

The Facts of the matter

Please read Acts 2 v 14-36 and then pray;

O Lord Jesus Christ, as you sent your Spirit upon your disciples in an upper room, so anoint us with your Spirit today, that we may be stirred into action to respond to your Holy Word, and thereby live to the glory and exaltation of your Name, which is above every name. Amen

Last week we began to take a good look at Peter's Pentecost sermon. The summary of the sermon which Luke gives us in Acts 2 begins with Peter quoting from the Old Testament prophet Joel. The reason for Peter to start here was because he wanted to explain why the disciples had been enabled to speak and praise God in tongues. Peter, now filled with the Spirit himself, reveals that this phenomenon was due to the long awaited and prophesied coming down of the Holy Spirit spoken of by Joel. We learned that the coming down of the Spirit on this Pentecost morning was in fact a *huge downpouring* of the person and power of the Spirit of *gigantic historical significance*. The Spirit was now here for *all God's people*. (17-18) The Spirit was now here to distribute *gifts of grace and power to all*. All God's people would be enabled to *prophesy* (18). They would be enabled by the Spirit to proclaim God's word and deeds, which is what the disciples had been doing in tongues. (2:11)

But this huge avalanche of the Holy Spirit had also historically signalled the onset of *the last days*. (2:17) This was *the period between the first and second advents of Christ*. During this period the gospel must be preached "to the ends of the earth" (1:8) in the power of the Spirit. Then the end would come, but not before there were numerous harbingers of judgement, signs both on the earth and in the heavens (2: 19-20). This is a period of opportunity to *call upon the name of the Lord for salvation* (2:21) and to enter a *new covenant* which would now be given to believers as a gift, and enable them to know and love the Lord personally, have their sins completely forgiven and wiped away, and know the gift and power of the Spirit in their hearts and lives. This is where we left off last week. We now know what the sound of the wind and the vision of the tongues of fire were. They were the promised *baptism with the Spirit!* (1:5) God the Holy Spirit gave birth to the Church with power and glory!

Now we move on the even stronger meat of the sermon. The question arises – why now? Why has the Spirit come or been sent now during this Pentecost celebration? Who has sent the Spirit? Has he come of His own accord? How does this affect us? Peter continues to be serious, forthright and bold. **Men of Israel, listen to this!** (v22) You need to really take note of what I am about to say. This is of the utmost importance. Listen! Pay close attention! Peter then proceeds with great power and directness to outline the **key FACTS** about God's saving acts and action through **Jesus Christ**.

One of the things that we should be interested in is **facts**. We don't want half-truths. We don't want spin. We don't want journalistic embellishment or prejudice. We certainly don't want lies or stories someone has made up. We want *the facts of the matter*. We will want to know all the actual facts about the Covid-19 virus. They will hopefully all come out into the open, just like all the facts about the Iraq War came out into the open some years ago. Sometimes people don't want the facts – the truth – especially if it means that they are seen in a bad light – or if they are likely to be heavily criticised or lose their job or be punished in some way – even imprisoned. But the facts are essential. **Peter now, in the power of the Spirit is going to present all the FACTS about Jesus!** We are about to receive the *kernel* of the gospel – and the gospel – at its heart and core – is built upon a foundation of *historical facts* about the person of Jesus Christ. People then AND now need to listen to these facts! What are they? All these facts are important and have eternal significance for the world. So, listen to them!

Fact 1 may seem a little odd. It comes in the form of a title or ascription. **"Jesus of Nazareth"** (v22). Jesus Christ, the Son of God was *Jesus of Nazareth*. This was a simple, straightforward **fact**. Jesus was

raised in Nazareth in the northern part of the country by his parents. They chose to live there when Jesus was very young and accordingly a prophecy was fulfilled (Matthew 2:21-23). Jesus was a Nazarene. This was his hometown where he grew up and worked. It was a backwater place, not known for anything special. Nathanael had asked his friend Philip; *“Can anything good come from Nazareth?”* (John 1:46). When Jesus eventually began his ministry, he left Nazareth for the Galilean lakeside towns. Jesus did launch his mission and mandate from the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-22), but he was nearly killed in the process, and as he explained, *a prophet is always without honour in his own town* (Luke 4:24, Mark 6:4-6). Incredibly Nazareth, because of its antipathy and aggression toward Jesus was the one place where he did not do *many miracles* because of their lack of faith.

