

The power of God's Word

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In the 16th and 17th centuries the churches in western Europe were Roman Catholic. At that time in history the weekly mass was done in Latin. Most people did not read, and even if they did, they did not understand Latin.

It was during these years that Martin Luther and others began to challenge the way church was being done. One of the results from this Reformation was that the Bible began to be translated into the languages of the ordinary people. No longer did only the religious elite and the well-educated have access to God's Word. It resulted in a spiritual awakening that swept across the continent and changed the cultural landscape in many ways. It was a testimony to the Power of God's Word.

As the scriptures were translated into the languages of the ordinary people, this was amplified by the invention of the printing press. Those of faith could now move beyond empty religious ritual and a second-hand explanation of God, and enter into an intimate relationship with God and His Word. Not only were individual lives transformed, but this continent was transformed.

Out of this, many were introduced to the phrase, "sola scriptura". It was testifying to the fact of the power and sufficiency of the Word of God. In these next pages we will see how essential the scriptures were and still are in the life of the church today.

As we look at Peter's sermon in Acts 2, we first must remember what has been described in the previous chapter of Acts 1. Jesus was crucified to pay for our sin. God raised Him from the dead, proving that the penalty for sin, death, had been paid in full. Jesus appeared to His followers during the next 40 days and instructed them to return to Jerusalem and await the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus then ascended to heaven. With joy these followers of Jesus, which numbered 120, returned to Jerusalem and waited. Acts 1:14 tells that, "***All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer.***" We are told that this number included the apostles and even Mary, the mother of Jesus, and His brothers. They waited and prayed, not knowing when or how the Holy Spirit would come.

Acts 2 tells us what happened 10 days later:

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Can you imagine what it must have been like? A sound like a mighty rushing wind. Tongues of fire resting on each one of them. Filled with the Holy Spirit. Speaking in foreign languages. But why did they need the foreign languages? The next verse tells us:

⁵Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?"⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome,¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God."¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"¹³ But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

The works of the Spirit caused curiosity and brought attention to the Spirit's coming. Their ability to supernaturally speak foreign languages allowed all people to understand the message. It gathered a crowd and stirred interest. Once the crowd had gathered, Peter, ***"standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them."***

He first discounted the belief of some in the crowd that the disciples were drunk. Peter argued that drunkenness was not possible because it was only 9:00 AM. Some might say that this is a weak argument, because there are alcoholics that drink that early in the morning, but those in the Jewish culture did not. The time before 9:00 AM was for morning devotions. They did not eat or drink before 9:00 AM, especially on a Sabbath or on a Jewish holiday like Pentecost. This practice would have been so known as the cultural norm that, as soon as Peter brought attention to this, the cynics would have submitted to Peter's reasoning.

Now this was a spur of the moment, spontaneous sermon to an international crowd. His Jewish hearers, who were in the city for Pentecost, had a good understanding of the Old Testament. Because of this, Peter started from Old Testament prophecies pointing out that day's events as fulfillment of scripture about the Holy Spirit. We see in this unplanned sermon how well Jesus must have prepared His disciples. Peter knew both the truth and the spirit of the scriptures. He had memorized the scriptures, but Peter could also clearly bring together the larger truths of scripture and the gospel, and present them in a way that pointed his listeners clearly from the Old Testament to Christ.

Peter first pointed them to the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹ And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; ²⁰ the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. ²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Peter is reminding his Jewish listeners of the words of the prophet Joel. That in the last days God would pour out the Holy Spirit on His people. The Holy Spirit’s coming at Pentecost was marking the beginning of the last days. These “Last Days” will continue with future events that will culminate in the Day of the Lord, the return of Christ.

Continuing in Peter’s sermon, in Acts 2:22-24:

²² Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— ²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

The first proof Peter offers up is the life of Jesus. He was known throughout Judea, Samaria and Galilee for all the mighty works that God had done through Him. Whether it be the raising of the dead, the healing of the leper, the giving sight to the blind, the calming of the sea, turning water to wine, or teaching as no one had ever taught before, through mighty works and wonders God had made it evident that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. As it says in Acts 26:26, *“These things were not done in a corner.”* Anyone who was honest with themselves would have to admit the hand of God was upon this Jesus of Nazareth.

This same Jesus had been delivered up, according to God’s plan, to the Jewish crowds who had Jesus crucified. On the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead, setting Him free from death.

