



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

## SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## Unfinished

Part 4: The Truth Is...

Acts 2:14–41

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My name is Jeremy Anderson. I serve as the middle school director here—and I love it. In case you're wondering, it's not student ministry Sunday. We're going to continue in our series in Acts, and I invite you to open to Acts 2:14–41. As you're turning there, I want you to think with me for a minute about something basic, something we use all the time but often don't give much thought to—and that is our words.

When we're kids, we're told to be very careful with our words, because once you say them, you cannot get them back. We're told this because we know words have great power. They have power to bring people down. They can cut deep to the heart. That's why we want to be careful, as we don't want to hurt somebody with our words. Words can accomplish a lot of good, and they can do a lot to bring harm.

We can think of some examples of ways words can bring harm. Someone might say, "You're ugly." I don't like when people tell me I'm ugly—although it doesn't happen often. But when they do, it's not fun. Words can be used to ridicule and mock people. It's not so great when you do something really goofy and then people never let you live it down. They mock you for it time and time again, until you wonder if it will ever end.

Words can be divisive. Proverbs 15:1 says, *"A harsh word can stir up anger."* We see this happen within families and between friends. As a middle school youth pastor, I see it often with students. "Did you hear what Joey sent me in a text message this week?" "No, I didn't. What happened?" "He said he doesn't want to be my friend anymore." Crazy stuff. Words can bring division. It happens between races, cultures, and political views.

Words can also carry the burden of bad news. When we look at the latest headlines in the world, we might see news of natural disasters, trafficking, wars and rumors of wars, and we think, "What is going on?" Words can bring bad news.

But despite all that, words can do immeasurable good. We all know the power a kind greeting can give on a bad day. Someone might just say, "Hi. How are you?" As a kid, it's important to hear that your parents love you. It's great to see my wife light up when I say, "Bri, you look beautiful today." Her face gets all smiley. "Oh, that's nice." Words can do a lot of good.

I'll never forget, as a senior in high school, when we won the state championship. My dad came down on the court afterwards, and he came up to me and gave me this big hug. He said, "I'm proud of you." That meant so much to me. A few simple words can have so much meaning. They can give confidence and security, and they can motivate us to do so much.

Last week our passage in Acts ended on the day of Pentecost with the apostles being mocked, ridiculed and accused of being drunk because of the work of the Holy Spirit that was taking place inside them. That brings us to where we are today, learning that God has given us the gift of words to declare truth as well. We are not going to read the whole passage all at once, but we'll reference it throughout the message. Starting in Acts 2:14, it says, *"But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: 'Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.'"*

Before we dive into Peter's sermon, I want to point out a couple important things. First, Peter is preaching to an audience of unbelievers which tells us from the get-go that Peter's purpose in his sermon is primarily evangelistic. He's trying to convince people of the truth. He's going to address a false understanding and then correct with the accurate interpretation of what was going on at that time. That's why the title of today's message is, "The truth is..."

The second thing—on a random cool note—is that Peter's sermon was taking place probably right around the time this sermon is, or maybe a little earlier, about 9:00 in the morning. So good job, guys, for getting up and getting here, ready for the morning message.

Third, Peter calls his audience to listen. Now, as parents, I'm sure you've done this a number of times. My parents did it all the time. My mom especially would say, "Jeremy, look at me. Listen carefully to what I'm telling you right now." Then she would start talking, giving directions of what I was supposed to do, or where to find something. But as I walked away, I'd think, "Wait—what did she say?"

Now, while I'm not a parent, I am a youth pastor with middle school students, so I'll often do the same. If I'm talking to them and there's an important message to communicate, I'll say, "Okay. Everybody's eyes on me. Look at me right now. I need you to hear what I'm saying."

Peter is doing this. He's saying, "Guys, I need you to listen to me. Consider what I have to say right now." He's going to do this twice. He does it at the start; then he does it again about halfway through. This tells us that he's got something important that we need to hear. And that's true for all of us.

