

Let's open our Bibles this evening to Acts 2:37.

Luke wrote both these gospels - the one that bears his name and the book of Acts, as well - to teach us about a couple of things: the ministry of Jesus (Luke covers His birth and all the way through the resurrection) and then this second book which talks about what happens when the Lord departed and the Holy Spirit is poured out, and the church is empowered; and what happens then to this beginning of the church which God had planned and wanted to reach us by.

In Acts 1, if you've been with us, Luke seamlessly mixes the two together. He starts on resurrection evening, if you will. He mentions the forty days that Jesus spent with His own, showing who He was, making Himself known to the disciples through the kind of infallible proofs that would convince them that He was, indeed, alive. They learned during those six weeks (almost) that He was always with them, even when they didn't always see Him. It was a good transition for them because God's always with you and me. Even though we don't see Him, He's with us always, He said, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). And so He convinced His own. The empty tomb and certainly His appearances won them over.

He had breathed on this 120 (or so) folks on Easter evening (according to Luke 24 and John 20), and He had given them the Holy Spirit. He had opened their understanding that they would understand the Scriptures, opened their eyes to the things of God, told them to wait. "Now that you're saved, wait until you receive power from on high. It's a good thing that I'm leaving. If I don't leave, I can't send the Spirit to you. But if I ascend, I'll send Him from the Father." And then He ascended. In fact, the last words that Jesus spoke on the earth, prior to this ascension, are found in verse 7 and verse 8 of chapter 1 (of Acts) where He brought that same message. "You've got to wait. If this is going to work, if reaching the world with the good news of Jesus and His sacrifice are going to work, you're going to need the Holy Spirit to help you. So wait upon that outpouring." They didn't know.

It would be ten days later that Pentecost would roll around, but they didn't know. They obediently and joyfully were waiting together, praying. They were in unity,

we read. They were obedient to the Lord. During those ten days, we are told (at the end of chapter 1) Peter really believed that maybe the delay was because they were obligated to find a replacement for Judas. And so he had verses and text - he was a young Christian - and the Lord never really put him in his place (if you think he did the wrong thing). I personally think God had Paul in mind, but Peter was zealous, and he had Scriptures in hand; and so they picked a guy, and he kind of disappears from the scene. But that was what happened during those ten days.

And then Pentecost morning rolls around. Josephus tells us there were maybe a half a million people in Jerusalem celebrating the Feast of Pentecost. Imagine that many folks crammed into Jerusalem and its surrounding areas. And then that morning, the Lord poured His Spirit upon the boys and girls as they were sitting, again, praying. Three things took place that we never see happening again. There was a great sound "as of a rushing mighty wind." It doesn't mean there was wind, but there was noise. There was a vision or a view "as of fire," tongues of fire, sitting on the heads of every one of these 120. And, as they began to worship, the people from all different dialects and languages began to hear in their own language these men and women worshipping the Lord. As a result, this huge crowd gathered. They theorized about what they were seeing and what they were hearing. They had some interesting ideas.

But then, by the Holy Spirit, Peter (who always is ready, isn't he?) stood up to give a biblical explanation and an application for what they were seeing. In fact, he was able to say (in chapter 2:16), "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel." He was able to take the Bible and say, "Here's what we're experiencing. Here's what God promised, and so this is what we look for."

Last week, we looked at Peter's short but very powerful biblical message that left thousands of people standing around him, wondering about their own futures. How could they be right with God? They agreed, in their despair, that they were sinful, that they had had a part in some small way (or larger way) in the death of Jesus, in the antagonism that they'd showed Him. And, as God's Spirit moved mightily (from verse 14 to verse 36), Peter lays out from God's Word, using and beginning with the prophecy of Joel - that in the last days the Lord would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh - and he quickly pivots from that (because that's what they were seeing) to say to them, "I want you to know that Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested before you by God with many signs and miracles and wonders which He did - Him, He set in your midst even though you wanted Him dead, He delivered Him into your hands.

And God has let this happen, and now He's the Lord, He has risen, and He's alive." And so Peter takes the prophecy of Joel to speak to what they were seeing, but he quickly turns the message to Jesus and to the age of grace, where he's able to say to them that they can be saved, and the grace of God is available to all. And so Peter sets before them the proof of Jesus by His works and the proof of Jesus by His resurrection. The empty tomb and the works that He did was his argument, and he said Jesus was alive, and He's sitting at the right hand of the Father (verse 33). And from there, the Holy Spirit has been poured out as He promised. And he ends in verse 36 by saying this, " 'Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ' " (the *Mashiach*, the *Christos*). " He's the Savior. He's the One that was promised. He focused on the sinfulness of man and the deity of Jesus, and in just a few words and in just a few moments, he gets to stand and watch as the Holy Spirit takes God's Word and presses it into the hearts of many. And not everyone repented, but many did. I mean, there was an amazing response on this first day of the birth of the church.

