



way  
of  
life

**P**eter and Paul absorbed the reality of God that comes from our salvation in Jesus Christ. They worked to translate that reality to the word in a number of powerful sermons in the book of Acts. Through our series, **Way of Life**, we'll be looking at these powerful sermons and how they call us to action. Early Christians were known as "People of the Way," as though they were fighting for a new way of life. They were advocating for a way of life, but that way of life is Jesus Himself. Presenting Jesus as Savior and Lord competes with the alternative ways of life presented in culture. By digging into these sermons in Acts, we will see how the way of Jesus is better than any alternative offered by the world.

## JESUS IS LORD AND SAVIOR • Acts 2:33-41 • Junior McGarrahan • September 11, 2016

Today is a somber day as we remember the events of September 11, 2001. Most of you can vividly recall where you were and what you were doing and what you felt on that day. As a nation, we were in shock. We felt sucker-punched and perplexed. In his novel *The Thin Red Line*, a story about the horrors of Guadalcanal, James Jones captures that perplexity:

This is great evil. Where does it come from? How'd it enter into the world? What seed, what root did it grow from? Who's doin' this? Who's killin' us? Robbin' us of life and light. Mockin' us with the sight of what we might have known. Does our ruin benefit the earth? Does it help the grass to grow or the sun to shine? Is this darkness in you, too? Have you passed through this night?  
*The Thin Red Line*

From where does such an evil come? Is that evil just *out there* and out to get us or is that evil also within us? And, how does Peter's Pentecost sermon help us to reflect on these questions? *Let us pray.*

*Lord God, as we come to Your Word yet again, speak to us in ways that reveal Yourself to us and by the power of Your Holy Spirit, enable us to respond in ways that are for Your glory and the good witness of Your people. Amen.*

Today, we come to the end of Peter's Pentecost sermon. Read Acts 2: 33-41.

Exalted to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. 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."

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter replied, "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. The promise is for you and your

children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

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 three thousand were added to their number that day.

Three thousand converts...three thousand baptisms! Now that's a sermon. One thing we've learned about this sermon is that it has been fueled by the Holy Spirit and Jesus is at the center of the entire sermon. Let's review what Peter has said.

In the first part of his sermon, Peter reminded us that God is here. We affirm this each Sunday – God is here...amongst us. Sometimes we can get so curious and impatient about Jesus' Second Coming that we forget about His present presence. He promised to be *with us* and He is.

In the second part of the sermon, Peter assures us that *life beats death*. Christ didn't die in order to get God the Father to be in a good mood. Christ entered death in order to rescue us. One of the Church Fathers has said that we are like precious diamonds that fell into a pit of deep and heavy mud, sinking to the bottom. The weight of the mud kept us down, suffocating us and Jesus sank to the depths with us in order to rescue us, lifting us to light and life because we could not lift ourselves. And as Tim said last week, "Jesus died for us so that we might live for Him."

Today, Peter concludes this sermon by declaring that God made *Jesus Lord and Messiah* and the crowd goes wild!

Now, let's remind ourselves of the context of this sermon. This sermon was not a planned church event for a quiet spring day. This sermon exploded in the midst of an already volatile situation. Don't forget, this happened about 53 days after the frenzied day of the crucifixion of Jesus. That was a day marked by the chaos of the clash of world kingdoms. The Romans needed to quell any kind of dissent and the religious leaders feared what the Romans might do. That fear led them to a strategy of accommodation. Getting rid of Jesus would be a small price to pay for peace in our time and it didn't hurt that they could also stay in their positions of power. So, there was a tense political atmosphere.

Then for forty days after the resurrection, the risen Jesus appeared to various groups of disciples. Can you imagine the gossip and confusion during that time? If they had had the Internet back then, people would have been checking in on their devices every ten minutes to see what had happened next. The plan had been to get rid of Jesus and then everyone could go back to the way things were – the Romans in charge of the city and the religious leaders in charge of the congregations.

But no, there were...rumors...and anxiety. And then this...Pentecost...only ten days after Jesus had ascended. We get so used to the millennia since Jesus promised to return that we forget about the almost immediate fulfillment of the promise that the Holy Spirit would come and turn these disciples into witnesses who would, in their own generation, "turn the world upside down."

So Peter, full of the Holy Spirit tells them that all this strange activity is from *God*. It has nothing to do with drinking or, in fact, any other human activity. The most egregious human activity is one which Peter tackles head on. Peter reminds the people that Jesus, the one who did miracles which they all saw, is the same person they handed over to be executed, the one they nailed to the cross and, as he says in the reading for today, "God made this Jesus *whom you crucified* both Lord and Messiah."