Finally, Peter's sermon resulted in an awakening. It said 3,000 people were saved that day. I was a little disappointed to see that there weren't 3,000 people here today, because I was thinking, "No pressure. I'm preaching on a sermon that resulted in 3,000 people being saved." I mean, what do you add to that? Should I just read it and be done? "Let's read verses 14–41," and then, "Have a good Sunday—we'll see you tonight."

What a great reminder it is for us to see what God did to establish His church. It was through the message of one man that God was able to work on the hearts of many, to reveal the truth to them. Remember, the Jews had all gathered there for the feast, and then they would go back to all the places where they had come from—and the message of Jesus Christ would go with them. How amazing is that?

It's cool that we celebrated communion together as a church family, remembering the work Jesus did on the cross. But now we're not only going to celebrate the work God did, but hopefully we'll be encouraged to carry the spirit of this sermon into our day-to-day lives. So let's jump into Peter's sermon.

## **Peter's sermon defends the Spirit's ministry with Scripture**

Think of walking into a situation and having no idea what's going on. I remember one time when we were at fall camp with some of the middle school boys. We were getting ready to shut down for the night and were heading back to the cabins. I walked in the cabin, and... Well, if you don't have middle schoolers, or don't spend much time around them, they smell of one of two things: BO or ungodly amounts of Axe.

I walked in this cabin and it was like a wall of Axe hit me. It's almost worse than BO, because you can't even breathe. I said, "What is going on in here?" I see some guys sliding a bottle of Axe across a table. I don't know exactly what they were doing, but if the bottle landed in a certain way they would have to spray it at each other. Apparently it landed that way a lot, because there was no mistaking the smell of Axe in that cabin.

That's not really the situation Peter was dealing with. Men were coming in and saying, "What is going on in here?" They thought it was something bad, but Peter stood up and said, "It's not what you think it is." He has a good explanation for what was going on there. It's important to note that the apostles were showing evidence of the Holy Spirit working in their lives. Remember, a crowd had come around them, but there was a really distinct difference between the apostles and the other Jews in town. And it wasn't that they were just going to church. Sometimes we get the idea that if we go to church regularly, we're good. We're different from other people.

But the difference with these men was not their church attendance or their synagogue attendance. There was a very real living out of the Spirit's work in their lives. This is why a defense needs to be made and why Peter first had to address the misconception: "These men are drunk!" Peter says, "No. It's too early for that. It's 9:00 a.m."

We won't get into all the reasons that it would be true that the men weren't drunk. There were no sobriety tests in that day to make them prove they were sober. Instead, Peter jumped right into explaining the truth of the matter. He says, "The truth is, fellas, this is what Joel talked about."

That worked, because the Jews were familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures. Peter said, "Joel told us that God's Spirit would come upon all mankind. It wouldn't be reserved for the religious elites. It wouldn't just be for the prophets or kings or rulers of the day." In the Old Testament, the Spirit would come upon someone for a period of time to accomplish something. But Peter is now saying He was coming on men and women, young and old, slave and free. God would give His Spirit without distinction to everyone who believed.

Whoa—think about it. That's us today. As believers, we too get the Spirit of God. So, does your life today manifest the working of the Holy Spirit? Would your neighbor be able to tell a difference in you by the way you treat people, the way you organize your priorities, how you spend your time, the way you honor God and the way you speak of Him in your conversations?

There are times when we are so afraid of standing out today. We want to be like spiritual chameleons. Sometimes young people ask the question, "How far can I go without sinning? How far is too far? How much can I look like the world without being too worldly? How much can I blend in and still be a Christian?" I think that carries into adulthood, although we might not phrase it that way.

That's not the idea Peter and the apostles had. They boldly stood out, confident of the work God was doing in their lives. They spoke freely about it. And brothers and sisters, if we are living lives marked by the Holy Spirit, we're going to be different. We're going to stand out. And that's a good thing. We shouldn't be like the world. We should take encouragement from that. When it happens, we should not be standing out as lunatics or weirdos or whackos. We should stand out because we have sound discernment. We're going to stand out because our priorities are right, honoring our families and honoring God in the process. We're caring for each other. People's heads will turn and they'll wonder what's going on.

