

dead in Christ shall rise. We shall be gathered up to meet with them. So shall we be ever with the Lord. If there was ever something to live for, it is this! Let us take our eyes of the fading glory of this present world. Let us fix our eyes fully on the Lord Jesus Christ, and our hope in him.

A second thing to see in these verses is that *the wicked will be judged very severely*. We live in a day when judgment is thought of as a bad thing. Evil and good are accounted as being very little different. One man's good may be another man's bad. Talk of standards is said to be old, and worn out. Tolerance is in. Nobody may call a thing immoral. Everything is good, to those who enjoy it. To speak out against sin, is to make yourself a bigot. Even God himself, must not be one who will judge!

We must be thoroughly convinced that such talk is completely wrong. God is still a God who is just. Sin is ever a great offence in his eyes. His standards are not flexible, and his justice is entire. The judge of all the earth, shall do right. Mark, then, what Peter says. Those who do not accept the grace and salvation of Christ shall be "utterly destroyed". To refuse to hear the final prophet of God, is an act of unpardonable sin. There is a Saviour. To reject him, is to choose darkness and death without end. To reject Moses was a most serious thing. Under the Old Covenant, many perished for such a sin. But to reject Jesus Christ goes far beyond. He is the very image of God. To scorn his grace, is to spit in the face of our Maker. To do that to the very end, is to run into the depths of hell.

Let us see for a third thing *what the gospel ought to do to us*. Who is the person who shall be blessed in the age to come? Who is the person who shall not receive the punishment of their sins? It is the same as the one who repents (v19). It is the one who turns from his iniquities (v25). This one is blessed. This one finds his sins blotted out. This one receives refreshing from the presence of God, and the Spirit of Christ. This one will share in the restoration of these things. Those who do not hear this word, will be destroyed.

Has the gospel turned us away from our sins? Have we seen them for what they really are? Have we loathed them, and hated them? Have we run from them, to the arms of Jesus Christ? This is what the word is sent to us for. If we hear it, this is what we do. Jesus Christ came to save us from our sins - not to leave us in them.

Let us ask ourselves very carefully if this is true for us. Have we turned from our sins? This is a question on which a mistake would be fatal. Let us make very sure. Do we love sin still? Are we nourishing some secret delight close to our hearts? Are our iniquities still kept close to our chest? Let us be convinced, that Jesus Christ commands us today to turn from such things to him. He is alive. He offers to bless us. Let us reject our sin, and embrace him.

Expository thoughts on **The Acts Of The Apostles**

Daily Bible Reading Notes

Week 2 (Chapter 2:22-3:26)

Grace Church Belper

<http://www.gracebelper.org.uk>

(For previous weeks' notes, e-mail david@gracebelper.org.uk – I will e-mail you back the week's notes for you to print)

Acts 2:22-28

22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves also know - 23 him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; 24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it. 25 For David says concerning him: 'I foresaw the LORD always before my face, for he is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. 26 Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. 27 For you will not leave my soul in Hades, now will you allow your holy one to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of joy in your presence.'"

29 "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, he would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, 31 he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that his soul was not left in Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses."

We have before us some of the most significant words ever spoken by any man. Here, the gospel is preached for the first time in the Christian church. Here, Christ's spokesperson declares the way of salvation. If anyone wishes to know what the first Christians believed, they may find it here. Let us read these words with care. Let us read them expecting a great blessing.

The first thing to be noticed is that *Peter preached Jesus Christ*. There is little to be found in this speech apart from Jesus. When the Christian church was launched, the preaching was all about Christ. Peter told the crowd that God had marked him out. He testified that he was the promised Messiah. He preached about his innocence and purity. He declared his death. He bore witness that it was all willed and planned by God. He told them that that Jesus was risen. He testified to them that he was appointed to rule. In short, Peter declared the great facts about the Lord Jesus.

If we long for relief and mercy for our sin-weary souls, this is where we must look. We cannot look to Mary, or to great saints. We cannot look to the church. We cannot trust in any ceremony or sacrament. The Bible itself cannot save us. All these things have their place - but not the place of Jesus. Salvation is to be found only in him. If we want our sins to be forgiven, we must look to him.

