

Accredited by God, Acts 2:1-36

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Introduction

Like the Christmas story, we read the Pentecost story every year in church. Unlike Christmas we do not hear the Pentecost story over and over for a month beforehand, in carols, choir concerts, television specials, church pageants, and extra services. Christmas is the story of how God came to be at home in human flesh. Pentecost is the story of how our flesh comes to be at home in God. In our culture we immerse ourselves in Christmas, but Pentecost immerses us in God. Thus what Peter has to say might really come as a surprise to some of us, because we have heard it in church enough times to tune it out. But have we really HEARD it?

“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. 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. But God raised him from the dead...”

Jesus is accredited by God, meaning, in Jesus God is revealing his testimony to the world. Through foreknowledge God was already accrediting Jesus by the visions of prophets. God accredited Jesus by raising him from the dead, and God continues to accredit him by inspiring us to participate in sharing the power of his name in our generation. But we will miss all these ways that God accredits Jesus of Nazareth unless we understand the prophets, unless we recognize God’s power, and unless we own our part in the plans of God.

Let us pray: Lord God, open our hearts to immersion in your Spirit, that we may live in you, and testify in power to the name of Jesus. Amen.

1. Prophecy (how to understand it)

One aspect of the Christian faith that butts heads with modern philosophy, is the claim that God has a set plan and knows the end from the beginning. Critics of the faith have argued for several hundred years that this makes God immoral and unjust. Even some evangelicals have been led astray and have begun talking about the God of Potential rather than the God of promise and prophecy. While philosophers wrangle, the believer is called to this confidence: That a promise God has spoken through the prophets of Israel is not just a good intention or a positive potential, it is a snapshot of the future. Even before the apostles teachers in the faith of Israel recognized that many scriptures which described a prophet's own time, also contained promises foreshadowing the Messianic Age. When Peter quotes the prophet Joel and two psalms to apply them to a new context, he is using a familiar pattern of rabbinic preaching. The radical nature of his message is that the fulfillment of these prophecies is now begun; the Messianic Age has dawned in Jesus of Nazareth.

Consider the quote from Psalm 16 that Peter uses. Scholars agree the psalm was written by a person recovering from a serious illness, who was on the brink of the grave but then recovered. His words apply to that situation, but also paint a vivid picture of a person who has actually died yet was risen from the actual grave before the actual decay of the flesh began.

On the other hand the prophecy from Joel of the "last days" was not something Joel saw fulfilled in his own lifetime. This for Joel was a snapshot of the future, and Peter declared, "that future is now." The infilling of the apostles by the Spirit to preach the gospel in the languages of the nations is the sign that the last days have begun. In these last days women will preach as well

as men, and shall be servants of God as well as men, as stated in verses 17 and 18. Some corners of the church are recovering the true force of this promise, for which we praise God. There were signs on that morning from heaven, as in verse 19: Blood and fire and billows of smoke – the tongues of fire that came upon them. Verse 20 describes how these last days will end, with God turning off the light before Jesus comes again.

And then in verse 21 Peter speaks the promise that Joel had foreseen, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” The sermon Peter preaches follows on that theme, by announcing to everyone in clear terms that the Lord’s name is Jesus. The last days foreseen by Joel are here. Call on the name of Jesus, and be saved.

2. Power (how to recognize it)

Faith that a prophecy is not just wishful thinking but rather a guarantee, is faith in the power of God. God has the power of resources to cause things to happen: the energy, the fuel, the motive force, which is infinite and inexhaustible. God has the legal authority to command things to happen, for God holds absolute ownership of all things including all humankind and every angel as their Creator. And God has the moral right to address and redeem what is wrong.

Resource power, legal power, moral power: in this Triad God’s power is absolute. Legal power is ascribed to God the Father, maker of heaven and earth. Moral power is displayed in Jesus Christ, the fullness of God in the fullness of flesh. Resource power, infinite divine energy, is conducted through the Holy Spirit. For many church traditions Pentecost Sunday is all about the resource power, and the hope that something exciting is going to happen in the Holy Spirit. Yet when I read Acts 2, I see that most of what is said is about Jesus and how God has shown us that we must trust him. Acts 2 tells us that the apostles were filled with tongues of fire, that is exciting. It does not tell us that the three thousand who were saved and baptized that day were

giddy and fainting and chanting gibberish; it tells us they were repentant and called on the name of Jesus to be saved. For when we speak of the Holy Spirit, we speak of Very God who brings order out of chaos, not the other way around.