If you cannot see in your life how the Spirit is working, then it's safe to say the people around you can't either. If you can't see it yourself, then nobody who's around you will see how the Spirit is at work in your life. These men were called to witness to the work of the Spirit because they let Him be demonstrated through their lives.

We should never quench what the Spirit is doing. But sometimes our busy schedule or our entertainment gets in His way and we'll ignore His prompting to be obedient. Maybe He'll nudge you to pray for someone who is struggling or just to greet them. Maybe He'll ask you to give to a brother or sister who you know is struggling. Maybe He will prompt you to mow someone's lawn. But sometimes we have all kinds of reasons not to do what He wants us to do.

Peter addressed the unbelieving audience with Scripture, but sometimes we think we shouldn't use the Bible when we're talking about God to our unbelieving friends, because they don't believe the Bible is true. But Peter used it to defend what was happening. Jesus used it as His defense. Paul used it as His defense. What authority do we have to defend our faith without the Bible when that's where we learned what we know in the first place? We might think logic will be enough—and there is a time and place for reasoning. Peter used it when he mentioned that it was too early for people to be drunk. But that will only take us so far. We need the Scriptures to communicate truth, and Peter went directly there. He knew that truth was to be found in the Scriptures.

Remember what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16–17. *"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."* We shouldn't be so quick to abandon the Bible. Rather, this should be the one place in which we should have serious confidence. What is written in this Book is truth, and there's nothing to be ashamed of in it. We can stand on it.

Isaiah 55:11 says, *"So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it."* It's not our responsibility to change people's hearts. It's not our responsibility to make them believe what the Bible says. Our responsibility is to share the truth with people; it's the Holy Spirit's work to convince them of that truth. God has given us the powerful words of Scripture for our good and to share with those around us. Peter's sermon defended the ministry of the new church and the ministry of the Spirit with the Bible, and we should do that today as well.

## Peter's sermon declares Jesus Christ as Master and Messiah

After referring the people back to the Scripture in Joel, Peter goes on in verse 22: "Men of Israel, listen to these words." He's saying, "In case I've lost you, listen up. We have more good things to talk about." He then declares that Jesus Christ is Master and Savior.

I don't know if you watch many movies. I like watching movies, but I don't watch them too often. I have however noticed—especially in the superhero movies—there's always a time when the protagonist is depicted as the savior. What's interesting to me is you'll see them coming in at some point and making a sacrifice or putting their lives on the line, and then this happens. Their arms are stretched wide, and the music gets so intense and serious. It builds a desire inside you to say, "Yes! Get it! You're the savior—save them. Yeah!"

I don't know if they had music playing during Peter's sermon, but if they did it would have been intense, because he's going to talk about Jesus as the Master and Messiah. When he does, he does something difficult, something you and I don't like to do—or to receive. He calls people out point blank for what they've done and he gives them no excuse. He tells his audience that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah and that God had attested this reality to them with many signs and wonders. John 20:30–31 says, *"Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."*

Peter says, "The truth is, fellas, Jesus is the Messiah and Lord." He's talking to Jewish people who are waiting for their Messiah and he says, "That was Him. You nailed Him to the cross by the hands of sinful men." Peter was being firm, but he was also being gracious and gentle. In Acts 2:23 Peter says, *"This Man [was] delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God."*

He doesn't say that to bash them or call them fools. Rather, Peter is telling them with compassion that Jesus is in fact the Messiah and that they need to know Him. What happened to Jesus was according to God's plan. Even though they had done the most extreme thing possible to stop His ministry, they couldn't actually stop Him. God used their evil plans to carry out His good. He said, "You nailed Him to the cross, but God was working in that."

Jesus cannot be stopped. All that is happening around us in the world is under the sovereignty of God. The evil things we are seeing today are still within the sovereignty of God. Jesus is the Lord and Master of all.