So, Jesus was **Jesus of Nazareth** or Jesus from Nazareth. This is important mainly because it declares that he was a man *who lived in history at a particular time and in a particular place*. He existed. Now why is this an important fact which Peter highlights and which is highlighted in so many of the sermons and speeches in Acts? (Acts 3:6, 4:10, 6:14, 10:38, 22:8, 26:9). Well Peter did this just in case anyone might want to know exactly who Jesus was and where he was from. May be Peter was also thinking ahead (to the 20th or 21st century?) when people might be ignorant about **the fact** that Jesus actually lived, that he was a real man, and not some invented mythical religious mystic or guru. Even today, you get some ignorant people insisting that Jesus didn’t ever live. The Church made up the story about him. And they say this despite **the fact** that reliable ancient historians like Josephus and Pliny the Younger also bear testimony to the fact that he lived. So, fact number one – Jesus existed – no-one can doubt it. Facts are facts. As Peter preached everyone knew he was telling the truth. He was outlining the *facts of the matter*. Jesus was and always will be **Jesus of Nazareth**.

Fact 2 was that Jesus was both accredited by God and anointed by God (the Holy Spirit) through the miracles, signs and wonders he performed in abundance. Everybody knew that Peter was presenting **them with facts – even Jesus’ enemies**. Peter put it like this in a later sermon to Cornelius and friends;

“YOU KNOW what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”
Acts 10:37-38

The fact that Jesus performed many miracles, signs and wonders stemming out of his compassion was well known and attested to. Everyone knew this fact about Jesus. Jesus was famous because of his extraordinary miracles. So many people had witnessed them; vast crowds had travelled to receive healing from him; they went to him just for his healing power and touch; (Luke 6:17-19) he fed a multitude with barely any resources; he performed miracles in front of the eyes of those who opposed him as he healed on the Sabbath (Luke 13:16-17, John 9:13 f). Jesus infuriated his enemies as he healed on the Sabbath. When he raised Lazarus from death – they wanted to kill him (John 11:53). Jesus revealed through acts of great power that the Kingdom of heaven had arrived with him! His “signs” (John 20:30) revealed who he was and what he had come to do. At that time, it would have been stupid and useless to argue (like some do today) that Jesus did not perform miracles of power and compassion – because so many people knew he had done, and hundreds had seen him do them. They were eyewitnesses of his healings and may had been recipients of his healing power. You could not deny the miracles - however prejudiced you were! The miracles of healings and deliverance were **facts**. The blind could see, the lame danced, lepers had been cleansed.

What was going to be really fascinating was when Peter and the others apostles started to perform miracles themselves **in His name** (these things that some people say can’t possibly happen). Jesus’s healing power and miracles were going to continue *through them*. (Acts 1:1) The works of the kingdom that had begun in Jesus continued to occur through the apostles as we see everywhere in Acts. (5:12)

For example, in the *name of Jesus of Nazareth* (Acts 3:6), Peter and John healed a well-known crippled beggar outside the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. The man's instant healing caused a great commotion as he walked and leapt and praised God. The religious authorities had a problem. They could not deny the **fact** of this miracle (Acts 4:22). Everyone *knew* the beggar in question and everyone *knew* he had been healed. So, we get this comical situation in which the religious authorities say;

"What are we going to do with these men"? they asked. *"EVERYBODY living in Jerusalem KNOWS they have done AN OUTSTANDING MIRACLE – and we cannot deny it."* Acts 4:16

Likewise, no one could *deny* that **"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. (v22)** Here Peter well and truly nails **fact no 2**. And even if people who think they are "clever" today deny miracles, they could not have done that back then. It was historical truth not the manufactured lies of disciples. Again, the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus recorded that Jesus was "a worker of wonders."

Fact 3 presented by Peter comes in two parts – both critically important. Fact 3 states that this Jesus of Nazareth, who performed many miracles, signs and wonders was **nailed to a cross and crucified**. Nobody could deny that **fact** either! It had happened just a few weeks earlier at the time of the Passover festival right there in that very city – the sham of a trial and the crucifixion just outside the city at the place of the Skull. Peter presents **two facts** about this **fact**.

Firstly, it occurred because God has purposed and planned it as the major part of his saving plan for the world. In an ultimate sense God was behind this death. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, or as the prophet Isaiah had revealed centuries earlier; *"Yet it was the Lord's will to crush and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand."* (Isaiah 53:10) As the apostle Paul puts it – such a great mystery; *"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting men's sins against them. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* (2 Corinthians 5: 19 & 21). God is sovereign over all! *"Tis mystery all – the Immortal dies; who can explore HIS STRANGE DESIGN."* (C Wesley)

Secondly, some of the Jews standing in the crowd that day, along with other wicked men had killed Jesus. They had perpetrated the execution of Jesus. They were clearly culpable. They had planned it; they had organised the false arrest and trial of Jesus, they had stirred up a mob or been part of the mob which had incessantly demanded Jesus's crucifixion and Barabbas's release; they had watched and mocked as the Romans enacted the crucifixion of an innocent man. They had done it! That was a **clear fact**. They knew it! They could not deny it! They were responsible! (see also Acts 4:27-28)

