



Acts 2.¹⁴⁻²¹— meditation 1

¹⁴But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, “Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: ¹⁵for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. ¹⁶But this is that which was spoken by the prophet a Joel;

¹⁷And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God,
I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh:
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams:

¹⁸And on my servants and on my handmaidens
I will pour out in those days of my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy:

¹⁹And I will shew wonders in heaven above,
and signs in the earth beneath;
blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:

²⁰The sun shall be turned into darkness,
and the moon into blood,
before that great and notable day of the Lord come:

²¹And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

This meditation is the first of a series of meditations devoted to the earliest Christian sermons as found in the Book of Acts. This sermon, found in Acts 2.¹⁴⁻³⁶, was the very first recorded sermon of the 1st century A.D. Christian church. Peter delivered this sermon on the day of Pentecost, just fifty days after Jesus’ death and resurrection, to an audience that witnessed Jesus’ disciples speaking “with other tongues.”¹ In this meditation, we have a look at the first half of this sermon.

We observe, first, that this very first of all recorded Christian sermons begins with a quotation from the Hebrew Bible—specifically, Joel 2.²⁸⁻³². This observation serves to remind us that these first Christians were Jews, and that, as Jews, they saw themselves and the movement of which they were a part as a continuation of the Jewish tradition with the sacred Hebrew writings as a standard of truth and proof of their movement’s inspiration.

It also reminds us, more generally and more importantly, of the centrality of scripture in the disciple’s life and in their messaging of truth to others. Scripture is the standard. It begins and ends all our religious thoughts, speculations, beliefs, and teachings. It is impossible to calculate the value of scripture and all

¹ Acts 2.⁴

that we can learn and do through the instruction God so mercifully offers therein. But, here are a few that stand out to me.

Scripture provides insights into the meaning of events that occur in our lives. It provides warning against the many and varied spiritual dangers that infest this mortal existence. It bears witness to the existence and incomparable character of God. It testifies that this incomparable God is aware of and interested in human affairs—large and small, individual and societal. It bears witness that this incomparable God feels a deep love and commitment to those who inhabit this earth and that He willingly, happily, and intimately involves Himself in human affairs. He lives and involves Himself in their lives in hopes of advancing and improving their lives, both here and beyond. He reveals Himself and His character so that we might know what it is He wants and intends to make of us.

It is impossible to overestimate the value and importance of scripture in and to our lives. Beyond doubt, scripture is truly one of the greatest gifts God has bestowed upon mortals. His bestowal of this gift is one of the greatest of all God's acts of mercy, grace, and love. In Peter's early use of scripture as justification for the new movement's existence and proof of its power, it seems to us, Peter recognizes and reinforces the importance of the word of God. This reminds us that, in like manner, the Lord's latter-day work is built on scripture and the impact it had on one young boy's search to know his "state and standing before God" and what God would have him do and with the life God had granted him.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 27, 2024)

Acts 2.¹⁴⁻²¹— Meditation 2

¹⁴But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, “Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: ¹⁵for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. ¹⁶But this is that which was spoken by the prophet a Joel;

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²⁰The sun shall be turned into darkness,
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before that great and notable day of the Lord come:

²¹And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

This meditation is the second of a series of meditations devoted to the earliest Christian sermons as recorded in the Book of Acts. This sermon, found in Acts 2.¹⁴⁻³⁶, was the very first recorded sermon of the 1st century A.D. Christian church. Peter delivered this sermon on the day of Pentecost, just fifty days after Jesus’ death and resurrection, to an audience that witnessed Jesus’ disciples speaking “with other tongues.”² In this meditation, we have a look at the first half of the sermon.

In our first meditation we found it significant that the very first recorded Christian sermon relied heavily on scripture as evidence of the new movement’s legitimacy and power. We suggested that this reliance on scripture can serve as example to all of us. Scripture should be the basis of all our private religious thinking and all the religious messaging in which we engage with others.

In this meditation, we want to consider the specific scripture that Peter quoted at the very beginning of Christianity’s history of preaching. It was a sizable and multi-cultural multitude that witnessed simple, back-water Galileans speaking in tongues in such a manner that all understood their words regardless of their language. All who witnessed this wonder were “amazed and marveled.” There were some who mocked.³

Peter expresses his own wonderment at the multitude’s amazement. Had not the prophet, Joel, spoken centuries earlier of God’s willingness and ability to reveal himself to and through any individual and all classes of people: male and female, young and old, bond and free? Indeed, Jesus’ entire ministry was a confirmation of this prophetic insight. He revealed the nature of God through the unclean leper and the deaf and the blind and the possessed and the sinner, even sinners whose sins were many. He found revelations and sermons in mere babes, in those who candidly and openly confessed their sinfulness, in

² Acts 2.⁴

³ See Acts 2.⁷⁻¹³

publicans, in gentiles who believed he could heal their loved ones from a distance, in widows who paid a meager tithe of a single mite, in thieves hanging on crosses next to him, and in many others. As for Peter, not long after his first recorded sermon, he would extend God's ministry to gentiles, who would reveal things about God never before imagined.

