



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #3

B. Examples of New Testament Sermons

2. Other New Testament Examples of Peter's Preaching (Acts 3-4, Acts 10)

When Jesus sent His apostles out into the world to preach the Gospel, He told them that signs or miracles would accompany their preaching to confirm the Word. Jesus said that one of the signs would be the healing of the sick: **"They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover"** (Mark 16:18). It happened just as Jesus said it would. **"They went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word through the accompanying signs"** (Mark 16:20).

There were three such signs on the day of Pentecost: the sound of the mighty wind, the flames of fire on the believers, and the sudden ability to speak in languages that they had never learned before. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit did not use the signs to bring people to faith in Jesus. He used the preaching of the apostle Peter, through whom three thousand persons believed the Gospel he preached and were baptized.

Very soon after that event, the Lord gave His apostles Peter and John the power to heal a crippled beggar. Peter said to the man: **"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk... and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them – walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God"** (Acts 3:6-9).

This miracle gave Peter the opportunity to address the crowd of Jews who were amazed by what had happened. He said some of the same things he had said on the day of Pentecost, accusing his listeners of having killed the Son of God. **"You delivered (Jesus) up and denied (Him) in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer (Barabbas) to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life"** (Acts 3:13-15). These were strong words of law that were intended to make the people fully aware of their great sin. That is what the law does – it shows us our sin.

But Peter was also quick to bring them the Good News of what God had done. **"God raised (Jesus) from the dead, of which we are witnesses"** (Acts 3:15). Peter said that it was obvious that Jesus is alive, for it was Jesus who has given them the power to heal the man. **"His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know"** (Acts 3:16). Then Peter told them about the forgiveness of sins, as he had done on Pentecost: **"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out"** (Acts 3:19). Peter preached the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name. This is the heart of the Gospel that must be present in every sermon that we preach. After we have reminded our audience that they are sinners and need forgiveness, we must preach Jesus Christ crucified and risen, and preach the forgiveness of sins in His name.

Peter also established the truth of what he was saying by referring to the Old Testament prophets. **"Those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled"** (Acts 3:18). Since Peter was speaking to Jews, who treasured their Old Testament Scriptures, he pointed out that what happened to Jesus was part of God's plan from the beginning. It had been announced through the prophets in advance. These are things **"which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began"** (Acts 3:21). Peter then talked about three Old

Testament believers that the Jews held in high regard: Moses, Samuel, and Abraham. Moses had foretold the coming of the great Prophet. Peter told them that Jesus is that Prophet. God promised a Seed to Abraham in whom all families of the earth would be blessed. Jesus is that promised Seed.

God again blessed Peter's testimony. **"Many of those who heard the word believed"** (Acts 4:4). The Jewish leaders, who were chiefly responsible for putting Jesus to death, arrived and put Peter and John into jail until the next day. When the authorities questioned them on the next day, Peter had another opportunity to glorify Jesus, and he did not let this opportunity pass by. He again gave Jesus the credit for the healing of the beggar, saying: **"By Him (Jesus) this man stands here before you whole (healthy)"** (Acts 4:10). He then referred to the same Old Testament passage that Jesus had once used in speaking to these same Jewish leaders: Psalm 118:22. Peter told them that the Man they crucified **"is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone"** (Acts 4:11). Peter concluded with this powerful statement: **"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"** (Acts 4:12).

Notice that Peter did not call Jesus only a Savior. He called Him the *only* Savior for the entire world. That is why our Lord wants His Gospel to go out to all peoples and nations. There is no other Savior from sin and eternal death. Our sermons and talks today must speak with the same urgency. Jesus is not simply one of many good religious leaders who can teach us important things about God. Jesus is the *only* Savior. Jesus is the *only* Son of God, whom God has sent to rescue the human race from the effects of their sin. No Buddha can save us, no Confucius, no Muhammad, and none of the millions of gods or idols that are worshiped everywhere in the world. There is only one Savior for all mankind, and that is Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Mary, who was crucified, died, was buried, who rose again from the dead, ascended to heaven, and will return at the end of time to take those who trust in Him to be with Him forever. This is what we must teach and preach at all times and in all places.

After Peter and John were released from prison and threatened with punishment if they continued to speak about Jesus, the believers in Jerusalem gathered together for prayer. Prayer is important in our preaching as well. We need God's help to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ. We can accomplish nothing by our own power or strength. We do not have the courage to stand firm against the many enemies of Christ or the threats leveled against us for preaching Christ or even for just being Christians. We need to pray like the Christians in Jerusalem did. They prayed: **"Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word"** (Acts 4:29). We should never attempt to speak in Jesus' name without praying for our Lord's help and strength and courage. God answered their prayer at once. **"They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness... And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus"** (Acts 4:31-33). He will do the same for us.

