

# **THE ACTS 2 STORY**

**The first message preached  
to unbelievers after the  
resurrection of Jesus.**

**By Jim Larsen**



## A LOOK AT THE FIRST SERMON PREACHED TO UNBELIEVERS AFTER THE RESURRECTION

Two thousand years ago thousands of Jewish pilgrims were in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. Just fifty days earlier they had arrived to observe the week of Passover. On Friday of Passover Week Jesus had been crucified. He rose from the dead two days later, on Sunday. But the grand, you could say God's 'formal and public' announcement of his victory over the grave would not be made until Pentecost.

It was typical for those who had traveled so far to take in both big celebrations...one celebrating their miraculous deliverance from Egypt, the second was more of a Thanksgiving for the giving of the Law.

This Pentecost would be like none other. Devout Jews from towns all around the Mediterranean, Northern Africa and the Arab world had the city bulging at the seams.

We read that the Apostles were gathered in a house when, suddenly the sound of a mighty wind filled the house that was heard throughout the city. Thousands of people came running, looking for the source of the phenomenon. What they found were the twelve Apostles, each with something like a tongue of fire sprouting from their heads. Then each of the twelve began to preach in languages familiar to those from those far flung locations.

What follows is even more incredible. The people in the crowd asked the first of two huge questions they had that day. The first one was, **"What is the meaning of this?"**

Some in the crowd wondered if the apostles were drunk and that was the explanation for what was happening. Peter said that was not the case and then took the opportunity to answer their question by preaching a potent message. This was the first sermon preached to unbelievers after the resurrection.

Peter answered their first question by pointing out several key points in his message:

1. He told them that what they were observing has been prophesied by Joel centuries earlier. It was in their historical writings.
2. He reprimanded the people for not recognizing that Jesus has been accredited by God himself through miracles, wonders and signs, which many in the crowd has witnessed.
3. He accused them of the obvious that they had killed Jesus, the Messiah.
4. He showed them that David's prophecy (Ps16) told that Messiah would be recognized by his victory over the grave and his body not decaying.
5. He shared with them that the 12 apostles and many others had witnessed all events connected with Jesus death and resurrection.
6. He assured them that God was behind all of this. It was his plan of salvation for all who heard and believed. The sacrifice and the resurrection were all part of God's eternal plan.  
"Let all the household of Israel know for certain that this same Jesus you crucified, God has made both Lord and Christ."

Then comes the **second question** from the people. After hearing Peter's message they were convinced that Jesus was their messiah. They were convicted of their horrible sin of killing him and devastated when they saw the truth of what they had done. Their grief and realization of all this brought them to cry out "**What shall we do?**"

They had blown it. They had ignorantly but willfully killed the Jesus, the Messiah. His blood was on their hands. Was there any escape from what they had done?

There was. And here was Peter's answer to their second question.

It was brief and direct. "**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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.**"

As we know, about 3000 staunch adherents to the Law of Moses and the Jewish faith were obedient to Peter's command and were immediately baptized into Christ.

This was no small thing. On a simpler analogy, can you image the coach of the Chicago Bears showing up at a rally of life long, die hard Green Bay Packers fans, giving them a speech encouraging them to become Bears fans and then seeing 3000 throwing down their 'cheese head' hats, taking off their Green Bay shirts and hats, and putting on Bears clothes? Not likely!

On a deeper level, can you image a gathering of die hard Muslims gathered in the Middle East when a preacher shows up, preaches about Jesus and 3000 of them renounce Allah and become followers of Jesus on the spot? It would be shocking.

That shows the impact of what happened this day. Peter preached to life-long Jewish believers who carried their convictions to the point that they killed Jesus. But after listening to Peter's convincing message, they turned around and became followers of Jesus. That move brought ridicule, rejection and persecution for making such a decision. Again, the huge number of converts to serve Jesus is simply shocking and amazing. This was unlike any other event in the Bible history. One might read the story and miss out on the profound response to Peter's sermon.

We read that in the days that followed, many others were added to their number. The answer to that second question of the people would be recited to audience after audience, continuing on even when these pilgrims returned to their homes.

There was nothing to argue or debate about in Peter's answer to the people's question that first day. The people heard the message. They responded as Peter instructed on that day. ***They didn't want to make another huge mistake by rejecting Jesus a second time.***

When those thousands returned to Libya, Egypt, parts of Arabia, Rome and elsewhere they became a wave of missionaries. To countless thousands they recounted what had happened on the most unusual and impactful Passover and Pentecost ever. They shared the heart of Peter's sermon and when those they were sharing with believed in Jesus, the only directive given to them to tell the people what to do would have been the same as when the first converts had asked the question themselves: "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus." And the same promises given the first believers would be passed on for generations to come: "You will be forgiven of your sins and God will give you his Holy Spirit." *There was no other message given by God in the following centuries.*

Wherever Christ's ambassadors carried the news of Jesus death and resurrection they would give the same compact, clear and simple answer as those who had ready become disciples of Jesus.

God made no mistake in the message Peter preached on that first day in Jerusalem. Peter preached the 'inspired Word of God.' And Peter made no mistake.

He kept the message short enough for any disciple to memorize. No compilation of scriptures as we have today would be available for mass distribution for a long time. The message of hope and joy would be passed on by hand-written letters of the Apostles and by 'word of mouth' for generations. The simple Gospel was preached and taught wherever devout followers of Jesus went. Peter's inspired words would be carried far and wide.

Imagine you are a citizen of Libyasome 2000 years ago. A friend returns from his pilgrimage to Jerusalem with the wonderful story of Jesus. Your friend shares this Good News with you and you believe in Jesus. Based on what he had heard from Peter, what would your friend tell you to do in response to your eagerness to become a follower of Jesus? What would he say?

To this very day we cannot go wrong by relaying those same inspired, dynamic instructions to hearers who want to be added to God's forever family. It hasn't changed. All we can do today is pass on what was clearly preached that first day in Jerusalem. God never changed it. Indeed, when Paul gave his testimony of conversion (Act 22) he quoted Ananias: **And now, what are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized, washing away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.** Peter and Paul were of one mind on the place of baptism in the course of receiving God's forgiveness. We can quote them with full confidence that we are being obedient to the Word of God.

Here is a short assignment.

Following is a list of a number of conversion accounts from the Book of Acts, including the record of those first to say yes to Jesus.

Read again the account in Acts 2 and Peter's message summary in 2:38,39.

Then read about the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8).

Study the case of the Philippian jailer and his household (Acts 16).

Then read Paul's own words of his conversion, found in Acts 22:16.

What aspects or steps do you observe that seem to be a path to giving one's life to God?

In light of these stories, what would you tell someone interested in becoming a Christian today?