It is hard to tell how much more Peter was planning to say because they stopped him. They cried out, as he was speaking, "Stop!" Well, they didn't yell, "Stop!" They yelled, "What can we do?" (verse 37) "What can we do?" "What shall we do?" And here's a pretty valuable lesson for us because the Holy Spirit brings to bear the Word of God preached through the lives of His people, and it has great power.

We've mentioned to you (and I'll try to do it as we go through the book - I know it's a long book) that you want to try to mark down, as you read the report of the early church, when you discover what kind of people God uses and how does God work. Because, if you can discover that in your own life, then you can get in line and go with Him. And the lessons are all here. We get the snapshot of the first thirty years of the church's history just so we can go, "Well, that's how the Lord works. This is how He does things. This is where their emphasis lie, and this is what they pursue." But notice that, as you see Jesus in the message of Peter, then you see yourself very clearly. Right? In other words, the Word of God reveals the heart of man. I don't know how you felt about yourself before you got saved, but I guarantee you once you got saved, you didn't like yourself too much. When you looked in the mirror, you went, "Oh, I'm a sinner! I have fallen way short!" And then, not only is God's grace and mercy very attractive, but you find that that is where you turn. Right? That is where your heart begins to go. Isaiah, when he saw the LORD high and lifted up (in Isaiah 6), said, "Woe is me. I am undone." And

it isn't a very good word in Hebrew. It literally means, "I'm falling apart, I've been exposed, I've been found out." "I'm a man of unclean lips, and I live amongst a people that have the same thing; my eyes have seen the King." And he was just brought to his knees because his eyes had seen the King. Here, Peter shows them Jesus, and the people can't handle it. They don't want to see it. Or they do. They don't want to see what they see in themselves. Remember Peter, when he took Jesus fishing (Luke 5), was just so put out by Him because he'd been out all night, and he finally said, "Yeah, I'll just take Him out, and I'll take one net. And you guys don't bother. I'll just get little Jesus, the Bible guy. He doesn't know anything about fishing." And when the boat began to fill up, Peter went, "Uh oh. This is more than a Man. This is God. He commands the fish." And he fell on his face, in the boat. "God, get out of the boat. I am a sinful man, Oh, Lord."

So, you see it here as Peter - just a couple of minutes of God's Word being applied. And you might say, "Well, I believe in the Lord." But look at the conviction that believing in Him brings. Right? When Jesus spoke (in John 16:8) to the disciples about the Holy Spirit's work, He laid out for them, pretty clearly, what the Holy Spirit would do in the world; not in the church, not amongst the believers, but really the work that He does out there. And He said, "When He comes, He will (a) convict the world of sin because they don't believe in Me." That's really what the message of the Holy Spirit has always been - that He convicts the world and that our sin is laid out for us because we believe we can do it on our own. You can make a great case for your moral life or your ethical life. You can compare yourself with others. But God is only concerned with one thing - that the sacrifice of His Son would be exalted in your life so that He would be honored, that every time you come, you go, "I'm here because of Him. I'm here because of His sacrifice. I'm here because of His love and His mercy and because of His grace." That's what God's concerned with. "The only name given among men whereby you can be saved" (Acts 4:12). And people say, "Well, I believe in Jesus." Well, then you'll make Him Lord. Not only will He be One that you rely on to save you, He'll be your Lord. You'll take orders from Him. Your marching orders will come directly from Him. That's what believing means. It means wrapping yourself around the Word of God. It means storing treasures in heaven and not upon the earth. It means following Him day in and day out. Jesus said (Matthew 16:24), "You want to follow Me? Deny yourself. Pick up your cross. Let's go. Let Me be the Lord." And Peter, as he lays this out, you can watch the Holy Spirit convict the hearts of these men and women - because they didn't believe in Jesus; they wanted Him dead. Peter says that

three times. "You killed Him, but God knew about it. You killed Him. You did this. But He's the Lord. And you didn't erase Him from the planet."

