles, the wonders, and the signs, and many of them witnesses of the resurrection itself.

But Peter has another witness, and in some respects his principal witness on this occasion. And this witness is the prophet.

The prophets are in this occasion one particular prophet. There in verse 30, we are told of David, whom he quotes, and he is described for us.

[20 : 04] We are told, but he was a prophet, and knew that God had promised him, and so it goes on. We seldom think of David as a prophet, or seldom give him that title, though he quite evidently was.

We're told he was, and we find in the Psalms, constantly David serving as a prophet, and prophesying concerning things to come.

And let's consider the prophet David, and how he serves as a witness for the case that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. And particularly, Peter quotes from the psalm that we have read and sung, Psalm 16.

Let's just notice how David quotes that psalm from verse 25. David said about him, about Jesus, what did he say? I saw the Lord always before me because he is at my right hand.

I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my tongue rejoices. My body also will live in hope. And very particularly, the core of the prophecy in verse 27, and the matter that Peter himself focuses his attention on.

[21 : 10] Because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. And he continues. As I say, verse 27 serves as the heart of this prophecy that Peter brings to bear as he would seek to establish that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

The psalm speaks of one who could have, and who speaks with the assurance that he would not be abandoned to the grave, that he would not know decay or corruption.

Now what does this mean? What is the purpose, or what is the meaning of this prophecy being quoted by Peter? Well, fortunately, it is a fairly straightforward thing to answer that question because Peter does it for us.

What is the meaning of this prophecy? What does this prophecy teach us? Well, all we need to do is listen to what Peter tells us in that regard. What does he tell us? Well, from verse 29 he explains, and the first things he tells us is that in this psalm, the author, David, cannot be speaking about himself.

He begins by making that clear. David clearly was not speaking about himself. Why? Well, because David is dead and buried. Peter knows that, and so does his audience.

[22 : 36] And again, I think it's interesting the way Peter draws in his audience. He's saying, not only do I say that David is dead and buried, you know that. Indeed, his tomb is with us to this day.

You know what it is. You can visit it. You know that that is where he was buried. So clearly, when David spoke in these terms, he wasn't speaking about himself. That's the first thing Peter highlights.

What else does Peter say? Well, he reminds them, if indeed it was necessary to do so, that this David who spoke was a prophet. He was a prophet. And he also tells us that David knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.

The promised kingly Messiah, the one who would reign forever on the throne of David. Now, all of these things were truths familiar to his audience that they would have been quite willing to give their assent to.

And then, of course, Peter comes to his conclusion. And what is his conclusion? Well, David was, on this occasion, as he wrote this psalm, speaking prophetically about the Messiah and his resurrection.

[23 : 50] Verse 31, Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay.

Perhaps on another occasion, this evening is not the occasion to do so, but we could ponder on how much David understood as he wrote these words.

And the measure of his understanding perhaps is something we are not able to come to a conclusion on. But what we certainly can do is simply read and echo the explanation given by Peter that in some way, in some measure, David saw what was ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, of the Messiah.

And so, as Peter continues to build his case, he has stated, he has presented his candidate, Jesus of Nazareth. The evidence? Well, witnesses.

Who are the witnesses? The disciples themselves, and indeed the men of Israel who were witnesses to the truth that Jesus was accredited by God, by signs and wonders and miracles.

[25 : 00] The disciples were witnesses of the fact that he had risen from the dead. And this was an established fact that nobody, no reasonable person could question because it was a simple thing to speak to the multitudes of witnesses and establish that this was indeed true.

But then, Peter says, but I have another witness for you. And here is another witness, Prophet David, the patriarch David who you consider so highly. He also is brought in as a witness to establish that the one whom Peter presents as Messiah is indeed the Messiah.

but we have a third witness. And who is the third witness? Well, the third witness presented by Peter is the Holy Spirit himself.

You see, again, there might be those who would respond to Peter as he speaks of the resurrection and as he says, look, even the patriarch David spoke of Jesus as the one who would rise from the dead.

Perhaps there would be those who would respond, well, very well. Let's take it as true. Let's accept your argument that Jesus was indeed raised from the dead. Well, where is he?

[26 : 13] Let him speak for himself. Why does he need you to speak for him? If he is indeed the Messiah, well, let him be at the head of this gathering. Let him speak to us. And Peter, as it were, anticipates this objection in verse 33.

And as he does so, he introduces his third witness. In verse 33, anticipating, as it were, this protest that there might be, what does he say?

Well, this Jesus who rose from the dead, where is he now? 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.

The risen Jesus will not indeed address them there on the day of Pentecost. Why? Because he has been exalted. He has ascended on high. He has seated at the right hand of God. But as he was exalted to the right hand of God, Peter assures his audience that he received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit.

And having received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, he then pours out the Holy Spirit on his people gathered there in the upper room. And then, what does Peter say once again as he draws in his audience and as he would persuade them of his case, what does he say?

[27 : 35] The promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. You see, here is the third witness, the Holy Spirit. And how is he a witness? Because you yourselves are seeing the evidence of his having been poured out.

You yourselves have heard these Galileans speak in tongues they had never learned the wonders of God. You yourselves are witnesses to these things. It's not just that I'm saying so.

You are witnesses to these things. You have just witnessed this. The audience, witnesses of the witness, of the Holy Spirit of God himself working in his people and allowing them and empowering them and emboldening them as we were considering on a previous occasion to declare the wonders of God in this marvelous way.

The Holy Spirit himself is the third witness. But as I say, the crowds are witnesses of the work of the witness. And just to make his case watertight as it were, Peter again backs up his claims concerning Jesus being exalted on high with the support of prophet David.