There's a story about a ship captain who was sailing in the night. It was very dark and foggy; all he could see in the distance was a faint light. So he told his signalman to send a message that said, "Alter your course 10 degrees south." And a message returned saying, "Alter your course 10 degree north." The captain was a little upset. "Send another message. Alter your course 10 degrees south. I'm the captain." The response came back, "Alter your course 10 degrees north. I'm Seaman Third Class." The captain was getting pretty ticked off at this point. "Alter your course 10 degrees south. I'm a battleship." He thought, "That will do it. That will tell them." The message came back: "Alter your course 10 degrees north. I'm a lighthouse."

There are times in our lives when we speak to God as if we're a battleship. We expect God to alter His course because we think we've got something going for us. We think we have our plans and ideas exactly right. But the truth is that God is immovable. He is the Master. He will rule no matter what.

There are lots of voices in this world today—especially in this information-loaded world. If you were to reach in your purse or pocket right now, you'd probably be able to pull out a cell phone. You have unlimited access to information and messages through that phone, that little computer in your pocket. You can find out what's going on in the world by looking up the news. If you want to know what's going on in your best friend's life—text them. If you want to know how Mom and Dad are doing, give them a ring. Shoot them a text. Facebook lets you know about everybody's life.

There's information everywhere and we need to be careful about what we hear, what we believe, and what information we're following in our lives. There are all kinds of blogs, newscasts, messages, magazines, etc., where we can gain information that might be deceitful and wrong. We must be sure to know the Scriptures so we can filter everything else through what we read here. This should be our authority, our truth. We should not rely on the happenings around us for information. Instead, we should rejoice in God's Word.

Peter isn't talking about Jesus as Master to suggest to his audience that even though he believes Jesus is Lord, it's okay if they don't. He's telling them that it's a matter of fact. Jesus is the Master, period, end of discussion. Your option is either to bow the knee to Him or to continue to fight against Him. His position is not up for debate. The only debate is in your heart as to whether or not you will acknowledge Him as Lord.

Peter continues by making what is possibly the greatest statement in his sermon. He says in verse 24, *“But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.”* Not only is Jesus Lord and Master, He’s also the Messiah and death could not conquer Him. The grave could not keep Jesus down. Today we can still celebrate the fact that Jesus is a risen Lord and Savior.

Peter is excited about this—*“This is good news! Jesus is risen”* and knows what his audience is thinking, so he quotes Psalm 16, where David says, *“Because You will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.”* Peter knows the people will say, *“Well, Peter, that’s David talking about himself.”* Peter responds, *“I can confidently tell you that David is dead. He was buried and his grave is still here. If you doubt me, we can go check it out. His body has decayed. But David was looking forward to the Messiah, the risen Son of God. He was talking about Jesus. You can’t say the same thing about Jesus’ grave as you can say about David’s. His grave is empty.”*

Because of this truth—that Jesus has risen and conquered the grave—we can still live in confidence today. We can share and declare to the world around us that Jesus Christ is Master and Lord. He is the Messiah. He is the only Way. We can echo Peter’s message that because Jesus is Lord, we should serve and follow Him. We can be bold to say this because we know it to be true.

## **Peter’s sermon demands a response**

Have you ever watched a movie—or read a book—and in the middle of the story you’ve gotten so caught up in it that your emotions are overwhelming. There’s a lump in your throat. You almost want to cry, except you’re worried that the people around you will think you’re weird. I’ll tell myself, *“Hold it together, Jeremy. You can get through this. I know it’s touching—but don’t cry.”* Maybe it’s just me. I used to be hard-nosed when I watched movies. No emotion. But now I get emotional over almost nothing. It’s ridiculous. It could be a sports movie, a war movie, or whatever, and I’m in anguish. The movie elicits a strong response from me. Last week I spent a couple days in the Rockies, and that elicited a response from me as well. *“Wow. This makes me feel small.”* Back home I feel like I’m taller than everything, but out there I’m shorter than everything.