Second of all, He said (in John 16:8), "When the Holy Spirit comes, He will convict the world of righteousness because," Jesus said, "I'm going to the Father."

Translation - if you want to get to heaven on your own, you've got to live like Jesus. He sets the standard by which man can be acceptable in God's sight. Live your life like Jesus did, and you can then measure yourself against Him, and you can be perfect as He was; and if you can, then you can merit your way to heaven. Matthew 5:48, Jesus said, " 'Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.' " You want to get to heaven? Then you've got to be perfect. If you're going to do it on your own, you've got to be perfect. If you don't measure up, then you're going to need a Savior. That's the work of the Holy Spirit. He talks to you about Jesus. He talks to you about you and your sin.

And thirdly, He said (John 16:11), "When the Holy Spirit comes, He will bring judgment because the prince of this world has been judged," or, if you like, Satan can't hold you anymore when he's been defeated. You might have, at one point, said, "Well, I'm just under the power of the enemy. I've got no power to deliver myself." And you'd be right - unless there's a God who can deliver you. And if He can, and He's defeated the enemy at the cross, then you can be set free from the power of sin in your life.

So, those three things you can find very plainly laid out in the message that Peter preaches here. And the message fell pretty hard on the hearts of the people. I mean, stand in the crowd and listen as they would, and hear what they would hear. And God was doing a great work. And the lesson of chapter 2 is very simple - God's Word saves. I think if we had the same kind of confidence in it, as we shared it, that Peter does (here in chapter 2), then we would know that His Word doesn't go out void (Isaiah 55:11), and we would rely upon the Spirit to convict hearts, and we would share God's Word more often. Rather than beating around the bush or arguing from a hundred different angles, just tell them the Word. God blesses His Word.

The Welsh Revival began in 1904. We were in Wales several years ago, in the library where they have all of the newspapers that they saved during the year when this great Revival took place. It was led by a guy named Evan Roberts, and he was, at the time, a 26-year-old kid, a collier actually, a minister-in-training. The

Revival lasted for just a little under a year. During that year, 100,000 people were saved just in Wales. Their names are all printed on the front page of the Wales daily paper. You can find every one of their names. They were there for a year. They were to send in their names, and the paper devoted itself to listing who was getting saved, what bars were closing. It was an amazing work of God's Spirit. And, to be honest with you, Evan Roberts - when he got later in life (he died in the early 50's) - kind of went south afterwards; got really pumped up, like, "Look what I did," and the Lord couldn't use him anymore. But at the time, God used him greatly.

So, here's the first sermon, and we get the reaction of the people which is why I wanted to kind of slow down. Because here's what God can do through His Word - the saving power of God's Word.

"Now when they heard this," verse 37, "they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' " You know, one of the greatest fears that we have is the fear of failure; that we would fail at something we've committed ourselves to, that we would fail someone that we don't want to let down. Dream analysts (I don't know how many of you invest in them - I just think it's usually the burritos I've eaten) tell us one of the most important dreams is the anxiety of failure - failing the test, failing a relationship, failing a speech. A lot of people have tremendous fear thinking they were put in front of others to speak. So you should pray for us pastors because that's all we get to do every week. We have nightmares, we don't have dreams. But fear is pretty much (and failure) common to man's existence because we are born sinful, we're separated from God, and so no matter what we want to do - including redeem ourselves - we're going to fail on our own. In fact, everything I remember in life that I tried for the first time failed. First time I tried to walk as a kid (I saw pictures), I didn't do good; like a drunken sailor, just falling into everything. I was just a little kid. First time I tried swimming, I sunk. A lot. First time I tried to hit the ball, failed. So try to live a better life, try to sin less, offend less, be better on my own. Fail, fail, fail, fail, fail. And you look at these men and women in this crowd, and they're listening to Jesus and who He is and the righteousness that He has brought, and the victory that He offers, and we try to turn over a new leaf. But we can just do nothing but fail. James said (in chapter 3:2), "For we all stumble in many things." It's underlined in my Bible. It's circled. There's an arrow to it. Thank You, Lord. We all stumble in so many things. And, "If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body." But it

starts with everybody falls, everybody fails. It doesn't take the sting out of failure, mind you. Peter had been a failure. In fact, in the gospel, his motto - open your mouth, shove in a foot or two. He's forever failing. Read the gospels. I think we like him because he's such a failure. We admire.....we don't like Joseph. No failure. We don't really appreciate Daniel. No failure. But Peter.....oh, everybody's poster child because he's such a goof. He recently had denied the Lord three times. He'd even made eye contact with the Lord while he was doing it. How hard must have that beaten him down, and yet his failure became the fulcrum for greater usability. When the Lord met with him, He said (Luke 22:32), "Peter, when you're restored, I want to use you to strengthen the brethren." In John 21:15, Jesus publicly, in front of his peers, reinstated Peter to a place of ministry and allowed him to answer for his denials.

