

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

August 23, 2026

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Jesus' Faithful Witnesses... **...bearing witness to Jesus' life-changing message.**

(Studies in the book of Acts)

The Apostle Peter's Timely Message

(Acts 2:14-41)

Study #3

Introduction: *Good timing...*

We would say that the hero who arrived on the scene at just the right moment to save a child from danger acted in a *timely* fashion.

Likewise, an athlete's *timely* training will get him ready for the big game. A comedian makes a *timely* pause before the punchline.

And today, we'll hear the Apostle Peter speak to his audience in a *timely* way to address their unique need.

Preview...

Each week I spend time doing "sermon prep." Here at the start, I'm going to prep you for this morning's time in the Bible.

Today, my sermon is about a sermon Simon Peter gave. I even thought about titling this sermon, "*Dave's Sermon About Peter's Sermon.*" I repented of that idea.

Peter's sermon was tailor made for his audience. It was *timely*. And it is important that we see Peter's point to them.

My message has a point for all of us here today. And my point to us is drawn from Peter's point to them.

But the point of my message today isn't exactly the point Peter was making to his audience. That's because there are crucial differences between us and Peter's audience. (It'll be important to keep that in mind.)

I am eager for our time together in the Bible this morning for what we can learn about Jesus, about Peter's message, and about walking with God.

Review and preview...

We enter the Bible's story on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, where thousands of Jews had gathered to worship.

In a house in the city, the 120 or so believers in Jesus were all together, having just received the Spirit's baptism. (Acts 1:5)

It was a noisy baptism, and a crowd of thousands - many of them having come from distant lands - rushed to where the disciples were and heard them speaking in their own heart language.¹

And, again, the Apostle Peter brought a very *timely* message.

Peter was preaching to "***devout***" Jews. They, no doubt, were familiar with the Old Testament.

So, it was safe for Peter to assume that everybody listening to what he had to say would make the same Bible-based tie-in he was making to what had already happened on that day.

¹ I suspect that the large crowd and the disciples made their way to the temple precincts (likely the Court of the Gentiles) where there would have been sufficient space for such a crowd.

The Old Testament prophet, Joel, predicted what would happen on “*the day of the Lord*,” a way to refer to the arrival of the Messiah.

Peter said that **THIS** (Pentecost) was **THAT** (“*the day of the LORD*” that Joel predicted).

A Message FROM the Heart TO Hearts (Acts 2:16-36; Joel 2:28-32))

THIS DAY (*Pentecost*) is (*Joel's*) **THAT DAY** (2:16-18)

[2:16] but this is what has been was spoken through the prophet Joel:²

**[17] ‘AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,’ God says,
‘THAT I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND;
AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS WILL PROPHECY,
AND YOUR YOUNG MEN WILL SEE VISIONS,
AND YOUR OLD MEN WILL HAVE DREAMS;
[18] AND EVEN ON MY MALE AND FEMALE SERVANTS,
I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT IN THOSE DAYS
And they will prophesy.**

Note: The rest of Joel’s prophecy (vv. 19-21) was not fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. So, Pentecost was a partial fulfillment of Joel 2, the rest of which will be fulfilled when Jesus returns to set up His kingdom.

None of the Jews listening would have had a problem with what Peter said here. He was giving a reasonable explanation, from Scripture, of what was happening.

They would have thought, “*Yep. It sure does look just like Joel’s prophecy coming true.*” These “devout” Jews who were in Jerusalem to worship God would have been thrilled to see that.

But then, as sometimes happens in sermons, Peter stepped on toes, moving from his comment about Joel’s prophecy to Jesus.

Peter Preached Jesus (vv. 22-36)

YOU saw Jesus’ miracles (vv. 22)

[Acts 2:22] “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene,³ a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know...”

All of those who heard Peter and lived in Jerusalem would have known plenty about Jesus.

And those who had come from a distance for Passover and who had then stayed for Pentecost would have also heard a lot about Jesus during the fifty days they had been in the city.

There was no way Peter would have gotten away with his remark about Jesus’ miracles if Jesus had NOT performed miracles.

