

## **The Message of the Early Church**

Sunday, August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1084

### **Acts 2:22-36**

*“Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye ourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.*

*For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.*

*Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.*

*Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool.*

*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.”*

One of our TV listeners visited our services yesterday, last Sunday, and coming out of the door of the church he said to me; “I have been watching you and listening to you for a number of years. You have helped me and you have been a good teacher.”

That is what I want to do; I want to teach. I want to be a pastor and teacher; I want to help you understand the Scriptures and the way of life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You see; we are not going to shout people into the Kingdom of God. We are not going to sing them into the Kingdom of God. We are not even going to weep them into the Kingdom of God. We are going to preach them into the Kingdom of God.

That's right! *"The Lord hath chosen by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? How shall they hear without a preacher and how shall they preach except they be sent?"*

I don't just want to stand here and grab my ear and holler into this microphone. I don't want to shout, scream, and say old phrases. I want to teach you what the Scripture says about God, about men, about Christ, about salvation, and eternal life. I want us to *"search the Scriptures whether these things be so."*

My subject today is: "The Message of the Early Church."

The disciples and the members of the early church are our patterns and they are our examples. These people were devoted to God, men like Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul and the apostle Peter.

These men and their followers, the believers who believed as a result of their preaching, were men and women who were devoted to God. They were cast out of the synagogues, out of organized religion and they were persecuted and hated. They were even killed for the Gospel. They were devoted to God. They were consecrated to God.

They were devout in their worship; they were faithful in worship. Upon the first day of the week the Scripture says; *"they met together to break bread."* Paul preached to them and they continued in fellowship and the breaking of bread from house to house.

These people who are our patterns and our examples were devoted to one another. They loved one another and sold their possessions and gave to those who had need. The Scripture says, *"They had all things common."*

When one part of the body of Christ was in need, the other came to their rescue. *"They wept with those that wept. They rejoiced with those that rejoiced. They had all things common."*

These people were dedicated to the preaching of the Gospel. They were dedicated to witnessing and missionary work. *"They were scattered abroad and they went everywhere preaching the Gospel, declaring the good news."*

These people were doctrinally sound; they continued in the apostle's doctrine. They didn't go off into customs, traditions, and all manner of things. They continued in the apostle's doctrine. *"They did not shun to declare all the council of God."*

They were examples of faith, examples of good works, examples of holiness, examples of honesty and they were examples of godliness. These people were devoted to God. They were dedicated to one another. They were devout in their lives. They were people who were dedicated in their preaching; they were examples.

Here is my question: what did they preach; what was their message? This is what I am interested in more than anything else. What was the message of the early church? What echoed from the pulpit? What did they preach when they gathered together? What did their preachers proclaim?

Their proclamation can be summed up in one word, the message of the early church can be summed up in one word and that word is Christ. That is what they preached; they preached Christ.

The apostle Paul said in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:23; *"But we preach Christ and Him crucified."* In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2:2, he said; *"for I determined to know nothing anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified."*

Phillip, in Acts, the 8<sup>th</sup> Chapter says; *"He opened His mouth and began at the same scripture and preached Jesus Christ."* That was their message; Christ was their message.

Listen to this in Acts Chapter 4; the authorities called the disciples together and *"commanded them not to speak at all or to teach in the name of Jesus Christ."*

That was their message and that is why they were persecuted. That is why they were jailed and why they were hated. This is what the authorities commanded them not to preach, *"The name of Jesus Christ."*

Listen to Acts Chapter 5; they said, *"Did not we command you that you should not teach in the name of Jesus Christ, but you have filled Jerusalem with this doctrine."*

Peter replied, *"We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus Christ whom you crucified, and Him hath God exalted to be King and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, the forgiveness of sins, and we are witnesses of these things."* This was their message; *"Jesus Christ and Him crucified."*

I want you to go back to Peter's message at Pentecost. All of you should be familiar with Acts the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter. If you have your Bible with you, why don't you turn to the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Acts? Let's see an example of the preaching of the early disciples, an example of the preaching of the early church, the message of the early church. What did they preach?

Let's look at Peter's message in Acts 2:22 he starts out this way; *"Ye men of Israel; hear these words."* These are his opening comments; *"You men of Israel hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God."*

That is where he started; he started with Christ. This message started with Christ and ended with Christ. It started with Christ as being a man. Jesus of Nazareth was a man approved of God.

