

The Unchanging Message Acts 2

The goodness of believing the gospel

I was thinking this week how thankful I am to be a Christian.

Hearing of the death of the parents of friends reminded me both of the death of my parents who were believers, and of the certainty of my own coming death

How good is it to be able to say, as Paul says to the believers in Thessalonica, comforting them in the loss they had experienced “We, all believers who have died before the Lord returns and all who are still alive when that day comes, we will be with the Lord forever.” [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18]

To be able to grieve with hope, and to die with hope – hope of resurrection life and resumed relationship – in a world where we all die – what a gift.

And then this week as they have started talking about rising interest rates again, and budget cuts – you can feel that our economic prosperity is so uncertain, and it’s easy to start to be anxious about provision for yourself and your family

But the Lord Jesus says that I don’t need to be anxious, for as a believer I have a heavenly Father, the God who feeds the birds and clothes the lilies, who knows what I need and will provide all I need as I seek to live His way, seek first His kingdom and righteousness [Matt. 6:25-34]

For those who think that Christians are only Christians because they are born into a church and have never thought about it, or who have been taught to see believing in Jesus as some kind of burdensome restriction, it may surprise, perhaps even irritate, that Christians are glad and thankful to be Christians

But we are

Believing in Jesus is light in the darkness of lies and moral confusion, hope in the face of the death which is ever present, enduring love in the face of abandonment and betrayal,

All not earned by our goodness or works

But the gift of believing the Christian message, the gospel, the royal good news the Lord Jesus sent His apostles into the world to proclaim to all. [Acts 26:18]

What is the gospel?

But what exactly is that message, believing which brings these great gifts?

Last week we considered the character of that message as witness, the witness the apostles were commanded to give, speaking of all they had seen and heard of Jesus.

Acts 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

And we saw that this makes the Christian message news – a declaration of something that has happened in the world, which if true then is always true.

But today I want to look at the content of the Christian message, the content of this news Jesus’ first followers were commanded to take to the world – by looking at the first preaching of this news by the apostle Peter – one of Jesus’ closest companions – recorded in Acts 2

The Occasion

The occasion for this preaching, as you heard, was the fulfilment of the promise of the Father, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them which was evidenced by the small band of Jesus' followers speaking in different languages about God's great acts. This drew a curious crowd of Jews from all different language backgrounds who were perplexed by hearing the disciples speaking to them in their own languages, and asking "What does this mean." Acts 2:12.

Peter's response after identifying what was happening as the fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel of the coming of the Spirit in the last days focuses on Jesus – His ministry, death and resurrection as the cause of the coming of the Spirit.

It is in his words that we see the content of the witness the apostles are to give – not just in Jerusalem, but to the ends of the earth.

The content – all about Jesus and what God is doing in Jesus

²² "Fellow Israelites, listen to these words: This Jesus of Nazareth was a man attested to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did among you through him, just as you yourselves know. ²³ Though he was delivered up according to God's determined plan and foreknowledge, you used lawless people to nail him to a cross and kill him. ²⁴ God raised him up, ending the pains of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by death.

Peter is speaking of a real man, with a public and extraordinary ministry.

It wasn't hidden "as you yourselves know" Peter can say.

And it was in recent memory for Peter is speaking fifty days after Jesus' crucifixion.

In speaking of Jesus Peter is speaking of someone well known because of what He had been doing for the last three years

Somebody whose activity – his healings, his casting out of spirits, his feeding the crowds, his raising the dead, singled him out as sent from God

Peter is not speaking of an idea, or a philosophy, or a symbolic figure of myth. He is not even speaking of some vague, shadowy figure on the margins of public life.

If that were the case his hearers could have immediately dismissed Peter

In speaking of Jesus Peter is speaking of a well known figure of recent memory

Someone whose death, whose execution, the Jerusalem crowd had shared in.

²³ Though he was delivered up according to God's determined plan and foreknowledge, you used lawless people to nail him to a cross and kill him.

Jesus was killed on a cross. There is no hiding from what was seen as shameful, a sign to the Jews of being under God's curse.

Jesus' crucifixion is there, part of the gospel, from the beginning and remains central to the Christian message.

Have you thought about that? Crucifixion of a Saviour is hardly something that would be made up for crucifixion, universally, was seen as shameful and degrading, as it was designed to be, a testament to the victim's powerlessness and humiliation before the might of an all powerful, all conquering, Rome.