Nobody suggested that Peter was mistaken or that he was lying. Everybody listening knew that Jesus HAD performed miracles.

Things got tense when Peter called his listeners to account for Jesus’ death.

YOU were complicit in Jesus’ crucifixion (v. 23)

[23] this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

Peter was not saying that every member of his audience of thousands was literally guilty of nailing Jesus to a cross.

While some of them may have been involved in Jesus’ death, some of them had only been bystanders.

² See Joel 2:28-32.

³ Peter didn’t hesitate to reference Jesus’ humble beginnings of being raised in Nazareth, a village with a reputation of being backwards and insignificant.

But Peter lumped all the Jews together as being responsible for the death of Jesus. It was a national thing.

The Jewish nation had been offered the Messiah in the Person of Jesus. Instead of accepting Him, the nation, as a whole, rejected Him.

Remember. On Jesus' final Friday morning, the Jewish rulers delivered Him over to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, for trial.

Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent, so he tried to free Jesus by offering the Jewish crowd a choice between Jesus and a notorious criminal named Barabbas.

The crowds yelled at Pilate to let Barabbas, not Jesus, go free. They screamed, "[John 19:15] ***"Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!"***"

And when Pilate asked the crowd, "***Shall I crucify your King?"***" they replied, "[John 19:15]... ***"We have no king except Caesar."***"

So, here (v. 23), when Peter said that they were responsible, there was no pushback. They owned responsibility for Jesus' death.

But Peter wasn't finished because Jesus' story didn't end with crucifixion.

YOU know He was raised from the dead (vv. 24-35)

Death couldn't hold Him (v. 24)

[2:24] "But God raised Him from the dead, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power."

And again, no one yelled, "***Liar!"***" Everyone who could have known, did know the overwhelming evidence for His resurrection.

They all knew that there was no other good way to explain the empty tomb on that first Sunday morning other than resurrection.

It was impossible to explain the changed lives of the disciples apart from an alive-again Jesus.

And Peter piled on. He had brought in the prophet Joel to explain the events of Pentecost. Then, he brought in King David to explain Jesus' power over the grave.

David's occupied grave (vv. 25-29)

**[25] "For David says of Him,
'I SAW THE LORD CONTINUALLY BEFORE ME,
BECAUSE HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND, SO THAT I WILL NOT BE
SHAKEN.
[26] 'THEREFORE MY HEART WAS GLAD AND MY TONGUE WAS
OVERJOYED;
MOREOVER MY FLESH ALSO WILL LIVE IN HOPE;
[27] FOR YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES,
NOR WILL YOU ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.⁴
[28] 'YOU HAVE MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE;
YOU WILL MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH YOUR PRESENCE.'**

Here, David was not writing about himself, David's body had decayed in his tomb in Jerusalem. (Acts 2:19) But there was Someone whose body did NOT undergo decay.

Jesus' UNoccupied grave (vv. 30-35)

[30] So because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, [31] he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. [32] It is this Jesus whom God raised up, a fact to which we are all witnesses.

⁴ Peter quoted Psalm 16.

[33] Therefore, since He has been exalted to the right hand of God, and has received the promise of the Holy Spirit through the Father, He has poured out this which you both see and hear.

[34] For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says:

‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD,

“SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,

[35] UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES

A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.’”⁵

Everybody listening to Peter knew that David’s body had decayed in a tomb. But Jesus’ body had not stayed in the tomb long enough to decay.⁶

Peter explained that the Pentecost happenings were God’s validation of every claim Jesus made for Himself during His life.

Then Peter delivered the knock-out punch.

YOU crucified Jesus, the LORD and Christ (Messiah) (v. 36)

[Acts 2:36] “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ - this Jesus whom you crucified.”

That’s Peter, newly baptized with the Holy Spirit, delivering a devastating truth blow to the crowd of Jews before him at Pentecost.

Imagine that you are a Jew hearing what Peter just said. You are one of those ***“devout”*** Jews who have come to Jerusalem to worship.

There is nothing you’ve hoped for so much as the arrival of the Messiah. He is the Savior who will restore Israel. He’ll set up a kingdom.

