

THE FIRST SERMON (PART I): THE GOSPEL MESSAGE ACTS 02:14–24

Introduction

This is the first sermon ever preached in the new church age, after Jesus' ascension and Pentecost, that is, after the coming of the Holy Spirit. If men would preach what is preached here, what a difference would exist in men's lives, in the church, and in world history. (Because of its length and the time limit placed on preachers in the churches of so many industrialized societies, the message preached by Peter is split into three studies.)

- I. Infilled believers (vv. 14-16).
- II. These are the last days, the days of God's last work on earth (vv. 17-21).
- III. This is the day of God's Saviour: Jesus of Nazareth (vv. 22-24).

I. Acts 02:14–16 *Infilling of the Holy Spirit*

The believers were infilled. The disciples were so full of the Holy Spirit, so full of God's presence and joy, they could only...

- act excited.
 - speak about the wonderful works of God (see Acts 2:11).
 - express joy and rejoicing in what God had done.
 - demonstrate absolute confidence, assurance and conviction of God's presence and eternal salvation.
 - bear testimony to all who would listen.
1. Such behaviour required an explanation. It was not common behaviour, not among a people who lived in a world of trials, uncertainty, struggles, suffering and death; a people who knew their world was such, but who evaded the fact and did all they could to escape the reality of it. A person who demonstrated absolute confidence and conviction of God's presence and of eternal salvation had to explain himself.
 - a. Some in the world were amazed at such behaviour and wished to know what it meant. An answer was required (see Acts 2:12).
 - b. Others mocked, jokingly suggesting that such behaviour *was crazy and foolish*, just like the behaviour of a drunken man; and they, too, were due an answer (see Acts 2:13).
 2. A spirit-filled person is not under the influence of a man-made, induced excitement. Peter stood to his feet *with the eleven* other apostles: they all stood before the thousands who had gathered (v. 41). Peter spoke at the top of his voice. Note the authority and forcefulness of Peter! What a difference the Spirit had made in this man — the man who had been so *up and down* in following Jesus:
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=> “Let me explain.”

=> “Listen carefully to what I say.”

=> “It’s only nine in the morning!”

Peter declared that they were not deluded; they were not acting and speaking *foolish* things like a drunken man. What was happening was just what Scripture predicted. It was the work of God, just what God had promised to man. It was the glorious gospel (good news) promised by God.

II. *Acts 02: 17–21 The Last Days and the Work of God*

These are the last days, the days of God’s last work on earth. Standing there before the throng of thousands, Peter declared:

=> Today, this day, the great prophecy of Joel begins to be fulfilled (Joel 2:28-32).

=> Today, this day, begins the *last days* of earth’s history.

=> Today, this day, begins the *last days* of God’s work on earth.

=> Today, this day, begins the *last days*, the final age of God’s plan for human history.

=> Today, this day, begins the *last days*, the dispensation of God’s grace (the church), the age of the gospel.

Thought 1. In the Scripture, the “*last days*” mean all the above. The *last days* began when Christ came to earth and they will end when Christ returns to earth. Note: we are already 2000 years into the last days.

1. The last days include the great outpouring of God’s Spirit.
 - a. The word *pour* (ekcheo) means to pour out, to pour forth, to shed forth. It means that God gives His Spirit...
 - to *dwell in* the believer (Jn. 14:17; 1 Cor. 6:19-20).
 - to *abide with* the believer forever (Jn. 14:16).
 - to abundantly fill, to overflow the believer (Eph. 5:18).
 - to give very special *manifestations* of Christ to the believer (Jn. 14:21).
 - b. God pours out His Spirit on *all people*...
 - upon sons and daughters.
 - upon young men and old men.
 - upon His slaves, servants and handmaidens.

The point is this: God’s Spirit shows no discrimination. The Spirit of God is available to all: male and female, young and old, slave and free, rich and poor.

- c. God pours out His Spirit with very special gifts...