And prophetic words spoken in Psalm 110 and verse 1 there in the sermon related and quoted in verse 34.

[29 : 06] For 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. And it's worth mentioning that this is a verse that Jesus himself had already used to identify himself as the Messiah.

And so Peter also makes use of this verse to substantiate his claim that this Jesus who had risen again has been exalted on high and seated at the right hand of God having received the promised Holy Spirit has poured it out upon his people.

And the Holy Spirit then constituting himself in a third witness in his case for Jesus being recognized as the promised Messiah.

Now before we move on and bring things to a conclusion I just want to notice how this particular reference or this particular quote from the prophet David as he spoke in Psalm 110 how the work of mission is described in this prophetic word.

As we began this series on Acts we describe this new age as the age of mission and it's revealing how as Peter makes use of this particular verse from Psalm 110 there is insight into what we might describe as that work of mission.

[30 : 42] There in the verse God the Father invites Jesus to sit at his right hand. The Lord said to my Lord sit at my right hand. Jesus had fulfilled the mission that he had been given by the Father.

He had fulfilled it to the uttermost and the Father was well pleased with him. He was his beloved son in whom he was well pleased and so he invites him into heaven.

He invites him to take his rightful place at his right hand. He is exalted above all. And then the Father says to him, the Father says to Jesus, sit down here at my right hand.

And what else does the Father say? Until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. The Father makes his great promise to Jesus. He says, I, as I reward you and as I vindicate you, I will have you sit at my right hand and I will make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

Now when those words were first penned by David and would first have been read by those who read them in the Old Testament, I don't think they could have been understood in any other way as the ritual humiliation of the enemies of the king.

[31 : 57] When these words would first have been read, people would have had this vision of the enemies of the king being destroyed and humiliated and placed under the feet of the great king.

The only reasonable way they could have understood these words. But not so with King Jesus. His enemies are indeed made his footstool by the father.

But they are made his footstool as the arrows, to use the language of the psalm, the arrows of the gospel pierce their hearts and they are brought into joyful and willing subjection to the king.

And this is what is going on in this age of mission. We are part of this age of mission when the enemies of Jesus are being made a footstool for his feet. We are a footstool for his feet.

And as we do the work of mission we bring others to that place, seemingly a humiliating place, but for the Christian a place of great dignity and honor to be a footstool for King Jesus.

[33 : 01] And this is what we are about. This is what the father has promised to his son. Sit at my right hand. You have done your work. Sit at my right hand and I will make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

And this work of course fulfilled in the power of the third witness, the poured out Holy Spirit. So Peter began the second part of his sermon presenting his surprising candidate for Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

And he has proceeded to bring before the crowd three witnesses, the disciples themselves, and indeed his audience, the men of Israel, witnesses of Jesus accredited by God.

The disciples particularly witnesses of the resurrection. Peter has presented the prophets as witnesses for his case and particularly the prophet David.

he has presented the Holy Spirit at work in the believers as a third witness in his case for Jesus as the Messiah.

[34 : 14] At each step of the way Peter has drawn in his audience and now he comes to his dramatic conclusion in verse 36.

Therefore, therefore let all Israel be assured of this. God has made this Jesus whom you crucify, both Lord and Christ.

Jesus is the Messiah, but he is indeed more than the Messiah, he is the Lord. And much could be said concerning what we find contained in this concluding statement of Peter.

Peter. But suffice it to say that these words demonstrate to us also what lies behind what is the purpose of Peter in preaching this sermon, in presenting these witnesses, in engaging with his audience.

His primary purpose is not to win the debate. His primary purpose is not to be able to prove his point that he's right and they're wrong. His primary purpose is to call men and women to repentance, that they might know this Jesus, that they might become part of this royal footstool, that they might be filled by his Spirit as he and his fellow believers have been filled by his Spirit.

[35 : 39] And hence the dramatic manner in which he presents his conclusion and indeed in the very order in which the words were voiced, were presented by Peter.

these words that we have translated in verse 36. Just listen to the manner in which he would have said the words, the order in which he would have voiced the words there in verse 36 in his conclusion.

It was in this way, Be assured Israel that even Lord and Christ has God made him, this Jesus, whom you crucified.

You see, these final words have this very clear purpose to bring them to repentance. See, this isn't some theological debate. He has before him men who are guilty before God.

He has before him men and women who have participated in this horrendous crime of crucifying Jesus Christ. And his great desire isn't to win an argument. His great desire is that they would repent.

[36 : 39] And so he presents his argument and it's coherent and it's solid and it's substantial. But as he comes to his conclusion, his final words are, whom you crucified.

Men and women of Israel, you are guilty. Repent of your sins. Repent of your sins and know the forgiveness that is on offer to you. This is his purpose.

And so it must be our purpose as we would preach the gospel. Yes, by all means let us rally in our defense all the arguments that we can. Let us present coherently our message, but let us never forget that its ultimate purpose is that men and women, sinners before God, would be brought to repentance.

And his message did indeed have that response, did indeed have that outcome. In verse 37 and on another occasion we'll be considering these verses, but we'll just notice very quickly the response.

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and they said to Peter and to the other apostles, brothers, what shall we do? They didn't say, oh, what a wonderful argument.

[37 : 50] Yes, you're right. Well, how amazing. Yeah, it does seem as if Jesus is the Messiah. Well, who would have thought? No, they say, what must we do? We killed him, we crucified him, we're guilty before God.

What must we do? And on another occasion we'll discover the answer that Peter gave them. And their response is indeed the only appropriate response to the gospel being preached, that we would ask this question ourselves to, what shall we do?

Let us pray. Thank you.