That attitude was so ingrained that Paul could say that

Paul – 1 Cor. 1:17, 22-23

1 Corinthians 1: ¹⁸ For **the word of the cross is foolishness** to those who are perishing, but it is the power of God to us who are being saved.

And that preaching Christ crucified was

²² For the Jews ask for signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, **a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles.**

But Jesus was crucified and Paul reminds them that they shared in that action

And then makes this startling claim about the betrayal, torture and humiliation of Jesus

he was delivered up according to God's determined plan and foreknowledge

Those events and Jesus' death were not just random, bad luck, an unfortunate mistake

Nor were they the crowd just getting their way, the religious authorities working out their envy.

God was at work

It was His will, determined and revealed long ago, that the Christ should die

That death was purposeful in God's plan, that, in Jesus' words, He should give His life as a ransom for many, the price paid to set people free from sin and death [Mark 10:45],

Or, as Paul summarised it, that He should die for our sins.

And then, stunningly, Peter says of the crucified Jesus

²⁴ *God raised him up, ending the pains of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by death.*

Peter insists on this

³² *"God has raised this Jesus; we are all witnesses of this.*

Insists on the reality of the resurrection because he and the other apostles witnessed the risen Jesus. Peter is preaching the risen Jesus on the basis of personal experience.

Peter repeats this claim to be a witness of the risen Jesus when in Acts 10 he talks with Cornelius. Here we see the kind of experience that convinced Peter and the other apostles that the Jesus they had seen killed and buried was alive in the body in which He had died.

Acts 10: ⁴⁰ God raised up this man on the third day and caused him to be seen, ⁴¹ not by all the people, but by us whom God appointed as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

Peter is saying Jesus is risen because He has seen Him and eaten with Him.

This is also the testimony of the gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the written witness of the apostles to Jesus.

Their testimony is not that they were expecting to meet Jesus alive again, but that they needed convincing.

And their testimony is not that they felt the influence of Jesus on their lives was continuing and so great that it could only be explained and communicated to others by saying that He had some kind of continuing life

And their testimony is not that Jesus had some kind of miraculous escape from dying – because he was swapped out on the way to the cross, or only fainted on the cross and revived in the tomb.

Their testimony is that they had seen Him killed and buried, and, if you read the gospels, that they were shattered and afraid

But then Jesus, whom they had known intimately for the past three years, appeared to them

He spoke with them

Told them to touch Him

Showed them His wounds

Ate with them on multiple occasions

That having been dead He was fully, powerfully, alive

In the same body in which He had died with the wounds still visible, but now transformed, no longer subject to the same kind of limitations we know in this life – able to appear behind closed doors, to ascend to heaven

And His resurrection was not like that of Lazarus, coming back to this life to die again.

Jesus' resurrection was the prelude to His public enthronement, to eternal life in God's presence.

Risen, He has done with death forever and entered into His reign

³³ *Therefore, since he has been exalted to the right hand of God*

He has been exalted to God's right hand

The right hand doesn't mean God has a body.

A way of speaking that says Jesus has the position of authority in the court of God, that the authority He now exercises is the authority of the living God – in judgement and mercy

As Peter says later

Acts 10:⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins."

As the risen Jesus said to His apostles

Matt 28:18 All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me

Pause

Think for a moment – all authority

Authority over nature

Authority over all spiritual forces

Authority over the wicked who reject Him

Authority over human history

Authority to enact the judgements of heaven

Authority to forgive, to declare now the judgement of the final day.

Is that how you think of Jesus, as He is – the one with all authority, whose word rules the universe?

Not some pale figure of history, an intriguing character in an ancient story, a wise teacher

But the awesome, living One who reigns and rules.

And as the one with all authority Jesus, says Peter, is the One who gives the promised Holy Spirit, whose coming to Jesus' followers testifies to that exaltation [Romans 1:4, John 16:5-15].

and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, he has poured out what you both see and hear.

What does mean that Jesus pours out God's Spirit on His followers?

That Jesus is the giver of ecstatic experiences?

Much more

The Lord Jesus is the giver of the Spirit promised in the Old Testament

For example in Ezekiel 36 where God says

Ezekiel 36:²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances.

