

CAN I GET A WITNESS?

ACTS 2:25-39 AUGUST 14, 2019

Acts chapter 2, beginning in verse 25 this evening. We're in the middle of Peter's sermon, the first sermon of the Church age, delivered to a crowd of thousands.

We've all seen movies or tv shows whose plots unfold in a courtroom. Often there is great tension surrounding someone who will serve as an *eyewitness* to a crime. Those scenes go one of two ways when the witness is asked if the person they saw is in the courtroom. Either they bravely point their finger and say, "He's right there." Or, the prosecutors are caught off guard when their star witness *suddenly* changes their tune and says, "I don't know *what* I saw." And there's usually a mad dash, scrambling for papers, as they try to salvage their case.

There are whole movies dedicated to the protection and delivery of witnesses so they can give testimony at trial. Clint Eastwood's 1977 film *The Gauntlet* is one. Bruce Willis' *16 Blocks* is another. Of course there's Harrison Ford's 1985 movie *Witness*.

We have laws against intimidating a witness. We even have the Witness Protection Program. All of this happens because we understand the *power* and *importance* of eyewitness testimony. Of course, in the *real* world, it's not always foolproof, but the sworn words of a witness carry great weight.

When we left off last time, Peter had explained *why* the miracles of Pentecost had happened. Then he quickly pivoted to speak to his audience about the coming, future judgment and their need for salvation. As he preached, he revealed that there is only *one* way to be saved: And that is through faith in the Messiah. He then *identified* Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. Now here there was a problem, because, Jesus had *died*. And the Jewish concept of the Messiah did not include a Savior that was slain. Not only that, but Jesus had not thrown off their oppressors and established world peace. Even the Disciples kept thinking (back in the Gospels) He would *have* to do right away if, indeed, He were the Messiah.

But in the second half of this sermon, Peter is going to serve not only as an eyewitness, but also an *expert* witness, identifying Jesus as the Messiah and *proving* from the Scripture that He fulfilled the prophecies God had sent through King David. He's already spoken to them from the book of Joel, now he starts referencing the prophecies of David, from a few of his Psalms.

Acts 2:25-28 - ²⁵For David says concerning Him: 'I foresaw the Lord always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. ²⁶Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. ²⁷For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. ²⁸You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.'

The Holy Spirit, speaking through Peter, declares that this passage from Psalm 16 is speaking about Jesus Christ. When the Bible comments on itself like this, *that* is the interpretation. We're not to try to assign some *additional*, distinctive interpretation. For example: In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus says "The sower sows *God's word*."¹ When the Bible makes this sort of definite comment on itself, we're not free to come along and say, "I think Jesus *ALSO* meant we're to go around sowing *love*."

¹ Mark 4:14, Luke 8:11

Here, in Psalm 16, David may not have fully understood it, but he was speaking about the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Because of progressive revelation, that's made known to us. So, the question is: Does Psalm 16 lose its value for me? Not at all. Because you and I, as Christians, are *included* in the wonders of these verses in the following sense: Paul declared in Romans 6:5 that we are going to be united with Christ in a resurrection *like* His. Peter would write in his second letter that Christ has given us great and precious promises, promises which enable us to share His divine nature.² So we can take great comfort and excitement in these verses which describe the Messiah's resurrection.

And what a great string of promises they are! The Lord *with* us, strengthening us. Allowing us to rest in hope. Filling up our hearts with gladness and rejoicing, to the point that praise just overflows from our lips. A God who knows and loves us so well and is able to make known to us the ways of life, making us full of joy in His presence. That's the power of the resurrection.

This amazing power is not withheld from us until after we cross over into eternity. Paul said he wanted to experience this resurrection power himself and wanted all of us to experience it as well in our day to day living. Lives full of joy and praise and rest as we confidently hope in the Lord.

Peter continues in verse 29:

Acts 2:29 - ²⁹ "Men *and* brethren, let *me* speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.

When Peter says he's going to speak freely he's announcing that he is speaking the truth with authority. And, he recognizes that his statements may be seen as controversial. Indeed, this wonderful message of salvation and resurrection *was* and *is* often met with violent reactions. But Peter takes courage to tell these people the truth, just as a good witness would in a court of law. When Peter says, "Let me speak freely," one resource defines it this way: "The sense is boldness - the trait of being willing to undertake activities that involve risk or danger; especially that involve being honest and straightforward in attitude and speech." He speaks as a definitive expert here.

