

September 26 Lesson 4 (NIV)

## Praise for Salvation

Devotional Reading: Acts 2:37–47

Background Scripture: Acts 2:32–33, 37–47

Acts 2:32–33, 37–47

32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. 33 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.

.....

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

38 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. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

### *Key Text*

*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.—Acts 2:42*

## Celebrating God

### Unit 1: God’s People Offer Praise

Lesson Outline

Introduction

A. No Longer Endangered

B. Lesson Context

I. A Divine Plan (Acts 2:32–33, 37–40)

A. Promises Fulfilled (vv. 32–33)

B. Promises Offered (vv. 37–40)

God's Plan or Mine?

II. A Divine Change (Acts 2:41–47)

A. Added to the Church (v. 41)

Changing Perspectives

B. The Active Church (vv. 42–46)

C. A Growing Group (v. 47)

Conclusion

A. Transformation

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Corinthians

Ko-rin-thee-unz (th as in thin).

Deuteronomy

Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.

diaspora

dee-as-puh-ruh.

koinonia (Greek)

koy-no-nee-uh.

Leviticus

Leh-vit-ih-kus.

Messiah

Meh-sigh-uh.

Nazareth

Naz-uh-reth.

Pentecost

Pent-ih-kost.

Samaria

Suh-mare-ee-uh.

Theophilus

Thee-ahf-ih-luss (th as in thin).

## Introduction

### A. No Longer Endangered

News about the endangered species list is rarely uplifting. Of the 719 animal species that have been listed for the US, at least 11 are extinct on the continent, and many more remain endangered. Only 27 animals have been taken off the list, due to species recovery. In December 2019, the latest three joined the list of recovered species: the Monito gecko, the Kirtland's warbler, and the Foscett's speckled dace. Removal from the endangered list requires evidence that the species can survive and flourish on its own in its natural environment. Many factors come into play to make sure that such recovery can be expected to continue. When all criteria are met, we can celebrate a successful recovery.

As new life can be breathed into dying species, God can breathe new life into endangered people. Today's lesson gives us a dramatic example in this regard.

### B. Lesson Context

The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were both written by Luke, a Gentile disciple and physician (Colossians 4:14). The Gospel is like a Part 1, while Acts is Part 2. Luke addressed both of his books to a certain Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). Acts 1:8 anticipated the spread of the gospel message from Jerusalem to Samaria and on to the remotest parts of the earth. The contents of the book of Acts span about 30 years, beginning in AD 30. The time frame of our lesson is 50 days after Jesus' resurrection.

The apostle Peter was the one speaking in today's text (see Acts 2:14). There's a very good chance that many or most of his audience had been in the city during Jesus' trials, crucifixion, and resurrection; it was natural for those making the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for observances of Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:5–6; Luke 22:1) to stay for the Festival of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:9–12). The latter came to be known as Pentecost.

The people who heard Peter preach were from various locations (Acts 2:8–11). Imagine the non-stop talking in the streets about the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth! There would have been rumors, questions, and doubts about the identity of Jesus. Did he really rise from the dead? Was he really the Christ?

At first glance, we may be surprised that Peter exhibited the boldness we see in today's text. After all, he had denied Jesus three times before the crucifixion (Luke 22:54–62) and had cowered afterward in a locked room (John 20:19). But having been reinstated by Jesus himself after the resurrection (21:15–19), Peter became a different man.

## I. A Divine Plan

(Acts 2:32–33, 37–40)

### A. Promises Fulfilled (vv. 32–33)

32. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.

The Jewish people were expecting a king in the likeness of David (Matthew 12:23), not this Jesus. The people expected their Messiah to deliver them from Roman rule and “restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6). Instead, Jesus was a humble servant who had no palace (compare Isaiah 53:1–3; Luke 9:58). He came to provide forgiveness of sins and a better kingdom (John 18:36).

The people might not have recognized the arrival of the Messiah, but that was all in the plan of God from the beginning (Acts 2:22–23; Galatians 1:4). The death of Christ was no accident or unforeseen wrinkle; it was the perfectly executed plan from God. From the Garden of Eden, in which God promised to strike the serpent (Genesis 3:15; compare Romans 16:20), to the promise to Abraham, wherein his

seed would be a blessing to all nations (Genesis 12:1–3), God worked his plan (compare Galatians 3:16–18).

That plan included raising Jesus from the dead just as the Scriptures had predicted (Acts 2:23–35). The apostles were witnesses. They had seen Jesus alive again and had watched him ascend to Heaven to sit at God’s right hand (see next verse; also Luke 24 and Acts 1).

33a. Exalted to the right hand of God,

To be at the right hand of someone is to be in the position of honor or preeminence (Genesis 48:13–20; Psalm 80:17; Acts 7:56; Ephesians 1:20; etc.). Peter expanded on this a bit by quoting Psalm 110:1 in Acts 2:34 (not in today’s text).