If we have Jesus Christ, then we have everything. Our knowledge may be scanty. Our fears and doubts may be many. Our comforts may be few. Our hardships may be great. But Jesus Christ is the Son of God. If we have him, then we have all. Let us never think

sins. He does make us half-children of God. He does not give us half a promise of heaven. He does not give only some of us the Holy Spirit. The work of salvation is a perfect work, and he does each of these things to the full.

Let us rely on the perfection of Jesus' work. We have a rock, which we can rely upon. To be sure, we have much still to learn. We will ever be sinners, until our dying day. But our new birth is not a half. The whole creature is new. And the promises are not by halves. The completion is quite sure. The future is not uncertain. We shall be glorified, and the work will be thoroughly complete.

This is the salvation which Jesus Christ brings. Let us not settle for anything less. Let us rest our whole weight upon him. We need never be disappointed, if we are looking to him.

Acts 3:17-26

(Reading omitted – please read it from your own Bible – otherwise we flow over the 16 page limit!)

Let us remind ourselves that these are very valuable words. A great miracle had been performed. But what did it mean? There is an apostle on hand, to explain. Christ's mouthpiece is speaking. Let us listen to him!

Let us notice very clearly from these verses that *the present age will have an end*. The world will not go on for ever as it does now. Jesus Christ has gone to heaven. He is at the right hand of God. But there will come an appointed time. Peter calls it "the times of restoration of all things". It was spoken of before by all the prophets. Moses spoke of it. He said that when the Messiah came, to reject him would mean death. This final judgment has not yet come. But come, it will.

The end of our age, then, is a thing which God has often spoken about. We cannot claim to not know. It has been announced from very early times. It has been long delayed. God's mercy and patience have been extremely great! But they will come to an end. Jesus Christ will return, not to save any of the lost, but to be their judge.

There is nothing more foolish than to live as if this world is all there is. This world is passing away. Its time will soon have an end. How can we live, as if it will go on forever? How can we invest all our time in that which will be burnt up? How can we place all our hopes in that which is doomed? Truly, to live only for today is the most unwise thing we can do. We have no excuse.

Let us who believe look to the future with joy. Everywhere in this world we may see sorrow. We may be deeply grieved to see wrong being constantly done. We may see God's name defiled. His Son's honour is despised. His people are scorned. But these things shall not always be. God has set a day, when all injustice will come to an end. The Saviour shall return. All things shall be made new. All sin shall be purged. The

him over to death! When he looked like he might be let go - they completely refused. When the choice was given to them - they chose a murderer instead. Christ was holy - and this Christ, they hated.

There never was such a full proof of man's wickedness, as the murder of Christ. There was nothing in him to bring out hatred. The hatred was all in man's heart. He was hated "without a cause".

Let us put away all foolish talk about the goodness of man. The Bible's verdict is quite different. His heart is "deceitful above all things - and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). He is twisted, and evil, beyond any hope outside of God. He does not need mere help - he needs to be saved. Lack of good advice is not his problem. His problem is lack of a good heart.

Have we yet passed this verdict upon ourselves? We ought to, for it is true. We can see it often in others. Why are we so blind about ourselves? Let us remember that Jesus Christ did not come to save the righteous. He came to save sinners. Until we know we are such, we cannot receive anything from him. Until we bow down low, he will not lift us up high. Until we come to him and repent, we must be strangers forever to God. Let us not be proud. Let us count it a blessing, to be broken before God.

Let us notice secondly *what Peter attributes the man's cure to*. It was faith in Jesus' name, and nothing else, which made the man whole. It was the name of Christ, which he had heard. And it was the name of Christ, in which he had believed, and received his life.

What an infinitely valuable thing it is to have faith. Those who have faith have something more precious than millions of pounds. They have something which obtains for them blessings of eternal and infinite worth. They have that which will bring them life for evermore.