- the gift of prophecy: proclaiming and predicting the truth (see *Prophecy*, 1 Cor. 14:3). Note this gift is given to both men and women. This was part of the Scriptural promise.
- the gift of seeing visions, especially among young men. The Greek word *visions* (*horaseis*) means appearance (Rev. 4:3) or an ecstatic revelation (Rev. 9:17). In Scripture the Greek word is used for both what a man can envision (see, imagine, think, cause to appear) within his own mind and what is given him by God through a special revelation (Rev. 9:17).
- the gift of dreaming dreams, especially among older men. The idea is that a dream is given by God.

Thought 1. Note a crucial fact: history has shown and Scripture warns that spiritual gifts are often misused and abused, tragically and destructively so. (See notes, 1 Cor. 12-14.)

- 1) We must guard against accepting every dream and vision as being of God. God's Word is the revelation of God. What God wants to reveal to us is therein. We must stand upon God's Word and measure every vision and dream by God's Word.
 - 2) A study of the visions and dreams in the Book of Acts shows that every one of them had to do with witnessing, with reaching people for Christ. Not a single dream or vision had to do with *personal edification* or with *boosting self to be spiritually superior*.
- d. God pours out His Spirit only upon His servants, "both men and women." This is the emphasis of this verse, the reason for repeating what has just been said. Note that the verse is a summary statement: no one receives God's Spirit, no one, not until they become His servant.
- e. God gifts His servants, "both men and women" with one very special gift — the gift of prophecy. Again, the point is primary, to stress what is so important. The gift of prophecy, of proclaiming that God's very own Son has come into the world to save sinners, is the primary gift of God's Spirit. Every one of God's servants are gifted to prophesy.

Thought 1. Note the devastating blow to the ego of *professionalism* and to the practice of so many of us.

- 1) So many of us leave proclamation, that is, witnessing, up to others, using the flimsy excuse that we are not capable nor gifted to witness.
 - 2) Too many enjoy the prestige of a *professional gift* and a *professional ministry*, minimizing the lay ministry and the layman's gift to proclaim Christ. And although there are *measures* or degrees of gifts, the great need of the hour is for every believer to proclaim the living Lord.
2. The last days include the days of terrible judgment at the end — the Day of the Lord (see *Day of the Lord*, Acts 2:19-20).

3. The last days include the days of great salvation. Throughout the last days, during the whole period, man can be saved by doing two simple things:

=> He has to *call*: to sense the *need* to be saved.

=> He has to call upon “the name of the Lord”: to know and believe that Jesus is the Lord and to be ready to submit to His Lordship, to serve Him as Lord.

Rom 10:13 For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Rom 10:9-10 That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

ACTS 02:19–20 DAY OF THE LORD (JEHOVAH)

I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. Acts 02:19–20

In the simplest of terms, the Day of the Lord is the Day when Christ returns to execute judgment upon the earth. It is a definite Day that is coming upon earth, and note: it is coming at the end of the *last days*, at the end of the present age. (See notes, Mt. 24:1-25:46.) Note two points.

1. The Day of the Lord is to be characterized by several things.
 - a. *Wonders (terata)*: marvels, signs, happenings, portents in heaven above, that is, in outer space; happenings and marvels that point to something unusual about to happen.
 - b. *Signs (semeia)*: events and happenings on earth given by God to warn that the end is at hand.
 - *Blood and fire and billows of smoke*: terrible bloodshed and explosive fire that causes...
 - mushrooming billows of smoke
 - the sun to be turned into darkness and blotted out
 - the moon to be turned into blood

Thought 1. It is thought-provoking when we consider how closely the language resembles atomic warfare.

2. The events to happen in the Day of the Lord (as revealed by the whole of Scripture) seem to be fourfold. Note: no attempt whatsoever is made to put these events in any specific order. There are two reasons for this.

=> There are so many divergent opinions.

=> More importantly, Scripture does not give a complete list of last events.

Throughout Scripture, four events are discussed as happening in the Day of the Lord: the return of Christ, terrible tribulation, judgment and the remaking of earth.

a. A terrible period of tribulation (7 years). This includes the last half of the period known as the great tribulation (3½ years). This is the fulfilment of Daniel's "seventieth week" (Dan. 9:27). (See notes, Mt. 24:15-28.)

b. The return of Christ as sovereign Lord. He shall rule and reign in glory upon earth (the Millennial reign of God's Son, Rev. 20:4-6).

c. The resurrection and final judgment of all. This includes...

