



The early results of the Pentecost

Acts 3:1-4:31

The miracle of Pentecost made itself felt immediately, but it would take some time before the recipients of the Pentecostal power really understood all the implications of this event. Such a change had been wrought that no one could estimate its influence. The change was evident in the Apostles themselves and it was also evident in the hearts of those who heard the word of the gospel.

Luke informs us of the immediate results in the earliest time of the post-Pentecostal church. Peter and John go to the temple at the usual time of prayer — 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon. Notice that they do not break with all the customs and rules of the Jews now that the gospel of Jesus Christ has come. There is a period of transition. They keep these hours of prayer and also the Jewish sabbath. Slowly, but surely, the ways of the believing people in the early church turn to the custom and rule of the New Testament.

The miracle

As they are about to go into the temple they see a man at the temple gate who has been a cripple from birth, begging. In him we have an evidence of the decay in the Jewish religion (and there were many more). There was to be no beggar in Israel! (Exodus 22:25, 23:6, etc.) They have become so bold that they not only allow begging in the land, but allow one to lie at the gate of the temple, seeking alms. Apparently that is the only way he will be able to feed himself. Luke pictures what follows dramatically. He expects alms also from Peter and John. But, he is going to get something quite different. *"Look at us,"* says Peter. And then: *"We don't have silver or gold for which you are begging, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, go!"* This is about as clearly as we can translate the original. For this cripple, for whom this day began like all others, a gripping change was to take place. Peter helps him up; the bones in his feet and ankles are strengthened; and he leaps! There is no doubt about his cure! His leaping for joy for that which had happened to him draws the attention of the people in the temple. They recognize him as the man they have so often seen at the Beautiful Gate. This is a miracle which has many surprised witnesses. Such things are unheard of! Later we read that he was more than forty years old. His patience had been taxed, but he could now praise his God.

The Word explains the Act

Naturally the curious people now surround the two Apostles and the man who has been healed. This hour of prayer has turned into something unexpected, but also into something great — an opportunity for the Apostles to preach the gospel to them. That healing was, of course, important to the man on whom it was performed, but that was not its real importance. The man's name isn't even mentioned. All the emphasis has to fall on the preaching which accompanied this miracle. Peter reproves the people for being amazed at this miracle and for looking at these Apostles as though they have done it. He says, *"We didn't do it!"* He preaches to them in a manner similar to the one he employed on the day of Pentecost. He reminds them of the God of the Patriarchs. Those were the ancestors who were held in highest honor in Israel. The people have to realize that the God of the Patriarchs is the Father of Jesus! This connection which they had not seen before, is crucial. The same God who was worshipped by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has glorified His child Jesus! That is the way in which the Old and New Testaments are related!

The personal application

As he had done on Pentecost Day, so now Peter accuses them of the crime of crucifying Christ. *"You delivered Him up and you denied Him before Pilate when he was ready to release Him."* Pilate did not know what to do with Him because he knew that Jesus was blameless of the crimes they alleged against Him. But, in that crucial moment, "you made up the mind of Pontius Pilate. You denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked for the murderer Barabbas! You were as guilty of His death as Pilate. You killed Him but God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of the resurrection, and, if you won't believe that, you see this man standing before you healed whose healing is proof of the living Christ. Jesus did it; we didn't. Faith was given to this man in the name of Jesus and by that name he was healed." There is nothing magical here. No, faith was required and he received it at the proper time.

Peter now softens his words somewhat. He says that he realizes that they denied and killed the Christ in ignorance *"as did also your rulers."* Ignorance is no defense against the law (Numbers 15:27), but it surely makes a big difference whether they sin with "the high hand" or if they do so in ignorance. *"Unwittingly you fulfilled the prophecies."* God had spoken through the prophets that the Messiah should suffer. This does not absolve them of blame and Peter therefore counsels them to repent and turn from the path they have walked to the right way shown them in the Scriptures. Many believe that Peter now refers to the second coming of Christ. However, I do not believe this to be the best explanation. Seasons of refreshing will come when Israel repents. Christ has come to them — they did not receive Him — He will come again through the preaching of the Apostles. They must remember that Jesus will reside in the heavens until all things are restored.

Again the Apostle draws on the teaching of the Old Testament. The Spirit has given him insight into the word of God so that he is able to apply it to the Christ and to the times in which he is living. Moses, the hero of Israel, had spoken of the Christ to come, *"This is the great Prophet like me who shall come."* Israel had not always obeyed Moses, but they had better obey the great Prophet coming after Moses, or they will be destroyed. All the prophets have spoken of these days. "God didn't just give you Bible stories. He revealed Himself and His coming Son through the word. You must remember that you are the sons of the prophets and of the covenants. All the nations were to be blest by Israel. Therefore God sent His Son to you first. You were to receive the first blessing. You must therefore turn away from your iniquity so that you may become a blessing to all the nations of the world." All the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ!

