

**Easter 2**  
**April 23 2017**

*"Spirit-Filled Christians Boldly Witness to Jesus' Resurrection"*

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### **ACTS 2:14, 22-32**

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**T**hen Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: <sup>22</sup> "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. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> David said about him: "I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. <sup>26</sup> Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, <sup>27</sup> because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. <sup>28</sup> You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence." <sup>29</sup> "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. <sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

It should surprise us that Peter stands up before a large crowd of people, on the day of Pentecost and boldly witnesses to Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Remember it was Peter who two months before this cursed and swore that he never knew Jesus.

But then it should not surprise us that Peter boldly witnessed to Jesus' resurrection. Before ascending into heaven, Jesus promised the disciples that he would send them the Holy Spirit to help them be witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and all the world.

I have one regret in life that I would like to share with you this morning. I have not been as bold to witness to Jesus and his resurrection as I should be. Are you any different? I don't think so.

Does that mean we just roll over and say, "I guess, I will never change?" No, the promise Jesus made to his disciples about sending the Holy Spirit is just as valid for us today as it was for them. Rather than moan and groan and mumble and grumble that I will never be any good at witnessing to Jesus' resurrection, I want to change. With the time the Lord gives me here on this earth, I want the Holy Spirit to take a hold of my life and help me boldly bear witness to Jesus' resurrection as Peter did on the great day of Pentecost. What I am sharing personally with you, is what I am sure you also want in your personal life as well.

## **The Holy Spirit will help us witness to the facts of Jesus' resurrection**

It is not a stretch to think that the Holy Spirit can help us boldly bear witness to the facts of Jesus' resurrection as Peter did. You see dear Christian, with our eyes of faith we have seen the risen Lord, and when you see something so spectacular how can you not tell other people about what you have seen. Peter stood up before the large crowd gathered to celebrate the Old Testament festival of Pentecost. It says he raised his voice. He wanted everyone to hear what he had to say about Jesus and his resurrection from the dead.

"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you with miracles, wonders and signs which God did among you through him." A bold witness to Jesus Christ includes telling people who Jesus was. He was a man. He was born of the virgin Mary. He ate. He slept. He was hungry. He suffered pain when he was whipped and nailed to the cross. He was even tempted in all parts as we are, yet he was without sin. This amazing man, the carpenter's son from Nazareth, was much more than a carpenter's son. He is God's Son, Lord and God from all eternity.

He was a man, Peter says, accredited by God with miracles and wonders and signs. The people listening to Peter certainly heard about the miracles Jesus performed. Perhaps some even saw these miracles with their own eyes. Large numbers of people from Jerusalem had gone to the little village of Bethany near Jerusalem to see first-hand the man named Lazarus who had been in the grave for four days and then raised to life by Jesus.

Jesus did so many miracles. Our gospel reading for today says, "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." When we read the Bible and see these miracles with our eyes of faith it convinces us beyond any doubt that Jesus Christ is our Lord and God.

Lee Strobel was a lawyer living in the Chicago area and he was an atheist. He was appalled when his dear wife became a Christian. But then he saw how her life changed so he set out to use his skills as a lawyer to investigate the evidence in the Bible about Jesus Christ. He came to the conviction on the evidence he saw in the Bible about Jesus, especially his miracles and the miracle of his resurrection, Jesus is Lord and God. He wrote a book called the "Case for Christ" which is certainly worth reading and is now being put into a movie. What did Thomas say when he saw the evidence that Jesus was alive? He proclaimed Jesus as his Lord and God. He would do this fearlessly for the rest of his life.

Peter does not hold back. He is not afraid. The Holy Spirit has taken a hold of his heart and now from the abundance of his heart the mouth speaks boldly about Jesus' death. "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 witnessed boldly to the fact that Jesus' death was all part of a predetermined plan to rescue people. This was not some plan that went astray, or some spontaneous lynch mob, or the unbridled anger of Romans soldiers that put Jesus to death. It was God's preset plan to have his Son die to rescue people from horrors of eternal suffering in hell.