Whatever we do or don't have, let us make sure we have faith. Let us be looking to the Lord Jesus, and resting in him. Let us be relying on him, as the only name by which we can be saved. Let us give up all hope of saving ourselves. Let us abandon all thoughts that we shall be alright on our own. Why should Christ die, unless we needed him? So let us look to him, and be made perfectly whole. If we have faith, let us value it at more than the world. Let us watch over it, and seek that it should grow. Let us carefully see if there are any signs of decay. Let us make sure, that we are ever looking to Jesus, our eyes fixed upon him.

See finally *what a complete cure this man received*. Peter says that he was "strong". He had received "perfect wholeness". He leaped! He jumped! He praised! This was no part-cure. This was no work of mere man. The muscles which had never been used, now worked as if new. The legs which had never walked, now ran.

When Jesus Christ saves us, it is a perfect work. He does not only forgive half of our

that we can have too much of Christ. Let us never think that we can be too near to him. Let us never think that we can spend too much time in praying for his help, or in reading his word. The thing which we need most of all is more of him.

What is the Christian gospel? It is Jesus Christ. He can never be preached too much, or lifted too high. Too much cannot be made of him. Too much value cannot be put on his death, or his rising again. Well would it be for the church if we could remember this! Well would it be for our own souls if we could hold more fully on to him! Let us resolve, every day that we live, to cling more closely to Jesus Christ.

Let us notice secondly *what Peter says about Jesus' death*. Here we are moving onto holy ground. The death of the Son of God is the most momentous event in all history. It is a subject which angels desire to look in to. And here we have some of the most awesome words ever spoken about it.

Jesus' death, Peter says, was purposed and ordained in eternity by God. His "being delivered" was God's sovereign will. The Father himself had determined that it would come to pass. It is true that "lawless hands" had done it. The guilt belonged to the crowd who Peter addressed. They had taken him; they had put him to death. The fault was not God's. They did exactly what they wished to do. But as they did so - they did precisely what God had fore-ordained.

This is plainly the teaching of God's word. It may be very mysterious. It might seem to cause many difficulties. We may wonder just how such a thing could be. It might seem "too high" for us. But the Bible says that it is true. The first Christian preacher placed it at the heart of his message.

The sovereignty of God is not something to be ignored. Much less is it something to be excused, or denied. It is a glorious truth, to be openly declared. It is not to be hidden, reserved only for the church. It is to be put at the heart of our witness to unbelieving men. It is to be something we keep very near to our hearts. We must think about it often. God is God! Salvation is no accident - he has been planning it from the very start.

The death of Jesus was a most wicked act. He was innocent. He was murdered. It was the most wicked crime ever done. The Son of God was put to death! Yet it was also the will of God. When wicked people prosper, let us remember this. They cannot move an inch outside the will of God. He is not guilty of their sin - but they can only fulfil his will. Whatever harm they may do - it is under control. Here is comfort for our hearts. Here is a solid rock for life's storms. The Lord rules - let the people be glad!

Let us notice thirdly that *the resurrection of Jesus was predicted before*. It was a fact which Peter found plainly in Scripture. David, in the sixteenth psalm, had spoken. But he had not spoken of himself. He had spoken of the resurrection of the Christ. Christ would not remain dead, but would live. His body would not be left in the grave. His soul would not remain in the place of the dead. He would return from the grave. He would rise, and ascend to rule as God. He would rejoice in the presence of his Father

for evermore.

None of these things were true of David. His grave was known to all who heard Peter. His soul had departed, and his body had rotted. But he did not speak of himself. He spoke of the greater David to come; he spoke of the Christ.

Here is solid ground for our faith. We do not believe things which have come "out of the blue". We do not believe things which are completely new. We believe things which were spoken of long before they ever took place. We believe things which God had announced well ahead of time. Let us not be afraid when the world taunts us. We are standing upon the rock.

Let us read the Old Testament with understanding. No doubt there are many things in it which confuse. No doubt many parts are dark, and obscure. But there are also many clear beams of light. It is full of Christ. It speaks of his life. It speaks of his death. It speaks of his rising again. As we read it, let us look for him. It is not a code book. It is not full of secret riddles. It is a book intended to lead us towards the Son of God. We may not understand it all straight away. But let us resolve, that every time we pick it up, we will look for him.