Well, here's Peter. He's saved. He's been waiting upon God. He is filled with the Spirit. He stands before tens of thousands of people to deliver the good news of Jesus - to the first audience, the first sermon. He's a Jew talking about a Jewish Messiah to a Jewish audience that has the Bible, the Old Testament, as their place of record and understanding.

Learn this - God uses the weak and the failing, just like Peter. God can use you. I know you just want to write yourself, "Well, I'm just a loser." No. Peter was a loser. But he's our example. And I think God chose him to speak and to preach because we went, "That guy? Really? I vote for another guy." But God voted for Peter.

"Now when they heard this," we read (verse 37), "they were cut to the heart" because God's Word, by the anointing of God's Spirit, will cut the hearer to the heart, to the innermost being. In fact, the primary result of teaching God's Word to the lost is conviction of sin. It has to start there. Unless we're poor in spirit, unless we realize that we don't have what it takes, all the rest of the good news isn't very good because we're still on our own. Conviction of sin goes first. And there were many in the crowd that realized Peter was right, and they were guilty. "What can we do? We've already rejected Him. We've already joined with those who had Him killed. We voted for it." But what interests me (and maybe it's the way God has made us) is that, though they had done what could not be undone - the death of Jesus - they still hoped there was some way out for them. "I know. We're guilty. What do we do? How do we go back? How do we make this right?" It reminds me of the Ninevite king who, when Jonah came walking through town -

and he didn't want to be there, and he said (Jonah 3:4), "Forty days and then judgment," and Jonah was just about as happy as he could be that these enemies of his would be destroyed. "You guys are gonna get it. Hahaha. Forty days." He wasn't a preacher. He was lording over them. Angry with them. But the king listened to what the pronouncement of God was, and he ordered that every beast in the kingdom be covered with sackcloth, and he cried out mightily (you read in chapter 3 of Jonah) to the LORD, "Let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands." And he would say this to his whole nation, as king, " 'Who can tell,' " (who knows) " 'if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?' " And then you read this, "Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it." But here was a bunch of people that had no right to hope otherwise, and yet they hoped otherwise. And here's a people. God's Word convicts. But they're not destroyed by it; they are brought low by it, but they're still hanging on to hope through it. "What can we do? Where can we turn?" Awesome response.

And I think that sometimes we don't see this powerful work of God's Spirit in our sharing because we don't have the same confidence in what we are sharing that Peter does. He's a bold guy! In fact, in a couple of weeks here, when we get to chapter 4, Peter and John will be arrested and stand in the very same place they condemned Jesus to death. And I don't know but Peter wouldn't have said, "This place looks really familiar. It scared me last time." And yet he was bold, man. He was so confident in what God had said.

We sometimes place a greater, I think, confidence in our planning or in our arguments or in our presentation. Do I have a good story? Am I funny? Will people like me? Who cares?! Here's God's Word. It brings life. Give them God's Word simply, and let the Holy Spirit work in their hearts. "For the word of God is living and powerful," Hebrews 4:12, "and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." And it was working here. God's Word was working. It'll bring the hardest sinner to his knees. Look around here. Look at the kinds of people that have gotten saved here. Some rough guys here. Not even talking about the men. No. I'm just (Laughing) kidding. There're some tough guys here. "What can we do?" What do you think Peter said? "Join the church? Start tithing? Buy a book? Let's do a tape?" Nope. None of those.

Verse 38, "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent.' " What can you do? You can repent. And then, " 'Let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.' " Repent. Most people will define repentance by saying you're sorry; so sorry that maybe you'll never do it again. You're really sorry. But, though that is certainly part of the concept of repentance, the word "*metanoia*," in Greek, literally means to turn around. It means stop going in that direction, start going in another direction. And when it comes to its use in terms of your relationship with God, it literally means (in every place) stop going your way, start going His. Stop running away from Him, start running towards Him. Stop doing things your way, start doing things His way. That's what you can do. You can stop and turn around. In the crowd - blasphemers, murderers, rejecters of Jesus, blasphemers of His Word. "Okay," says Peter, "I see you. Now turn around. Admit you're a sinner. Admit Jesus is the Savior that has come to die for your sins, and you'll be saved, and you'll find His grace, and you'll get the gift of the Holy Spirit as well. Just turn around."