Peter was God's chosen apostle to the Jewish people. But there was at least one occasion when Peter had an opportunity to speak to non-Jews about Jesus Christ. This was not something that Peter was inclined to do because of his background and training as a law-abiding Jew. Therefore, God had to do something special to encourage Peter to preach the Gospel of Christ in the home of a non-Jew or Gentile. When Peter was staying in Joppa he went up on the housetop to pray at noon. He felt very hungry. God gave him a special vision. He **"saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, 'Rise Peter; kill and eat'"** (Acts 10:11-13).

The Jewish people in the Old Testament were given food laws which strictly forbade the eating of any unclean animals. As a law-abiding Jew, Peter had never eaten any unclean food. But when Peter refused to eat the food lowered from heaven, the Lord repeated the vision two more times. The voice said to him: **"What God has cleansed you must not call common"** (Acts 10:15). Peter did not know what this meant until three men arrived at the door at that very moment, looking for Peter. These men were sent by a Roman centurion named Cornelius, who lived in Caesarea. An angel of God had told Cornelius that

he should summon the apostle Peter in Joppa to his Gentile home in Caesarea to bring him a message from God.

God's vision now became clear. The Old Testament rules about clean and unclean food were no longer valid. Jews could now associate freely with Gentiles without being contaminated with unclean food. To make sure that Peter got the message, the Holy Spirit said to Peter: **"Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them"** (Acts 10:19-20).

Peter therefore accompanied these three men to the home of Cornelius, and six Jewish Christians from Joppa went with him. Although Cornelius was a Gentile, he had already become acquainted with the Jewish Old Testament. He was already a worshiper of the God of the Jews. He prayed to Him regularly and lived the life of a convert to Judaism. The three messengers told Peter that Cornelius, their master, had **"a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews"** (Acts 10:22).

Cornelius was waiting for Peter in Caesarea. He had invited his relatives and friends to come and listen with him to what Peter had to say. Peter began by saying to this Gentile audience: **"You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean"** (Acts 10:28). How important this is for us to remember today also! There is no human being from any culture or language or nation that we should regard as unclean – as someone to whom we should not bring God's Word. In the Old Testament God had His good reasons for keeping the Jewish nation separate from others. But that is no longer valid today. There are many nations and peoples and tribes in the world, but none of them are off limits for the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. Whether they are rich or poor, whether primitive or sophisticated, whether old or young, whether enemies or friends, we are to regard them all as persons for whom Jesus died, and as persons with whom God wants us to share the Gospel of Christ.

What did Peter say to this Gentile audience? He brought the same good news he had brought to the Jews on Pentecost. After a short introduction he talked about Jesus Christ. He called Him **"Lord of all"** (Acts 10:36). Since Cornelius and his friends already knew something about Jesus, he summarized the life of Jesus by saying that He **"went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him"** (Acts 10:38). Then Peter got to the main point, saying: **"We are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead"** (Acts 10:39-41).

Notice that Peter did not accuse Cornelius of killing Jesus. Cornelius had not been present in Jerusalem on that day. But the Gospel facts that Peter preached were the very same: Jesus' death and resurrection, and that Jesus is the Lord of all. Then Peter explained the meaning of all of this: **"He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins"** (Acts 10:42-43).

There was not much law in Peter's message to Cornelius and his friends. But he did speak about the final judgment of the living and dead. That in itself makes a person think about whether he is ready to stand before the Judge and Lord of all. But Peter's main point was that forgiveness of sins was available to anyone and everyone who puts their trust in Jesus. In fact, this was the message of all the Old Testament prophets: the forgiveness of sins for all nations through the coming Messiah. And now this promised Messiah has come and carried out His mission. Tell all the world now that in Jesus we have peace with God! Our sins are forgiven through His death and resurrection! Trust in Him.

Questions

1. What did Jesus promise His disciples that would confirm their word?
2. List some of the miracles done among the early Christians, as recorded in the book of Acts.
3. What incident occurred that gave Peter the opportunity to address a Jewish crowd at the gate of the temple?
4. Why did Peter accuse his listeners of killing the Son of God?
5. Why should we call attention to people's sins in our sermons today?
6. What was the main point of Peter's sermon that day?
7. Why must this continue to be the main point of our sermons today?
8. Why did Peter refer to the Old Testament prophets in his sermon?
9. Why were Peter and John put in jail?
10. What bold statement about Jesus did Peter make on the next day?
11. Why is it so important that we say that Jesus is the only Savior of all?
12. What is the importance of prayer in our preaching of God's Word?
13. How did God answer the prayer of the Christians in Jerusalem?
14. Why did God give Peter the vision of the unclean animals?
15. Why would Peter have refused to go to Caesarea without this vision?
16. What kind of man was Cornelius?
17. Which nations or peoples are off limits for our preaching today?
18. In which ways were Peter's two sermons different from each other?
19. In which ways were Peter's two sermons similar?
20. What was the main point in Peter's sermon in Caesarea?

Read Acts 7-8.