Luke tells us that Peter’s sermon elicited a response from his audience. Verse 37 says, *“Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart.”* Imagine that. They said, *“What do we have to do?”* I think the reason his audience got to this point was that he won them over by being a good persuader. He stuck to what he would later say in 1 Peter 3:15, *“Always be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”* He gave a defense. He was firm, but he was gentle and respectful.

I see Christians often get so heated in debates when we’re talking about different ethical or moral dilemmas in our world—or even theological ideas. We just rag on each other. We can get so hostile, it’s no wonder that people see us and think, *“I don’t want to believe what you believe.”*

But Peter was gentle. He reasoned with them, saying, *“This is the error in your ways. This is the truth.”* I believe that’s what won his audience over. His defense was compassionate and he allowed room for the Holy Spirit to work. Sometimes today we don’t allow much room for the Holy Spirit to work. We try to do the work of the Spirit ourselves.

When we get heated we can start harping on people. We start saying things that are divisive and hurtful. That doesn’t give the Spirit an opportunity to work in the hearts of the people we’re speaking to. It’s sad that the common perception of Christians is that we’re hypocrites and judgmental people. Let’s let Peter be our example, being gentle and kind in our defense of our faith.

With that in mind, let’s look at a few of the responses that Peter told his audience they needed to have. First, he said, *“We need to listen to God’s Word and to the Holy Spirit.”* He says, *“When you come to church, it’s not all on the preacher. You’ve got some skin in this game too.”* It’s your responsibility and my responsibility to listen to the words of God.

Second, his words were evangelistic. He told them, *“Repent.”* The response to the good news of Jesus Christ should be to repent and believe. To repent means to change our mind and agree with God about our sin. Sometimes we think it’s just a matter of feeling bad about what we’ve done. *“If I feel guilty, then I’m good.”* If we beat ourselves up a little, that’s all it takes. *“I didn’t do the laundry like Bri told me to.”* Or, *“I was such a jerk in that situation.”* Then I can think, *“Okay, now I’m good.”*

But the Bible ties repentance to changing our minds and then changing our actions—these cannot be separated. And as your mind is changed about the sin in your life, you will not continue to act the same way. You’ll turn and walk with the Lord in righteousness. Peter says we must repent.

Third, he told them to be baptized. There are a lot of believers who say, "I'm just not ready to be baptized yet." Biblically speaking, if you have authentic saving faith in Jesus Christ, you're ready to be baptized. If we're honest, when we say we're not ready to be baptized, most of the time that means we're scared to get up in front of the church. I understand that. I was scared for a long time too. But that does not make it right. That's not the reason to not be baptized. Peter says, "Be baptized. You've put your faith in Jesus Christ—now publicly declare to the church that you are a Christian. You've trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior."

Listen. Repent. Be baptized. Then fourth, speak up. Give a defense for your faith. Don't be afraid to talk about Jesus. When you're in your workplace, talk about Jesus. When you're in your school, talk about Jesus. You never know when the people you're talking to are ready to hear the good news about Jesus Christ.

Peter was talking to thousands of Jews who were hostile toward him, who just weeks before had crucified Jesus. Peter had denied Jesus and the disciples had all fled when He was arrested, yet now Peter was standing confidently before the same Jews, saying, "This is the truth." Can you stand confidently and say, "This is the truth," when your faith is questioned?

The last response we need to have is to submit to the Holy Spirit. This happens daily in our lives. Luke's exposition of the events that took place during and following the day of Pentecost clearly shows that it is the Holy Spirit Who bears witness to God's work in our lives. If you want people to see the work Jesus is doing in you, live according to the Holy Spirit.

Obey. Trust. Follow. You're no longer the ruler of your life. Rather, you must live a life in submission to the Lord. You don't get to call the shots. In Galatians 2:20 Paul says, *"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."* In 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 he says, *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."*

It's been said that a spouse who is 85% loyal is not loyal at all. There is no partial loyalty when it comes to following Christ. It's all or nothing. As Augustine said, "Jesus isn't valued at all until He is valued above all." Is that true in your life today? Do you value Jesus above all things?

Let us echo the prayer of David in Psalm 139: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way."*

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

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