Notice that the gospel is not based upon people cleaning up their own lives. We're getting close to New Year's. I don't know if you make New Year's resolutions, but it's a waste of time because if you're not doin' it December 26th, you're not doin' it January 2nd. You won't get past the bowl games, and you'll already be, "All right, next year." Because there's no way you can clean up your life. You can't make vows. You can't turn over new leaves. You can't get your act together. All of that is baloney. It's baloney. If you could do that, Jesus died for nothing! You just needed to try harder. But if you change your mind about you - turn around - and you change your mind about Jesus, then you got it worked. You know who you are now - a sinner - and you know who He is - a Savior. And now you're off the hook. Right? And now you're going to head towards Him in faith, not away from Him in rebellion. And if you cry out to Jesus, He forgives your sin. He sends the Holy Spirit. He comes to dwell within you. Your life can be victorious. But it has to be repentance first. Which is why in this order you will find it in the Scriptures - repent and then baptism has meaning. Because without repentance, baptism is just a religious act that goes nowhere. There is no baptismal regeneration in the Bible. You don't get saved or transformed by gettin' stuck in the water. It's repentance that saves you. Identify your repentance publicly with Jesus. And that's really what baptism, at least in the 1st century, was all about. Get baptized in His name. In so doing, you declare He's right, you're wrong, you need Him and can't live without Him. That's how you get saved.

By the way, for a Jew to get baptized was a big deal because, for thousands of years prior, no Jew was ever baptized for any reason whatsoever. They were the only people on the planet who believed in one God. So the only people that were ever baptized were Gentiles - who believed in a multiplicity of gods - who came to the God of Israel and said, "I'm going to now begin to believe in one God." They went from polytheism to monotheism. "We're just going to believe in one God." And so they would be baptized. They would set aside all that they had been involved with before, and they would agree. And so it was a humbling move by a Gentile to say, "You're right, we're wrong. We've been on the wrong path. We're joining with you." No Jews were baptized. For these listening to Peter, it would be costly to be baptized because outwardly identifying with Jesus, so close to His death as well, would result in anger from everyone. Your community would set you aside. Your parents wouldn't see you anymore. The synagogue wouldn't accept you. You wouldn't find a job in town. You weren't welcome at the doctor's. You were just isolated completely. It was a big cost to be a believer. "Come on, turn around about you and Jesus, and stand up for Him publicly. Confess that your religion hasn't saved you. You need a Savior. Be baptized." Why? So that you could have remission for your sin. The word "remission," even though it was a costly act, had great benefit. Because the word "remission," in English, means forgiveness or pardon or release or deliverance from imprisonment, from bondage. Jesus will set you free. That's literally what that word means. Come to Jesus by faith, and He will assure you of complete deliverance. Even the horror of having taken an active part in His death, feeling your guilt - even to that point, come to Jesus. Repent of your sins. You'll be forgiven of your sins, and God will give you the gift of His Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given to those who repent and turn to Jesus publicly.

Now, both the new birth (which took place on Easter evening), "Receive the Holy Spirit, He was with you, He shall be in you," and the baptism of the Holy Spirit (here on Pentecost) where "the Holy Spirit comes upon you to empower you to be a witness" were gifts, and are gifts, from God. Now, unless you make a formula - you get saved, you repent, you get baptized, then you get filled with the Spirit - when you get to Acts 10, it isn't A, B and C - they got saved, they got filled with the Holy Spirit, later they got baptized. I got saved on a Thursday night in Bellflower, in a house of a guy who I grew up with (whose dad thought I was a bad influence on his son) where I had gone to pick up a kilo of pot. And met Jesus. Got a kilo of grace. Got saved at 8:00 at night, got baptized in the Holy Spirit at 9:00 at night, got baptized three days later in his pool. Kind of out of sync, I guess. But, oh, man. I

needed it early and fast. So repent. You'll be released of your sins. Identify yourself with Jesus, publicly so, and you'll receive His gift of the Spirit.

" 'For the promise,' " verse 39, " 'is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.' " What promise? Well, go back to chapter 1:4, the promise that Jesus made before the cross that He would, on Easter evening and again, His last word, send the promise of Joel upon the people. The Holy Spirit was coming. The gift of God (of salvation) was coming. He would accomplish what He had promised. This is His work for you, not your work for Him. And two thousand years later, from here - where we're reading, this grace of God continues, and the Holy Spirit continues to fill the hearts of the people who have looked to Him and empowers those who will trust upon Him.