Acts 2:33-36

33 "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he poured out this which you now see and hear. 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The LORD said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, 35 till I make your enemies your footstool.' 36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. '"

Here is the great summit of Peter's sermon. Here is the climax of the day of Pentecost. Here is where the whole speech had been heading. Here are words which we should mark especially well!

Let us notice first of all Peter's explanation of the miracles of Pentecost. It was because Jesus was exalted. He was not only raised from the dead. He was not only ascended into heaven. He had risen up to the very right hand of God. He had been received by the Father. He had received from him the promised Holy Spirit. Now, he was pouring it out. The day of Pentecost was an act of the risen Christ!

The exaltation of Jesus is a most precious truth. Without it, things would be very gloomy indeed. But Jesus is reigning at the right hand of God. He is there as a king. He rules from his Father's throne. From there, he sends forth power. From there, he sends life to the church. From there, he pours out the Spirit of God.

These things are true. How, then, can we live as if they were not so? How can we live as if Jesus were dead - or had merely disappeared? Let us be convinced, then, that a

us! He has given us new life - even to us! The love of God is poured out upon us - even us. Do we know what this means? Is there something greater than this which means that we must always mourn?

It is to be feared that there are sad reasons for our lack of joy. We don't not feel our sins very much. The precious blood of Jesus means little to us. To have a heavenly friend is a small thing to us. A future hope and certain glory are little on our minds. We are carnal, and earthly. These things should not be so! Let us, every day that we are alive, meditate more on the things of Christ. Let us focus our minds on the things that are real. Let us seek to find out what it means to be in the presence of God, where there is "fullness of joy".

Acts 3:11-16

11 Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed. 12 So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. 14 But you denied the holy one and the just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. 16 And his name, through faith in his name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

Let us mark these words well. A great miracle had occurred. A great crowd ran together. The people were "greatly amazed". They marvelled at it. They started intently at Peter and John, wondering just who they were. An act of great power had been performed. Nobody could deny it. But what did it mean? What should they make of it? How were they to respond? There was only one way that they would find out. Peter would open his mouth, and preach to them. The miracle was a great sign. But of what? Only preaching would tell. Let us then listen well to Peter's words.

Let us see in these words firstly *the great depravity of the human heart*. This is what Peter's hearers needed to be shown.

There was never such a wicked act as the murder of Christ. God had clearly marked him out as the Messiah. He had walked as the flawless servant of his Father. When delivered up to Pilate, no fault could be found in him. The Roman leader desired to let him go! He was "the holy one". He was "the just". He was the "Prince of life". There was never such a perfect life as that of Christ. The very righteousness of God walked upon the earth. His deeds were without flaw. His words were without fault. His very thoughts were totally pure. There was only one man ever who was completely innocent of all sin. It was Jesus, the Christ. And yet what did they do with him? They handed

this is of man in sin! He is powerless. He is lost. He has nothing in himself to hope for. He cannot know life, as it was meant to be lived. He is a cripple, from birth. The best he can look for is a little relief through the things of the earth. What a sorry case he is! But now, the gospel comes to him. The preacher has nothing of this life to give him. There is no silver, and no gold. But such as he has, he delivers freely. The name of Jesus Christ brings eternal life. The cripple is made whole. The prisoner goes free. He is now alive! He can know God. He has the blessing of the Spirit. Heaven is opened to him. Spiritual things are now so very real. He can get up, and leap, and praise his God!

We must take this to heart. If we owned a whole world full of silver and gold, it would not save our souls. If this life is all we are living for, then we are to be pitied. What we need is life itself - through the name of Jesus Christ. It cannot be bought. There is no price on it. But it is more precious than the whole world.

Let us take note for a second thing *where salvation is to be found*. Peter fixed his eyes on the man. He asked for his attention. He did this so that no mistake might be made. What he did, he did in the name of Jesus, the Christ from Nazareth. Jesus Christ makes us whole.

The beggar was outside the temple. But the temple could not save him. Many worshippers went past him. But they had no power to raise him up. Now two apostles stood before him. By even they had no power of their own. Deliverance was to be found in one place only - in the name of Jesus Christ.