But now **Fact 4**, the **fact** of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (24-32). God has raised this Jesus from death to life! Peter and the other apostles had become eyewitnesses of this incredible **fact** which they were never to doubt or deny. This was something to which Peter and the others would testify to with great unswerving conviction and power (Acts 4:33). They had seen the risen Jesus many times over a period of 40 days and he had given them *many convincing proofs that he was alive*. (Acts 1:3) Here Peter outlines how Jesus's resurrection was spoken of prophetically by King David himself – and that David fully expected one of his descendants, a greater person than himself, to one day sit on his sovereign throne! Both prophet (David) and apostles now testify to God's action in raising Jesus from death. The resurrection was going to be the central tenant of all the apostolic preaching and it remains **the most significant fact in history** – not just salvation/biblical history - but all history. Jesus destroyed death and defeated the devil who keeps us in fear of death. (Hebrews 2:14-15, 2 Timothy 1:10). Jesus extracted the sting and power out of death. Where O death is your sting? (1 Corinthians 15:55). Death could not keep hold of Jesus because of his holiness, sinless perfection and pure love. It was *impossible*

for death to keep its hold on him. (24) It was always going to be a losing battle for death and the devil! And it proved to be so.

Fact 5 and Fact 6 are delivered by Peter as a double truth which come together. One fact leads straight on to another. Just as God had raised Jesus from death to life, so even more recently, God had **exalted Jesus** to his right hand. Jesus had ascended to God's throne and sat down! He had received all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). His earthly work complete, He sat down – at the right hand of God – the place of power and authority and majesty. (Hebrews 1:3). There were in effect two “raisings” of Jesus by the Father. God both raised his Son *from the dead* – and then God raised him *to the heights!*

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2: 9-11
*Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: he appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in all the world, **was taken up in glory.**” 1 Timothy 3:16*

And it was from glory, from the heights, that **Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit from heaven**, the promise of the Father (v33). This is **fact 6**. Jesus has now generously, super-abundantly poured out the Spirit as he promised he would. This is **a fact of history** now. You can see it today in Jerusalem says Peter. You can hear the tongues of praise - can't you? You can see the power of the Spirit at work - can't you? This is what *you yourselves* now see and hear. This is factual proof that Jesus has been exalted, that he is at the right hand of God, and that the promised Spirit has been poured out “as the prophet said it would be.” From heaven Jesus will also pour out gifts. He will scatter them liberally around his people – his church (Ephesians 4: 7-13). Jesus Christ has brought Joel's ancient prophecy to fulfilment, pouring out the Spirit which you now see! Because the Jewish onlookers could not deny the facts about the arrival of the Spirit (unless they wanted to stick to the too much wine argument), they really could not deny the other facts that Peter had so boldly shared – Jesus' resurrection, exaltation and the resultant pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

These were the key **facts** of redemption history through Jesus Christ! Amazing! The apostles continually kept these facts as the mainspring of their proclamatory preaching. And 4 of those facts had happened historically in the previous 50 days! 1) Death 2) Resurrection + Appearances, 3) Ascension/Exaltation 4) Pouring out of the Spirit! God had been busy in and through the Lord Jesus!!

But now we come to the inevitable, powerful and undeniable conclusion; **“Let all Israel be ASSURED of this: God has made THIS JESUS, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ!” (v36)**

This is **a fact!** Like it or loathe it! Love it or hate it! Accept it or reject it – but it is **a fact**. THIS JESUS is Israel's promised “Christ” – the Messiah, and the earth's Lord and Master! **God has made it thus and it is not going to be changed! Jesus is Lord.** This is what faced not just the crowd on that day – but what faces us **today!** The pressing challenge for Peter's large audience, and for people today is that **“the stone the builders rejected, has become the CAPSTONE”** (Acts 4:11). God has *made* Jesus the head stone – like it or not. There is no alternative. This is God's doing and God's chosen method of salvation through his Son, whom he raised from the dead and exalted to his right hand. God was “in Jesus” from beginning to end – reconciling the world to himself. The ancient prophecies are about him, his birth in Bethlehem, his upbringing in Nazareth, his baptism and reception of the Spirit, his miracles, signs and wonders, his sacrificial and atoning death, his mighty resurrection and ascension; and God the Father then gave the Spirit to Jesus for Him to pour out! So, if you are cleverly, arrogantly, nonchalantly or aggressively opposing or fighting against **these facts**, this objective apostolic teaching,

you are not fighting against the apostles or the Church which is built upon their testimony and that of the prophets – you are fighting against the Living God. (**Acts 5:39**). And there will only be One winner.

God has made this Jesus, who you crucified both Lord and Christ. That was and remains the message at the heart of the gospel. Christ, the promised One of Israel, the true Messiah - is Lord of all!

Is it any wonder, that under deep conviction of heart, as a result of the Spirit filled factual preaching of Peter – all the crowd could do was ask the question; “What shall we do?”. If these facts outlined by the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost are true – **and they are** - then “What should people do”? We will explore this next week and we will see how 3000 responded positively to this factual preaching presented in the power and with the blessing of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**