Peter is not just making a *spiritual* claim. He is also making a dangerous political statement. You see, the title "Lord" was used for Caesar. It was the proper address for the supreme authority in the Empire. Peter is clearly saying, "Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord." We'll get back to this in a moment. It's important.

When Peter reminds them (again) that they crucified Jesus, he's not pointing a judging finger so that he can gain the moral high ground... We do that a lot don't we? Over fifty years ago, my husband was three hours late for a date once and for years after, every time he was late, I reminded him of it. This is *not* that.

Peter is preaching good news to sinners. No matter how hard we try to push God to the sidelines and out of our lives – no matter how strenuously we try to be the masters of our own destinies and no matter how badly we mess up our lives, no matter how much you took matters into your own hands, -- no matter what – things were never out of God's control. *You may have crucified Jesus, but God has made Him Lord and Messiah.*

I saw a great posting on Facebook yesterday: If you think you have thwarted God's plan for your life, understand this – you are not that powerful!

You know, since the beginning of time, humanity has always rebelled at God's authority. It is a part of our human, broken condition and we see it all around us. It begins with stompy-foot toddlers who pout and yell, "You're not the boss of me!"

I was cleaning out my desk last week and came across these post-it notes which I will use on documents I send to Tim. At the top of the Post-it note it says, "You're not the boss of me!" Then, at the bottom it says, "No wait – you are. My mistake."

"You're not the boss of me" is actually a good one-sentence summary of Charles Taylor's immense book, *The Secular Age*. In it, he tells us that the best way to describe the culture of individualism in which we live is "the buffered self." What he means by this is that instead of God being at the center of the cosmos and at the center of our lives, we have insulated ourselves against any authority that would dare to tell us who we are or what we should do. And what's more, anyone who attempts to exercise authority over us is judgmental.

That "buffered self" results in a *trinity of self-centeredness*:

1. We become our own god and thus answer to no one but ourselves. We reject God and in the words of Jeremiah:  
"What fault did your ancestors find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves." Jeremiah 2: 4
2. We become our own savior: we seek our own remedies from our suffering but most often those remedies only increase our pain. Again, here is the prophet Jeremiah describing our efforts at self-salvation.  
"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."  
Jeremiah 2: 11
3. We become our own creator: the mantra "You can be anything you want to be if you want it badly enough" was used to build confidence

in our kids, but we now see that it has led to incredibly distorted lives. This “you’re not the boss of me” orientation has, in many ways, led to the culture of death that Tim spoke of last week.

So, when the people heard this they were cut to the heart and cried, “Brothers, what shall we do?” As soon as they hear Peter tell them the truth about who Jesus is and what God is doing through him, they respond immediately. And notice – Peter doesn’t say to them, “You killed Jesus, so what are you going to do?” The point is not putting them on the hook for what they did to Jesus. The point is getting them off the hook of sin and onto a new, Kingdom way of life.

They had been seeking power or security in all the wrong places and from all the wrong people. They had thought they were the ones in charge of their own lives and if they didn’t want Jesus to be a part of it, then they would take care of *that*.

That desire to be in charge was not unusual. When Peter declares that Jesus is Lord and Messiah, he is clearly setting Jesus up as the authority over all worldly powers and systems. We are always so tempted to look to kings or presidents to make things right – to save us. But here we are told in very clear terms Caesar is not Lord. Finding a new Caesar will not solve your problems. Jesus is Lord, as we so powerfully hear in Paul’s declaration in Philippians 2: God has exalted Him [Jesus] to the highest place and...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.

At this point, we should be in the same place as the people of Jerusalem. We should be asking, “What shall we do?” Well, Peter tells us...

First, *repent*. You are heading in the wrong direction as you chase after false gods and false saviors. Turn around and head in the direction of Jesus.

Second, *be baptized*. This last week, I was reminded of something I had found both funny and helpful in my Greek studies. We get a sense of the meaning of baptism from an ancient recipe for making pickles. The recipe says to first dip the cucumber in boiling water, but take it out quickly and then *baptize* it in vinegar. It is the cucumber’s baptism in vinegar that makes a permanent change. It is no longer a cucumber – it is a pickle. When you immerse yourself in Jesus, you are changed – you become a new creation. And, in the words of the baptismal liturgy, “You are marked as *Christ’s own* forever!”

Third, *receive forgiveness and the Holy Spirit*. These are great gifts that allow you to stand up straight, no longer paralyzed by the effects of rebellion and brokenness and sin. And you are empowered to walk away from the bondage of the kingdoms of this world into the freedom of God’s kingdom.