Peter knew that He was God. In fact, when our Lord Jesus said, *"Whom do you say that I the Son of man am?"* Peter was the one who said, *"Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God."*

Peter was present when Thomas fell on his face and said; *"My Lord and my God."* Peter was present when the Father spake from heaven and said; *"This is My beloved Son; hear ye Him."*

So, Peter knew that He was God but he started his message this way; *"Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God."* They preached that He was God but they preached that He was in every way a man in the flesh approved of God and sent of God.

Secondly: In Acts 2:23, the same verse, he says; *"Jesus of Nazareth (Jesus Christ) was a man approved by God by miracles and signs and wonders, which you yourselves also know; him being delivered by the determinate council and foreknowledge (or foreordination) of God."*

He said this; *"Jesus of Nazareth is a man, but He was delivered by determinate counsel of God (was sent to you ordained of God)."* He was sent from God into this world. This man Jesus Christ, whom we preach, in whom we trust, and in whom we believe, is the covenant Redeemer.

*"He was the Lamb slain before from all eternity, from the foundation of the world."* He is the one that God sent, God ordained, and God appointed and approved. They knew and preached that Jesus Christ, in all of His birth, life, death, resurrection, and everything,

all of it was ordained of God, promised of God, prophesied of God, and pictured of God in the Old Testament Scriptures.

That is what he said. What was their message? Their message was to preach Christ. Jesus of Nazareth was a man but a man ordained of God, a man sent by God.

Thirdly: Look at the next verse: *“You have taken and by wicked hands of crucified and slain.”*

They preached Christ Incarnate. They preached Christ ordained of God and they preached Christ crucified.

Yes, the death of Christ was the wicked work of men, but the death of Christ is the will of God. *“He was delivered by the determinate council and foreordination of God. But you took him and with your wicked hands have crucified him and slain Him on a cross.”*

The purpose behind His suffering on that cross was to *“die for our sins according to the scriptures.”* As Peter said in his epistle; *“We know that we are not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold from our vain conversation received by tradition from our fathers but with the precious blood of Christ as a lamb without blemish and without spot.”*

What did the early church preach? What was their message? Their message was the man Christ Jesus, the God-man. God was in human flesh and God incarnate.

Yes, as simply as I can state it and as simply as I can put it; I believe that Jesus of Nazareth who was born of Mary, worked in a carpenter’s shop. He lived on this earth, died on a cross, and was buried and rose again. He is God Almighty in human flesh. He is all God, but yet, a man, the God-man.

He has a divine nature and yet, human nature. God the Father sent Him. God predestinated His coming, foreordained His coming and sent Him with authority. The Father sent Him into the world. *“God sent His Son into the world, made of a woman, made under the Law.”*

Jesus Christ came into the world and was clothed in human flesh. He actually died on that cross. He did not fall asleep; He didn’t faint and He didn’t swoon; He died on that cross in a human body.

He died for our sins. He was our substitute; He was our sacrifice and He was our sin offering. He actually died. They took His body, His dead body, down from the tree, and wrapped it in grave clothes and laid it in a borrowed tomb. He died and that is just so! That is what they preached.

Fourthly: Look at the next verse in Acts 2:24 as they preach Christ resurrected. Peter said, *“Whom God raised from the dead.”*

*“You men of Israel; hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth a man, foreordained of God, sent into this world; you with wicked hands have crucified and slain, but God raised Him from the dead, having loosed the pains of death because it was not possible for Him to be held by death.”* Jesus Christ is alive. He lives because He is life.

Paul dealt with this over in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15; he said, *“How say some among you there be no resurrection of the dead.”* He said, *“If Christ be not raised there is no resurrection. If Christ be not raised our preaching is vain. If Christ be not raised your faith is vain. If Christ be not raised we are false prophets. If Christ be not raised you are yet in your sins. If Christ be not raised the dead are perished.”*

But He says, *“Now is Christ risen from the grave and is become the first-fruits of them that slept.”* They preached the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, most of their persecution especially from the Sadducees’ came because of them preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Most of their persecution came because they preached the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Fifthly: They didn’t stop there! Look at verse 36; this is all one message by the apostle Peter at Pentecost. This is an example of what they preached, their message:

He said in Acts Chapter 2:36; *“Therefore, let all the house of Israel know that God hath made that same Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ.”* This is our message. Jesus Christ is Lord of creation; *“all things were made by Him,”* for Him, and through Him. He has preeminence over all things.

