"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:3).

The Church Alive – The Results of Biblical Preaching (Part 1) *Acts 2:37-41* 

37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" 38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." 40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

Have you ever wondered what you might say to the pastor after the morning service? As shared by a one minister, the following are some things that have been said to him after his preaching:

- "You always manage to find something to fill up the time."
- "I don't care what others say, I like your sermons."
- "If I'd known you were going to be this good today I'd have brought a neighbor."
- "Pastor, did you know there are 243 panes of glass in the windows?"
- "We shouldn't make you preach so often."

What a tremendous task the preacher of the Word of God has, seeking to proclaim the depths and wonders of God's Word while keeping it both interesting and instructive. Moreover, if he is not careful, a preacher can easily fall into the trap of simply saying what he wants to say, using the Bible merely to prove his points rather than communicate the message of God to the people. Such is not Biblical preaching and when this happens, very little of spiritual value and meaning is accomplished. However, what happens when God's Word is truly preached?

The Word of God tells us that there is power in the biblically proclaimed message. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). I believe that the better I, or any preacher, actually preaches the Word of God, that lives are changed to the glory of God. Many of us know the difference between hearing someone recite a few verses and declare a few facts versus preaching that speaks to our hearts, convicts our souls and changes our lives. We have all heard sermons before that focused little upon God's Word, and communicated in vague terms about living a good life.

Oh that I would not be vague! Oh that we would hear the Word of God presented the clearly, line by line, paragraph by paragraph. Oh, that God would create unrest in our hearts where unrest is needed. Oh, that we would see more and more our need of our Savior through the study of God's Word. Oh, that every week we would be changed and conformed to the image of Christ because God's Word has convicted, comforted and challenged us.

What I speak of is what was happening on a grander scale on the day of Pentecost, some two thousand years ago, there in Jerusalem. It is the remarkable work of God in using the preaching of Peter to bring some three thousand people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Last week we finished looking at the content of Peter's sermon in verses 21-36 as he declared with Scripture concerning who Jesus is; but what was the result of his preaching? What happens when God's Word is truly proclaimed? In verses 37-41, we find three such results, results we

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need to be looking and praying for as we hear God's Word preached. We will look at the first two of these results this morning, leaving the third one for next week. But I would say to you that these three results are a test of sorts that you can apply to any sermon to see if it is biblical. What is the first result of biblical preaching as revealed in our text? First...

#### I. It exposes sinners (2:37).

Something astonishingly amazing happened to the crowd as a result of hearing Peter's preaching of Christ. Just fifty days earlier, from the same location as Peter is preaching, a mob had cried, "Crucify Him!" And just an hour or so before Peter's message, the people in this crowd had been oblivious to their own spiritual condition. But now, according to verse 37, "they were pierced to the heart." What made the difference? What was it that elicited this effect? Reading verse 37 again, Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"

What was this? It was Peter's sermon. Remember the context. Peter, the apostles and the rest of the 120 disciples were standing before some 50,000, 75,000 and perhaps as many as 100,000 people. All crowded in the temple court and all there because of a sound they heard that had captured their attention—the sound of "a violent, rushing wind" (2:2). And then the Holy Spirit came, filling the followers of Jesus and empowering them to speak in known, foreign languages that they had never learned. From all over the world, Jews had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish holy day of Pentecost. And here they heard these first Christians speaking in their own native dialects. They were bewildered and wondered how these backwoods Galileans could be doing this (2:6-7). Some thought they were drunk, but Peter answers the how question in verses 14-21, noting that with the coming of the Spirit of God came not only gift of prophecy, of proclaiming the mighty deeds of God (2:11), but also of warning, calling the people not to reject God. But how had the people rejected God? They had failed to recognize who Jesus was. And in verses 22-36, Peter outlines the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, proving from the Old Testament that Jesus was their Messiah and that they had murdered Him. They had rejected Jesus! And so, Peter lays this charge of sin before the people in verse 36, Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ - this Jesus whom you crucified." In other words, Peter told them that their assessment of Jesus was wrong. What matters is what God say and what God declares about Jesus, the one you killed, the one that is both Lord and Christ!

