

## The First Major Speech in Acts

To begin this lecture I will answer a few questions I have had from students. One is, where does Josephus fit within the spectrum of historians? Was he comparable to Thucydides? I would basically say, "Yes." One of the reasons that Josephus was such a significant historian is that much of his recording is from eye-witness reports. Some suspicion has been raised with regard to his motives because he was Jewish by birth, but then he crossed the lines and sided with the Romans. He was arguing with the Jews to surrender Jerusalem in order to save it; the Jewish people would not and so Jerusalem was leveled to the ground in 70 AD. But I would say that he was a conscientious historian on the whole, although there is probably some exaggeration of figures and some imprecision. But in many ways Josephus works fairly well. Also, it depends on which work of his we are discussing; in *Antiquities*, there is a good bit there, but you have to be careful as to where you look. What about Suetonius? Suetonius, I would say, is a little less clear in terms of his reliability. I would prefer Tacitus to Suetonius in terms of reliability. At one point I was in Cambridge, England as a student from the University of Aberdeen. While there I was involved in a little discussion group and a rustic, farming, older man sat in the corner. We were discussing things and at one point he opened his mouth and said, "When you hear something or read something from Tacitus, you need to pay close attention. If you hear something from Suetonius, it is a little suspicious. I thought, "That is amazing. In Great Britain, even the farmers know the difference between Suetonius and Tacitus." Well, it was later told to me that the man who made this statement was no other than F. F. Bruce himself!

Another question is, when was shorthand invented? Did it exist in ancient times? Its use would ensure accurate reflection of the speeches made. Also, how were speeches written? Were they recorded on the spot or memorized somehow? It would seem a remote possibility that someone could hear a rather long speech and remember it verbatim. Although I think the way we listen to speeches now is very different than the way historians of the past would have been trained to listen. So I would say that maybe there is such a thing as verbatim remembrance. But to answer the first question, there are good grounds to say that there was some form of shorthand, particularly in studying Matthew and his job as a tax collector. There was probably some form of stenography, so actually some of the speeches and sayings of Jesus could have been written down even before Easter, and certainly the speeches in Acts as well. So there is probably a concerted effort, both of memorization and of shorthand, which would explain how these speeches were reported.

Now let us move on to the next section: lecture eight. We will look at Acts 2:14-36. Perhaps we can also have a bit of a personal devotion here and not just reflect on the message of this major speech. Now that we have looked at the larger picture, let us look at one speech in detail. Here in this speech in Acts two, Peter stands up after the outpouring of the Spirit. Rather than being a fearful man who denies any association with Jesus, now he is someone who stands and pronounces authoritatively, clearly, and directly, the truth concerning the Gospel.

There are four major sections in this speech. The first, 2:14-21, is the explanation of the phenomenon of the outpouring of the Spirit of God, with reference to the prediction of the outpouring of the Spirit made in Joel. Acts 2:22-32 is the second major part in which the earthly Jesus is presented. This is the presentation of who Jesus is. In the third part, 2:33-36, Peter preaches about the exalted Jesus. Then the last part, 2:38-40, is the call to repentance. Let us look at this a little more in detail, to see what we find here in this majestic speech.

First of all, we notice that the way the speech is introduced is very significant. Acts 2:14 says, "Then Peter stood up with the 11, raised his voice and addressed the crowd." This is an indication of important

prophetic speaking. This description, of standing up, raising his voice, and addressing the crowd, establishes a certain inspired speaking and the expectation of unusual pronouncement. Then, in a very simple way, Peter addresses the Jews. Please notice that this is not just Peter's speech, rather it is the witness of the 12 with Peter as the spokesman. I have already emphasized that, but I want to emphasize it again. It is very significant that the initial witness to the truth of the Gospel is a corporate apostolic witness. It is not just one person who says something, but there are these 11 who stand, silently but tellingly, beside Peter while he pronounces for them what is happening. They can, at any point, say, "Wait a minute; that is wrong; that is not true; that is not quite right." There is this accountability, and so the totality of that witness is very compelling and very powerful in terms of the witnessed truth of what is being said.

