



The Message
Acts 2:22-41

The Church at Canyon Creek, Austin, Texas
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For 100 years, Eastman Kodak dominated the market on film for cameras. One hundred years of America's family photos were taken on Kodak film. But film became obsolete with the rise digital cameras. For 97 years, Sears was the top retailer in America. Every household in America had the latest copy of the Sears catalog. At its peak, Sears had 3,500 stores across the country; today there are only 500. Sears went down, as have other retailers, to the rise of Amazon. For years, families ordered pizza on Friday night and stopped by Blockbuster to rent a family movie. At its peak, Blockbuster had 9,000 stores across the country. But Blockbuster became obsolete with the rise of Netflix.

When the speed of culture, and the speed of technology, is changing faster than the speed of the company, that company is going out of business. Companies that do not adapt become obsolete.

Which raises a question. What about the church?

Only 36% of Americans attend church each week, and that number is trending down. According to Barna research, regular attendance used to mean 3-4 Sundays a month, today regular attendance means once every 4-6 weeks. A shift has taken place in our culture, and church is less important than it used to be.

So, is the church at risk of becoming obsolete like Blockbuster or Kodak?

Michael Gove writes about the church in England, "Christianity is now regarded in England with condescension and dismissal, even active hostility. To say you are a Christian is to declare yourself intolerant, naïve, superstitious and backward."¹ He states that Christianity in England has become a "toxic brand" and "completely irrelevant."

Former evangelical pastor Rob Bell, and now a celebrity on Oprah's network, has stated that "the church will become even more irrelevant if it continues to quote letters from 2,000 years ago as its best defense."

Is the church becoming obsolete and irrelevant?

Jon Tyson, in his book *Sacred Roots: Why the Church Still Matters*, contrasts the relevance of today's church with the church of Acts. "We have more Christian resources available to us than at any time in history – numerous Bible translations, all available at the touch of an app, podcasts of the most gifted and popular speakers, videos, worship music, Bible studies, conferences, webinars, radio, and television."² ... In contrast, how could the early church capture the imagination of the Roman Empire while we, with all our resources, are slowly losing influence in our culture? The early church leaders did not have the things we now consider essential for our faith. They did not have official church buildings, vision statements or core values. They had no social media, radio broadcasts, or celebrity pastors. They didn't even have the completed New Testament. Christ-followers were often misunderstood, persecuted and some gave their lives for their faith.

Yet they loved, they served, they prayed, they preached ... and they brought an empire to its knees.”³

That’s why we are studying the book of Acts this fall. The book of Acts records the birth of the Church and the thirty-year period following the resurrection of Jesus. It is filled with stories of incredible people. And what inspired them and sparked a movement was the resurrection of Jesus Christ! They heard His teaching, they witnessed His miracles, and they were there when He was horribly crucified. And amazingly, they saw Him alive again, proving He is the Son of God and proving that everything He said is true. ***They were convinced it was true, they were compelled to talk about it, and they were courageous to a take stand at great risk.*** And these first Christians are our mentors. We need their 1st century passion for our 21st century world. Our prayer this fall is that their passion revive our passion, that their faith revive our faith, that their courage revive our courage.

The story continues, and it’s still about Jesus. The mission continues, and today, in our generation, it’s up to us to take the gospel across the street and around the world.

THE MESSAGE IS ALL ABOUT JESUS

This morning, we’re going look at the message. And ***the message is ALL about Jesus.***

Peter was just a fisherman. But when he met Jesus, he left everything he knew and followed Him. Peter was the first to call Jesus “the Christ.” He was the one who cut off the ear of the soldier who tried to arrest Jesus. Peter vowed to die for Jesus. Yet, after Jesus was arrested, Peter hid in the shadows and three times denied even knowing Jesus. But after the resurrection, after seeing Jesus alive again, everything changed for Peter. Luke records the first sermon of the church. This is the first sermon following the resurrection of Jesus. And it begins with this description of Peter. “But Peter, taking his stand ...” (Acts 2:14).