I see a principle of application here that I would call you to keep in mind. Whenever what you think, or what you decide, or what you determine is in conflict with God's words and ways, you are in trouble and are setting yourself up for a fall, for some kind of spiritual crises. As the crowd heard Peter declare God's assessment of Jesus in contrast to their own, our text tells us that "they were pierced to the heart." We will look at what this means in a moment, but let me say that so much of preaching today is man-centered, it is focused on man, his wants and his desires. Biblical preaching is to be God-centered, focused on God's wants, God's desires and God's glory. How can we know if preaching is truly biblical? Well, as our first key point suggests, we must ask, does it expose sinners to the problem of sin? And from our text, we can see how such an exposure is revealed in two ways.

**First**, <u>biblical preaching produces godly remorse</u>. Again, verse 37 says, "**Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart...**" Your NASB marginal reading says, "wounded in conscience". The ESV says, "cut to the heart" and the KJV says, "pricked in their hearts". These who heard the message knew something was wrong within them. The Greek verb *katanusso* appears only here in the New Testament. It means "to pierce thoroughly" or "to agitate violently".

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It speaks of something hitting you suddenly and unexpectedly. We speak of piercing pain, something that shoots right through the body. What was it that had the power to penetrate to the innermost depths of these people's hearts? And what is it that can cut to the very core of any person and produce true conviction of sin? God's Word. When God's Word is clearly presented, it changes the way we see ourselves. It causes people to see themselves from God's perspective; from God's standard of holiness and beauty. And for any sinner exposed to his sin, that is a terrifying, although necessary experience. As the author of Hebrews declares in 4:12-13:

12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

The word of God preached, the word of God given meaning and understanding through the faithful proclamation, should cause a person to recognize the immensity and all-pervasive knowledge of God. God's knows everything about you. He knows every thought, every action, and indeed every sin. David realized this truth when he penned the words of Psalms 139:1-4 saying:

1 O Lord, You have searched me and known me. 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. 3 You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. 4 Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, You know it all.

This is the testimony of the Word of God – God knows you intimately and He knows every motive, good and bad. And when we are confronted with such truths, and realize that God is good, holy and just and that we are fallen, unholy and unjust apart from Christ, our sin is exposed. We begin to recognize that God should rightfully have noting to do with us. Like Peter, when he saw the power and holiness of Jesus after having doubted Him and His command to lower his nets again for a catch of fish; as we consider who Jesus is and how unlike Him we are, we should say, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8). Peter knew firsthand that exposure to the person of Christ inevitably exposes people to the knowledge of sin and thus their need for a Savior from sin.

In our text, Peter had exposed the crowd to the person of Christ, of who He was. And now, as these had been exposed to the truth that they had crucified their own Messiah; that they had rejected Him, they were exposed as sinners against God. As Peter wrapped up his sermon, there was no heart-stirring music playing in the background? Peter did not tell any tear-jerking stories. All he did was proclaim the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus to the people by preaching the Scriptures. So I say again, it is the proclamation of God's Word that produces conviction; that exposes sinners.

But there is a second evidence that accompanies biblical preaching and it is this; <u>biblical preaching produces a genuine response</u>. In our text, the people said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "**Brethren, what shall we do?**" What does this question tell us? For these asking the question, not only were they under conviction of sin, being full of remorse for what they had done, but some were also ready to change. The message they heard affected not only their hearts, but their lives as well. Some think that all preaching is meant to make people feel good and while

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preaching can be comforting, it will often times upset. Biblical preaching that exposes sin disturbs us because it reveals that we are not self-sufficient and self-reliant as we think we out to be. We do not like being told we are wrong, or how we need to change. We like the status quo; we like the even-keel. So long as we are not digressing, we are content; but a life that is stagnant or not progressing is just as ungodly as a life that is digressing. And it is the word of God that calls us to grow, to press on, to increase and abound all the more. These are challenging words, sometimes distressing words. Therefore, biblical preaching has the power to comfort the disturbed, but also to disturb the comfortable.

We see this kind of response to biblical preaching over in Acts 5. As Peter speaks to the Jewish leaders their need of repentance in Jesus name notice their response in verse 33, "But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them." And over in Acts 7:54, after Stephen preached about Jesus and how they had killed Him, we read, "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and they began gnashing their teeth at him." Biblical preaching exposes sin and solicits a response.