Well, we’ve come to the end of Peter’s sermon, except that the text says, “With *many other words* he warned them...” I think you’ve heard enough words this morning, but look at what happened...

Peter’s words were God’s word to the people and when God speaks, worlds come into being. That’s exactly what happened at Pentecost. There were 3,000 converts and baptisms, but as you continue on to the end of chapter 2, you see that a new community was formed. It was a community of prayer, praise, scripture and sharing. And the life of the community bore witness to what life is like in the Kingdom of God, where Jesus is Lord and Savior!

Lesslie Newbigin, the great British missiologist has said that the visible life congregation is an interpreter of the gospel to those around it. To what do we bear witness? Can people see that because we follow a different Lord, we have a different life...and they can, too? *Amen*.

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## JESUS IS LORD AND SAVIOR • Acts 2:33-41 • Jennifer Holz • September 11, 2016

Today we come to week three in our series, Way of Life, and our third look at Peter's sermon in Acts 2. Today we wrap up Peter's sermon and see how the people respond to what they are hearing.

If you recall from two weeks ago, Peter begins his sermon, explaining that the Spirit of God is moving in their midst. God is there. Jews from every nation have gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost, and the disciples are speaking to them in all their languages about the good news of Jesus. The people don't know what to make of the scene, and think the disciples must be drunk. Peter stands up to interpret what is happening. God has poured out his Spirit on them just as the prophet Joel said he would.

Then Peter explains the death of Jesus. *Jesus did die*, Peter continues, *but death could not hold him*. Life beats death. Jesus has been raised from the dead and in that moment in history, everything has changed.

It's great news. But Peter has one final point to make before he ends his sermon. *How could the good news get any better?* Hear the Word of God from Acts 2:33-36. This is the end of Peter's sermon.

*Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. 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."*

*"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."*

### **Exalted**

Our text today begins with the word "exalted." Jesus has been exalted, which means "placed in the highest place." He has been seated at the right hand of God. There is no higher place. Jesus has not only been resurrected (which is remarkable). He has been lifted high.

Peter points again to King David and speaks David's words from Psalm 110:1.

*"The Lord said to my Lord:  
"Sit at my right hand  
until I make your enemies  
a footstool for your feet."*

These verses indicate that even King David knew he himself was not the greatest king. This is a psalm about God's rule extending across the earth and beyond. One was coming who would sit at the right hand of God and defeat His enemies. He who would rule the earth, the cosmos, with righteousness and joy. The one David spoke of has taken His throne high above all else.

I loved watching the Olympics this summer. You probably did too. The medal ceremonies are always tear jerkers! We wait for the champion to ascend to the highest place on the medal platform and for their national anthem to play. We get a close up of their face and their emotion. That person is given the honor of "ruling the world in their event" for the next four years. I would guess most athletes would say that to win Olympic Gold is the highest honor in sports.

Over Labor Day Weekend, our family drove to the Alpine Visitor Center at the top of Trail Ridge Road in Rocky Mountain National Park. When we got there we read a sign that said we were at the highest visitor center in all the National Parks. Almost 12,000 feet. That felt satisfying. It feels good to be at the highest point. While Rocky Mountain National Park is very high in elevation, many of you have climbed much higher. There is nothing like summiting a mountain top after a long climb.

But our text tells us that God has lifted Jesus to the highest place...far beyond any medal platform or mountain top. Jesus has been exalted to His rightful place as Lord of all.

I'm reminded in this moment, that it is always God's job to do the heavy lifting, the exalting. Jesus shows us in His life and death the true pattern of humanity. Paul writes in Philippians that Jesus took on human form, a servant, emptied Himself becoming obedient to death.

*Therefore, God has highly exalted Him and given the name that is above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven, and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Phil. 2:9-11*

Our work in this life is to humbly submit to the King of all, to serve Jesus. We leave the lifting to God. That means we can be done with grasping to make our own lives significant, or leave behind the anxiety that

drives us to reach for the highest point in our lives. We follow in the steps of Jesus, the servant King, who humbles Himself and trusts God to lift Him up.

Jesus is Lord. Jesus is King over all.

### **Kingdom Living**

Let's talk for a minute about what it means to be part of a Kingdom, living under a King, a Lord. The language here in this first part of our text is heavy with "King" and "Lord" language. Jesus himself preached "The kingdom of God is here. Repent and believe the good news." For the people of Israel who longed for a King, who had a shared memory of living under King David, and now experienced the harsh ruler of kings who did not have their best interest in mind (King Herod and King Caesar), to live in a Kingdom meant something to them.