And this is what he said. “Men of Israel, listen to this: 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, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him” (Acts 2:22-24, NIV).

Peter was speaking to a Jewish audience. A large crowd gathered in curiosity after hearing the disciples speaking in tongues, speaking in many foreign languages. This was Jerusalem, where 50 days earlier, Jesus had been crucified and then appeared to many alive again. These dramatic events were fresh on everyone’s mind.

And Peter talked about Jesus. “Jesus of Nazareth ... this man.” “You saw Him. You heard Him. You saw His miracles just like I did.” The miracles and wonders and signs proved that Jesus was from God. Nicodemus, a Jewish priest, admitted as much. Nicodemus “came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him’ ” (John 3:2, ESV). And Peter said, “You yourselves know.” They were there. They saw the miracles with their own eyes.

Then Peter explained that it all happened according to the divine plan of God. “This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23). The cross was God’s idea. The prophet Isaiah declared, “It was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and make his life an offering for sin” (Isaiah 53:10, NIV). “The Lord was pleased to crush Him” (NAS). The Hebrew word for “crush” means to break into pieces, to pulverize into dust. Why would God do that to His own Son?

John Piper writes, “All the brutality against Jesus ... God was in it ... The lash on his back, the thorns on his head, the spit on his cheek, the bruises on his face, the nails in his hands, the spear in his side, the scorn of rulers, the betrayal of friends, the desertion by his disciples – these were all the result of sin, and all designed by God to destroy the power of sin.”⁴

Why would God do that to His own Son? Because Jesus absorbed our sin, He became our sin. That’s why “it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer” (Isaiah 53:10, NIV). It was the only way to break the bondage of sin in our lives, to free us, to rescue us, to save us. The cross was God’s idea.

But the cross is not the end of the story. If Jesus were still dead, there would be no story. The story continues because, as Peter said in verse 24, “God raised him from the dead!”

The message of the church, the hope of salvation, the story of Christianity is ALL about Jesus. Peter mentioned Jesus nine times in this speech. Jesus is the message. Every page of the Bible points to Jesus.

- “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV).
- Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6, NIV).
- “There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved” (Acts 4:12).
- Peter said, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3, ESV).
- Paul said, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9, ESV).
- And Paul said God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow ... and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:7-11, NAS).
- And John ended his gospel account by saying, “Jesus did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written ... But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 21:25, 20:31).

The message is ALL about Jesus.

PROPHETS & KINGS POINTED TO JESUS

And, *prophets and kings throughout history have pointed to Jesus*. In the first part of his speech, Peter mentioned the prophet Joel. In the second part, Peter appealed to King David, their King David, to give authority to the message.

Peter quoted David who said of the Messiah, of Jesus, “I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence” (Acts 2:25-28, NIV).

Then Peter said, “Brothers I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay” (Acts 2:29-31, NIV).

David believed in heaven. David believed in resurrection, and he predicted it. And Peter connected the dots for his Jewish crowd. “King David, our King David, told us of the Messiah to come. He told us of His resurrection. And now it has happened. The Messiah we have heard about all our lives is Jesus, the man from Nazareth, whose miracles you witnessed, whom you crucified, and who has risen from the dead. And we are witnesses.”

THE RESURRECTION PROVES JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD

David predicted it, and God did it. “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God ... Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (Acts 2:32-33, 36, NIV). *The resurrection proves Jesus is the Son of God and that everything He said is true.*

“Be assured.” Only Jesus rose from the dead. Every other religious leader in world history is still dead. But Jesus is alive. We believe that He actually, physically, and supernaturally rose from the dead. We believe, that through faith in Him, we can be forgiven of everything we’ve ever done wrong. We believe He will walk with us through everything we face in life. And, we believe that one day we will see Him face to face and spend eternity with Him in heaven. That’s why we’re here today. To affirm our faith, to celebrate our faith, and to renew our commitment to live like we believe it.

The resurrection proves that Jesus is the Son of God and that everything He said is true.

THIS IS THE MESSAGE OF THE CHURCH

This is the message of the church, it’s ALL about Jesus, and everyone needs to hear this message. The mission continues, and today, in our generation, it’s up to us to take the gospel across the street and around the world.