Here is a lesson which we must take to heart. The most eloquent preacher cannot do anything himself for us. The most intelligent theologian has no power. There is no salvation in services, or in buildings. All of these things have their place. But their place is not to save us from their sins. Jesus Christ alone does this work.

Dear reader, where are you looking? Is it to the church? Is it to your deeds? Is it to some good friend who means you well? None of these can redeem your soul. You must look to the name of Jesus Christ. He alone can save. Let us "fix our eyes" upon him. Power is in his name.

Finally, we cannot help but notice what this healed man does! He gets up. He leaps. He praises God! He is filled with wonder and joy. Here is a sight! The worshippers are filing into the temple for prayers. But one of them is leaping and dancing for joy. Whatever has happened to him? He has just encountered Jesus Christ. He has felt the power of Christ's word and deliverance. He is a new man! He has received life! Let the whole world know!

There is far too much joyless Christianity. I am sure as much as anyone that our sins ought to make us mourn. I agree that our religion should not be light, or trivial. I detest pretended joy as much as anyone. But for all this, Christ's work ought to bring us great delight. The Son of God has come - for us! He has shed his blood - for us! He has defeated Satan and hell - for us! He has overcome death - for us! He reigns on high - for

disheartened Christian should not be. Joyless, unbelieving plodding should not exist. The Christian's Saviour is exalted - to the right hand of power. The Christian's Saviour reigns - over heaven and earth.

Let us not listen to Satan's lies. All is not lost. Despair and defeat are not all we can hope for. We have a Saviour who is the victor - who is the king. Let us look, with joy, to him.

For a second thing, let us look more closely at what Jesus did. He poured out the Holy Spirit. He gave his promised gift to the church.

What a wonderful gift this was! Without it, there would not even be a church. Without Christ with us, we could do nothing. Without power, the gospel would be only words. Without the new birth, nobody would believe it, and be saved. Without the Spirit's gifts, believers could not be built up. Without the Spirit's work, no-one could ever learn to be holy. Sin would not be mortified. Love would not abound. What a graveyard and a sewer the world would be - without the Holy Spirit!

Let us resolve to know nothing at all of a "Christianity" which lacks the Holy Spirit. Let us reject any "Christianity" which is just the going through of set forms. Let us reject any thought of building the church by mere human cleverness and schemes. The church will only be built when the Holy Spirit blesses the gospel with power. Christians will only be born, come to Christ and grow in grace, by the Holy Spirit. Without him, there is only death.

Let us be careful never to grieve the Spirit of God. He has been sent to do a work. Let us not resist him. He has been sent to bring Christ to us. Let us not chase him away. He has been sent to bring blessing and life. Let us not quench his workings.

Neither let us make the mistake of thinking that the Spirit's work is all spectacular to our eyes and ears. It is true, that at Pentecost there were great outward signs. Of course there were! The church was being born. But the church only needs to be born once. The Holy Spirit does not come for the first time every week. The work of the Spirit is often unseen. He draws no attention to himself. He draws attention to Christ. His work is within the heart. His work is to make us, like him, holy. Let us not think that the Spirit is being honoured when we hanker after outward signs. If we would truly honour him, then let us, like him, draw attention to Jesus. If we would truly honour him, then let us, like him, seek to be holy.

Another thing which we must see in these verses is *how long Christ must reign*. It is a matter of which Peter spoke. It is something which David had announced long before. Christ must reign - until opposition is put down. He is at the right hand of God: until his enemies have lost their sway. His reign is not inferior to that of any earthly king. He does not intend to reign and allow the rebels to go endlessly on. He intends to reign, until they all bow down low. He intends to reign, until all things are in submission to him.

Here, no doubt, is a deep and mysterious topic. The Lord Christ could end all opposition at once. But he does not. There will be opposition until he returns. But let us see the big picture. That opposition is being put down. His enemies are being slain. Here is the explanation for the events in the world. Christ is at war. His foes are resisting. They may seem to have the upper hand. But he shall prevail.

Let us take this to heart. History is the story of the triumph of Christ. Earthly empires shall rise. Then they shall fall. But Christ shall remain, and his church shall prevail. He did not come to set up a kingdom that would be destroyed. He came to set up a kingdom that would advance. The church is not meant to huddle together until the end arrives. It is meant to go out and work - in the name of the conquering Christ.