The Spirit is bringer of new life from God

Who takes dead hearts and makes them living hearts, that can love God

Who makes people God's people in truth, those who do His will

And again in Isaiah

*Isaiah 32:¹⁴ For the palace will be deserted,
the busy city abandoned.
The hill and the watchtower will become
barren places forever,
the joy of wild donkeys,
and a pasture for flocks,
¹⁵ until the Spirit from on high is poured out on us.
Then the desert will become an orchard,
and the orchard will seem like a forest.
¹⁶ Then justice will inhabit the wilderness,
and righteousness will dwell in the orchard.

¹⁷ The result of righteousness will be peace;
the effect of righteousness
will be quiet confidence forever.
¹⁸ Then my people will dwell in a peaceful place,
in safe and secure dwellings.*

The coming of the Spirit is the reversal of the deserved judgement of God on rebellious people,

who not only makes the desert of our barren souls bloom with the good fruit of peace and righteousness

But guarantees to those who receive the Spirit a place in the Kingdom of God, participation in God's coming reign of peace where God's people *will dwell in a peaceful place,
in safe and secure dwellings.*

The Spirit is that guarantee for the Spirit is the life of the age to come.

Jesus is the one who, in giving the Spirit, determines who are God's people, who will live at peace forever in God's Kingdom

And in speaking of these things to His Jewish audience Peter has been reminding them throughout that these are events both spoken about by God beforehand and now fulfilled by Jesus, as he has quoted from Joel 2, Psalm 16, Psalm 110 – words spoken and written hundreds of years before.

The ministry, death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus is the work and plan of Israel's God, the Creator of heaven and earth

And Peter concludes by saying these events, including the pouring out of the Spirit which his hearers themselves were witnessing established Jesus' identity and reign, His forever authority

³⁴ *For it was not David who ascended into the heavens, but he himself says:*

The Lord declared to my Lord,

'Sit at my right hand

³⁵ until I make your enemies your footstool.'

³⁶ *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."*

Jesus is Lord – the exalted Lord of Psalm 110, to whom all His enemies, even death, will be subjected [1 Cor. 15:25-27], the one who rules all things with the authority of the LORD, the God of Israel

No one will be able to usurp or end His rule.

He is mightier and more enduring than any Caesar, any human power, any spiritual power

His will will be done

As Paul says, every knee will bow to Him [Phil. 2:10-11]

And Jesus is the Christ, the promised successor to David, the one who secures victory for His people

Of whom Isaiah said

Isaiah 9:7 Of the increase of his government and of peace

there will be no end,

on the throne of David and over his kingdom,

to establish it and to uphold it

with justice and with righteousness

from this time forth and forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

What is the Christian message, the witness of the apostles to Jesus?

Jesus was a real man who lived and ministered in first century Judaea

He was crucified, and that crucifixion was the will of God

He has been raised from the dead

He reigns with the authority of the Creator God, and is the giver of the Spirit, the life of the age to come, the never dying life

These are not nice ideas, but witnessed reality, what has happened

Events that are True, and known to be true in the way we know anything to be true – by what they experienced – saw, heard, touched

Truth that has consequences v. 37-41

An urgent need v. 37

³⁷ When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?”

Peter gets to this conclusion about Jesus, that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, and consternation breaks out in his hearers.

They get what this means, what are the consequences for them of Jesus being who He is.

They get that they have been terribly foolish in opposing Jesus.

More, that they were people who had brought upon themselves the wrath of God for opposing, killing, His Christ and were in a desperate situation.

We can understand their concern

To know that the one whose killing you had supported is the one who decides the eternal fate of each person; more, is the one who can alone bring what you as a Jew were longing for – God’s Kingdom, peace, security, life

Is to know you are in deep trouble

Jesus being Lord and Christ was a truth of great consequence for them

But not just for them

It is a truth with consequences for all

Jesus is Lord and judge of all

He is the Lord and judge of those who want to worship gods of their own making, and not their creator

So they should also be asking “what should we do”

For those man made gods, our idols – whether they are statues in temples or the idols of our hearts – our reason, our money, our freedom – to whom we give our trust and loyalty – have no power and authority to rescue us from His judgements, for Jesus has all authority, and no power to give what Jesus alone can give – life and peace in the face of death [Acts 17:30-31]

And if you have been living as if there is no god, maybe even claiming there is no god, you too should be asking ‘what should we do’

You may not think of yourself in the same category as the first hearers, as Christ killers, people who had set themselves in opposition to someone they could never beat

But in your determination to be accountable for your life only to yourself, in your heart you are the ally of those who wanted to get Jesus out of the way, those now confronted with the truth their efforts had failed, that Jesus is Lord

Your efforts will also fail

If you have been ignoring Jesus

Jesus can't be ignored. He lives, and you will meet Him

If misusing God's good creation

He will call you to account

If disobeying, knowing how God says you should live but choosing to do otherwise – whether that is with your words, or your money or your sexual activity

You will be judged by His word, which is true and sure for He is Lord, not by your own opinions, for your standards will never be substituted for gods.