Acts 2:30-31 - ³⁰ Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, ³¹ he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.

We noticed last week that Peter connected the prophecy of Joel to real, literal events and then spoke about a future Day of the Lord, which must also be real and literal. Here we see the same treatment of God's prophetic promise to David. First, it's clear that *David* really thought it would be literally true. And we notice how Peter described the coming King: "the fruit of [David's] body, according to the flesh." He could not be more clear that this was a real, literal prophecy. Not allegorical. Non-transferrable. No loopholes. So, therefore, the *other* aspects of the promises made to David, for example: The establishment of an earthly throne, in Jerusalem, must *also* be literal. Just as real as Christ's resurrection from the dead.

Acts 2:32 - ³² This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.

² 2 Peter 1:4

Peter, the expert witness (when it came to explaining the Scriptures), was also an eyewitness of the risen Christ. Not just him but many others. They had seen *for themselves* and now were spreading the word. In the end, each of the 12, other than John, would lay down their lives in an effort to spread this message. John was *not* martyred, not for lack of trying on the part of persecutors. But each of these witnesses were true and faithful till the end, despite the personal cost.

Acts 2:33 - ³³ Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

Peter brings them back to where they had begun. The crowd had gathered at the sights and sounds of Pentecost. And here, having testified of Jesus and proven He was the Christ, Peter explains that, even though the Messiah had ascended to heaven, He was *still* devoting His attention to mankind. Think of the love of God for us! Think of what God *could* be doing right now. Jesus Christ, in glory, fully God, highly exalted, has decided *not* to go off and create new universes or sit on some beach in cosmic retirement. He gives His attention to *us*. Not just to watch, but to intervene in our lives. To pour out every good and perfect gift. To accomplish His promises. *That's* what the people of Jerusalem were seeing that day. God actively loving His people and actively reaching out for the lost, invading our reality so that He could do great things for us and glorify Himself.

Acts 2:34-35 - ³⁴ “For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, ³⁵Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.” ’

Did you know that *this* Old Testament verse “is quoted in the *New Testament* more than any other single verse? [It's] quoted or referred to at least 25 times.”³ It is immensely important, showing that the Messiah would be divine in nature, not simply a man. It also serves as a proof of the harmony of Scripture. Written across thousands of years, yet Old Testament and New Testament do not disagree. They harmonize together. David and Joel do not contradict each other. David and the Gospels work in agreement. Jesus didn't come along and take a few verses out of context and apply them to Himself. He is the *culmination* of all that was prophesied about the Messiah and He continues to fulfill what has been revealed for us in the Scriptures.

Acts 2:36 - ³⁶ “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

Peter drive the point home, not only declaring the truth about who Jesus is, but also the fact of their *guilt* before a holy God.

Acts 2:37 - ³⁷ Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?”

The preaching of the Gospel doesn't *always* lead to a response like this one, but, in this case, the message hit its mark for at least 3,000 of them. Their question is an interesting one: What *could* you do to atone for the rejection of the Messiah? For the murder of God's own Son? There isn't a fine steep enough or prison sentence long enough, at least by *our* way of thinking. Luckily, God is not like us. He would not withhold forgiveness from them. His mercy was ready to save.

³ <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/acts-2/>

Acts 2:38-39 - ³⁸ Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

The way to salvation was very simple: Repent and receive. It’s important to know that to ‘repent’ does not simply mean ‘feel bad.’ It means to turn around. To change your mind. To believe God and trust Him. To abandon sin and instead embrace God’s righteousness.

But, let’s deal with two controversies within the church which bubble up from these verses. First of all: Is verse 39 suggesting that the Lord only calls *some* and that He does *not* call others? The Bible is clear when speaking about God’s heart and willingness to save. Again and again it uses words like, “Anyone. Whosoever. All.” The argument should be silenced by this statement from Jesus in John 12:32: “And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw *everyone* to Myself.”

The second controversy is Acts 2:38. This becomes a home base for groups who say that baptism is *necessary* for salvation. Of course, they go beyond even that - not *just* baptism but a certain *type* of baptism.

Let me give 3 reasons why baptism is not necessary for salvation.