It is likely that many listening to Peter that day had heard the false official announcement that was told in Matthew 28:12-14, *“... And after the chief priests had met with the elders and formed a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money and instructed them: ‘You are to say, ‘His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.’”*

In contrast to this false story, Christ’s crucifixion was true and was planned by the Father. If Jesus’ death were only mob violence and a combination of many individual’s choices that just happened to coincide in the right way, on the same day, with Old Testament prophecies, then it would not be

possible that we are saved *“with the precious blood of Jesus Christ who was chosen before the creation of the world.”* (1 Peter 1:18-21)

Our sovereign God set an intricate plan in place that is evidenced from Genesis, through Moses, through the Passover lamb, the sacrificial system, the writings of King David, the prophets, and the many details that were set in place so that in the “fullness of time God sent His son” to be the Savior of the World (Galatians 4:4).

Our salvation through Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection was not reliant on the fickleness of man or the probability of chance. “It was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.”

We follow a God who has intentionally set a plan in place to redeem us to Himself. At the same time Peter clearly places the blame on his non-believing listeners saying, *“You crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”* They were guilty for the crucifixion of the Messiah, even though they had not actually driven the nails into His hands. Here we see once again the sovereignty of God coexisting with the responsibility of man.

Peter then continued,

²⁵ For David says concerning him, “I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; ²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. ²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. ²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.”

Peter has quoted King David’s words and now Peter explains what they mean. It is interesting that he began with the word “brothers”, not choosing an adversarial position, but claiming relationship with his hearers as a fellow Jew and another human being.

²⁹ “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, ³¹ he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

The second proof that Peter used was the prophetic words of King David. Peter was speaking to Jews who believed the Old Testament scriptures. Peter was making it clear to them that David’s words could not have been referring to himself, because David had died, was buried, and his tomb was still with them today. David’s words of prophecy had spoken of “your Holy One” who was not abandoned to Hades, death, and whose body would not see corruption or decay. These words were describing the Messiah whose life would not end with death.

Peter then continued with his third proof:

³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.

The primary responsibility of the disciples was to be witnesses of what they had seen with their own eyes (Acts 1:8). The disciples were not sent out to establish a new systematic theology. They were not scholars or philosophers. They were common men who were supposed to be eyewitnesses and tell what they had seen and explain what it meant.

They were to testify to their personal relationship with Jesus and His coming to earth, to his sinlessness, to His miracles, to His being the Son of God, to His dying for the sins of man, and ultimately to Christ's resurrection. They were to be, first and foremost, witnesses testifying to the fact of Christ.

One must remember that at first even the disciples did not believe (Mark 16:9-14; Acts 1:3). Because of this, Jesus gave them ***"many proofs, appearing to them for 40 days"*** after his resurrection. They had nothing to gain by standing with Jesus, and everything to lose. And yet here they stood risking all to give testimony to Jesus and explanation of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Peter continued with his fourth proof:

³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. ³⁴ For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'"

From King David's words Peter is showing them that the ultimate Lord, God the Father, said to David's Lord, the promised Messiah, to sit at God the father's right hand. And being exalted at the Father's right hand, the Messiah has received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit. The Messiah, who now sits at the right hand of the Father, has now poured out the Holy Spirit on His followers, and that is what the crowd is seeing and hearing.

When you combine everything that Peter has said, who must this Messiah be? Jesus of Nazareth. The working of the Holy Spirit is the proof that Jesus is now in heaven. If Jesus were dead, He could not send the Holy Spirit. If Jesus were not at the right hand of the Father, He could not send the Holy Spirit. Jesus is alive and has sent the Holy Spirit. As Jesus told His disciples in John 16:7, ***"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you."***

³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Peter now declares the identity of Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Christ, the promised Messiah. He then ends with the shattering truth, ***"whom you crucified."***

The Jews had been waiting for the promised Messiah for centuries. He would be the ultimate deliverer of the Jewish people who would sit on the throne of King David forever. Now He had come and they had killed Him.

The story continues . . .

³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"³⁸ And Peter said to them, "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.³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

The Holy Spirit took the truth of the gospel and brought conviction of sin and truth to the hearts of many in the crowd (John 16:8, 13). In response Peter told them of salvation, forgiveness and the opportunity to receive the Holy Spirit. With more words Peter bore witness and exhorted them to take hold of this salvation found in Jesus Christ. As the disciples preached to various people in various languages, it says, ***"and there were added that day about three thousand souls."***

It is interesting to note that the conviction of sin and repentance did not come immediately after the violent wind, the tongues of fire, or even the speaking in tongues. It came after Peter and the disciples preached of Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:14 highlights the role of preaching Christ in these words, ***"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?"***

The truth of God accompanied by the Spirit of God (John 16:8) brought repentance. Peter preached the truth and through it the Spirit convicted the Jews of their sin. That is the power of God's Word.