But what about us? Most of us have never lived under a king. The founding of our country was in rejection of a King. We don't have a collective memory of what it means to live under the rule of a Sovereign. We are a republic, and we pride ourselves, perhaps, on not submitting to anyone or anything. If we were to imagine someone ruling our lives, it would be us, ourselves. We prefer autonomy to monarchy. Rule of self to rule of a king. We answer to ourselves, and we kind of like it that way. Now, I'm exaggerating a little, but I would submit to you that *submission* and *authority* are difficult words for us. We chaff against these.

Let's also confess that our main understanding of Kingdom living likely comes from Disney. "*Once upon a time in a Kingdom far away...lived a King and a queen and a beautiful princess.*" From Cinderella to Robin Hood to Sleeping Beauty, Kingdom living is an imaginary exercise at most for us. It's a fairy tale. We don't live in a kingdom and we don't answer to a King.

But Peter is clear in his later writings that whether we actually live under a King or not, we do live in a kingdom. Whether we call it the kingdom of self, the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of this world... there are competing kingdoms at work in our lives all the time. And when Jesus is not King in our lives, something or someone else will fill the void.

The prophet Isaiah (chapter 44) tells us that we are by nature idol-making factories. We have to worship something. We fashion our own idols, we prop them up, we call them "god," and we worship them. It's a humorous chapter. We cut down trees, and with half

of the wood we build a fire and make bread and cook meat. With the other half we fashion an idol, call it "god" and say "save me."

If we take a moment of self-reflection, you can probably name those things in your life. What are the things you bow down to in your life, the things that you have lifted high and allowed to rule over you?

The prophet Jeremiah, says we "exchange the glory of God for worthless idols" (Jeremiah 2:11). We make our own cisterns, which cannot even hold water. We live in unreality—exchanging the real and present Kingdom of God for false gods who lead us into drought and darkness. What "broken cisterns" rule your life?

If Jesus is Lord, then we have to reckon with the idols we have placed as rulers in our lives.

Jesus is Lord, Peter declares. That time has now come. Be assured of this, he tells the crowd. "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

In that moment, the sermon comes to an end.

No altar call. No music. No hymn of response. No prayer. Peter, didn't anyone tell you how to end a sermon?

### **The Response**

But what happens next is incredible. Peter didn't need to prompt them to respond. Listen.

*"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"*

*Peter replied, "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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."*

*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 three thousand were added to their number that day.*

– Acts 2:37-41

By the time Jesus died, there were about 120 faithful followers in that upper room. At the pouring out of his Spirit, 3,000 were added. 3,000 were cut to the heart.

John Stott rephrases this as they were *convicted of sin*. They were *conscience-stricken* (Stott, *The Message of Acts*, IVP). The Spirit was at work in their hearts, and true life was begging to emerge in their hearts. They could feel it; they could sense it. They knew they needed to respond.

*What do we do? How do we respond?* They ask.

Peter says, "*Repent and be baptized.*"

A new kingdom is here—and it is a kingdom full of forgiveness, life, second chances and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The way to enter this Kingdom is in repentance. Repent and be baptized.

## **Repent**

*Repent*, Peter says. Literally, turn. Renew your mind. Have a complete change of heart. Walk in a new way. Turn around.

But here's the thing, friends. For those of us who spend most of our days nurturing our autonomous lives, our response sounds something like this: "Yes, I will do it. I will change. I will turn around. I will submit my life to Jesus. " Even in repentance we have a way of making it all about us.

The reality is that apart from the Spirit of God at work in our lives, we are wholly unable to repent. Apart from God calling out to us, we are not going to find our way to Him. Like the scene in Jerusalem unfolding before us, the Spirit of God was going ahead of Peter's words, moving in the hearts of 3,000 people that day so that even their responsiveness was enabled by the Spirit.

When we think about repentance, we tend to pinpoint a behavior we need to change in our lives. And then we muster up all our will and try very hard to change it. That's what Dallas Willard calls "the gospel of sin management" and boy is that exhausting. But repentance begins *not* with thinking about ourselves, but setting our minds on Christ and changing our mind about who God is. We live with ourselves at the center and put God in a very small box somewhere out here. The work of repentance is to change that thinking—Jesus is at the center, not you; not me. Peter's call that

day was to repent of what they thought about Jesus, to receive the Spirit of God and to begin life anew in alignment with the Lord of life.

Baptism happens once to publically declare that we have changed Kingdoms and that repentance has taken place in our hearts. But repentance is our ongoing way of life nurtured by the ongoing sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

We submit our lives to the Lord of all, and then work out salvation, the Apostle Paul writes. FOR it is *God* at work in our lives enabling us to will and work for His good pleasure. That second half of the sentence is so important. Repentance is relational...with Jesus.

