

# Acts 2:22-47: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Preacher: Alastair Roberts

- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Acts chapter 2, verses 22 to 47. Men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.
- This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.
- For David says concerning him, I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced.
- My flesh also will dwell in hope, for you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life. You will make me full of gladness with your presence.
- Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.
- [ 1 : 1 8 ] This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.
- For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.
- Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brothers, what shall we do? And Peter said to them, Repent and be baptised, 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, for the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are afar off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.
- And with many other words he bore witness, and continued to exhort them, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation. So those who received his word were baptised, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.
- And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers. And all came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.
- [ 2 : 3 9 ] And all who believed were together, and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings, and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together, and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God, and having favour with all the people.

And the Lord added to their number day by day, those who were being saved. On the day of Pentecost, in Acts chapter 2, Peter preaches to the crowd that has gathered to see the spectacle of the disciples speaking in tongues.

He declares the fact of Jesus of Nazareth's ministry, divinely attested with mighty works, wonders, and signs, his death divinely appointed by the determined plan and foreknowledge of God, and his resurrection divinely accomplished, as it was not possible for death to hold him.

In Jesus, God has bared his arm. He's demonstrated his power in miracles and great deeds, through his ability to use the actions of his adversaries to achieve his own ends, and through the impotence of the grave to arrest him.

The very thing that the Jewish leaders presumed would destroy Jesus, was the divinely intended means of his victory, determined by God in every particular beforehand. Peter quotes Psalm 16 verses 8 to 11, where David provides testimony for Peter's claim that Jesus is the Messiah.

[ 3 : 58 ] These verses are also used by Paul in his sermon in Acts 13. Acts 13 verses 26 to 39 has pretty much the same pattern as Peter's Pentecost sermon. These provide two examples of the preaching of the early church, and how important these themes were within it.

Psalm 16, like many other passages used in the New Testament as witnesses to Jesus, is one that seems strange to us. It seems like an over-reading of the text by Peter. However, such a way of reading was not unique to Christians, and some Jewish readings understood the meaning of the text to refer to the Messiah, who would rise from David.

Such an understanding emerges quite naturally from the promise of the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel chapter 7 verses 12 to 16. When your days are fulfilled, and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men.

But my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.

[ 5 : 17 ] The underlying themes are clear here. David would descend to his grave and lie with his fathers, but David the dynasty, coming from his own body, would be raised up and endure forever.

In Jesus, the son of David, David is raised up as a dynasty and as a body. Isaiah speaks of this in chapter 11 verses 1 to 10, speaking of a time when the Davidic dynasty, which has seemingly perished beyond all hope of return, buried in the grave of exile, would be raised up and would flourish.

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his root shall bear fruit, and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.

And he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

[ 6 : 25 ] The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together, and the little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples, of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. The bold statements of Psalm 16 are but weakly fulfilled in the deliverances of David's own life.

David seems to be speaking of rescue from a far more terrible foe. If David the individual is the only subject of Psalm 16, then it is all very anticlimactic. For all of its bold words, David lies in the grave.

Yet when we read the Psalm more closely, we might get a hint that it is about something much greater. It is about the body of the king in the fuller sense, about the dynasty arising from him, about the beautiful inheritance that God has determined for him.

[ 7 : 36 ] Knowing that God had promised him an everlasting kingdom, his psalm of praise spoke of something beyond merely the ways in which God delivered him from death on occasions in his own life. It glorified God for his assurance of a dynasty arising from him that would not be ended by death, a dynasty secured in the raised body of Christ, the body of the son of David, also the political body of a people that participate in his life.

We see this in Romans chapter 1 verses 1 to 4. Paul, the servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning his son, who was descended from David according to the flesh, and was declared to be the son of God in power, according to the spirit of holiness, by his resurrection from the dead.

The grave eventually swallows all kingdoms and empires, yet in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of David is raised, and a king who has conquered death itself is set on the throne.

Jesus may have been raised from the dead, but that presents the obvious question of where he is now. From resurrection then, Peter turns to the ascension. Jesus was exalted to God's right hand, and the events of Pentecost are an initial demonstration and proof of the fact that Jesus is at God's right hand.