33b. he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

Just before returning to Heaven, Jesus reminded the disciples of his Father’s plan to send them the promised Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; compare John 14:16–17; 15:26). God began to fulfill this promise as he poured out his Spirit in Acts 2:1–4.

The phrase what you now see and hear points back to the evidence of the audible and visual phenomena of Acts 2:2–4. To correct a misinterpretation seen in Acts 2:13, Peter quoted from Joel 2:28–32 in Acts 2:16–21. That prophet had pronounced one of the greatest of all prophecies of Christ’s church. Joel foresaw Judah devastated by a terrifying locust plague (Joel 2:1–11). Yet God promised to remove the plague and pour out his blessings if the people repented (2:12–27). In looking into the distant future, Joel also said that God planned to do more than restore crops: he also promised to pour out his Spirit (2:28–29).

In Acts 2:34–36 (not in today’s text), Peter concluded his sermon with convicting words. His message is often called the first complete gospel sermon because it was the first public announcement of the significance of Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. The Scriptures had predicted that all this would happen to the Messiah (examples: Psalms 2; 16; 22; Isaiah 53; Luke 24:25–27).

B. Promises Offered (vv. 37–40)

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

This gospel message penetrated like a sword (Hebrews 4:12) as the people were called to account. Many came to the painful realization that God sent Jesus out of love for them (see John 3:16) but they had rejected him (Mark 10:32–34). Even though they had not personally driven the nails into his hands and feet, they had either agreed with those who did (Luke 23:21) or they had approved of the crucifixion by their silence.

Though we probably think of the reaction of being cut to the heart as little more than a gut feeling, certainly many in the crowd had their hearts prepared to receive correction from the Lord. A heart that is willing to ask what shall we do is prepared to discover the rich blessings of God. In this case, the people were asking the apostles for immediate help with their realized need.

38a. Peter replied, “Repent

The words repent and repentance occur more than 50 times in the New Testament. To repent is to turn away from sin and toward God in heart, mind, and lifestyle (compare Ezekiel 14:6; 18:30; Acts 3:19; 26:20). Throughout history there have been moments of truth in which people were faced with the stark choice of either walking away from God or toward him (Joshua 24:14–15; 2 Chronicles 7:14; etc.). A hard-hearted, prideful individual will not admit wrongdoing. But through repentance, that person can find peace with God. Instead of denying, excusing, or justifying sin, people must admit it and turn from it.

38b. and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ

The apostle Paul later explained that to be baptized was to be “buried with [Christ Jesus] ... into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead ... we too may live a new life” (Romans 6:4; see also Colossians 2:12). He further noted that “all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:27).

There is nothing magical about the waters of baptism; rather, baptism is God’s chosen time when regeneration and renewal happen (Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21). As such, baptism is not a human work of merit (compare Ephesians 2:8–9); rather, it is a work of God.

38c. for the forgiveness of your sins.

The most important thing anyone can do when reaching the age of knowing that they have sinned against God is to have those sins forgiven. The wonderful thing is that God is willing to forgive us and to help us resist future sin. The former (known as justification) happens through Christ; the latter (known as sanctification) happens through the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 6:11; also see next).

38d. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

With the gift of the Holy Spirit, Christians have the power to put off the works of the flesh and to bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–25). In this regard, Peter’s sermon foreshadows the church’s submission to the leading of the Spirit in the book of Acts and beyond.

39. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

Those who heard this sermon likely understood all who are far off to refer to Jews who had left Israel in the diaspora (the dispersion of Jews beyond Israel). That dispersion was not limited to the exiles of 2 Kings 17:6 and 25:21. The reality of the diaspora is a context of the first century AD, with Jews living all over the Roman Empire (see Acts 2:9–11; James 1:1).

In both Acts 8 and 10, there was confusion and questioning about the nature of God’s call. Christians of Jewish background initially believed that Jesus had come to redeem only Israel (compare Luke 24:21; Acts 11:18). But throughout the book of Acts, the Spirit led messengers to take the gospel to Gentiles as well.

40. With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”

The word translated corrupt is also translated “crooked” in Luke 3:5. That’s the idea in Deuteronomy 32:5, which refers to “a warped and crooked generation.” Christians must shine like stars in a sin-darkened world and keep themselves “from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27).

II. A Divine Change

(Acts 2:41–47)

A. Added to the Church (v. 41)

41. Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Modern estimates suggest that Jerusalem's population was 60,000–80,000 at the time. With the annual observance of Pentecost, however, the number would have been temporarily much higher. The three thousand who accepted Peter's message were therefore a small fraction of those who could have. Even so, their influence in Jerusalem and their hometowns located in the regions listed in Acts 2:9–11 could be enormous (compare Luke 13:20–21).