In our text we have see a great response as the people asked, "What shall we do?" Notice that they ask this not only of Peter but of the rest of the apostles as well. All twelve were involved in the witnessing that day and Peter was addressed as one among equals. question is, "What shall we do?" Beloved, that is a question you ought to ask after every sermon vou hear! It is biblical! For when the people heard the preaching of John the Baptist, Luke 3:10 records that they asked him, "Then what shall we do?" When the Philippian jailor discovered that Paul and Silas had not run off during the earthquake, he asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:31). And even Paul, on that road to Damascus, when confronted with his sin in the presence of the Lord Jesus asked, "What shall I do, Lord?" As we hear biblical preaching, prayerfully it will cause us to ask what needs to change; what steps must I take to be more like Christ. Beloved, if your aim in going to church on any given such is simply to feel good about yourself then I say to you not to bother going to a Bible-teaching church. Why? Because when the Word is faithfully taught, sinners are exposed. Our sinful condition is revealed. Let us never think that we can come to church and say that we were sinners. Beloved, we are sinners. That is difficult, I know, but it brings us to the place were we can rightly receive and experience the depth of the grace and mercy of God. We are sinners who have offended a holy God and we need to be reminded of that.

Every time the word is preached, the Holy Spirit is reminding us about the sin we have been saved from and for some, He is exposing them to their sin for the first time. Apart from the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, we would not even want to hear what we desperately need to hear. When biblical preaching occurs, the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to produce the conviction of God. And hear this: unless people are convicted of their sin, until they have a spiritual remorse for it, they will never see their need for a Savior.

So, as the Word of God is truly preached, it exposes sinners; but it does not stop there. God's word does more than simply expose the problem of sin; it also reveals the remedy for sin. And it is this remedy for sin that leads us to our second result of biblical preaching. For when the Word is preached, as it was in Acts 2...

#### II. It exalts the Savior (2:38-39)

No one can simultaneously give the impression that he is content in himself and that Jesus is mighty to save. We have noted that biblical preaching exposes sinners to their sin and then such preaching will exalt the Savior. This is exactly what we see in our text. Let us read again verses 38-39 and note his Christ-exalting invitation:

"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:3).

Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."

Note with me how Peter exalted the Savior by clearly revealing three critical truths for his audience.

First, <u>he told them how they must respond</u> (2:38a). In response to their question, "What shall we do?" Peter gives them clear, concise and biblical terminology. He does not sugarcoat it. He is firm in stating that there is only one appropriate response to what he had told them about Christ. Oh that this we true today. Before we examine Peter's exhortation, think about the ways in which we often hear people being called to Christ, using terminology not only different from Peter, but generally unlike anything we find anywhere in Scripture. How many have heard this invitation, "Will you give your heart to Christ?" That sounds good, does it not? It must be biblical, right? Do you know that the Bible never tells a sinner to give his heart to Christ? We are not saved by giving God anything, but by receiving His gift to us. As Ephesians 2:8-9 says:

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Something similar goes along these lines: "Won't you ask Jesus to come into your heart?" Again, such words are never used in the Scriptures. And biblically speaking, what is true of the human heart? According to Jeremiah 17:9, it is "more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick." We do not need Jesus to come into such hearts; rather we need Jesus to give us a new heart. And this new heart is a promised blessing of the New Covenant ushered in by Jesus with His first coming. In a passage that I never grow weary of hearing or reading, we see this in Ezekiel 36:25-27

25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

We should not be asking for Jesus to come into our hearts but rather to receive from Jesus the new hearts that He promises to all who believe on Him. Nowhere does the Bible tell us we have to plead with God and coerce Him to save us. Such invitations are not found in the book of Acts. As you read Acts, it is interesting to see how people responded when they wanted to become a Christian. No one walked an aisle. No one raised a hand for prayer. There is no exhortation to repeat a prayer (not that this is necessarily wrong). There is no record of Peter, James or any of the Apostles calling for every eye closed and every head bowed as the preacher leads the people in a prayer to receive Christ. Again, this is not to say that preacher ought not to do this at times, but that is not what we see in the book of Acts. What we see in our text from Peter's invitation are two specific charges. This is what sinners are to be invited to do.