Jesus pours out his spirit with dramatic phenomena that are evident to onlookers. As the multitude witness men and women speaking under divine inspiration in languages not their own, it is evident that something remarkable has happened.

[ 9 : 09 ] The spirit is confirming the message of the ascension. The spirit is also the promised spirit, promised in the scriptures in places like Joel 2, which Peter has just quoted.

It is also promised in passages like Ezekiel chapter 36, verses 25 to 28. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules.

You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your guard. It is also promised in the ministry of John the Baptist, in Luke chapter 3, verses 16 to 17.

John answered them all, saying, I baptise you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

- [ 10 : 12 ] His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into his barn. But the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. The Spirit was also promised by Jesus himself, in Acts chapter 1, verse 8, for you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

The ascension is a fulfilment of the words of Psalm 110, verse 1, the most frequently quoted verse from the Old Testament in the entirety of the New. The Lord says to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.

Once again, the words of David are being quoted. Once again, they cannot refer to David himself, but refer to some greater person to whom David himself bears witness. In Luke chapter 20, verses 41 to 44, Jesus himself had tested the scribes with this verse.

But he said to them, How can they say that the Christ is David's son? For David himself says in the book of Psalms, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.

David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son? A careful reading of the Psalms will reveal that Jesus is the fulfilment of the promises concerning David's kingdom. In light of all of this, the situation of the hearers can be seen in its true horror.

- [ 11 : 33 ] They had crucified the very one that God had made Lord and Messiah. Their response is one of great concern. They ask the apostles and disciples whether there is anything that they can do to escape the judgment that surely awaits them.

Peter charges them to repent and be baptised, promising that they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit if they do so. John's baptism had been a baptism for repentance in anticipation of the future gift of the Spirit.

Now baptism and the gift of the Spirit are offered together. Those baptised now are being plugged into the community of Pentecost, being made part of a new community that is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

This baptism is administered in the name of Jesus Christ by his authority and into union with him. It would seal to all who responded to the message of the apostles in faith and repentance the forgiveness of their sins.

The gift of the Spirit given here is not spiritual gifts, but the single gift of the personal presence of the Spirit within us both individually and communally, a presence that is ministered for the building up of the church in the exercise of his manifold gifts in mutual service.

- [ 12 : 42 ] Peter alludes to Old Testament scripture in speaking about the extent of the promise. Isaiah chapter 57 verse 19 Peace, peace to the far and to the near, says the Lord, and I will heal him.

And Joel chapter 2 verse 32, a verse located immediately after those that he quoted in his sermon. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls. Peter had earlier spoken about the way that those who called upon the name of the Lord would be saved, referring to Christ.

Now he speaks about God calling people. God's call is the effective summons of the proclamation of God's kingdom, the gospel message, which assembles people to him.

This is addressed not merely to the house of Israel, but also to people afar off, both Jews of the dispersion and Gentiles. In context, Peter's reference to the promise being for them and for their children is most immediately a reference to the house of Israel.

[ 13 : 47 ] However, many have seen in this a suggestion borne out elsewhere in Acts that the gospel message does not address us merely as detached individuals, but as members of households and peoples, whose response to the word is at once collective and individual.

The children of those who respond favourably are implicated in their parents' response, which they in their turn are expected increasingly to internalise as they mature. Peter charges his hearers to act, expressing the severity of the situation and the urgency of their response.

He describes them as members of a crooked generation, much as Christ himself had in passages like Luke 9 verse 41 and 11 verse 29. Devastating judgment will fall upon them before the generation has ended, and it is imperative that they respond while they still can.

The response to Peter's message was dramatic and remarkable. 3,000 people responded. As 3,000 had been killed at Sinai, now 3,000 are brought to new life.

Those who responded to his word were baptised and devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the fellowship of the church, to prayer, and to the breaking of bread. In this description we see all of the core elements of the life of the church.

[ 15 : 00 ] Baptism, leading into a life under the apostolic teaching, fellowship with each other in the body of Christ, most notably in the celebration of the Eucharist, and prayer together. The baptism of such a large number of people wouldn't have been unreasonable given the very large number of pools within the city of Jerusalem, although I really don't think that we need to presume that all of the baptisms occurred in that single day.