B. The Active Church (vv. 42–46)

42a. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching

Decisions changed lives—and eternal destinies. The new Christians devoted themselves to things they had not done before.

For one thing, they heeded the apostles' teaching. Jesus had promised that the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles "into all the truth" (John 16:13). They passed those truths along as they taught about Jesus. That life-changing message, preserved in the pages of the New Testament, remains the very center of the Christian faith. True teaching is important!

42b. and to fellowship,

The new Christians' steadfastness in fellowship is still a model for today. We have the privilege of belonging to the greatest family on earth as we work together to spread the good news. The Greek word being translated is *koinonia*, and many churches use that word as the name of one of their Bible study classes: *Koinonia* Class. When Christians pool their time, talent, and treasure into the gospel task, we can say they are "fellowshipping" in the gospel (Galatians 2:9; 1 John 1:3–7).

42c. to the breaking of bread

Breaking of bread could refer either to an ordinary meal or to the Lord's Supper (compare and contrast Luke 9:16; 24:30; Acts 20:7; 27:33–36; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:23–24). Just which is in view here is a matter of some debate. At the very least,



we should think that these meals involved close fellowship, since that was just noted.

42d. and to prayer.

Although prayer is mentioned fourth, that doesn't mean it's the least important! Whether prayer was offered by an individual (Acts 26:29) or by a group (12:5), these earliest believers realized how important prayer was to their new relationship with God. And so it is today.

43a. Everyone was filled with awe

Upon hearing the words of Peter and seeing the transformed lives, many present in the Pentecost crowd seemed to have been filled with awe. When the crowd realized they had rejected and killed the Messiah, they may have even been filled with fear, respect, and reverence.

43b. at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

God continued to shake Jerusalem by empowering the apostles to do miracles, which is what wonders and signs are (see also Acts 2:19; 2:22; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3; 15:12). The miracles were wonders because those who witnessed them were amazed. They were signs because they pointed people to the truth about Jesus (compare John 14:11).

44–45. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

One of the most important characteristics of Christians is generosity. The fact that these earliest Christians had everything in common indicates that they shared their possessions, going so far as to sell property and give as anyone had need (example: Acts 4:32–37). There would have been a pressing need during this time because of those who had stayed in Jerusalem following Pentecost. These new Christians seemed to have lingered in town to continue in fellowship. Provisions would have likely run out for some, given the extension of the originally planned length of the trip.

God helps the needy, and Christians must be like-minded (Galatians 6:10; 1 John 3:17–18). This is one of the first lessons that the earliest Christians learned, and they learned it quite well.

46. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,

These earliest Christians found strength in getting together every day. Larger groups could meet in the temple courts, while smaller gatherings could meet in their homes.

Temple gatherings occurred specifically “in Solomon’s Colonnade” (Acts 5:12), along the east side of the outer court. Jesus had been here (John 10:23), and it became the site of a miracle that resulted in another sermon by Peter (Acts 3:11–26) and sharp confrontation with opponents (chapter 4).

Meeting in one another’s homes was more conducive to sharing meals and personal interactions. The sincere hearts that led to or resulted from such gatherings set them apart from the rest of the world (see also Acts 5:42; 20:7). This happened as a natural outflowing of love, helping bind together those of “faith as precious as ours” (2 Peter 1:1).

In modern US society, Christians can allow themselves to become too busy to engage in this kind of fellowship. We may get home after work, shut the garage door, and “cocoon” for the rest of the evening. What a tragedy to miss out on opportunities that can bind the church together!

### C. A Growing Group (v. 47)

47. praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Public meetings in the temple meant that the earliest Christians were not huddling together in secret. Instead, their public witness gained them favor of all the people. To have a good reputation with outsiders is important for attracting them to Jesus (Colossians 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:10–12; 1 Timothy 3:7). And that seemed to be what was happening here as their number continued to grow daily. As the first Christians succeeded in being a strong, loving witness to the community, they also had God’s approval. After all, he is the one who ultimately saves (compare Romans 3:24–26 and Titus 3:4–7).

## Conclusion

### A. Transformation

The most powerful realization from today's text is that Christ is still good news for a dying world—he has been since the day of Pentecost, and he will continue to be so until he returns. Until then, we must share Jesus with everyone we can.

Foundational to this effort is a sense of awe, which is often missing in the church today. Sometimes our worship services feel stale. Our prayer lives may dry up. We allow the urgent to distract us from the important. But in those times, we can ask for transformation as we cry for God to “restore to me the joy of your salvation” (Psalm 51:12).

God still works in and through his people. May we be aware of his movement in our lives, our churches, and our communities so that we too may see the church growing daily.

#### B. Prayer

Lord, thank you for being the God of transformation! As you have been merciful, patient, and forgiving to us in that regard, may we be so to others who need to hear of your Son. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

#### C. Thought to Remember

God can transform those who have ready hearts.