

PENTECOSTAL PREACHING.

– JAN. 17. – ACTS 2:32-47. –

"The promise is unto you, and unto your children, and to all that are afar off." – Acts 2:39.

THE major portion of the New Testament consists of written addresses to the Lord's people, and each Epistle shows great order and ability in presenting truth logically and forcefully. The Book of Acts, however, contains records of several preached discourses, amongst which none are more interesting than the one now before us for consideration.

Apparently the eleven apostles had been talking to little groups of people, here and there, as they came together after hearing of the miraculous manifestation of divine power in connection with the Pentecostal blessing. Whether the apostles spoke each in a distinctly separate dialect and were heard by different groups of different tongues, or whether they spoke in one tongue and were miraculously heard and understood in different tongues by their different hearers we are not informed, but the miracle would be about equally great either way, and the result the same. After being charged with intoxication Peter seems to have become the main spokesman and "lifted up his voice," and thus changed the matter from private conversations by a number to a public discourse by himself. He protested, not indignantly but mildly, against the charge of drunkenness, in very reasonable and logical form; showing that it was too early in the morning to suppose the apostles to be drunken. The third hour would be what we term nine o'clock, a.m., and would imply that the disciples had met quite early in the upper [R2089 : page 14] room, and that after the blessing they immediately improved the opportunity for letting the light shine out by preaching the truth to the curious.

Peter immediately connected the outpouring of the holy spirit with the prophecy of Joel, and connected this with our Lord and his crucifixion and the prophecies concerning him, pointing to his resurrection. – Acts 2:15-32.

(32,33) After thus laying before them the basis of the gospel, the death of Christ, he most forcefully announces that himself and all of the apostles were witnesses of the fact that our Lord Jesus was not left in death, but the Father had raised him up to life and exalted him to his own right hand. Upon this, the only proper foundation of gospel hope and preaching, the Apostle proceeded to build the discourse of this lesson and to account to the people for the power of the holy spirit which they saw manifested.

(34,35) Realizing that his hearers did not understand the prophecy which he had just quoted from the Psalms (Psa. 16:8), Peter proceeded to prove to them that David could not have been speaking these words respecting himself; but that his words were an inspired prophecy respecting the resurrection of our Lord Jesus from the dead. In proof of this he called their attention to what they would all very readily admit; namely, that David was dead and in his sepulcher; that David was not risen; that David had not been exalted and made to sit at God's right hand; and that consequently some one else than David must have been meant; and he proceeded to show that Messiah was referred to by the prophet.

Very many Christian people are surprised when first they notice this positive statement by the Apostle, that the beloved Prophet David is not in heaven: so used are they to thinking of all the prophets as being now in heaven, instead of remembering as is clearly pointed out in Heb. 11:39,40, "that they without us should not be made perfect" – that the ancient worthies will not receive the blessings which God has provided for them, and intends to bestow upon them, until first the Church, the bride, the body of Christ, has been perfected with her Lord at his second advent.

The character of this discourse by the Apostle Peter is not only worthy of notice and remembrance, but worthy of imitation, by all who would preach the true gospel with power. His discourse was not to the effect that this manifestation of power was the second coming of Christ and the establishment of his Kingdom and glory; but to the very contrary of this he shows from David's prophecy that Jehovah said to Christ, David's Lord and Master, "Sit thou on my right hand [that is, occupy the chief place of my favor and power] until I make thy foes thy footstool." This implies that the Heavenly Father has engaged to honor the Son and to bring all things into subjection to him. In his discourse the Apostle does not intimate that this has already been accomplished and that all foes are overthrown, but merely that the first step in this programme has been accomplished; that Christ had suffered, that Christ had been raised from the dead, that Christ had been exalted to the right hand of power. This he emphasises by saying, "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Messiah." Peter's discourse was not about the stars, nor about the leaves, nor about politics, nor about finances, nor about eternal torment; but about the great central features of the gospel, that Messiah had come, had suffered the just for the unjust, and had been glorified and was yet to be recognized Lord of all. Nor did he fail to point out the responsibilities of the Jews before him, as a part of the nation, for the death of Christ.