And not only have you longed for this, but so did your parents and grandparents, and twenty generations before them.

The whole nation had been waiting hundreds of years for Messiah to show up.

And Peter said, *“He was right here. It was Jesus - and you killed Him. You missed it. You put to death the Son of God, the Lord of Joel’s prophecy, our Messiah. You gave up David’s greater Son to the Romans.”*

As we have heard, *“sticks and stones may break our bones”* - ...while some words cut like a knife. Peter aimed the scalpel of truth right at the hearts of his listeners.

Receptive Hearts (Acts 2:37)

Convicted and Convinced (2:37a)

[37a] Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart...⁷

Everything Peter said rang excruciatingly true. They accepted his message. They were ***“pierced to the heart.”*** - meaning, they got it.

They believed that the Jesus they had ignored and rejected was the Messiah they had longed for; Jesus was just who Peter said He was: Lord (meaning, God). Christ (the Messiah).

⁵ To call Jesus “Lord” is to call Him “God.” Jesus - as God - has the right to dispense the Holy Spirit, is seated at the right hand of God, is David’s ***“Lord,”*** and can save all those who call on His name. (2:21)

⁶ This was a claim that had shocked the Jewish Sanhedrin senseless less than two months earlier when Jesus said of Himself, ***[Luke 22:69] “But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.”***

⁷ This is the only time this word appears in the New Testament. In ancient literature it refers to a sharp pain or an emotional stab. *“Acutely distressed”* and *“convicted them deeply”* capture the sense of Luke’s use of the word here.

They believed. And we haven't forgotten that John wrote in His Gospel that those who believe that Jesus ***"is the Christ, the Son of God,"*** have eternal life. (John 20:31)

So, the listeners in Peter's audience who were ***"pierced to the heart"*** now have eternal life. This is their conversion.⁸

When they believed that what Peter said about Jesus was true, God justified them, regenerated them, and transferred them from spiritual death to eternal life.

These now believing-in-Jesus Jews turned to Peter and to Peter's fellow apostles and asked a frantic question.

Now That We Believe in Jesus...What? (v. 37b)

There was another time, years after this Day of Pentecost, when the man who was in charge of the jail in the city of Philippi, asked the Apostle Paul a frantic question.

He asked, ***[Acts 16:30] "What must I do to be saved?"***

This is what Paul said in answer to that man's question: ***[31] "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved."***

That was a timely answer because it perfectly fit the need of the hour for the unsaved man who asked.⁹

Here is the question Peter's audience asked of Peter.

[37b]...[They] said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what are we to do?"¹⁰

⁸ We need to keep in mind that for John, the key word about salvation is *"life,"* specifically, *"eternal life."* For Paul, the key word is *"justification."* John and Paul don't contradict each other. But neither of them ever associates his basic idea with anything other than faith.

⁹ This is consistent throughout Acts. When speaking to the Roman centurion, Cornelius, Peter said, ***[Acts 10:43] "Everyone who believes in [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins."***

They now see that they had missed what should have been so obvious. They each - and Israel as a nation - had rejected Him.

By their question, ***"What are we to do?"*** they were asking, ***"Given what we have done, what do we do now? Is there now no chance of Jesus inaugurating the kingdom?"***

Paul's answer to the jailer was *timely* to what that man needed to hear. And Peter's response to his audience was *timely* to the need of his audience.

But the answer Peter gave was a very different answer than Paul gave to the Philippian jailer because theirs was a very different question.

Next Steps (vv. 38-40)

[Acts 2:38] Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."¹¹

It seems to me that what Peter was saying was that the people in his audience needed to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins and that doing this they would receive the Holy Spirit.

I know that I just repeated Peter's answer, but I did that because it is common to explain away Peter's answer or explain it in a way that changes what he says.

I take his answer at face value, given the audience and the situation he was addressing.

¹⁰ See Luke 3:10, 12, 14 where those in the crowds (and specifically, tax-collectors and soldiers) listening to John the Baptist asked essentially the same question. They were clearly convicted by the truth of what John was saying as the crowds on the Day of Pentecost were convinced and convicted by what Peter was saying.