Yes, Jesus' disciples of all periods have often resisted the expansive nature of God's inclusiveness. It was no time at all before Paul was silencing women, a desire that has raised and continues to raise its ugly head over and over in ways extreme and subtle. God's people have and do constantly attempt to tame and domesticate God by restricting those through whom God can and does speak and act. But God will not be tamed. He is constantly expanding the groups through whom he reveals his expansive and inclusive character. It is highly likely that he is not finished yet. Our challenge is to accept God's own expansive inclusiveness without wonder and certainly without ridicule, and then go and do likewise.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 27, 2024)

Acts 2.¹⁴⁻²¹— Meditation 3

¹⁴But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, “Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: ¹⁵for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. ¹⁶But this is that which was spoken by the prophet a Joel;

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²¹And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Many foreign visitors to Jerusalem were “amazed and marvelled” when they heard, in their own language, simple, uneducated Galileans’ preach the word of God “with other tongues.”⁴ But Peter reminded them that they ought not to wonder at God’s ability to use these “hicks,” because God had revealed centuries earlier that he was able and willing to use people of all types and classes—male and female, young and old, bond and free—to reveal Himself and His ways. This reminder, as the initial statement of the first recorded Christian sermon, might serve to clue listeners then and readers now into one of the central purposes of Jesus and a Christianity that is true to him: expansion of salvation to far wider audiences and inclusion of heretofore excluded populations in the promulgation of that message of expansion and inclusion.

But, all of that was not to say that there were not reasons for amazement and marvelment at the labors of God in behalf of human salvation and advancement. God had warned centuries earlier that, as always, those who kept a watch on God should expect “wonders” and “signs.” They would be seen throughout nature and the cosmos.

“And I will shew wonders in heaven above,
and signs in the earth beneath.”

Nothing was or is too big or too small for God to use to send messages and to save. We are particularly interested in God’s “wonders” and “signs” as instruments of deliverance. Although it is a short list, Joel’s “blood, and fire, and vapour” and “darkness,” it seems, should send one’s mind back thousands of years to Moses and the “signs” and “wonders” God used to deliver Israel from Egyptian oppression and slavery. Through his quotation of Joel with Joel’s allusion to Moses and the “signs” and “wonders” that were central to his mission of deliverance, Peter reminds his hearers that there are still oppressive powers on

⁴ Acts 2.⁴

earth and in heaven that seek to hamper, capture, ensnare, and enslave those who would follow God. In addition, he reminds them that God intended to undermine those oppressive powers and deliver those who seek Him from those oppressive powers. And he would do so, as so often, with “signs” and “wonders.”

So, the reality of God’s deliverance through “signs” and “wonders” was true in the time of Moses. It was true in Joel’s day. It was true, as we will see in the following verses, in Jesus’ day. It was true in Peter’s day. Indeed, it was and is true in every day, including our own. There are still, today, cosmic powers and earthly powers inspired by them that oppress and seek to enslave and destroy. But God will, as he did to Egypt, undo all their machinations through “signs” and “wonders.”

“And verily I say unto you, the rest of my servants, go ye forth as your circumstances shall permit, in your several callings, unto the great and notable cities and villages, reprovng the world in righteousness of all their unrighteous and ungodly deeds, setting forth clearly and understandingly the desolation of abomination in the last days. For, with you saith the Lord Almighty, I will rend their kingdoms; I will not only shake the earth, but the starry heavens shall tremble.”⁵

“And thus, with the sword and by bloodshed the inhabitants of the earth shall mourn; and with famine, and plague, and earthquake, and the thunder of heaven, and the fierce and vivid lightning also, shall the inhabitants of the earth be made to feel the wrath, and indignation, and chastening hand of an Almighty God, until the consumption decreed hath made a full end of all nations...”⁶

I don’t know about you, but the current state of earthly affairs grows increasingly intolerable making me feel that it is time for the “consumption decreed.” I am under no illusions that it will be easy or pleasant or comfortable. It will not be pretty. I expect to feel the hard times as much as the next person. Nevertheless, I know in whom I trust. I hope to be one of those who “call on the name of the Lord” and are saved by Him, even if it so be through “signs” and “wonders.”

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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⁵ DC 84.¹¹⁷⁻¹¹⁸

⁶ DC 87.⁶