Let us notice finally what this text tells us to do. It commands us to bow. Jesus was rejected - and crucified. But God has raised him up high. He has marked him out as the Christ. He has appointed him as universal Lord. The nations must now bow - because Jesus rules. Israel had rejected him - but God's word had stood. They had put him to death - but God had prevailed.

What terrible thoughts must have gone through Peter's hearers' minds! What was the meaning of all the signs? It meant that the crucified one now reigned. They had put him to death. But now he was Lord! They had hated him. Now he ruled! What awesome fear this must have put into every heart. What horror it must have brought to them. They had ended his life on earth. But now he would reign - until his enemies were subdued.

But, how wonderful: subdued does not have to mean slain. Jesus' victory is the best news for our soul. The Lord is the Saviour too. His victory is not only over us - but for us too. The fruits of his triumph are fruits that are for us. We may share in his reign. We may become the sons of God. We may sit upon his throne. He has sent the Holy Spirit - but not to kill us. He has come to wash us, and make us new. The only death, is that of our old ways, of our sin. The only death is of that which would ruin us. The gift of the risen Lord is not death - it is life. So, let us bow gladly to him. And let us be sure, that there is nothing better that we could ever do. But let us be sure of one thing. Whether we bow, or whether we do not - he is Lord. And one day, he will be judge too.

Acts 2:37-40

37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' 38 Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. 40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation.'"

church, and they can see no differences in the teaching. Truth and error is all the same to them. But the music! Ah - there is the thing that makes a church a church. And in many places, there is less and less of the word. But there is more and more of the sound! Friends, I do not wish to offend any. But the word of God requires that we speak plainly. God has not placed the great importance upon music which our age has. This obsession is not from God, but from the world. By all means, let us have joyful and reverent praise. But let us not imagine that we may cover over serious problems with music. The early church is described here in Acts 2. It was filled with the Spirit. It loved. It studied. It gave. It prayed. It remembered its Lord. It was glad. It witnessed. It experienced the blessing of God. Let us seek too to know something of these things.

Acts 3:1-10

Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. 2 And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; 3 who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. 4 And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us." 5 So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. 6 Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." 7 And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. 8 So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them - walking, leaping, and praising God. 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God. 10 Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

This is a most delightful story. It is touching and beautiful. It also contains precious truths for our souls. Let us mark them well! Peter and John go the temple to pray. There is a man there who has always been lame. Luke tells us that he was well known (v10). But today would be no ordinary day - for him, or the church.

Let us first notice one deeply important matter. One thing that this episode was designed to show us is that *salvation is far more precious than silver or gold*. There is nothing in the universe worth so much as the salvation of a soul.

This beggar was a pitiful case. He could not walk. He could not work. All he hoped for a little money. It might help him with his daily needs. But on this day he received something he never expected. Jesus Christ made him whole. He received something he could never have bought. All the money in the world would not have given strength to his legs. But the name of the Son of God now gave him his life.

We must not miss what this picture is telling us. The significance of each miracle must be carefully weighed. Here was a man who was in chains. He could not live, and had no power to change. The best he could hope for, was a little earthly release. What a picture

The believers did not only devote themselves to the teaching. They devoted themselves to one another. They devoted themselves to the remembering of the Lord's death. They devoted themselves to prayers. Let us take special notice of these things. When the Holy Spirit came, this is what the people did. There is nothing very flashy here. There is nothing to impress the world. There is nothing to excite the flesh. But there is everything that a believer needs. By faith, there are wonders and glories to be discovered in prayer. There are deep moments of sorrow and joy around the bread and wine. There is true love to be given and received in the church. Let us, like the first Christians, strive after these things.

Let us observe for a second thing *the love and contentment within the early church*. They were together. They considered all things as the possession of all. When one brother had need, another gave to him. They were of "one accord". They ate with gladness and simplicity. Here is a picture of contentment. Here is a picture of shared lives of love. Here is a picture of true Christianity.