=> men who are described as sheep and goats (Mt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:11-15).

=> the Beast or the antichrist, the false prophet and their followers (Rev. 19:11-21).

=> Satan and his angels (Rev. 20:10).

d. The destruction and remaking of the earth and heavens (2 Pet. 3:3-15; Rev. 21:1; see Isa. 65:17; 66:22). □

III. Acts 02:22–24 Day of God's Saviour: Jesus Christ

This is the day of God's Saviour, Jesus of Nazareth. Peter drove the thrust of his message home. He shouted out: "Listen to this"...

- the "last days" have been launched by Jesus of Nazareth.

1. "Jesus of Nazareth...a man accredited by God." The word *accredited* (*apodedengmenon*) means to point out, display, show, attest, accredit, sanction, certify, endorse. God put His stamp of approval upon Jesus, demonstrating and showing to all men that Jesus is *perfectly acceptable* to Him. Jesus of Nazareth had God's *approval*, His *perfect acceptance*.

There is proof of this, the proof of His miracles and wonders and signs.

- a. They were the works of God, the kind of works that only God could do. God Himself was working through Jesus of Nazareth.
- b. The works were done (through Christ) "among you," in the very presence of people. They were not done in secret. God attested and demonstrated to the world that He was working through Christ. The miracles, wonders and signs were done both *for* the sake of the world and *before* the world.
- c. "You yourselves know this." Man knows, for God has clearly shown that Jesus is approved by Him. The evidence abounds in the lives of those who have *truly* followed Christ down through the centuries, in the presence of the living Lord who has dwelt *within* their very being.

2. The death of Jesus of Nazareth was planned by God due to man's wickedness (see *Jesus Christ, Death*, Acts 2:23).
3. The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth ended the agony of death (see *Jesus Christ, Resurrection*, Acts 2:24). ■

ACTS 02:23 THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST

This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. Acts 02:23

This verse is saying a most significant thing. Jesus' death was planned by God *due to man's wickedness*. God planned Jesus' death, planned for Him to die upon the cross, but He planned it *because of man's wickedness*. Note two points.

1. Jesus was crucified and slain by wicked hands. Men are sinful, wicked, depraved and selfish.

=> They want to go their own way.

=> They want to do their own thing.

=> They want to control their own lives.

Therefore, they rebel and fight against God, against surrendering to God, against...

- following God's way • doing God's thing
- allowing God to control their lives

It was this corruptible nature of man that rebelled against God's Son and crucified Him.

2. The "set purpose and foreknowledge of God" saved man. God knew man, what was in man (see Jn. 2:23-24). He knew exactly what men would do to His Son. He knew they would kill His Son. But in the counsel and advice of His knowledge — in consideration of all the possibilities — God knew something else as well: the way of death, the way of the cross was the best way to save men. And being God, He was bound to choose the best way. So God determined to use the best way possible, the death of His Son to save the world. (See *Death of Jesus Christ*, Acts 2:23; *Foreknowledge, Predestination*, Acts 2:23; notes, Mt. 17:22; 17:23; *Death of Jesus Christ*, Mt. 20:18.)

John 3:14-16 *"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

Rom 5:6 *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.*

Rom 5:8 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Gal 1:4 *Who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.*

Heb 9:28 *So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*

1 Pet 2:24 *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

1 Pet 3:18 *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.*

Another way to say the same thing is that God foresaw sin even before the creation of man; so He, in love, planned beforehand that Christ should die for sinners.

John 17:24 *“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”*

Eph 1:4 *For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love.*

1 Pet 1:20 *He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.*

Rev 13:8 *All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast — all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. □*

ACTS 02: 23

FOREKNOWLEDGE, PREDESTINATION, SET PURPOSE OF THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST

This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. Acts 02:23

The word *foreknowledge* (prognosis) means to see before; to know beforehand; to see and know the future; to foreordain.

God is God; therefore He sees the future. No matter how far a person looks into the future, God sees it. God knows...