“When the people heard this, they were cut (pierced) to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ ” (Acts 2:37, NIV). Imagine that moment, when dozens, even hundreds, heard the message and were “pierced to the heart.” I wish I could go back in time and interview one of those people who were there, and who, at that moment, were convicted and were convinced.

I can’t do that, but I can show you this video of another Jew who has been pierced to the heart with the message of Jesus.

Dr. James Tour’s experienced the same thing experienced by those Jews who heard Peter preach. Conviction of sin. A rush of reason. The lights came on. The dots connected. Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah he had heard about his whole life. Like Cinderella’s slipper. Surely the servant girl in the kitchen cannot be the beauty at the ball the night before. But she is. The slipper fits. Surely a man from Nazareth cannot be the Messiah we have heard about our whole lives. But he is. And the resurrection proves it.

When the crowd realized that, they insisted that Peter tell them what to do. He said, “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” (Acts 2:38, NIV). “In the name of Jesus.” The Bible says, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be save” (Romans 10:13, NIV). These are not magical words, but a heart calling out to God. And when a person realizes they need a Savior, and calls out to God, He will hear, He will forgive, and He will save.

The scene ends with Luke reporting that “those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day” (Acts 2:41, NIV). That night, 3,000 people went home changed. Imagine the conversations that night all over Jerusalem. Imagine fathers talking to their children. Imagine brothers talking to brothers. Imagine neighbors talking to neighbors. That’s the power of the message.

CONCLUSION

Let me ask you, all of us, this. What dominated your mind this past week? My guess is that most of us were focused on work, on the start of school, on our busy schedules, on our problems and worries, and on just how tired we are. We can’t help it, the stuff of real life dominates our minds. And most of us live distracted and preoccupied lives. If that’s true, then we must admit that perhaps the gospel did not dominate our minds this week. I say that with empathy, and not condemnation. I’m preoccupied too. It’s understandable and human. However, when we read about the first Christians in Acts, they were obsessed with the gospel. When we read about them, we know we should be more gospel-minded than we are, more gospel-focused than we are. So how can we be less distracted and make more room for the gospel in our lives?

As I thought about that, I kept going back to the phrase “cut to the heart,” or “pierced to the heart.” There was a moment in the time when you were “pierced to the heart.” That time when the gospel penetrated your heart, pierced your conscience, convicted you of your sin, and convinced you that it was all true. And it was so overwhelming that you could not resist it. You had to believe it. You had to repent. You had to cry out to God and say, “Yes Lord! Please save me.” And the joy that came after that is still the greatest joy of your life.

So, perhaps the answer to the question, how can we be more gospel-minded, is to be pierced again. To go back to the cross, and remember that it was my sin that put Jesus on the cross. And that, He was willing to forgive me of everything I've ever done wrong. And let my heart fill up with gratitude. And, to let my heart be "pierced" again with an urgency for my friends and family and neighbors who do not know Him.

Is the church still relevant today? Of course we need to adapt with changing times in order to dialogue with people today. But I believe, with all my heart, that the gospel is still relevant! ***Therefore, the gospel has to be relevant to us, we must be "pierced" with a sense of urgency, before it will be relevant to anyone else.***

They were convinced it was true, they were compelled to talk about it, and they were courageous to take a stand at great risk. And these first Christians are our mentors. We need their 1st century passion for our 21st century world. May their passion revive our passion. May their faith revive our faith. May their courage revive our courage. ***The story continues, and it's still about Jesus. The mission continues, and today, in our generation, it's up to us to take the gospel across the street and around the world.***

NOTES

¹ Andrew Brown, "Michael Gove is right – Christianity has become a laughing stock," *The Guardian*, April 2, 2015.

² Paraphrasing and summarizing a long paragraph by Jon Tyson.

³ Jon Tyson, *Sacred Roots: Why Church Still Matters*, Frames, Barna Group.

⁴ John Piper, *The Passion of Jesus Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), page 119.