Notice in verse 38 that Peter spoke of the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is always by God's grace that you receive anything from God. Right? There's no relationship between "He owes me." You and God have no "He owes me stuff." You can't earn God's grace, you can't merit it, you don't deserve it, you can't make yourself worthy of it. At best, the Bible allows you to accept God's gifts with thanksgiving. There's that Scripture in Psalm 116:12 that says, "What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me?" (What shall I give God for everything He's given me?) And then it says, "I will take up the cup of salvation" (I'll just take what God has given me), "and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows to the LORD now in the presence of all His people." I'll start to serve Him. That's about all I can do. "Thank You, Lord, for saving me. Now I want to serve You. I realize I got in by Your grace."

So Peter makes this promise to the people who are listening. "God's promise was for you and your children" (I think that's to the Jews) "and to those who are afar off" (that's to the Gentiles), "as many as the Lord is calling." And here's the good news - today you can be saved and filled with the Spirit. You've just got to repent and turn to Jesus.

Now, we are told in verse 40, "And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation.' " Don't know how much longer Peter spoke to those who were interested. I suspect those who weren't were peeling off. But he was hanging around with a bunch of folks who were interested. And Peter spoke to them about salvation from this way of the world. The word "perverse" is a word that means to be crooked or bent. It is a

word that Jesus uses, there in Matthew 17:17, when He said, " 'O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?' " He talked about the world as being on a course that wasn't going straight. It is the same word that Paul will use in Philippians 2:15 when he talks about the church being "blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation." They don't know where they're going, but you do, and you understand where the Lord has called you.

So, rescue yourself - which is interesting because though the Holy Spirit cannot be earned (the gift of the Spirit), salvation is freely given, yet you have a part to play. You have to turn away from the world. You have to get off that path that leads to nowhere. You need to save yourself from where this world is going. You do that by turning to Christ and following His ways. But it is still upon you and me. Repentance transfers my membership and affiliation from a crooked world and its religious ways to Almighty God and to the Son that He has sent. I change kingdoms. I'm on a narrow path now, with a narrow gate, and few there be that find it (Matthew 7:14). But I've got to go that way. Did everyone in the crowd listen? They didn't. But some did. And I'll tell you what. You and I should live for the "some." Those who listen. Those who respond. Rather than, "Oh, they never listen." As a pastor, I could quit years ago with that. "Oh, they never listen!" But there're always those who do listen, and, man, it gets you out of bed. The few that listen - they're the ones that you want to serve, they're the reason that you're preaching, they're the reason you're reaching out.

Verse 41 says, "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." "Those who gladly received" Peter's testimony about their sin and God's love, about Jesus and their repentance, were gladly hearing it. "Oh, it makes me feel terrible, but I'm so glad to know there's a way out." They were baptized, publicly acknowledging Jesus as Lord; three thousand of them in all. Wouldn't you have loved to have been there? I can't wait to see the 4K video of this. You know, in heaven, we're going to watch the reruns. I know we are. Well, I hope we are. Luke, in his accounting, writing by the Holy Spirit, by the way, only references specific numbers a few times. Remember, this is the blueprint of the early church; God gave it to us so we would know how to be a church. But there are only a couple of times that he talks about numbers. And they are written out, I think no doubt, to powerfully impact the thought that the preaching of God's Word and the moving of God's Spirit make the impossible task of chapter 1:8 (get to all the world) less difficult. Because I watch Peter, and

I realize if the Word of God goes out, and the Spirit of God is moving, people get saved. I don't save them. He saves them. His Words.

There are many general references to the Holy Spirit moving mountains in many people's lives, through this Book. But I think that there is a proper place for numbers because when God works, you should see fruit. It may not come overnight, but I think you'd be foolish to be doing something for ten years and look around and go, "There's nothing happening," and then conclude something is happening. And so whether it is growth or church planting or salvations or missions, if you look at chapter 4:4, it just says, "many of those who heard the word believed." In chapter 4:14, it says, "And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing about him, and many followed up, and they believed." And chapter 5:14 says this, "And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women." Chapter 6:1, "Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying." So he goes from adding to multiplying. In verse 7 (chapter 6), "Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith." In chapter 9:31, "Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied." In chapter 12:24 it says, "But the word of God grew and multiplied." So you just go on and on. You read through the accounts. There is addition and multiplication; a couple of places there's some blessed subtraction - guys falling dead in the door, but it changes the hearts of the people.