¹¹ You will note that Peter's answer to their question included no reference to faith, grace, eternal life, justification before God, or regeneration. His answer - and their question - pertained to something else, namely maintaining a vibrant life with God.

So, let's walk through Peter's answer. The first word he said to them was, **[Acts 2:38] "Repent."** They were to repent.¹²

A Uniquely Appropriate Call to Repentance

Repentance means...

To repent means that someone, realizing that they're traveling in the wrong direction, and understanding that the only way to now make progress is to do an about face, actually does an about face.

The guilt of this generation of Jews made repentance necessary

Every person in Peter's audience was a part of a generation that had marched away from Jesus.

By being responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus, this generation of Jews had earned for themselves the unique distinction of being the guiltiest generation in history.¹³

At certain points during His life, Jesus had said that it will be better in the day of judgment for other notoriously evil generations¹⁴ than for the Jews of this generation because of the enormity of their sin of rejecting Him.

The repentance of these now-believing-in-Jesus Jews meant separating themselves from that generation's anti-Jesus stance, doing an about face, and publicly recognizing Jesus as Lord and Christ.¹⁵

To indicate the seriousness of their repentance, Peter called on each of them to be baptized.¹⁶

Baptism's Necessity for Each One Present at Pentecost

[Acts 2:38] Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ..."

The purpose of the baptism of John the Baptist and Jesus

We remember the work of John the Baptist. He baptized many of the Jews of this generation to prepare them for the arrival of Jesus.¹⁷

Those John baptized were consciously separating themselves from the evil and the corruption of their generation.

The purpose of the Day of Pentecost baptism

This Day of Pentecost baptism was similar to John's in that it symbolized a turning to the Lord Jesus, who, in John's day, was about to begin His ministry.

It was different than John's in that they were getting baptized in submission to the Jesus they had rejected.

Then, Peter told his audience that their repentance and baptism would lead to the forgiveness of their sins.

To understand Peter's thought here, let's consider the forgiveness-of-sin problem in two categories.

The Forgiveness of Sins That Restores Relationship

[Acts 2:38] Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."

¹² See Acts 2:40.

¹³ Note the threads that connect John's baptism with this Day of Pentecost baptism: an evil generation, repentance, baptism with the Holy Spirit. (See Matthew 3:5-12; Luke 3:3-18)

¹⁴ For John, baptism played no role in receiving "eternal life." For Paul it played no role in "justification." There is no New Testament writer who associated baptism with eternal life or justification before God.

¹² A wooden translation of the Greek word for repentance means "to change one's mind." (*μετανοεω*) In some cases, this may be the best understanding. But more broadly and more frequently, repentance involves turning from one course of action to another.

¹³ See Matthew 23:33-36.

¹⁴ Tyre and Sidon, Matthew 11:21-22; Sodom and Gomorrah, Matthew 10:15; Nineveh, Matthew 12:41.

The problem of SIN's penalty was resolved by the SON's sacrifice

First, there is the penalty category. The penalty for every believer's sin was paid for by the Son.

When Jesus became **[John 1:29] "the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world,"** He satisfied God's requirement for a penalty for our sin. Jesus paid it all.

Think of what happens in a courtroom. There, it is the judge's role to declare a defendant guilty or innocent of a crime.

- If the judge declares the defendant innocent, he is set free and there is no penalty.
- If he is declared guilty, he will pay a fine, be sent to jail, or will have to do community service. There is a penalty.

No Christian will suffer the penalty for their sin (See Romans 8:1) because Jesus took our penalty on Himself. We now have a relationship with God that can't be terminated by past, present, or even future sins.¹⁸

Peter's audience had resolved this penalty category of the sin issue by resolving the Son issue.

But there is another category of forgiveness of sin that is not over and done with at the moment we are born again. And it's personal.

The believer's ongoing need for forgiveness

If there is a fracture in a relationship between you and another because they have wronged you, you may say to him or to her, *"I forgive you."*

Now, that's a powerful thing to say, but that is not what a judge says to a defendant. (It would be weird if he did...)

"I forgive you" is what one person says to another to repair a fractured relationship.