"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:3).

#### 1. You must repent

The Greek word for "repent" is *metanoeo*. It means a change of mind or purpose. In the New Testament, it always speaks of a change of direction or intention, and specifically a turning from sin. As one preacher put it, "repentance calls for a repudiation of the old life and a turning to God for salvation." The Old Testament word for "repent" translated by the NT *metanoeo* means, "to turn or return." The picture that is painted is that an unrepentant person is going away from God, following his own way, and acting contrary to God and His ways. But the repentant person does a 180-degree turn around. He turns from his service to sin to serve God. To repent then is to express a willingness to change one's thinking and living so that it reflects the working of God in his life (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

We must also remember that repentance itself is a gift from God just as is faith. In Acts 5:31we read of Jesus, "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." And in 2 Timothy 2:24-25 we read of church leaders that... 24 The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth...

Beloved, there is not one sinner who will ever desire to repent apart from the working of the Holy Spirit within him. The word "repent" is often missing in our gospel presentations. There are some who say we should never call non-Christians to repent. All they must do is believe. Yet Peter called his audience to repent, as did John the Baptist in Matthew 3:2 as well as Jesus Himself in Matthew 4:17. Look at it again. When the crowd of convicted sinners asked Peter what to do, the first charge he gave them was to *repent*. There must be a radical conversion, a transformation of nature, a definitive turning from evil and a resolute turning to God in obedience. This is the repentance granted by God. This is the repentance of salvation. And it is not that we are saved by our work of repentance, it is rather that we are saved by God so that we can repent. And so, according to the New Testament, a person who does not repent is not a Christian. *You must repent*. This is the first charge stated by Peter. But there is a second charge as well; this second charge cannot be separated from the first...

#### 2. You must demonstrate allegiance to Christ.

Again, looking at verse 38 we read, *Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins...*" What does this mean? Let us first establish what it does not and cannot mean. Some will teach from this verse that one must be baptized in order to be saved. Is that what is being taught here? And more importantly, is that what the New Testament teaches? Absolutely not. Baptism does not and cannot save a person. And for those who teach that baptism is essential for salvation, why is it that Peter said nothing about baptism in his other recorded sermons of Acts 3:12-26, 5:29-32 and 10:34-43? When you read Acts 10:44-48, it is clear that Cornelius and his household received the Holy Spirit *before* they were baptized (44-48).

There is nothing magical about baptism. It is something every believer ought to desire and to do in obedience to Christ, but it does not save, nor does it literally wash away sins. So next,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> MacArthur, John "The Gospel According to Jesus" (Revised and Expanded Edition) – p. 178

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we must answer the question as to why Peter uniquely exhorted his Jewish audience to be baptized here in our text. To answer this, we must imagine ourselves as first century Jews.

It is hard for us to imagine the difficulty of the decision facing Peter's hearers. They were Jews. They had been Jews all their lives. They were devout Jews—remember; they had traveled from all over the world to observe this Jewish holy day of Pentecost. As Jews, they were highly patriotic, nationalistic culturally and religiously rich people. Their great aspiration was to see the yoke of Roman oppression broken so that they might be free. They prayed that God would establish His kingdom over the world—a *Jewish* kingdom. Remember that they had just two months earlier crucified the One they considered to be a barrier to their nationalistic goals.

So when they heard Peter say, "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus," they knew what he meant. They knew that baptism was a sign of identification and would signify a change. Some, perhaps, had been baptized by John the Baptist. But now Peter called on them to be baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ." In the nave of the very Person they had condemned and crucified just weeks earlier. Be baptized in that name. To be baptized in that name, would mean to be an outcast to their fellow Jews. It would declare they were breaking from Judaism. It would mean to associate with Jesus and His followers.

I see something very important here as expressed in baptism. Baptism means something. In the New Testament, faith in Christ was never simply a "private matter" like so many regard it today. Notice two critical things that are true of baptism according to our text.

<u>First</u>, baptism is <u>personal</u>. "Repent and be baptized, <u>each one</u> of you…". This is a call for a personal response. No one can be baptized for you, nor can you for me. Parents cannot make this decision for their children. It must be personal.