But here's one of the few times God adds the numbers. Three thousand. You go, "That's a big number!" Isn't it? One day. Forty-five-second message. In a culture that had just put Jesus to death seven weeks earlier. And Peter gets up and goes, "Hey, let me tell you about Joel. Let me talk to you about Jesus." And people go, "What do we do?" And Peter goes, "This is going really good! I must have a knack for this." God began to use Peter. Oh that God might grant us His power to see His Word change our communities. Touch our families. That we bring - I don't know how many people you've brought to church this year, but pray the Lord make it a lot more. How many people you've shared with, but pray, "God, make it a lot more." He's willing. You have what is necessary to see the lost saved. Will they listen? They won't all listen. They don't all listen here. Jesus had less than a thousand people He could point to after three and a half years of living a perfect life and even raising the dead. I'm thinkin' you should have a bigger Twitter

following by then if you're raising the dead. And He just kind of disappeared from the scene. Hey, the church is always going to be like that. "They gladly received his word. They were baptized. Three thousand souls added to the church that day."

And before we call it a night, I wanted to talk to you for a few minutes about baptism since it shows up in the book of Acts as an integral part of the practices of the early church. And, while I'm talking, maybe you can find Matthew 3. Because there's a lot of controversy over the years, in the church, about baptism. Should we dunk people? Should we sprinkle people? Should we baptize infants? Should we do baptisms for the dead? Should people be baptized head-first or backwards? In the name of Jesus or in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit? Man, you can write a book about weirdo questions about baptism. Do you have to be baptized to be saved? You see? It's the big issue.

Verse 1 of chapter 3 of Matthew says, "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent,' " (we just heard that, didn't we?) " 'for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!' For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight."' Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins." Like I said, the baptism of John was the first time we find Jews being baptized in the Bible. Because baptism in the Jewish mind was associated with pagans who came to their senses, who came around. "Oh, now you want to be with us? Good. You're going to have to be baptized." From polytheism to monotheism. As John preached (and it isn't just here in Matthew), John only had one message. If you ever wonder about, "Oh, man, I don't know what to say," John just had one message. He had it memorized. But why change if it's workin'? And so he preached it to everyone. And as he preached this message of sin and salvation to come, the crowds became bigger and bigger, and they traveled further and further. On our trip to Israel, we go to where the archaeologists and all have found where John probably did his baptizing, outside of Jericho down in the south. It is a long haul from anywhere. Even from Jericho, it was a long haul just to go to the middle of nowhere and see a guy dressed like a hippie, telling you, "You've got to repent." But the people couldn't stop coming. The Lord had His hand upon John. The message was going out. And so the people would flock there. They publicly

confessed their sins. Jews were going into waters to confess they were sinful and wanting to be saved. And over time, they flocked to him. Luke, in writing about this phenomenon of John the Baptist's ministry, wrote (in chapter 7:29), "When all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God." In other words, they said God was right. "By being baptized with this baptism of John, we're sinners." That's what they were able to say. It's hard for a chosen people to admit they're sinners. But the rest of the verse (in Luke 7:30) says, "But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him." "No, no, no. We're not sinners." So, even then, not everybody was listening. But the baptism of John was just that. It brought a prideful people - who believed God had chosen them and that they were the only chosen ones - to their knees. The baptism of John was all about repenting of your sin, confessing you didn't have what it took, and looking forward to the One that was to come and save.

In verse 7 (of Matthew 3), it says, "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'Brood of vipers!' " No way to greet them at the door as an usher. " 'Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our Father.' ' " That's the pride. " 'For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.' " To John the Baptist, baptism was more than a ritual. It was designed by God to bring people to reflect in their hearts, convicted of their sinfulness, and that God had a plan to forgive them. Anything else short of that - unacceptable. Anymore than what we read in Acts chapter 2, here, verse 41, "Those who gladly heard his word repented and were baptized." They were responsive from their hearts to the message that God had brought.

Verse 10 (Matthew 3) tells us, " 'And even now,' " John says, " 'the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.' " Jesus came to deliver man from his sin, to change man's life at the root, "lay the ax to the root." It's not just to the behavior but to the core, to the heart. New birth. Because we are sinful at the core. Jesus comes as our Savior, and to refuse Him now is to (verse 12) one day face Him as the Judge. It's the message of the gospel.