He is the Lord of heaven and earth; He said, *“All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”* He is the Lord of the living and the dead; *“He died that He might be Lord of the living and the dead.”* He is the Lord of life; *“as the Father hath life in Himself, even so hath the Son of God life in himself.”*

*“He will quicken whom He will.”* He is the Lord of salvation; *“neither is there salvation in any other.”* He is the Lord over all flesh; *“Thou hast given me (Christ Jesus) power over all flesh.”* This is what Peter is saying.

That man who was born of Mary and walked the streets of Jerusalem and the shores of Galilee; that man was ordained of God, approved of God, predestinated of God and sent into this world. He is God in human flesh.

You crucified Him and nailed Him to a cross. God raised Him from the dead. When God raised Him from the dead, God declared to this whole world that Jesus Christ is both Lord and Christ. All things are in His hands, all judgment, all authority, all salvation, all life, all creation, all power, and all authority. Everything is in Christ.

*“God hath given Him a name above every name. He has highly exalted him and given him a name above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow in heaven, earth, and under the earth. Every tongue is going to confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”*

That is their message! They didn't stop there. Peter didn't quit there. In verse 38, he commanded faith in Christ. He commanded repentance toward God and a confession of faith in Jesus Christ. They said, *“What are we going to do men and brethren; what are we going to do?”*

He said, *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”* That is what they preached about; they preached about Christ. They commanded and demanded faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sixthly: Let me show you another example of what they preached (the message of the early church):

Peter was upon the housetop one day and some men came to his house, some messenger, a Gentile man, by the name of Cornelius. They came to the house inquiring to see Peter. God had sent them there.

Before Peter came downstairs and greeted these Gentiles, God spoke to Peter in a vision. In this vision, God sent down a *“great sheet knit at four corners”* with all kinds of animals, which were declared *“unclean”* by Old Testament standards and laws.

He said, *“Peter; rise, kill, and eat.”* He said, *“Oh no, not so Lord; I have never killed or eaten anything uncommon or unclean.”* God said, *“Don’t call anything common and unclean that I have cleansed but arise, kill, and eat.”*

About that time they came up to Peter and they said, *“There are some men here to see you.”* He went down to them and he said, *“Where are you from?”* They said, *“That they were from Cornelius, a Gentile.”*

God had spoke to Cornelius and told him to send for Peter. He was to come down there and preach to them. So, Peter went, having been taught of God, that he was to preach the Gospel also to the Gentiles.

Peter went down there; let’s see what he preached. Let’s see what the message was of the early church:

First of all: When Peter visited the gentile, Cornelius and his household, sent there by the Spirit of God and this is what he preached in Acts 10:36; *“the Word that God saith unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ that He is Lord of all.*

He said, *“The same message that God gave to Israel is the message that he has given to you and that is peace by Jesus Christ.”* Peace, rest, forgiveness, and mercy are given by Jesus Christ because He is Lord of all.

Secondly: In verse 39, he says; *“we are witnesses of all things which Jesus Christ did, whom they slew and crucified on a tree.”* He was crucified on a tree as a substitute for sinners.

Thirdly: In verse 40, the Scripture says; *“Him, God raised up the third day and showed Him openly and we are witnesses of His resurrection.”*

What is Peter preaching? He is preaching the same thing that he preached to the Jews, the same thing that he preached at Pentecost. He is preaching the incarnation of Christ, peace through Jesus Christ, the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the Son of God.

Listen to Him in verse 43 as He brings to a close this message; *“and to him, (to Christ), give all the prophets witness that through His name, whosoever believeth on Him, should receive remissions of sins.”*

My friends, if we would be faithful to our God, if we would be faithful to His precious Word, if we would be true to our hearers. We need to be sincere in our desire to see men truly saved, not just brought to join our religious organization.

We do not need to add proselytes to our denomination. We do not need statistics that we report that we have won to Christ. If we truly desire to see men redeemed and brought from death to life, we will preach what the apostle preached and that is Christ and Him crucified.