We must be quite certain about one thing. If our Christianity is dull, grumbling and mean, then something is quite wrong. If we feel no love to our brethren; if we are always restless and anxious; if we always have something to complain about; then something is amiss. This is not the work of the Spirit. His work is to bring joy and peace. He brings us to share in the rest of Jesus Christ.

We must ask ourselves - how much do we know of these things? I do not ask if we walk in perfect peace. Such does not exist this side of heaven. I do not ask if we have experienced flawless love. Such is only to be found in the very presence of God. But I do assert that real Christianity, though on earth, is heaven begun. We do not only have promises ahead. We have real blessings now. Again, I ask - how much do we know of these things?

For a third thing, notice what happened when the Spirit first came. Verse 43 tells us that there was fear on every soul. Verse 47 tells us that they were in favour. The same tells us that the church daily grew. Here was a church which was respected - and increasing. They were not respected because they insisted that they should be. They were respected because the work of God could be seen. They were not growing because they were watering down the faith. They were growing because the Lord himself was adding to them those who were being saved. Those who hated the church were strangely restrained. They did not like the truth. But they could not move against it. There was fear upon their souls.

Times of persecution would come. The hatred of the wicked would be known. Suffering would come. But for now, God's will was not so. He would first show the world the church, and that it belonged to him.

Let us notice that the Holy Spirit recorded nothing in these verses about music. To hear some speak today, you would think that music was all. People can go from church to

What stirring words these are! The Holy Spirit has just been poured out. One of the most direct and striking sermons of all history has just been preached. Jesus Christ, crucified Saviour and risen Lord has been declared. What boldness! What a moment! And here is the response of the crowd. Let us pay careful attention to these words.

The first thing to take notice of is that *Christianity is not something only for the head*. The crowds heard that they had murdered their own Christ. They heard that the one they had crucified was now Lord of all. Their sin now appeared to them as very great. It was against God. It was extremely wicked. It exposed them to dreadful penalties. When they realised these things, says Luke, "they were cut to the heart". It was as if a sword now struck down into their souls. They were devastated. They were broken. Only damnation was fitting for such ones as they. They could only be deeply moved. They must cry out. What could they do? A case so desperate? An offence so vile? Could they hear such a sermon, and go home unchanged? Could they agree, and yet remain the same?

Let us be clear about one thing. Sin is not just a fact for our heads. It is something to pierce our hearts. It is something which we ought to grieve over deep within. It is something that ought to move our hearts to sorrow and to lament. This is what happens when the Holy Spirit is at work. This is what Jesus said he would be coming to do. What was his task? "He will convict the world ... of sin". This is what he did at Pentecost. This is what he does in every true child of God.

If we have never felt conviction over our sins, we ought to be alarmed. To feel at peace, as if we had done no serious wrong, is not a safe place to be. It is the place of self-deception, and the road to hell. It is like the passenger snoozing contently in his cabin, whilst the ship goes down. It is like the man sleeping happily in his bed, whilst his house is burning to the ground. It is not the peace of God. It is the peace of death.

Conviction of sin is not a state to work ourselves up into. I am no friend of hysteria or useless show. Conviction of sin is a work to be done deep within. It is not a frenzy. It is the most sober, chilling reality of all. If we have never known it, then we do not know ourselves. Let us study the Scriptures more closely. Let us look more carefully at the perfect life of Christ. Let us look more deeply at our own wicked hearts. Let us see the gaping chasm between ourselves, and the righteousness of God. Let us consider the fierce wrath of God against us. Let us seek to understand what it was that made that crowd cry out - "What must we do?"

Let us notice secondly *the way of salvation which Peter declared*. He answered their question straight away. He pointed them immediately to what they must do.

To be saved, said Peter, you must repent. You have fought against God. You have resisted his rule. You have scorned his Son. You have rebelled. But now you must repent. You must turn from your selves. You must turn to God. You have resisted. But now you must yield. You have done as you have pleased. Now you must bow.

To repent is a very simple thing. It simply means to bow to the Lord. Jesus is Lord, and that means we have a choice. We can either be rebels. Or we can bow. The way of rebellion is the way in which we are born into this world. We are fallen. We love our own way. We do what is right in our own eyes. We say, "I am Lord!". But now we must turn. We must take the crown off our own heads. Now we must say "Jesus is Lord". "What would you have me to do, Lord?" must now be the question on our lips. In short, we must repent.