So, we see Jesus, then (verse 13) coming from Galilee to John at the baptismal site, "and John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?' But Jesus answered and said to him, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he allowed Him." But Jesus had to convince him. So Jesus has no need to be baptized. Right? Baptism is an awareness of our sin, our confession publicly that we need salvation, and that we've fallen short. Well, Jesus hadn't sinned. You say, "Well, why is He being baptized?" Here's why - because Jesus comes to meet man at the place that he recognizes he's a sinner. God can't do anything for you until He meets you at the place where you're broken in your own sin. Right? He comes to the place of meeting. John's baptism was a place of repentance. He comes to identify with sinners. He meets us where we're repenting and convicted of our sin. He becomes sin for us, even though He knew no sin so that we could be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). So He meets us as our Savior where we've failed. Where you see your sin, Jesus is there, and you can identify with Him. And that's where you get saved. That's what baptism was all about.

So, the baptism of John prepared the way, brought many hearts to an awareness of their need. He did his job really well. In fact in the book of Acts, later on - years later, Acts 19 (down the road a few more chapters), Paul will come to Ephesus and actually run into a bunch of guys, and he said, "Have you guys been baptized?" and they said, "Yeah." And he said, "What baptism?" and they said, "John's." And he goes, "That's all you know?" "Yeah. That's all we know." And so he had to sit them down and tell them about Jesus, who John was preaching ahead of. And when they believed in Christ, he baptized them again. Interesting. Re-baptized them. Except this time in their trust and their confidence in the Lord.

After the resurrection, baptism became an integral part of the life of the early church. You will find it in the Scriptures a lot. As people wanted to identify with Jesus, outwardly, admitting their sin and saying publicly, because of the stigma of baptism, "This is the way I follow God's salvation in His Son." As you look through the Bible, you will quickly learn that salvation is not found in baptism. Any more than, in the Old Testament, circumcision saved you. In fact, Paul will write (in the book of Romans 2:29), "But he is a Jew who is one inwardly;" (not who is one outwardly, after the circumcision of his flesh) "and circumcision is that of the heart." So, it really is a matter of your relationship with God. You can be baptized every day, in whatever method you want, by whatever words you prefer, with any prayer that you choose, and be completely lost. Or, you can follow the Lord and

testify of His saving grace, and obey Him, and be baptized by identifying with Him. Only faith saves. Baptism is an act of obedience after the fact, where you obey the revealed will of God. Philip, when he's in Samaria, you read these words, "But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized" (Acts 8:12). As they believed, they then followed the Lord in water baptism. The eunuch on the way to Gaza, that Philip got a chance to go out and share with (in Acts 8), as they were going down the road, they were passing some water, and the eunuch said to Philip, "There's some water. What would keep me from being baptized?" And Philip said this, "If you believe with all your heart, you may be baptized." And he said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." He said, "Let's go. Then let's do this." But it was, again, the believing that led to the action. Even in Mark 16:15, you will read, "'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved;' " but then it says, "'but he who does not believe will be condemned.' " And it leaves off the baptism altogether. Because it's the unbeliever, the one who doesn't believe, that finds the judgment of God.

Paul goes so far, in 1 Corinthians 1, to distinguish the gospel from baptism and to downplay his participation in it when he lists the families he did and didn't baptize. He didn't want to take sides, which is what was going on there. And he said, in 1 Corinthians 1:17, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel." He didn't send me to baptize. He sent me to preach the good news of Jesus. Because that's where life is. Baptism is a follow-up. It's an obedient action, and it is intended to be that way. In fact, if you read Romans 6 (first four verses), Paul gives you the spiritual understanding of baptism. You go to Christ, you're buried with Him in His death. You go under the water. We don't let you up, that's exactly where you'll stay. When you come out of the water, you rise in newness of life. You are no longer the person you once were. You have found the Lord's strength. So buried with Him, old life buried; I'm crucified with Christ, my debt is paid; out of the water, new spirit; put on the new man. It's an action of a saint who identifies with Christ.

And so back in Acts 2:41 we read this, "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them" on Pentecost morning. The rest of the chapter will tell us what those three thousand people then began to do. In fact, you could call the rest of this chapter, "Life in the Early Church." Here's how the church lived its life after it came to know the

Lord. It is our intention (next week) to just look at verses 42 through 47. So you should be able to read ahead five verses.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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