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Peter and the Power of Pentecost

by Daniel R. Mitchell

With his heart in his throat and his life in his hands, Peter ascended the temple steps to announce, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth . . ."

This Jesus. Only a few weeks before, Jesus had taken up this rolling stone of a man and promised that he would play a crucial role in laying the foundation of the church (Matt. 16:18). Yet so much had happened that ages seemed to have passed since Jesus uttered those words. Indeed, even as Peter stood before that

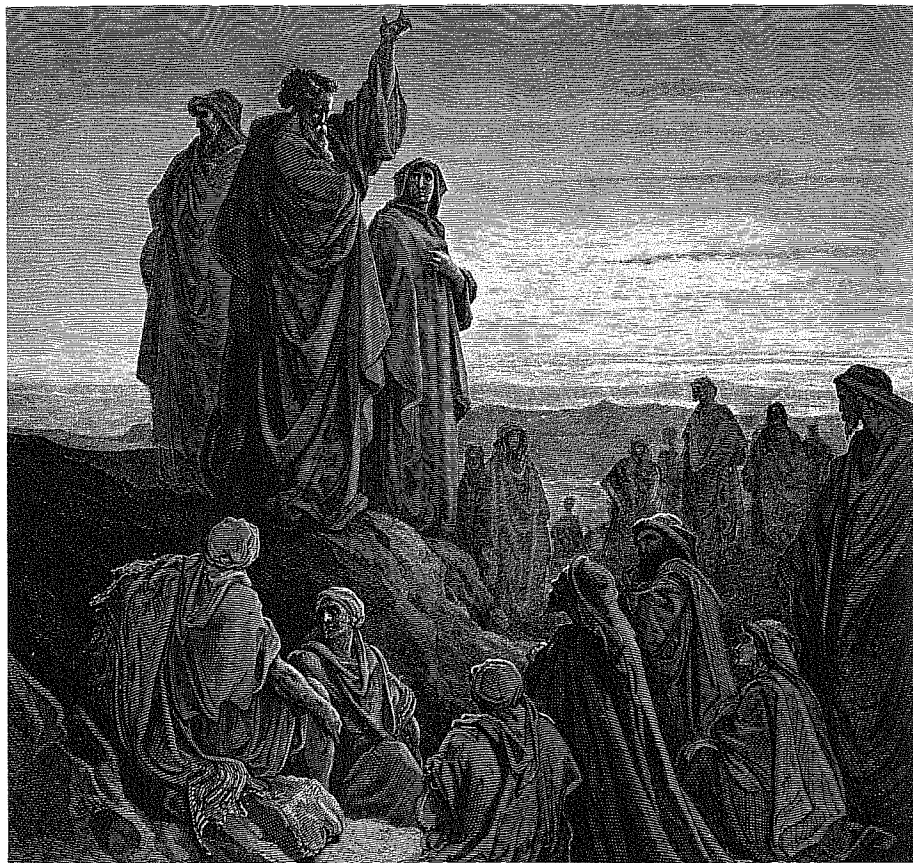
Peter stands before a jeering crowd, to lay the crime of the centuries at its feet.

hostile crowd on the Day of Pentecost, he was probably not aware of his role in the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy. Perhaps what was really echoing in the chambers of his mind was his thrice denial of Jesus in the crucial hour before His Crucifixion. He might have been muttering to himself, "By God's grace I shall not deny Him again!"

But this man was empowered by more than mere grit. Luke reminds us that Peter's authority came through the baptism and filling of the Holy Spirit. He was not braced with new wine, but by the promised Paraclete whose arrival they were to await before attempting to carry out their commission. He had come and now they were ready. The event caught the immediate attention of the city, but was destined to change the world.

The Jews who had gathered at Jerusalem from all over the empire understandably wondered, "What meaneth this?" (Acts 2:12). Peter's sermon is a response to this question.

Imagine the excitement of Peter and his companions as they tried to explain



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what was happening to them. They hardly knew, themselves! They were much like the blind man who, after experiencing Jesus' power, responded to a similar question with: "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." Peter may not have understood everything but, oh, he knew Jesus and something about the events that had just transpired in Jerusalem.

He knew now that Calvary was not a calamity, but part of a wondrous, eternal plan conceived in the heart of God for the salvation of the world. Jesus of Nazareth had been attested to with the mighty works and wonders and signs God did through Him. But now God had raised Him up, signaling the end of sin and death and demonstrating to all the house of Israel, that this same Jesus whom they had crucified is both Lord and Christ.

Peter, who had cowered in the shadows—who was known to have drawn a sword, in panic, against an unarmed man—now stands in the light of day, defenseless before a jeering crowd, to lay the crime of the centuries at its feet.

Part of the Jewish celebration of Pentecost was to bring in the sheaves of harvest to God. What a harvest Peter had that day as 3,000 souls were saved.

What a sacrifice of praise to God it must have been.

But for all Peter might have already known, he also learned something that day. He learned the power of the gospel. Peter's words cut deep until the crowd cried out in despair, "What must we do?" This power was evident in Paul's ministry too, and later he wrote, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

The dynamic of the gospel message was never more powerfully evident as on that inaugural day of the church. But there is a warning to be heeded here, lest we be tempted in the interest of sophistry or practicality to change this message. If our churches today want the power of Pentecost, they must be faithful to the proclamation of Pentecost. This same Jesus remains both Lord and Christ. None other name under heaven has been given whereby we must be saved. He alone is able to save all who come to God by Him.

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