"Fellow Jews and all of you who are in Jerusalem..." Who does that address? As we have discussed, the visit to Jerusalem at the feast of Pentecost would mean the Diaspora Jews—Jews from different areas of the Roman Empire—would have come to celebrate the feast. So Peter addresses Palestinian Jews, but also Diaspora Jews. "Let me explain this to you." In his explanation, he deals first with the accusers and then with those who seek—first with those who look down upon him, and then with those who want to listen. Then he begins his speech with the explanation of Pentecost by reference to Joel. The reference to Joel has particular significance: "'In the last days,' God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit of God on all people.'" That is why I have been using the word, "indiscriminately," to describe the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. That is the big thing: every social stratum, everyone will be poured out upon. There is an openness of this movement of the Spirit to reach out and it is even more significant when you look at the context of Joel in the Old Testament. It is part of a call to repentance and an offer of forgiveness, as well as a prediction of the coming of the day of the Lord. Thus I would say that from the perspective of Joel there may be this expectation of one grand event in which all things are being wrapped up.

As Peter preaches saying, "This is that; this event relates to Joel"—as he prophetically connects pieces of God's self revelation—we see that there is a telescopic expansion. There is something happening here that is beginning the end times, but perhaps not culminating them. I would say that what Peter pronounces here is the commencement of the end times. You have heard me say that before and I do not tire to repeat it. I believe we have been in the end times for at least 2,000 years now. Peter announces this outpouring of the Spirit, and we see from the passage of Joel that this outpouring goes beyond simply the people of Palestine; it is very pervasive. There is one problem, however. In 2:19-20 we read, "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." Some people would ask, "Why does Peter speak about that? What does that refer to?" This is conscientious exegesis, as Bruce has said. These references that I have just read pertain and refer to the unusual circumstances surrounding the crucifixion of Christ. I am not quite sure what I think about this issue. I do not want to get involved in much debate on that particular issue of how to understand this further reference to Joel, but I do think there is a simple answer here. Peter begins the citation of this passage because it explains the phenomenon of the outpouring of the Spirit, and he ends this passage on the point that he wants to end on: the last verse, "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." He cites a whole section. The beginning certainly applies. The middle section maybe we can agree to be open on. But the concluding point is so important: "Now that you hear that God has worked in your midst one more time, call on Him." Let me linger a little on this phrase, "Call on the name of the Lord." This is a very significant phrase in the Old Testament. If you went to the Jews and said, "I am calling on the name of the Lord," you would clearly be implying that you are attributing divinity to God. If you call on someone, you call on him as if he is God. But here the reference is to calling on the name of YHWH—that is, in the Hebrew Old Testament text. "Whoever

calls on the name of YHWH will be saved. Whoever seeks his salvation with Him, whoever places his hope on Him, he will be saved.”

Thus the explanation of the first part of Peter’s speech, until 2:21, is very clear. He is saying, “Let me explain to you by Old Testament reference what has happened this day.” Then without real transition, Peter moves on to his second point. The transition is a little abrupt. If you were striving for a smooth style of transitioning, you would not move from verse 21 to 22. Unrelated to what he has just said, Peter says in verse 22: “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs...” Reading or hearing this, you might wonder, “Where is Peter going? This has nothing to do with the outpouring of the Spirit of God. We can follow his speech thus far; we can see that there is an Old Testament anticipation and fulfillment. But how does this Jesus who he is talking about relate to this?” It is true that initially in this speech there is no direct connection with describing the earthly Jesus. The explanation comes only in the third section. But let us hold that tension and just slowly, though briefly, move through what Peter presents in this description of the earthly Jesus.

Peter, in verses 22-24, refers to the fact that Jesus performed many miracles, wonders, and signs. I would say that by this he means to explain that the Messiah of God was confirmed; the signs and wonders confirm the authority and the claim of the Messiah. Then very briefly Peter describes the handing over of Jesus by God's set purpose and foreknowledge. Here you have this amazing tension that, while the people thought they were pursuing their agenda, they were actually playing into the hand of God. I cannot really fathom that, but it is the amazing truth that the most evil thoughts of men are turned by the hand of God to pursue and fulfill His Purposes. Now that does not justify evil in the least. It simply exalts and glorifies the power of God. There is no justification for evil deeds. But there is an amazing wonder that you see here and that is repeated so often in the speeches in Acts: the purpose of man to oppose God turns out to work right into the purposes of God Himself. “This man was handed over to you.” When Peter says that Jesus was “handed over,” he means that God took His protective hands off of his anointed servant. He exposed His servant to the random destructive evil powers of man. But this handing over was “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.” Here you have the sobriety, the earthiness, of this Gospel. It is not some fancy thought or captivating idea. It is a very harsh, hard description of the disciples’ master going to death. I think you need to remember that and retain that; the Gospel is a very simple and a very real story of Jesus going to death.