The people respond with a sense of fear and awe. It is clear that God is doing something remarkable in their midst, and this is further demonstrated by the many wonders and signs that are being done through the apostles confirming their message.

The original Feast of Pentecost, like the year of Jubilee, had concerns of economic justice near its heart. In Leviticus chapter 23, verses 21 to 22, Israel was directed to celebrate the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost in a way that has special regard for the poor of the land.

And you shall make a proclamation on the same day. You shall hold a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a statute forever in all your dwelling places throughout your generations.

And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner.

[ 16 : 17 ] I am the Lord your God. In a similar way, Deuteronomy chapter 16, verses 10 to 12, underlines the importance of the Feast of Pentecost as a time where the poor were especially recognized.

Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the Lord your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the Lord your God blesses you. And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your towns, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you, at the place that the Lord your God will choose to make his name dwell there.

You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes. Pentecost was also a sort of mini-Jubilee. Jubilee was the time when all of the poor of the land were restored to their ancestral properties, the life of the early Jerusalem church, where things were held in common, and rich and poor alike shared in the goodness of God's gifts, was something of a fulfillment of this.

As we read further, it seems that this wasn't a denial of private property, so much as a community of common concern. In having all things in common, they acted like a large or extended family, where individuals might have their own private property, which they were free to dispose of as they wished, but many resources were voluntarily pooled or mutually provided at the points where they were most needed.

We should also note the power of selling property in Jerusalem as a prophetic symbol. Jesus had foretold the destruction of Jerusalem within a generation, so his followers liquidated their property.

[ 17 : 53 ] When thousands of people in a city of likely well under 100,000 people did this, the population in general would sit up and start to pay attention. Jerusalem, we must remember, was also uniquely positioned as a city, as a site of frequent pilgrimage for Jews and proselytes, and also a city uniquely situated as a meeting place of east and west, north and south.

There were probably 2 to 4 million Jews outside of Palestine at the time, with only about 1 million within it. The death and resurrection of Christ, and now Pentecost, had occurred around the time of pilgrimage festivals, during which time Jerusalem's population would have swollen with visitors for the feasts.

At such times, Jerusalem could be like a dandelion clock, from which new doctrines and movements could fly to all corners of the empire on the four winds of heaven. The early church's practice seemed to have involved regular attendance of the temple, which provided lots of room for congregating as a group, along with meetings in private houses.

Later in Acts chapter 5 verse 12, we see that the disciples regularly met together in the precincts of the temple, in Solomon's portico, which was on the eastern side of the outer court of the temple.

Perhaps this location was chosen not merely for reasons of practicality, but also as the site from which the waters of the Spirit were expected to flow, according to the prophecy of Ezekiel chapter 47 verses 1 to 2.

[ 19 : 17 ] Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the temple faced east. The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar.

Then he brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east, and behold, the water was trickling out on the south side. The disciples have glad and generous hearts as they receive their food.

Common meals had been an important theme throughout the Gospel of Luke, and now in the book of Acts they also retain importance, although an importance that is shaped by new events.

After the resurrection, Jesus had demonstrated that he was alive to his disciples by sharing meals with them. While we typically think of the celebration of the supper in the light of the Last Supper as a memorial of Christ's death, we must also recognize the importance of the breaking of bread as a way in which Christ demonstrated that he was alive, the celebration of shared meals of which the breaking of bread was a central element, recalled Christ's presentation of himself as alive to the disciples in the joyful resurrection feasts, those shared meals that occurred between the resurrection and the ascension.

All of this might also make us think of the appropriate character of the covenant people in relationship to the Lord and to their neighbours in places like Deuteronomy chapter 26. They are a community of joy, of thanksgiving, contentment, generosity, at peace with and honoured by all around.

[ 20 : 48 ] In Luke's Gospel we have a number of formulaic descriptions of the growth of John the Baptist and Jesus as young children. These follow the pattern of 1 Samuel. Now we can see an example of a corresponding expression for the growth of the church, which might also recall Old Testament descriptions of the multiplication of Israel's population.

A question to consider, how might the early Jerusalem churches' approach to their shared meals and their sharing of possessions be a response to the teaching and example of Christ as it is described in the Gospel of Luke?

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