We don't want to be shy. We don't want to hold back when it comes to pointing out from

Scripture that what happened to Jesus was carefully planned and predetermined. Isaiah 53 says with such clarity that it was God's will to crush him. It says that the punishment for our sin would be upon him. On the night of his resurrection when Jesus appeared to his disciples behind the closed doors, the account in Luke tells us, "He opened their minds, so they could understand the Scriptures." Jesus set an example for us. It is my prayer that the Lord will continue to give me many opportunities to show people from the Scriptures that everything that happened to Jesus was part of a carefully constructed plan.

Every human being born into this world has a plan built into their system that says, "I know that I can do something to please whatever god or force exists in the universe and be rewarded for it in this life and in the life to come." It is only in the Bible that you discover that this plan built into every fiber of your being is a total failure. It doesn't work. Our heavenly Father designed a plan that was guaranteed to succeed. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to witness boldly to this fail proof plan just as the Holy Spirit did with Peter.

Peter cannot keep silent. He has to speak. His heart is full and his mouth must speak about Jesus' resurrection. "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." The Greek word for "hold" is a strong word, sometimes used in the New Testament for grabbing a hold of person and shaking them, or arresting them. Death had its agony for Jesus and death will probably cause most of us some pain and agony unless death happens very quickly. Death has a sting and the sting can be real ugly as the poison of death pumps itself into our system. But death could not hold on to Jesus.

When we were children on the family farm, we would catch flies, and there were lots of flies, and hold them in our hands and listen to them buzzing to get away. We played with flies and we also played with fire crackers when we were older. We never put a fire cracker in our hand, lit it and held onto it tightly. When death took a hold of Jesus it thought it had a little fly that it could crush and destroy. Death was in for a big surprise. Jesus totally destroyed death. 1 Corinthians 15 says, "Death is swallowed up in victory."

Notice Peter says, "But God raised him from the dead." There is no conflict in the Bible when it says that God raised him from the dead and when it says Jesus raised himself from the dead. In fact Romans 8 says the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead. If you are talking to some people who do not believe that three persons are one God, ask them who raised Jesus from the dead. Father, Son and Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead.

### **The Holy Spirit will help us point to the witness of Scripture**

Peter could not keep quiet about Jesus' resurrection and he could not keep quiet that all of this was predicted long before it happened. He takes these Jewish people back to King David and the Psalms. David said, "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 will also live in hope; because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay."

Peter confidently and boldly declares that David was not speaking about himself, but about his descendant whose body would be placed into a tomb but it would not see decay. Peter pointed people to the tomb of David that was in Jerusalem. People could visit that tomb just as we can visit the grave of people like Abraham Lincoln or I can visit the cemetery where the bodies of my parents are resting. David predicted the body of Jesus would not see decay. You will recall that when they placed the body of Jesus into a tomb, there was no smell of death only the smell of stone that had been freshly hewn. The body of Jesus did not see decay. Last Sunday we took our Easter lilies home after worship and our house has the smell of Easter lilies. The tomb of Jesus had no smell of death, only the smell of aloes and myrrh that had been used to wrap the body of Jesus. The prophet Isaiah predicted that Jesus would be wounded for our transgressions. He also predicted clearly that Jesus would see the light of life. Spirit-filled people witness boldly to what they see in the Scriptures regarding Jesus' death and his resurrection.

Before the Lord calls you home to heaven, you will have opportunities to talk to people about yourself. They may ask you where you live, or what you do for a job, or what you enjoy in life. At the heart and core of who we are is the reality and fact of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. It really defines my whole life. I may have not always witnessed as boldly to this as I want to. But the best days are yet to come. With Peter and the others we can boldly say with the help of the Holy Spirit, "We have seen the risen Lord." Our lives have never been the same. Amen.