Then, in verse 24, we learn of that to which Peter can authoritatively testify: “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.” Here Peter is referencing Psalm 18:5, a description of death, of the labors of death. This Psalm says that death cannot hold the righteous one. Death is nearly like birth pangs; it has to release, give up, or hand over the righteous one. The purpose of this reference is that death could not hold the righteous one, but had to birth Him. This description of God’s power is amazing. Then Peter references David's testimony in verses 25-28. Psalm 16 is one of the central Psalms referring to resurrection. The argument here is this: “Because [the Lord] is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad ... because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.” Here the reference from Psalm 18 to death not being able to hold the righteous one is connected to the promise in Psalm 16 that the Holy One will not see decay. Thus Peter shows from the Old Testament, and from Psalms 16 and 18 in particular, that Jesus had to be raised from the dead.

You may already anticipate a little of the answer to the connection between 2:14, the Pentecost outpouring, and Jesus. There is something unusual happening here. Jesus comes back to life. He is not only revitalized, but He is established to eternal life. Thus there is new power here. Then comes one of

the more tender parts of the speech in which Peter again addresses his audience as “brothers” because this is such a tender issue. “Brothers, please listen, I am not trying to offend you by speaking against our honored patriarch David, but we must understand this. We cannot apply Psalm 16 to David. Psalm 16 is not fulfilled by David. David's life ended in the grave, and we know he did not come back to life. We know that the arms of death actually took hold of David. Thus we know that this does not pertain to him.” Peter introduces this in a very gentle way. Then in verse 30 he says, “But [David] was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that He would place one of his descendants on his throne [a reference to 2 Samuel 7]. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ.” So we see Psalm 18, and particularly Psalm 16, in the reference that the Righteous One cannot be held by death and that the Holy One will not see decay in the grave. The resurrection is shown from the Old Testament and witnessed to by the disciples as true. Therefore, the basis for an explanation for the outpouring of the Spirit of God is given: God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of the fact.

In 2:33-36, Peter moves to the exalted Jesus. You could put these two sections, 2:24-32 and 33-36, together as a reference to Jesus. This section, verses 33 to 36, is perhaps the most concentrated reference in all of Acts to who Jesus is, perhaps with the exception of Acts three where much is said about Christ. We find in 2:33-36 that the resurrection anticipated a place of honor—a place of honor that gives Jesus the divine status of sitting at the right hand of God. The amazing thing in verse 33 is that the Father hands the promise of the Spirit to the Son and the Spirit is poured out by the exalted Christ. Now you see that the reference to Jesus explains the outpouring of the Spirit. Thus the outpouring of the Spirit is referred to first, followed by the explanation of the Old Testament and a description of what Jesus did, who He is, and how He was raised. All this explains that the originator of the outpouring of the Spirit is none other than Jesus Christ Himself, who has received this promise and privilege from the Father. Here we get a wonderful insight into the love and mutuality, the authority and submission, between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is wonderful how we get a little glimpse of the Trinitarian love that exists forever—eternally. So this reference to the outpouring of the Spirit here in verse 33 is significant.

Perhaps you remember back to Acts 1:1 where I tried to argue that Peter, saying to Theophilus, “In my former book I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach,” communicates that the book he is now writing to Theophilus will be about what Jesus is continuing to do. And the major work that thus far has been described is that the Son has poured out the Spirit. He has done this to fulfill the promise that He will be with them to the end of the earth, that he will send the Paraclete to them so that they will not be orphaned or left alone. This is magnificent. Then in verse 34, Peter references Psalm 110. Besides Psalm 16, and maybe Psalm two, Psalm 110 is the most significant messianic Psalm. Psalm 16 is the resurrection Psalm, Psalm two is the messianic Son Psalm, and now will see what Psalm 110 holds. “For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”’” Acts 2:34-35 quotes Psalm 110. Psalm 110 is an amazing Psalm because it says this: “YHWH said to *Adonai*,” “YHWH said to my Lord.” David is describing, in his prophetic understanding, a conversation between the Father and *Adonai*. YHWH is the covenant LORD of Israel, *Adonai* is the creator God. “YHWH says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand.’” So YHWH says to *Adonai*, “Come up, sit with me. Sit at my right hand until I have made your enemies a footstool for your feet.” YHWH says to David’s Lord, “Come up, be exalted until I have subjugated your enemies.” As we can see from other areas, this is speaking about Christ. It is interesting that Christ, in the Gospels, teaches the apostles to understand this verse in this way. Let us briefly turn to Mark 12:36. Here Jesus instructs the disciples and argues with His opponents by saying, “David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit...” In Acts two, Peter explains David’s divine inspiration by saying, “[David] was a prophet.” There are always these references to the inspiration of Scripture, and this one in particular points to the inspiration of Psalms.

