

The Jesus of the First Christian Sermon

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The first recorded Christian sermon was preached by the Apostle Peter on the first day of Pentecost as found in ACTS 2:14-36. In verses 1-4 approximately one hundred and twenty disciples were gathered together in Jerusalem for prayer when God poured out the Holy Spirit on them. As they were filled with the Spirit “they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” This caused confusion among many in the city including Jews visiting from a variety of others nations. Their consternation was intensified as “each one severally heard those who were speaking in his own language” (verses 6-8). Some were beside themselves while others “mocked saying, ‘They are drunk with wine!’”

In response Peter along with the Eleven Apostles stood up and called the crowd to heed his words. He began with a citation of JOEL 2:28-32 (verses 16-21), a prophecy of a coming time when God would “pour out His Spirit on all flesh.” According to Peter that prophecy had begun to be fulfilled on that very day as God filled the disciples of Jesus with His Spirit.

Peter then called on the “men of Israel” to hear his words about “Jesus the Nazarene, a man pointed out of God to you by mighty works and wonders and signs” (verse 22). Peter identified Jesus as one who came from Nazareth and as a “man.” Peter used the term *anér* rather than the more generic Greek word for human being, *anthrōpos*. *Anér* means “man” but also one who is *male* rather than *female*. This “man” was “pointed out” (*apodeiknumi*) “from God” by means of signs and wonders that God did among those who saw Jesus. The Greek sentence reads that he was “pointed out *from* (*apo*) God,” meaning that the miracles performed confirmed he was a man sent from God. In this verse as elsewhere in Peter’s sermon **a distinction is maintained between God and Jesus**. It was God who actually performed the miraculous deeds that confirmed the status of Jesus, not Jesus himself.

This same man, Jesus, was “marked out” by the counsel and “foreknowledge” of God. “Counsel” translates the Greek noun *boulé*, which means “counsel, purpose, plan, decision, resolve.” In other words, what happened to Jesus was in accord with God’s plan and purpose. “Foreknowledge” does not imply preexistence. Rather God saw ahead of time who and what this man would be. Put another way, the things that occurred in the life of Jesus were according to a Divine plan foreseen by God and set in motion by Him in the past.

This same Jesus was “slain” on the cross and later buried. Yet his body did not see corruption because God raised him from the dead (verses 23-32). God “neither abandoned him to Hades nor allowed his flesh to see corruption.” Instead God raised him up. As a genuine human being who had died his body was subject to decay. God prevented it by raising him from the dead. The implication is clear: if God had not raised Jesus his body would have decomposed as is the way with all human beings.

This same Jesus of Nazareth was subsequently “exalted to the right hand of God” where also he received “the promise of the Holy Spirit” from the Father, the very Spirit poured out on the disciples in Jerusalem. “Exalted” translates a Greek participle in the passive voice and aorist tense. The passive voice signifies Jesus was acted upon, in this case by God Who exalted him. Jesus did not exalt himself. The aorist tense refers to a past act. In other words, at a particular point in time God exalted Jesus to His right hand. There he will

remain until God “makes his enemies his footstool” (verses 34-35).

Peter concluded by calling on the house of Israel to know that the very same Jesus whom they crucified “God made both Lord and Christ.” “Made” (Greek – *poieō*) translates a common Greek verb meaning, “to make, do, perform, accomplish.” It is the same Greek verb used in the Greek *Septuagint* translation of the Old Testament in GENESIS 1:1 where “God **made** the heavens and the earth.” In verse 36 “made” is in the active voice and aorist tense, indicative mood. The active voice emphasizes God as the one who acted **to make** Jesus “Lord and Christ.” The aorist verb tense signifies an action seen as a whole that occurred in the past. This means at a particular point in time God “made” Jesus both “Lord and Christ.” “Christ” or *Christos* is the Greek equivalent of the Jewish term *messiah* or “anointed one.” Peter did not specify precisely when or how this appointment took place, but the implication is that there was a time when Jesus was not “Lord” or “Christ.” His position as ruling Lord and messiah is not something he has by nature or “Divine right.” Rather **God gave his exalted position to him in consequence of his obedience even unto death** (PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11).

~ Concluding Points ~

The Christology of Peter in this first sermon is relatively simple. **He treats Jesus as a genuine human being** from Nazareth who actually died on the cross. **His death was real.** Unlike other men God did not allow Jesus to see bodily corruption, though if God had not intervened he would have decomposed. God raised Christ from the dead and subsequently exalted him to His right hand where Jesus now rules until such a time as God puts all his foes under his feet. This was all done in accordance with God’s plan and foreknowledge.

Throughout this sermon Peter maintains a clear distinction between God and Jesus. It was God who performed the miracles in the life of Jesus, God Who allowed him to be slain according to “his counsel,” God Who raised him from the dead, and God Who exalted him. At a specific point in time God “made Jesus both Lord and Christ.”

Nowhere in his sermon does Peter hint at the idea of Jesus being a Divine being or as having existed before his birth. **His unjust death is seen as a real death.** Throughout the sermon Peter treats Jesus the Nazarene as a genuine human being though one in whom God worked miraculous deeds and one whom has subsequently been highly exalted.