**Second**, baptism is *public*. Anyone can *say* he has repented and believed in Christ. But the proof of the sincerity of a person's repentance and faith is declaring publically their allegiance with Christ, something that baptism pictures. I think it is Don Whitney who noted that the New Testament knows of no Christian who sought to remain *unbaptized*. If you have believed in Christ, the world is supposed to know. For a Jew in Peter's audience to decided to be baptized; it would be akin to him saying, "I was wrong about Jesus before, but by God's grace, no longer. I believe He is both Lord and Christ, and from this day forth He will be *my* Lord. I give my allegiance to Jesus."

Again, to be clear, the act of baptism does not and cannot save anybody. A person is saved by faith, not by works. Peter himself later clarified that for Cornelius saying in Acts 10:43, "through His [Chirst's] name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." So, while baptism is not necessary for salvation, it is necessary as the Scriptural means of obediently expressing one's faith in Christ. To be baptized is to declare publicly what you have already confessed privately, "I believe that Jesus is my Lord and Savior. Lord, let me declare my allegiance to You to the world!" To be baptized is to declare one's allegiance to Christ. This is how we exalt Christ, when biblical preaching causes us to repent and to give our allegiance to Christ.

So Peter exalted the Savior next by clarifying first how one must respond, with repentance and allegiance, but **second**, <u>he told them what they will receive</u> (2:38b). We find two gifts that come as a result of repentance and allegiance to Jesus.

<u>First</u>, is the *gift of forgiveness*. Peter said, **Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins..." The one who repents has his sins, his crimes against God, no matter how vile, forgiven by the work of Christ on the cross! Beloved, no matter how sinful you think you might be, your sin is no match for the work of Christ. Remember that some in Peter's audience were directly responsible for crucifying Jesus, yet he** 

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promises them forgiveness in Jesus' name. There is room at the cross for you! Receive the gift of forgiveness! How? Repent and pledge your allegiance to Christ. But there is one more gift.

**Second**, is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter goes on to say in verse 38, "and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." This is a fact; there is no doubt, those who repent and pledge allegiance to Christ are empowered by the Holy Spirit. And the gift of the Spirit is the Spirit Himself dwelling within you. Peter is saying in effect, "Respond to God's call and what happened to us will happen to you. The Spirit of God will come and live in you as He does in us! So then, we have seen that baptism is personal, and it is public, but as we close, let us see what makes all this possible.

What makes the promise of forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit possible? Let us read verse 39, "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."

Please notice two things here. First, the invitation to the crowd was <u>universal</u>. Who is invited to respond here, "all" – the promise of the forgiveness of sin and of the indwelling Spirit is offered to all who will respond in faith and repentance. The invitation is to all. But, please do not miss this next statement as we see second that the call is particular. The invitation is to all, the call is to "as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."

Do you see the balance? All are invited to be saved? But who is saved? Only those whom the Lord calls. Peter does something so many preacher avoid. In a message given predominately to unbelievers, Peter told these unregenerate sinners about the sovereignty of God in salvation. In passages like Romans 8:28-30 and Ephesians 1:4-5, we learn that God, in eternity past chose an undeserving people for Himself. It is God who promised He would save them. Now we have no idea prior to salvation who the elect are and so we have the responsibility, like Peter here, to call all people to respond to Jesus. And then, as we do this, God will save those whom He has chosen and called. Beloved, make not mistake, if it were not for the effectual call of God, whereby faith and repentance are granted, not one person would be saved. I can preach with confidence because I know that God is the author of salvation and I can say with 2 Timothy 2:10, "For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory."

Beloved, when the Word of God is preached, it exposes sinners and exalts the Savior. These are the first two results of biblical preaching, but these ought to be what we see then in our lives. Do you see yourself as a sinner in need of a Savior? Do you read the read of God and become reminded what He has done for you? Have you seen the heinousness of your sin at the cross of Jesus? Have you seen the grace of God at the cross of Jesus? Oh, may we long for and respond to such proclamations of the Word of God that result in these things. Yes, when the Word is preached, it exposes sinners and exalts the Savior. From the beginning to end, God is exalted in the salvation of His people. How will you respond? Will you repent and receive the blessings of Christ or will you remain in unbelief?

## Soli Deo Gloria

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