- exactly what *will* happen, every single event and its consequences.
- exactly what *could* happen (but will not), every single possibility and its consequences.

Therefore God knows...

- exactly what man *will* do, every single act and its consequences.
- exactly what man *could* do (but will not), every single possibility and its consequences.

God is God. He is eternal and omniscient (knowing all). He knows the past, the present and the future. And note: He knows it all eternally, forever. God knew...

- every event of world history before the *foundation of the world*.
- every event of a person's life before the *foundation of the world* (see Eph. 1:4).

Now in light of this, a question arises that is extremely important. If God knew all the terrible consequences of evil and death that would enter and overtake the world, if He knew the world would even kill His Son, why did He go ahead and create the world? Why did He not choose another way to do things? In the simplest terms possible, there are at least two reasons.

I. God wanted a creature, a being with free will. God created man because God willed to have the *presence* of a being who could *freely choose*...

- to love and worship Him
- to obey and fellowship with Him
- to serve and reign with Him

In His foreknowledge, God knew that some would choose Him and some would reject Him. But He was willing to face...

- the pain and hurt to His heart,
- the abuse and shame to His person,
- the rejection and rebellion against His will.

God was willing to face all this in order that some might know His glorious mercy and grace and experience all the glory of Himself and heaven. (See note, Rom. 9:22-24; Eph. 1:5-6; 2:7.)

2. God did not choose another way to create and deal with man...

- because the way God created man was the best way: perfect, in a perfect environment, with free choice and will, and in perfect fellowship with God (see Gen. 2:16-17).

- because the way God deals with man is the best way: in love, in the mercy and grace of His Son. Love is the greatest force on earth. It is the very nature of God Himself (1 Jn. 4:8). Love will change and transform, help and give, win and conquer when nothing else will. Love will cause a person to reach out and help another and even cause a person to sacrifice his life quicker than any other force on earth (Jn. 3:16; 15:13; Rom 5:8).

Note one other point that is critical, a point that stresses the glorious love and care of God: it is the set purpose of God (see Acts 2:23).

The word *set* (*horismenei*) means predetermined, appointed, decreed, ordained, planned, purposed. It is a plan set within bounds, within a certain boundary. It is a purpose that is set, marked out, determined, decreed to happen.

The word *purpose* (*boulei*) means to advise, counsel, design, will; to give a piece of advice. It carries the force of being willed and determined. Since God knows exactly what *would* happen in every situation, He plans for the best thing to happen. God takes counsel, puts all things under advisement and chooses the best way.

We may not understand some things that happen nor why they happen the way they do. We may think something else or some other way would have been better. But we must remember two things.

1. We cannot see into the future. No man can. We cannot know what would have happened if another way had been chosen. We cannot know what would have happened...

- to us
- to others
- to the world

In every situation or event there are many other things that could have taken place. This is true of every situation, whether we call it *good or bad*. Think for a moment.

=> What would have taken place if the situation had been replaced by some other happening?

=> What would have taken place if another way had been chosen?

=> What and how much would be changed for the worse eventually, if not now?

We cannot know. But we can know this: God knows, for He deals with the future as well as the present. God deals with eternity, with the whole view. Therefore, another situation, another way could have changed things for the worse. Simply stated...

- God knows the future, everything that could happen as well as what is best and should happen.
- God takes counsel, purposes, determines, plans and chooses the best thing to happen.

2. We who love God and are called according to His purpose know that all things work together for good. How do we know? Because we *do* love God and *are called* according to His purpose.

God knew that we would say “Yes” to Jesus, that we would love and follow Him. Therefore, God called us.

Rom 8:29 *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

Note why we are predestined. This is the key: “that he [God’s Son] might be the firstborn among many brothers.” God has determined that Jesus will have many brothers, many who will live and fellowship with Him as the first Person, the preeminent Person throughout the universe.

This is the reason God chooses the very best events and the very best way for us. It is the reason He works all things out for good for believers. God knows all the possibilities; therefore, He is able to take counsel and determine, to plan the very best for us. *Believe and trust the glorious truth.*

1 Cor 2:9 *However, as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.”*

Rom 11:33-36 *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?” “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

Eph 3:20 *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.*

Phil 1:6 *Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

Psa 31:19 *How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you.*

A STUDY OF SOME SCRIPTURES DEALING WITH GOD’S SET PURPOSE AND FOREKNOWLEDGE

(A study giving comfort and security — God is in control.)