Mark 12:36 says, “[David] declared: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.’” This is the reference to Psalm 110. What does Jesus say after this? What does He ask? “David himself calls Him Lord [*Adonai*]. How then can He be his son?” This is a strong reference, and Jesus does not deny that the messiah is, in a certain way, the Son of David. But in a more important way, the messiah is the Lord of David, the *Adonai* of David. I believe that this is the origin of this preaching and the confession of the early church: “Jesus is Lord.” This adds a little more significance to the question, “Can you confess Jesus as Lord?” Some people might say, “Sure, I can say anything.” But the real connotation is, “Can you confess Jesus as *Adonai*? Do you refer to Him as the one who has been exalted to the right hand of the Father and who is enjoying the privilege of having His enemies put under His feet, according to the purposes of the Father? Is He the Lord you confess?” Peter also says, “If you call on the name of the Lord, you will be saved.” There is much connection here. I have not made all of these connections evident. But you can see here that when Peter stands up and preaches with Psalm 110, he has been trained. He has been taught. And now, as the Spirit enables him, he has the confidence to make evident these connections and say, “Listen to this! The phenomenon that you have seen is the phenomenon that comes out of the work and ministry of Jesus. It is the phenomenon of the outpouring of the Spirit and of the exaltation of the Son to the right hand of the Father.”

This exaltation has as its consequence: opposition. In Psalm two you have opposition against the Anointed; you have the theme of opposition in Psalm 110; you have the theme of opposition and destruction in Isaiah 53. So we see that, where God acts and intervenes, there is opposition. The book of Acts is a telling commentary that this opposition is actually ensuing—and very strongly so. Therefore, do not be surprised that, as you get swept up onto the train of God's purposes, you will find that same opposition. Now, you need to remind yourself with Peter, “Do not suffer for your own foolishness.” We come up with super-spiritual ways to say, “Poor me. I am bankrupt again. I must be doing the right thing for God because I am bankrupt again.” rather than saying, “How do my spending habits need to change? How can I be a better steward of the resources God has given me?” Do not blame God or make it spiritual when you suffer for your own foolishness. If you have difficulty managing money, you need to beware and work on that. Pray about it, but do not act like you are suffering for Christ. Make sure you know the difference between suffering for Christ and suffering for your own foolishness. But when you suffer for Christ, expect opposition. Expect that to happen because it happened with the very Lord and Master. And we are not lower or less than the Master in the sense of being opposed as He was—being associated with Him. Thus, this last part of Psalm 110, “until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet,” is an eschatological description—a description of what is ensuing *now* that the Son has been exalted. *Adonai* has been exalted to the right hand of Yahweh; the Lord of David has been exalted.

Do you also notice in the Petrine speech that great respect is paid to David? It is not a message that plays down everything that came before. Rather, it simply says, “David looked forward.” That is a wonderful pattern in the whole book of Acts. People accuse the disciples saying, “You are speaking against the law.” But the answer of the early Christians is, “I am standing with Moses. Moses said that there would be a prophet like him and that we ought to listen to Him. If you do not listen to Him you will be cut off from the people. I am standing with Moses.” Others would accuse the believers saying, “You are against the temple.” The Christians responded, “We are with the temple. Listen to the dedication speech and the prayer that Solomon gave when he dedicated the temple. He said, ‘God is not confined to a temple.’ He is the Lord of heaven and earth and in his condescension He committed Himself to the temple for a time. But now, as always, we are to worship the Lord in Spirit and in truth.” They were saying, “We are standing on the instruction of Moses and David and we understand the intention of the temple—and we are coming to the fruition, the conclusion, of these things. Peter pursues a wonderful argument here

when he speaks very gently and tenderly about the respected patriarch, David, who has spoken as a prophet in the Psalms. I know that you and I enjoy reading the Psalms for personal edification, up-building, counseling, and nourishment. But let us not forget that they are prophetic writings that reveal as much about the purposes and heart of God as the rest of Scripture.