*“For neither is there salvation in any other. For there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, Christ the Lord.”* For He, of God, is made unto us all that we need, *“wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.”*

In closing: You might say that the apostles preached Christ and Him crucified to sinners. They preached Christ and Him crucified to people seeking life and seeking redemption.

What about teaching the church? What about edifying the people of God? What about exhorting the people of God to holy living, to honesty, to integrity, righteousness, love, and all of these other things?

Did they also preach Christ when they preached these subjects? Well; let’s find out. I am saying that every grace, every gift, and every fruit of God, is understood and experienced in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the way the early disciples preached.

For example, take the subject of love. We are exhorted to love one another, how? We are to love one another *“as Christ loved us and gave himself for us.”*

The book of John exhorts people to love one another. John says, *“Herein is love, not that we love God, but that He loved us.”* He also said, *“He that is born of God will love.”*

The example of love is Jesus Christ’s love for us. *“Greater love hath no man than this that he lay down his life for his friends.”* Christ laid down His life for His enemies.

You see; that is the way that they preached love. They exhorted people to love one another *“as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us.”* Even our Lord said that; *“A new commandment I give you that you love one another as I loved you.”*

What about the subject of forgiveness or forgiving one another? In Ephesians 4:30, the apostle Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus said; *“be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another.”*

Some say, “If you don’t forgive one another, you will lose your reward; if you don’t forgive God will take something away from you that is precious to you. Oh no! He said, *“Forgive one another as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”* That is the basis, that is the motivation, that is what constrains us. It is Christ’s love for us and Christ’s forgiveness on our behalf.

What about giving? What about preaching on giving, getting folks to give, to share with one another, to help one another along the way, to support the ministry of the Gospel? What about supporting those who are missionaries and other things?

Paul, writing to the church at Corinth says; *“now, you abound in faith; you abound in utterance and you abound in all of these different graces; see that you abound in the grace of giving.”*

How is He going to enforce that? He says, *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ how that He was rich and for you sakes He became poor.”* Paul bases the motivation for giving on the love of Christ for us and the death of Christ for us, Christ emptying Himself that we might be full.

Paul said this; *“The love of Christ constraineth us.”* The motivation for giving of myself and the motivation for living for God motivates me because Christ loved me and gave Himself for me.

What about preaching the resurrection? What is the hope of the resurrection? What is the hope of eternal life? Christ said, *“Because I live you live.”* Paul in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15 says; *“we will be resurrected because Christ died and was buried and rose again.”*

What about witnessing? Our Lord Jesus said; *“As My Father sent me, even so, send I you.”* Witnessing is based on Christ. Everything we do is in accordance with our relationship with Christ.

What about godly living? In Romans 6:10-11, Paul says; *“In that Christ died, He died unto sin once; but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise, reckon ye yourselves, to be dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

That is your motivation; that is your reason in that Christ died and He died unto sin. *“In that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise, you reckon yourselves in the same way to be dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ.”*

What about comfort? In 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:13, some of the people in the early church had died. These people were so troubled, so bereaved and filled with so much sorrow. Some of their loved ones had died. They had taken them out to the cemetery and buried them.

Paul was going to comfort this church. In 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:13-18, he said; *“I would not have you to be ignorant brethren, concerning them that are asleep: That you sorrow not as those who have no hope. For, if we believe, that Jesus died and rose again, even so, them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him when He comes.”*

*“For the trump of God shall sound. The voice of the archangel and the Lord Jesus shall descend from heaven and those which are alive and remain will be changed and caught up together with those that sleep to meet the Lord in the air.”* Therefore, he said; *“comfort one another with these words.”*

Do you see what I am saying? The early church preached Christ; they preached Christ. They met a sinner who was seeking salvation, who was seeking redemption. They met those who wanted to know how God saved sinners. They preached Christ, Christ incarnate, Christ crucified, Christ buried, Christ risen, Christ seated and Christ our Intercessor.

They called for that man to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. That is when the Philippian jailer came to Paul and said; *“what must I do to be saved?”* He said, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.”* Rest in Christ, trust in Christ and commit your way to Christ. It was Christ and Him crucified.

They preached to the early church and talked to them about loving one another, forgiving one another, and showing mercy to one another. They preached about giving, the hope of the resurrection, holy living, all of these things.

The preaching was based on Jesus Christ and Him crucified. That was their motive, Christ and Him crucified.