This is a most serious thing. Reader, have you repented? Have you called Jesus Christ "Lord"? Have you said "No" to your sins - or are you still saying "No" to Jesus Christ? We must do one, or we must do the other. There is no middle way. Without repentance, says Christ, we shall all perish. We may be so very religious. We may have done so very much. But unless Jesus is Lord, we are still in our sins, and will shortly be damned.

To those who repent, Peter has another word. That word, is to be baptised - in the name of Jesus Christ. He is now our teacher. We are now his disciples. He is now our master. Our identity is now caught up completely in him. We have trusted him to wash us clean, and to present us perfect before God. All of this is represented by baptism. And to baptism Peter now directs them. They had publicly disowned Christ. As a crowd, they had cried out for his blood. Now they must publicly own him. Now they must testify to the world that they are his. This is done in baptism. Let us note carefully that it is the first act of obedience for a Christian. It is not something for those who have not repented. It is not something for those who have been Christians many years. It is not a badge for the advanced. It is a sign for all who truly trust in Christ. We may feel ourselves to be very sinful. We may think ourselves most unworthy to witness to the Lord. But if we have sought him for the forgiveness of our sins, then his will is clear. We must be baptised.

Let us notice finally *who these promises are for*. They are, says Peter, for all. What a wonderful thing this is!

Have you heard the gospel? Then it is for you. Do you have children? Then it is for them too. Are you close at hand? It is for you. Are you far off? It is for you as well. Whoever hears of Jesus Christ, and however they hear - it is for them. If they will repent and embrace Jesus Christ, then all the blessings of salvation will be theirs. The Holy Spirit was not given at Pentecost only for a few Jews. He was given to the whole church - throughout the whole world. If we trust in Jesus Christ, then the promises are ours too.

Let nobody think that the gospel is not for them. Let nobody imagine a God who turns penitent sinners away. The truth does not lie there. His arms are open - and his welcome is sure. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord, shall be saved (v21).

Reader, where does this leave you? Have you turned to the Lord? Have you trusted in God's Son? Do you now hate your sin? Do you now love Jesus Christ? You have heard

God's promise - but have you made it your own? Let us not make any mistakes about this question. Let us all make sure that we know just where we stand.

Acts 2:41-47

41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptised; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46 So continuing daily with once accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

The first Christian sermon has been preached. The word has pierced its hearers' hearts. They have cried out for mercy. Peter has directed them to faith in Christ. He has promised them that they too may receive the Holy Spirit. What will be the outcome? The answer is in these verses. If we desire to know what the early church was like, the answer is here. If we want to know what a church filled with the Spirit does, this portion tells us. What precious words these are! Let us read them with care, and with hunger for the blessing of God!

Let us note for one thing in these verses that *the early church was faithful*. They did not receive the word one day, and neglect it the next. They did not enrol as disciples and then go elsewhere. They remained in the school of Christ day after day. The first thing that the Holy Spirit has recorded is that they "continued steadfastly". It is one thing to begin. But it is another to go on. Many start the Christian race. But fewer make it to the end.

We must be convinced that there is only one way to avoid falling away. We must "continue steadfastly" each day. We must steel ourselves. We must look to what we are doing today, and now. Are we holding on, more than before? Are we growing nearer to Christ? Are we hungering more for his word? The Holy Spirit was given to the church. This is what those with the Spirit do.

Luke has told us just what things they continued in. The first of them all was the "apostles' doctrine". They did not neglect teaching. And they did not follow any teaching that came their way. They devoted themselves steadfastly to the truths delivered by the apostles. To grow, they must feed on Christ. But who could teach them the ways of Christ - except Christ's apostles? To grow, they must avoid feeding on poisonous errors. But who could warn them about such - except those whom the master had taught? We cannot expect to make progress unless we do likewise. The apostles' doctrine is recorded for us in Scripture. What a blessing! Let us not think that a Spirit-filled church is anything other than one which devotes itself to it.