Verse 36 says, “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” In this speech, and perhaps in the entire book of Acts, this is perhaps the most concentrated, crystal-clear, and logical statement on who Jesus is. Some people have argued that the phrase “God has made this Jesus . . . both Lord and Christ” is an indication that Jesus was made into something that He was not before. He was made into Lord and Christ, they say, which means that He was not Lord or Christ before. The problem with this argument is that the same word, “made,” occurs in Mark 3:14. This passage in Mark, in the New International Version of the English Bible, is translated “appointed.” “He appointed the twelve.” He prayed, reflected, and then He appointed the twelve to be apostles and to travel with Him. That same word is used in both passages, and in both places it has more of the sense of “appointed.” I would have preferred the translation, “appointed,” in this passage in Acts as well, because, as in the Mark passage, here it has more of a sense of “appointed.” It does not refer to making something out of nothing, but it refers to affirming, or commissioning. This word, “made,” does not imply that Jesus was not the messiah and Lord before this exaltation. Jesus is exalted. He is appointed for the particular ministry of being Lord and Christ. You see here that the word Lord, *Kurios Adonai*, occurs here again. This is a very significant term in Acts, referring to the nature of Christ.

This is a basic analysis of what Peter has to say in this speech. Now you know that the entire speech in 2:14-36 is closely connected. You have also seen that the ministry and the preaching of Jesus are not the foundation of some new sect. They are not some strange deviation, encouraging Jews and others to believe in Jesus at the expense of God the Father. Rather, they are very intricately connected and embedded in God's Old Testament self-revelation—with His signs and wonders and the presentation of His Spirit. That Christianity is the fulfillment of Jewish beliefs and hopes is witnessed by these apostles who testify to that truth and to the amazing fact that there is one who has not been held by the grasp of death. Rather, He had to be birthed to life in death, and could not be held. Peter says, “You explain who Jesus is if He is not the *Adonai* that YHWH spoke to and who has been exalted.” Then Luke's account in verse 37 says that the people who listened to Peter were cut to the heart. Their hearts were pierced. And they said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Perhaps this is a little insight into the Jewish mindset. They do not ask, “What should we think about now?” Or, “How should we respond to this?” Rather, they ask, “What can we do?” Maybe I am over emphasizing that a little. Perhaps there is more of a tone of what is next? What now? But it does refer to a desire to mend this by a deed. Peter's response is, “You cannot mend this by deeds at all. Let the Spirit of God work repentance in you. Be baptized.” I would think “baptized” here refers to water baptism, but also to identification with Christ. In Acts, “In the name of Jesus Christ,” refers to identifying with the person of Jesus Christ, of which identification baptism is a sign and seal. “Repent and be baptized, 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.” As we have discussed the work of the Spirit in Acts, I would say that verse 38 is the summary statement of this work. The work of the Spirit is one work of God: softening a person's heart toward repentance and faith, identification with Christ, and receiving the promise of the Spirit.

“The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” This reference echoes the Abrahamic promise of “To you and your children.” It indicates an outpouring of the kindness of God, but also the sovereign intervention of God to all those whom He will call. It is not at the disposal of man; God is in charge. God is the one who calls, but it does include all those who are far off. Maybe Peter still thinks that “those who are far off” means all those Jews who

happen to be as far as Alexandria, Ephesus, Athens, and even Rome. I do not know how well Peter understands the totality of what he is preaching here. In Acts 10 and 11 he has to go through a rather serious lesson, learning to comprehend that God even reaches out to these absolutely filthy Gentiles. Certainly there is already the promise here that God's call will go out far and wide. This connects with the quotations from Joel concerning the outpouring of the Spirit on all. There is an anticipation here that this will go out very widely rather than very narrowly.

Luke concludes Peter's speech by saying, as I have already mentioned to you, "With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about 3,000 were added to their number that day." There is an amazing burst of external growth with this first major speech by Peter. It is amazing that this rough fisherman from Galilee, who works in his trade and whose own character is pretty much set, is transformed in the hands of Christ to be such a wonderful and direct witness. Peter has been transformed into a compelling witness of the truth of the Gospel.

Do you know why you believe in Jesus as Lord, and do you know how to communicate that truth? I hope I have helped you to understand the foundation of that. We do not want to say, "Jesus is Lord," because it is the Christian thing to do, but rather because we know that this is true. This amazing phenomenon of the Lordship of Christ—Jesus as *Adonai*, the exalted Son of God—arose on the very soil of monotheistic Palestinian Judaism. It did not arise from polytheistic Hellenism in Athens or from polytheistic Greco-Roman thought in Rome. No, it arose from the very soil that jealously preserved the one God. And that is where Paul comes in. He viciously persecutes that sect that seems to him to threaten the monotheistic core of the confession of the Jews. He has to find out that the Christians are not jeopardizing that monotheistic core, but they are actually following with God's purposes. There is more to God than you think.