The arrest

What will be the result of this preaching of the word? Notice, no one stumbles over the miracle which was performed, but they indeed stumble over the preaching of the gospel. The priests, the teachers of Israel and those who are in the temple at the hour of prayer, together with the captain of the temple, a priest with a special duty to guard the sacredness of this holy place, and the Sadducees fell upon them. Especially the latter are very displeased that they had preached the resurrection of the dead through Jesus because the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection. The others are also displeased. The priests are the ones chosen for the task of instructing the people and that is a task which may not just be taken by others. In a way they are acting responsibly. They had been charged with keeping the teaching of Israel pure and they were to discipline those who did not do so (Deuteronomy 13:13-14). There is no time this day to determine what is at stake, so they imprison them for the night and will look at the case again in the morning. But, the gospel also has a different effect. Many believed. The number now becomes about 5,000!

The trial

The following day the council, the Sanhedrin, comes together to give judgment. A few names of these rulers are mentioned. Although we know nothing of the last two, Annas and Caiaphas are well known to us. Here is also an instance of the spiritual decline of Israel. Annas *had been* highpriest, and his *son-in-law* was now highpriest. Although in Israel the highpriest was to serve until his death and then his son was to succeed him, the office had now become a political plum.

Their inquiry is interesting. They ask by what name or power they have done this. Strange questioning! But, it is important to them because wonders might only be done in the name of God!

Peter makes good use of the occasion presented him. He is filled by the Spirit. He is polite. Is the charge that we have cured a cripple? Is this the question? Is the question how this man was made whole? I will tell you. This man has received healing through the name of Jesus Christ. Again: you crucified Him and God raised Him from the dead. The Apostle again refers to a well-known passage of the Psalms and applies it to Christ. Although you, the builders, rejected this stone — it was worthless in your eyes — God has taken and used it at a very prominent place in the building of His kingdom. He made this rejected stone the corner stone. This is the only name in which there is healing and salvation. There is no other saving name!

This council is in a very difficult place. In the first place, they are not able to understand that unschooled men have such boldness. Where did they get this articulation? They realize that they have been and still are with Jesus. He is the One who has given them understanding. In the second place, they have to admit that a great miracle has taken place.

To deny this would be irrational. All the people have seen this man too. But, thirdly, if this goes any farther, what will happen to all that which we hold dear? The counsel which comes out of this kind of situation is usually not very good. They should have cried to these Apostles: "*Men, brethren, what must we do?*" Instead they *threaten* them, "*Do not speak in this name again!*" In other words, "You may heal, but you may not preach!" They are not afraid of the healing — but that word! Peter and John simply refuse this way out. These rulers surely ought to be able to judge whether a person should obey men rather than God. The answer to that question is very simple. God has told them to speak in this name!!! This is difficult for these rulers, but there can be no charges against them. So, they have to let them go. They must also live with the people!

The prayer

When these two "pillars of the church" come to the company of the believers they unite in prayer. They have not been frightened by the rulers of the people. Instead, they see in that which has happened to them a fulfillment of Psalm 2. The rulers are raging and are imagining vain things against the Lord and against His Anointed. Right in this city, Jerusalem, the city of God, these things are being fulfilled. They now pray earnestly for boldness and faithfulness in preaching the word of God and the name of Jesus Christ. This prayer lies at the basis of every reformer's work. They also pray that signs and wonders may accompany the preaching of the gospel. These are the aids of the gospel. They open the way for the gospel to be heard.

Did the Lord hear this prayer? They don't have to wait for an answer. The place where they met shook. This is not a second Pentecost, but the author tells us specifically that they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. This Spirit enables them to speak the word with boldness. That is the need of the early church, and of the church of all ages.

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Questions for discussion:

1. Should healing always accompany the preaching of the word? How would you answer faith-healers?
2. Why were the disciples able to do miracles in the early days of the church which we cannot do today? Is our inability a sign of lack of faith? What purpose did these miracles serve?

3. Where does the emphasis lie in this passage, on the healing or on the preaching?
4. How does Peter's sermon and his defense show us how the Old Testament must be used?
5. How does one obtain boldness in speaking the truth of God?
6. Why do the rulers threaten them when they know the Apostles are right? Is this typical of unbelief?