*In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.* (Isaiah 30:15). In yielding to the work of God in our lives and resting in who Jesus is, we stop striving for our own perfection and clawing our way to a better life. In quieting our souls, we are apprenticed in the unforced rhythms of grace found in Jesus. We learn to listen and follow.

This is the Kingdom of God. This is the way of true life.

At the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, a young, middle class Italian named Benedict, left home to attend school in Rome. Christianity had become the religion of the empire, and everything (including the church) was a mess. He knew the current system could not provide a way forward for Christ followers. Benedict began to carve out a new Christian community for followers of Jesus that would come to be known as "The Rule of St. Benedict."

He begins his little book with these words:

"Our whole life is a gift of the truce God has declared—a chance for us to relearn the life we were made for...Life with God is possible—but only in the way that God has shown us. We must get ready then—heart, mind and spirit—for the great struggle of learning to listen to God's word" (*The Rule of Saint Benedict*, Paraclete Essentials, paraphrase by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, p. 5).

The small community would grow over time to lay what one Benedictine scholar would call "seedbeds for democracy and abolition, public education and hospitals" (ibid., p. vii). These were learning communities of the world-to come. Benedict would not have known all that would come from his work...his desire was to simply present a tradition of radical commit-

ment to the gospel and a life shaped in community around the Word of God.

Benedict's *Rule of Life* guides many of our practices today. And it's worth going back to read his humble work as God shapes our Way of Life today.

In humility, rest, repentance and obedience...our way of life begins to form as we listen to God's Word, repent of our self-focused lives and practice the way of Christ together.

### **The Spirit at Work**

Let's finish with this. 3,000 people were baptized the day that Peter preached his sermon. I'll just stop there and let you take in that scene. That's a lot of water.

3,000 experienced a new way of life in Christ and began to be in fellowship together.

I can't even imagine what that was like. As an introvert, I'm good with one person and one conversation at a time. But the text indicates that the Spirit has no limits—the Spirit is active in the lives of thousands of people at any given moment, maybe hundreds of thousands. Probably more.

Across time and space, the Spirit calls. Peter says the Kingdom call is not just for those who were present that day, but to their children, the generations to come, and those who are far away. The Spirit calls out to our generation too moving in hearts and preparing people for the good news. Jesus is Lord.

If, like Peter, we listen and look for the opportunities to speak truth and hope into another's life, chances are the Spirit is already working in that person's life. It wasn't Peter's job to convert, it was Peter's job to listen, to be willing and ready for the opportunity of the Spirit. By listening to the Lord, we simply become partners in the gospel proclaiming Jesus is Lord.

Benedict wrote to his community 1000 years ago, "Listening [to the Lord] is hard work, but it's the essential work. If you're ready to give up your addiction to yourself, this message is for you: to listen is to equip yourself with the best resources to serve the real Master, Jesus Christ" (ibid., p. 3)

Jesus is Lord. May it be so among us.

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## **STUDY GUIDE**

### **"Jesus Is Lord and Savior" • Acts 2:33-41**

#### **Start It**

In what ways do you think the common and ordinary things of life can become false gods in our lives? What kinds of things can dictate the decisions we make?

#### **Study It**

- Why do you think that Peter twice reminds the people of their guilt and complicity in the crucifixion of Jesus? How does this help you understand why we take time in each worship service to confess our sin?
- Jeremiah 2:11 tells us that we reject God's spring of living water and try to build cisterns of our own that cannot hold water. Where do you see tangible examples of this kind of self-salvation?
- Read Isaiah 46 and spend some time on this. Describe the differences between the one true God and false gods. What effect does the worship of false gods have on us? What is the character of the one true God and what does he do for us?
- It is easy to think that the Ascension of Jesus just tells us that Jesus left the earth and will come again someday. Acts 2:33 tells us that the destination for Jesus in the Ascension is exaltation to the right hand of the Father. So, while Jesus is not on earth, he is someplace and that someplace is the "right hand of the Father." What does it mean to you that Jesus has been exalted?

#### **Pray It**

*Lord God, we call you Lord but often live as if we are the masters and commanders of our own lives. We forget that you are Lord of all. O Lord, we pray, in the words of Flannery O'Connor, "I do not know you God because I am in the way. Please help me to push myself aside." Help me to so order my life and my desires that I delight to do your will. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

#### **Live It**

Take some time in a quiet place and inventory the places in your life where you most often place your desires and plans ahead of God's desires and plans for you. Lift those things up to the Lord and ask Him to cause your heart to delight in Him. Ask Him to place in your heart the right desires. (See Psalm 37: 1-7)