As I have been thinking about forgiveness - as it appears in our passage today and in most places in the New Testament - I am seeing it, not as the removal of a penalty and not as a part of receiving the gift of eternal life.

Forgiveness of sin is about restoration of a relationship, of fellowship.

For you to forgive someone is to remove the relational rift between you and that person. For God to **"forgive"** us is for Him to remove the relational rift between us and Him.

The condition for forgiveness

God has the right to determine in every age and circumstance what the conditions of forgiveness are going to be.

Under the Mosaic Law, offering a sacrifice was a way to experience this in-the-moment forgiveness and to re-establish fellowship with God after a sin.¹⁹

The Old Testament Jews weren't justified when they offered sacrifices to God. They were justified by faith in the promise God had given them of a coming Messiah.

The whole sacrificial system was designed to restore a Jew's relationship with God after he or she sinned.

Here, for the Jewish crowd to whom Peter spoke, what brought this relational forgiveness was baptism, baptism being the symbol of their repentance for their rejection of Jesus.

And after repentance and baptism and after the forgiveness that would follow, Peter promised that God would give them the gift of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ See Ephesians 1:7; 4:28; Colossians 1:14.

¹⁹ See, for example Leviticus 4:10, 26, 31, 35.

...And Then These Believers Would Receive the Holy Spirit

[Acts 2:38] Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This, more than any other part of this passage, highlights that the book of Acts is tracing the experience of God’s people in a period of transition.

There was a time, before Jesus’ died, when believers in Jesus did not receive the Holy Spirit. (John 7:38-39)

Here on the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit was NOT automatically given to every believer. They had to be baptized first.

For a brief period of time - just a few years - a generation of Jews were required to ***“repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of [their] sins”*** and THEN they received the Holy Spirit. (This was also the case for the Apostle Paul, as is made clear in Acts 9 and in Acts 22.)

And the changes in how the Holy Spirit was received continued as the story of Acts unfolded.

Just a couple of years after this, Samaritans received the Spirit when the apostles laid their hands on them, proving that, in Jesus, the Jewish-Samaritan division was over.

And not long after that, in the house of the Gentile centurion, Cornelius, they received the Spirit when they believed²⁰ and before baptism. (Acts 10)

²⁰ Peter was in the middle of explaining the message of Jesus to the Gentiles gathered in Cornelius’ house when the Holy Spirit ***[Acts 10:44] fell upon all those who were listening to the message.*** As Peter later explained to the Jews in Jerusalem, ***[Acts 11:17] “Therefore, if God gave them the same gift as He also gave to us after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?”*** (that is, to prohibit them from being baptized)

That set the pattern for the reception of the Spirit going forward, including us, today.²¹

And what was the response to Peter’s message?

At Day’s End - Glory! (v. 41)

[Acts 2:41] So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

We don’t know how many people were in the crowd on the Day of Pentecost to hear Peter.

No one thinks that everyone was ***“pierced to the heart.”***

But, out of the total crowd, three thousand Jews did believe, did repent and got baptized, did experience the forgiveness of their sins, and did receive the Holy Spirit.

It all happened on this day. The Holy Spirit arrived with wind, fire, and word and thousands were converted, providing the spark that got quite a fire going.

And Luke says that all of these who believed in Jesus ***“were added.”*** Added to what? They were added to the living, breathing Body of Christ - the church.

Conclusion: The timelessness of Peter’s message

Peter’s message was exactly fit for the need of the hour of his audience on the Day of Pentecost. It was timely.

²¹ Peter kept after them to respond to his message: ***[39] For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” [2:40] And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on urging them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!”***

And we have recognized the uniqueness of Peter's audience and the transitional nature of Acts. Both of those realities tell us that not everything Peter said to them will perfectly apply to us.

But there are *timeless* truths that do apply to us from what Peter said.

Today:

- Hear and believe the truth about who Jesus is - He is LORD (God) and Christ (Messiah) - and He will give you eternal life.

- When you become aware that you have sinned, confess that sin to God. (See 1 John 1:9) Agree with God that what you did or said was wrong, turn from it, and you will receive fresh forgiveness and a restored relationship with God.

- Rejoice that when you believe in Jesus, you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.