We see the early church continue to rely on the scriptures as their lifeline throughout the book of Acts. When persecution against the Christians breaks out in Jerusalem, in Acts 8, ***"those who were scattered went about preaching the word."*** In Acts 8:26-40, Philip reads the scriptures to the Ethiopian Eunuch, and through the reading and explanation of God's Word the Ethiopian Eunuch believes in Jesus. Throughout the Apostle Paul's missionary journeys, he proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ and people came to faith. God's Word led them in their decisions, their mission, and in their ministry, as the early church took form.

We see their understanding of God's Word in their writings:

Hebrews 4:12 tells us that ***"the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword . . . discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."*** The Word of God has spiritual power to shape us, mold us, refine us, and convict us as the Father works in our lives to make us like Christ. It is not static

writings like a history book or a fiction novel. The Word of God is active in one's life. As we read it, listen to it, memorize it, meditate upon it, minister it to others, and obey it, we find that it has the power to change us.

Ephesians 6:17 describes God's Word as ***"the sword of the Spirit"***. Just as Jesus used scripture to fend off Satan's temptations in the wilderness, so we too must be prepared to fight against the evil one when attacked. We need truth to repel lies.

Listen to what else the scriptures say about what God's Word accomplishes in our lives:

Faith comes from hearing the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17). *Through the encouragement of the scriptures we have hope* (Rom. 15:4). *Those who love God's law will have great peace and will not stumble* (Psalm 119:165). *We will receive comfort in our affliction, and God's promise gives us life* (Psalm 119:50). *God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path* (Ps. 119:105). *The unfolding of God's words gives light and understanding to the simple* (Ps. 119:130). *Even when our "soul melts away with sorrow", God's Word gives us strength* (Ps. 119:28). *Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart* (Psalm 119:111).

The Word of God helps us understand everything around us. Struggles, successes, people and things. Suffering and joy. Temptations and triumphs. Good and evil. Truth and lies. Even our own sin and who we really are in Christ. The Word of God explains to us the true reality of this life that God has created for us, and then makes it possible in our lives. Great are the benefits of God's Word.

Jesus described the life of one who hears and lives out His teachings as one who builds his house upon a rock: ***"The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall."*** (Matthew 7:24-27)

When we try to build our life on anything else but God's Word, it may seem logical and even work for a while, but when the storms of life come the truth is made clear. Our misplaced trust is then exposed for what it truly is and we are left with only instability and a sense of hopelessness.

Can you imagine finding out this week that you have lost your job? But instead of being angry, bitter, and consumed by worry, the truths of God's Word come to mind. You remember God's instruction in Matthew 6:25, ***"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on."*** Then you think about God's promise in Matthew 6:33 that says, ***"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you."*** So before you even write up your new CV or look on LinkedIn to find a new job, you have a better idea. You spend the afternoon "seeking God first" and gaining a proper perspective of your situation. Afterwards you are armed with the promise of God's provision and His peace as you begin thinking about your next steps to finding a new job.

Can you imagine, being humiliated by your boss? Not being appreciated for your excellent work. But you have been hiding God's Word in your heart, and this time, instead of being angry, bitter and vengeful, your heart responds differently. Your mind is reminded of Colossians 3:23-24, which says, ***"Whatever***

you do, work heartily, as for the Lord not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”

What if you are passing through a time of uncertainty or confusion? Can you imagine as you lay in bed, thinking about the situation, that James 1:5 comes to mind, *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”* And then Proverbs 3:5-6, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths.”*

What if you go to the doctor and discover that you have Covid-19? Can you imagine, in that moment of shock, that your mind goes to Philippians 4:6-7, *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* Then, as that verse begins to sink in, another verse comes to mind, *“All things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28).

In the days ahead may we call out to God for a hunger for His Word and may we take the needed steps to study God’s Word, listen to God’s Word, memorize God’s Word, and meditate on God’s Word, so that we may be prepared to know God and make Him known. May the word of God dwell in us richly (Colossians 3:16) as we join with the words of Psalm 1:1-3:

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ² but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”

Psalm 19:7-11 says:

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.

The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.

They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;

they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.

By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Discussion questions:

1. What of the sermon did you find interesting?
2. What is one of your favorite Bible verses? Why?
3. Can you remember a time that God's Word ministered to you in a special way?
4. How would you summarize the proofs of Jesus as the Messiah that Peter gave in his sermon?
5. How might one begin to draw close to God's Word on a regular basis?
6. What do you need to remember from this sermon?
7. What do you need to do about that?
8. How can we pray for you?