First of all, that idea is not consistent with the rest of Scripture. When Jesus told Nicodemus how to be saved there was no talk of baptism. If you were the recipients of Paul’s letters to the Romans or the Ephesians you would not come to the conclusion that baptism was required for salvation. In fact, in 1 Corinthians, Paul says outright that Christ did *not* send him to baptize. Those are significant problems, theologically.

Second, notice what the verse says. It says, “Repent and...be baptized...and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” That’s the order. Those who teach that baptism is necessary for salvation would have to admit that, using their logic, baptism is therefore also necessary to receive the Holy Spirit. Yet we will see later in this book that Cornelius and his household experience a *different* order. Apparently the Holy Spirit got ahead of Himself and forgot what order He does things!

Third, for those who teach that baptism is necessary for salvation, ultimately, their system of theology is built upon a *preposition*. It’s the word ‘eis’ in the Greek or ‘for’ in our translation. “*For* the remission of sins.” We understand it to mean, ‘because of the remission of sins,’ however these other folks demand that it mean, ‘*in order to receive* the remission of sins.’

Now, not only is this word ‘eis’ used elsewhere in the New Testament the way we understand it, including once by John the Baptist *in regard to baptism*, but it is a dangerous thing to build a system of theology from the interpretation of *one* word. It will inevitably create massive contradictions. Their understanding of Acts 2:38 cancels out John 3:16 and that’s a problem. God’s Word must harmonize. A person is saved by grace alone, through faith alone, with no works contributing.

But now, notice a few precious things from Peter’s answer to their question “What must we do”: The first is the reminder that we could never, *ever* merit salvation or earn God’s favor. If these people would repent and believe, God would then be able to accomplish the *remission* of their sins. They did not pay Him back for what they had done. *Remission* mean to be *released* from your obligations or debts. A debt we owed and could never pay, yet Christ willingly repaid Himself.

Second, notice the width of God's offer: To them, their children, people near, people far. God's desire is to save *everyone*. They must *turn to* Him and receive salvation (we're not universalists), but God wants to save the *worst* of the worst. And He sends us to tell them.

Third, notice the importance of the Holy Spirit. Peter spoke of the Spirit as an *essential*. He didn't say, "get saved and *some* of you will be Spirit filled." To *be* a Christian was to *be* Spirit-filled. And, not only was it *essential*, we see it was *equal*. Christ killers who became born again would have the same gift poured out on them as the 12. No caste. No probationary period. Immediate access to the Lord and all He had promised.

Peter was an *powerful* witness that morning. He did not hold back his testimony. He spoke personally and pointedly. He served as an expert witness and an eyewitness. And he is, for us, a good example to follow after.

Because God desires to build testimonies in each of our lives. Things we are eyewitnesses of concerning His goodness and glory. These testimonies are going to be different from life to life, but they're meant to be built and used so that we can take the stand as Peter did here and preach to a lost and dying world.

We remember Jesus sent the man who had been demon possessed home, saying, "Go and tell them everything the Lord *has done for you*." Be an eyewitness to God's power and mercy. Paul says that Christians are a living epistle, sent to testify to the world. In Revelation 12 it describes God's people as defeating the devil by the blood of the Lamb and by their *testimony*.

God intends to build eyewitness testimonies in your life so that you can speak not just generically, but *personally* about what you have seen Him do. How you have seen Him work. How you know Him to be true and faithful. To demonstrate that He is not just a God, but that He is *your* God.

In the mean time, we're also able to follow in Peter's example as an *expert* witness. Peter was no scholar, yet he unveiled the Scriptures to this crowd in a way they had never heard before. They had these prophecies of Joel and David. Yet, they had completely *missed* their Messiah, even when He was standing right in front of them! Peter was able to speak expertly and definitively in a way that changed their lives. Why? Not because of intellect or schooling but because Peter had internalized God's Word and he was a man filled with the Spirit. You see, these Jews had read the texts, but they didn't understand them. Paul explains why in 1 Corinthians 2:14:

1 Corinthians 2:14 - ¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

Peter was an 'expert' witness not because he was smart, but because he was Spirit filled. And the Spirit took the Scriptures that Peter had hidden in his heart and mind and used it to change the lives of countless thousands of people.

We can be "experts" in God's word by being like Peter: Simply hiding God's word in our hearts and by being filled with the Holy Spirit. This is the kind of witness God uses, the kind each of us can be. Witnesses whose testimony makes an eternal difference.