When we speak of the moral power of God, we mean more than that Jesus Christ is a mere example for us. The moral authority of God is this, that in Christ God is become a human being in solidarity with us. In Christ, God knows by experience our human predicament, and what it means to be tired, to be insulted, to suffer pain to the body and wrong to the soul. Remove the divine nature from Jesus, and all that is left is a Galilean martyr whose vision of turning the other cheek took him to the cross, end of story. There might be an example in that, but there is no power and no promise: if that is all we have to hope in than we as Christians are the most pathetic people in the world.

The gospel is that God is present in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God. Through the rabbi of Nazareth God knows the sadness and infirmities of our days, and the insults we suffer are suffered by God. This solidarity with us is all the moral authority God requires to do what must be done to redeem history and restore holiness. God has the moral authority to make promises and keep them. God has the moral authority to warn humankind that we are born into alienation and must repent and put ourselves on God's side of history. It is too late to make that choice when we die, it is too late when the world dies. But when we repent the glory into which Jesus Christ has entered is our promised future, and the Spirit of Christ becomes available to us, now, to begin living in the power of God.

3. Participation (how to own it)

God's power is absolute in its resources, its legitimacy, and its moral right, to keep the promises God spoke to the prophets. God speaks now through the prophets and apostles, for the

scriptures are alive with the promises and warnings of God for every generation to the end of the Age. Peter calls the crowd in Jerusalem to participate in the life of God, and calls us too.

Life with God begins when we own our share in the sins of the world, repent, and surrender our wills so that God's Spirit may enter our lives. Peter states, "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." We are removed thousands of years from the event, yet we share in the crime of crucifying Jesus. He lived and died in order to cure the sinfulness of our flesh. Sin is the spiritual defect into which we all are born, by which we all die, and because of which our world is in a mess of rivalry, injustice, abuse, depravity, and violence, all of which, then and now, are the reasons Jesus went to the cross.

Some claim that things are not SO bad. Any 24-hour news cycle tells us it is that bad. In conversation about current events with non-believers I find among many the notion that some people are good, and others are bad. What grace does the world offer to bad people? Christians claim that all alike have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, and mercy is free to everybody.

Oh, but it's Christians who are judgmental, it is Christians who are bigots. Here is why this charge is laid against us by worldly people. It is because we say that we are all in the same place before God and need to repent, that no one is born okay, that what we are born with has nothing to do with being right with God: We must be born AGAIN.

The world says, *The God of the Bible is bad and the apostles are bigots and chauvinists.* We should accept that Christians in our imperfections will be accused by the world for our faults. But these things said about the Bible are a lie, and they are a dodge by those who want to avoid the central issue of their own sin. For as Christians own our sins and repent and become joined to the life of God, we are set apart by this testimony: the amazing grace that a wretch, like me, is saved because I called on the name of Jesus. Christians have the power to make that testimony in

the face of a hostile world because God's Spirit lives in them and makes them bold even when they are meek, and makes them confident even when they are humble.

In the life of God there might be moments of thrilling, supernatural ecstasy. Yet that is not the goal for participating with God in a Spirit-led life. Acts 2 shows us that the supernatural ecstasies of the Spirit are a preparation for a life re-focused on Christ; so that we must anchor our experiences of anointing in the Word of God. Pentecostal scholars have reached the conclusion that the ecstatic gifts they value so highly, are external signs to prepare the believer for a life of mission and testimony. This is what Peter models for us as he lays down, boldly and bluntly, the gospel to his city. The people responded not to the fire and smoke and clamor, but to the word of repentance and gospel that was preached in their hearing.

Conclusion

As Jesus' life was accredited by God, so Peter's testimony was accredited by God, and so our own testimony is called to line up with all that God attests, approves, and demonstrates. Christians today will not be eye-witnesses to Jesus himself for the most part. I do believe that many have had visions of Jesus that have turned hearts to him. For the most part, Christians today continue the story of Pentecost with our testimonies of the Spirit dwelling within us. Life in God might include moments of occasional ecstasy, it might include moments of physical healing within yourself or passed on to others. These things are accredited by God in lives that are anchored in the Word, and that are focused on Jesus in all that he did for us, so that we can share his gospel to our world.

For in these last days, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And the name of the Lord is Jesus. Amen.