(37-41) The effect of this preaching, on a right theme and in a direct and forceful manner, was the conviction of some of his hearers that if these things were true they were under a responsibility, and an inquiry as to what should be their course. We look with intense interest to see whether or not the Apostle advised them, as some preachers of today would advise – that they come to a mourners' bench and pray and agonize and cry aloud to the Lord to receive them, while he and the apostles gather around them and sing hymns and pray also for them. We find nothing of this kind, nor do we find the Apostle losing his senses and his argument and logic in excited declamation without

meaning, intended to terrify the repentant ones. On the contrary, he proceeds in the same earnest, logical manner as before to answer their questions and to *inform them*, not that they need to urge God to forgive them, but on the contrary, that God has already provided forgiveness in Christ and is waiting and ready to receive them, and that the proper steps for them to take are (1) repentance, reformation of life, [R2090 : page 14] "the turning over of a new leaf," and (2) that as repentant believers they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ – thus consecrating themselves to him and to his service, and outwardly and publicly acknowledging the same. And he assures them that upon so doing they shall receive the gift of the holy spirit also. He points out that the promise of the holy spirit included them (as Israelites), and that the Lord had specially called them, through the hearing and understanding of the truth, that they might become heirs of these promises and recipients of this seal of acceptance.

The astounding fact that three thousand were converted to the Lord, as the result of the Apostle's clear presentation of the simple facts and how [R2090 : page 15] they fitted to the prophecies, is not to be accounted for by supposing that the holy spirit operated upon the hearers as well as upon the speaker; for the holy spirit is never given to any except consecrated *believers*. Nor are we to suppose that the Apostle spoke with such an intensity of power as would of itself have produced such results upon any congregation of hearers. The explanation lies in the fact that his hearers were specially "devout men," and the work of that day and of a succeeding period was merely the gathering of the ripe grains of "wheat" from that nation, which had for over sixteen centuries been the recipients of Divine favor with "much advantage every way, chiefly in that to them were committed the oracles of God." The same Apostle and the other apostles under the power of the same holy spirit and with probably increased natural ability in the handling of the sword of the spirit, the Word of God, did not subsequently succeed in accomplishing similar results so far as numbers were concerned.

It is worthy of note also that the holy spirit's method was not to send the apostles, when imbued with power, off to heathen lands to preach to those who had never heard of God; but, on the contrary, divine providence so ordered matters as to gather some of the most worthy Jews out of every nation under heaven to the apostles, for the purpose of hearing and being blessed with the truth. These "strangers" from various parts were all Jews, although their language differed because born in foreign parts; furthermore, it was not until about three and one-half years after this that the Lord sent the good tidings beyond the Jews to the Gentiles – Cornelius being the first Gentile convert.

So we hold that the present harvest message is now sent primarily to the "devout" of Christendom: and we therefore seek and use the means provided for preaching to these *first*, "for the perfecting of the saints"; rather than neglect this work by going after those who can and will be so much more successfully reached in the Millennium, by the glorified Church – the seed of Abraham in which all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

(42-47) We cannot wonder that such a group of consecrated children of God, after being illuminated with the holy spirit of promise, felt an instinctive desire to be in each other's company; nor can we wonder at the unselfish, loving spirit manifested in the arrangement that they should have "all things in common." No, such a course is only what would suggest itself to all true Christian as a desirable one. Their zeal toward God is also attested by their application to the study of the doctrines of Christ, their daily prayers, etc. And this, as verse 47 informs us, resulted in attracting others of kindred spirit to the truth. Thus the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved, – such as were in a condition to be saved from the blindness of their nation (Compare Rom. 11:25,26); such as were the "wheat," ready to be separated from the "chaff" and gathered into the "garner" of the Gospel age, and away from the "fire" of trouble that presently came upon all the "chaff" of that nation. – Luke 3:16,17.

Although the Lord specially blessed this Communistic arrangement in the beginning of the Gospel age, it was, we believe, for the purpose of drawing to the truth the unselfish lovers of righteousness and peace. For the same reason he blessed the Church at that time with peace, and with "favor with all the people." After the Communistic arrangement and the favor with the people had been permitted for a time, and had accomplished their work, of gathering certain characters to the Church, the Lord broke up the arrangement entirely, and scattered the Church through persecution and disfavor with the people "everywhere." Nor do we believe that it was ever the intention of the Lord that his people should live in a communal manner during this Gospel dispensation. But on this subject we refer the reader to an article in our issue of Sept. 1, '95, entitled, – "They Had All Things in Common."