1. The Scripture dealing with God’s foreknowledge.
 - a. God’s foreknowledge concerns Christ.

Acts 2:23 *This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.*

1 Pet 1:20 *He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.*

- b. God's foreknowledge concerns believers.

1 Pet 1:2 *Who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.*

Rom 8:28-29 *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

(Note: These two verses actually show that God acts or predestines on the basis of His foreknowledge, of His counsel.)

- c. God's foreknowledge concerns Israel.

Rom 11:2 *God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah — how he appealed to God against Israel:*

2. The Scripture dealing with God's set decree.

- a. God's set decree concerns Christ.

Acts 2:23 *This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.*

Luke 22:22 *"The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him."*

Rom 1:4 *And who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Acts 10:42 *He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.*

Acts 17:31 *"For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."*

- b. God's set decree concerns salvation and security for believers.

Heb 4:7 *Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” (see 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 13:8)*

3. The Scripture dealing with God’s purpose.

a. God’s purpose concerns Christ.

Acts 2:23 *This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.*

Acts 4:28 *They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.*

b. God’s purpose concerns believers and salvation.

Acts 13:36 *For when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed.*

Eph 1:11 *In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.*

Heb 6:17 *Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath.*

c. God’s purpose concerns God’s plan for the world.

Acts 20:27 *For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.*

d. God’s purpose concerns those who reject Him.

Luke 7:30 *But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God’s purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John. □*

ACTS 02:24 RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. Acts 02:24

This is a great verse dealing with the resurrection of Christ. Note three points.

1. God raised up Christ. God knew that the very best way to save man from death was through the resurrection of His own Son from the dead.
2. The resurrection of Christ freed “him from the agony of death.” The word *agony* (*odinas*) means birth pangs. For the unbeliever, there is great pain in death, pain such as that experienced by a woman in giving birth. But man no longer has to suffer the pain of death nor fear suffering through it. Christ has conquered and

abolished death, made it completely harmless. Death is actually the most glorious and joyful experience for the believer, an experience that simply explodes human imagination. (See Jn. 5:24; Heb. 2:14-15.)

3. It was impossible for death to hold Christ. Why? There are several significant reasons.
 - a. There was God's set purpose and foreknowledge. God knew that the way of the cross and resurrection was the very best way to save the world. Therefore, nothing could stop God from following through with the death and resurrection of His Son. (See Acts 2:25-28.)
 - b. Jesus was approved by God. He had God's approval, sanction, accreditation and endorsement. Jesus Christ was perfectly acceptable to God (see Acts. 2:22-24).
 - c. Jesus' resurrection was foretold by Scripture, and Scripture must be fulfilled.
 - d. Jesus was *Life* itself. He possesses the very *being, essence, quality, substance* and *energy* of life. He is *The Life*, Life itself; therefore, He is the source of all life. All life finds its source in the energy and being of Christ Himself. Therefore, being Life, death could not engulf Him any more than darkness can engulf light. (See Jn. 1:4-5; Jn. 14:6.)
 - e. Jesus was sinless. Death exists or happens because everything is short of perfection — short of what it should be — short of *God's glory*. This is true of man. Man dies because he falls "short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Sin is...
 - falling short
 - missing the mark
 - transgressing God's glory

And it is sin that causes death. Therefore Jesus Christ, being sinless, did not have to die. He died because He *willed* to die for man.

The point is this: Jesus was sinless and perfect and righteous (Jn. 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet. 1:9; 2:22). He was the Ideal Man, the Sinless Man, the Perfect Man — the Ideal Pattern for all other men. Therefore, when He died for men, He died as the Ideal Man or the Ideal Pattern. And death cannot hold the Ideal Man, for the Ideal Man came short in nothing. He was not short in life; therefore, He was destined to live forever. He was Perfect Life and Perfect Man. As the Scripture says, "It was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." (See Rom. 1:4.) □