Just as Jesus being Lord and Christ had consequences for the first hearers, so it has consequences for us all – for every one who wants to live ignoring, disobeying, rejecting Jesus

It tells us those choices, that way of life – is doomed, will bring us death - eternally, not the life we are seeking

But there is another consequence of Jesus being who He is, and this is why the Christian message is gospel, good news

A sure and good promise vv. 38-39 [Acts 10:42-43, 13:38-39]

³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

As Lord and Christ Jesus is the judge, and He has the authority not only to condemn but to pardon

To forgive

And He has the authority to give the Holy Spirit, that new life, eternal life

And through His apostles He says He will forgive and give His Spirit

To those who ‘repent and are baptised,’ that is to those who repent and believe the witness of the apostles, for to be baptised is to confess your faith in Jesus, your believing in Jesus

As so much hangs on it let me explain what it is to repent and believe

TO repent is to change your mind and so change the direction of your life.

It is to change your mind about who is rightfully in charge – to say Jesus is Lord, not me, not my desires and feelings, not my idols.

And when you change your mind, you will change your direction. Instead of moving away from God, trying to get away from Him as far as possible so you can do whatever you want without thinking of Him, you will turn back to Him and acknowledge that He has the right to rule your life

And to believe is to both believe that the witness of the apostles, what they say about Jesus is true – that He lived, died, rose and reigned

And it is also on the basis of the truth of their witness believe Jesus’ promises and to call out to Him, for He lives, to do for you what He promises to all – to forgive you and give you His Spirit

And He will

This is why being a Christian is so good

Jesus forgives those who repent and believe – not just some of our sins, but all our sin, forgives for all time, for His is the judgement of God, and the forgiveness of God. And so forgiven believers in Jesus no longer fear God's judgement, and are freed from the fear of death – for they are at peace with God

And Jesus gives new life, the new life of the Spirit which changes us not to live lives of love, and which will continue into resurrection life, the Spirit who assures believers we are God's children, loved by our Father

And we have this good securely.

As Jesus lives with all authority, the Lord and Christ reigning at the Father's right hand, His promises are sure

And because the witness of the apostles is always true, and the consequences of Jesus' exaltation are always true

The Christian message always makes an appropriate appeal

An always appropriate appeal v. 40

⁴⁰ *With many other words he testified and strongly urged them, saying, "Be saved from this corrupt generation!"*

Corrupt has the sense of crooked or perverse.

And that is true of this generation, the inhabitants of our world who will not receive their Lord – then and now .

This generation is so full of contradictions

Then In the name of worshipping God, they killed His Son

Now, in the name of seeking truth in the world, our own truth, we reject the truth of Jesus

In the name of freedom, we reject the only one who can make us truly free and enslave ourselves to our own desires

That corruption can only have one end when Jesus is revealed as He is, Lord and Christ. Those who persevere in it will have no share of the life He brings as they are judged justly and condemned forever

To this generation Peter, and the gospel, appeals

be saved, be rescued from sharing in the fate of those whose hatred of God their Creator extends to killing His Christ, rescued from those who persist in ignoring, disobeying, rejecting the Lord, Jesus

How? God has already said

**Acts 2:²¹ *Then everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.***

Rescued, saved, not by our own efforts at reform, but by the mercy He will show to all who call out to Him, by the forgiveness He gives

And calling out is that – Jesus lives, He hears when you ask Him for help

The always true message 1 Cor. 15:1-5

This is the Christian message, the Christian gospel

It is all about Jesus

The Christian message is

Not Jesus loves you and wants you to have a happy life – a message all about you

It is not Somehow everything will work out ok in the end because God in some kind of vague way will recognise you meant well

It's not God will be nice to you if you try and be nice to Him

But God has made this Jesus

Jesus the real man who lived in first century Judaea

Who was crucified

Who was raised from the dead

Who has been exalted now to reign over all

God has made this Jesus Lord and Christ

Sometimes different parts of this message receive more emphasis

Sometimes in the apostles' preaching different points of connection are made with the hearers

But this is the Christian message, the witness of the apostles

And as witness it is always true

As true today as when Peter first spoke it, as when those first hearers responded to it in their thousands v. 41

And its consequences remain true. Rebellion against this Jesus will never win and just doom you, but Jesus will always forgive and give the Spirit to all who call on Him for HE has all authority, the authority to judge and forgive, for ever.

And as true it still demands a response

Still demanding a response

And I want to talk now to those who have not yet believed in Jesus.

I hope you see that the witness of the apostles to Jesus demands a response.

What you think about Jesus isn't going to change who He is or undermine His authority.

We didn't make Him Lord. He is not Lord because many of us want to make Him Lord.

We can't stop Him being Lord

He is the ever living Lord, and you will meet Him

But He is still the good Lord, offering forgiveness and the new life of the Spirit to all who will repent and believe, to all who call on Him

That might be you today

That God has convicted you as you listened to the witness of the apostles, to them speaking of what they saw and heard, that

Jesus lives and reigns

And you know you need to make peace with Him – because of your folly in the past of opposing Him, ignoring Him, disobeying Him

You can do that today, by asking Him to do for you what He has promised, forgive you and give you His Spirit.

It really is asking – some people call it praying because we can't see Jesus physically present with us, but He is here

Praying "Lord Jesus I have been wrong to live pleasing myself and not listening to you. Please forgive me and give me your Spirit, Make me one of your people."

He will hear

And then tell someone, a believer you know, because the Lord Jesus expects His people to love and help each other – and we would love to do that.

But maybe you are not yet a believer and as you've been listening you've been disturbed, unsettled, challenged by the witness of the apostles

By its clarity, insistence, and urgency – but are not sure if you should act on Peter's urging

Wondering, say, how you can know the apostles are telling the truth

That was easier for the first hearers, who could just ask them

But you have questions - like how you can know that what we read in the gospels and acts is a truthful record

And other questions

Find out more

Get in touch with Andy, or Clinton, or I

Fill out the communicate form on the web site and let us know you would like to find out more

Ask a Christian you know to read a life of Jesus with you

Don't put it off

Don't choose to ignore the witness of the apostles because you think you are too busy, or you fear that if it really is true it would mean you would have to change too many things

Eternity is a long time to regret not acting on what you have heard

And Christ appeals to you through His word, Be saved from this corrupt generation

But now I want to talk to those of you who are believers

As you've listened again to the witness of the apostles, been reminded of the consequences of the truth that Jesus is Lord and Christ,

I hope you have remembered and been moved to thankfulness for the gifts you have been given in believing the gospel – forever forgiveness and the gift of God’s Spirit, the gift of new and ever living life

To be shared urgently

More, I hope you recognise that this is a witness to be shared with all, and that all should be urged to respond to the truth of the gospel

That this is something our Lord Jesus wants us to do – His gospel brought to the ends of the earth

That love compels us to do, for being saved by Jesus is wonderful, and persisting in a doomed rebellion dreadful – robbing of peace and life now and forever

Sharing the witness of the apostles is something that all of us can always do

Whether or not our lives are perfect, whether or not we think we have all the answers

It is news. Its truth does not depend on us. True then, it is true forever

But this year, in about five weeks, we have an opportunity to share the gospel together in the meet Jesus mission

And all of us have a part in that

We can all Pray – pray for our friends, two for two. Pray for those of us who will be speaking – that we would be faithful, clear, and bold. Pray for those who hear, that the Lord would open their eyes to Jesus’ glory

Invite. Invite to the Sunday meeting Aug 4th to Sept 8th. If you think your friends might be uncomfortable coming to church, why not invite them to BundyLive before, as a relaxed way of becoming familiar with us

Commit to being here on those Sundays. Always lots going on in our lives – but having the auditorium full of people who want to listen to God’s word makes it easier for those visiting to feel comfortable listening, and it is good to be in group of people who sing wholeheartedly, and it is helpful to those who bring friends if there are others they can introduce them to.

Why not plan together to do something afterwards, like lunch

Be ready to Serve, conscious that people may be forming an impression about the Lord we serve by their interactions with us

Serve even in the cleaning bee helping to make our building welcoming

The gospel, the witness of the apostles, is Saving news our Lord who has saved us wants all to hear, to the ends of the earth, and sharing it is something we have the privilege of sharing in together