

Scripture Reading:

Acts 2:14 "14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. 15 For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 16 But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. 18 And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy. 19 I will show wonders in heaven above And signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. 20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. 21 And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the Lord Shall be saved.' 22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know-- 23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; 24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. 25 For David says concerning Him: 'I foresaw the Lord always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. 26 Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. 27 For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. 28 You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.' 29 "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, 31 he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. 33 Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, 35 Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" ' F11 36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" 38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and 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. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." 40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." 41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles."

Believing God's Promises

Today brings the second of three messages focused on why we trust God's promises: We are studying God's covenant of salvation and why we believe that the children born to believers are members of the covenant and should participate in the covenant sacraments of baptism and communion

- Last month, I used Genesis chapter 15 as an introduction to covenants
- Today I will make the case for baptizing our covenant children using Peter's sermon in Acts
- And Lord willing, next month we will look at how Jesus viewed the children of the covenant and what Paul means when he commands us to discern the Body in I Corinthians eleven

This morning we have read together one of the most famous sermons ever delivered... When considering whether the children of believers should be baptized we must ask what happened after this sermon?

The sermon we have read this morning is actually used by both sides of this baptism debate as the major basis of what they believe.

Those who hold to believer's baptism look to Peter's command that those convicted of their sin must repent and be baptized to justify baptizing only those who can give a credible confession of Faith

At the same time, Peter's command & promise has been used throughout Church history to administer the sacrament of baptism to all believers and their covenant children.

- So who is right? I certainly know I will not have the final word this morning but I do want to make the case for what we believe here at Christ Covenant!

IF we limit the discussion to only the New Testament, both sides end up arguing from silence:

- Those who hold to believer's baptism will tell us you can search from Acts to Revelation and you will NOT find one example of an infant being baptized
- Those who hold to covenantal baptism say you can search from Acts to Revelation & you will NOT find one example of a covenant child making a profession of faith and being baptized

BOTH are right as far as these statements go!

This still leaves us with the question of what happened after Peter's sermon? Why was God not more specific, so we could have avoided all this debate??

This is where the rubber meets the road for our discussion of whether we believe ALL of the Bible as we discussed at length last week. BOTH sides agree that Peter's promise applies to the adults who were present and repenting: The question is HOW this promise applies to their children, since Peter says that it does.

Those who hold to believer's baptism insist that they must first be converted, being given the gift of faith... But then how is this promise any different than the Good News that is presented to everyone?

Those who see God's covenant faithfulness as we studied last month would say that it is His faithfulness that is being testified too in Baptism and that we baptize our children as a sign of believing His promise! This had certainly been the pattern in the Old Testament and it would be strange for Peter to make this promise and then have the children excluded.

Here at Christ Covenant Church we believe that as officers in Christ's Church we are commanded to baptize those who make a profession of faith AND their children, BOTH based on God's promise: Just as Abraham was commanded to circumcise those in his household

- **Does this mean that everyone who makes a profession of faith and is baptized is saved for all eternity?**

No, as we clearly see with cases later in Acts and our churches today, there are some who are not sincere, but we cannot know the heart and must accept their testimony and trust God's promise

- **BUT this is the major objection raised to baptizing our covenant children: We cannot "know" they are saved for all eternity as members of God's elect**

We don't, but God's promise applies to them, just as it does for the adult who repents and based on God's promise they should be baptized and treated as members of God's church unless they show themselves to be covenant breakers.

Think about it this way: Which is the greater "testimony?"

First we hear a stunning conversion story of a drug-addicted atheist college professor. He knows the time and date that he was convicted of his sin, gave his life to Jesus, giving up his drugs and how he now debates his former colleagues

Then we hear from a faithful member of a local church who recently married in the faith. She attends church every Sunday, faithfully worshiping God each week as she confesses her sins and hears God's forgiveness. She explains that she has trusted Christ as her Savior for as long as she can remember!"

Sadly, in many American churches today, they would put the first front and center at the baptismal pool BUT they would wonder if the second person is REALLY saved?

- **As we saw last month, both are the result of God's eternal decree of salvation with their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life:
Saved by God's gracious love!**
- **Both are covered under Peter's promise and both the result of them receiving the gift of faith**

You see, in BOTH cases the focus should not be on their faithfulness, but rather the faithfulness of God... To help us understand this, let me turn to the New Testament reading from Luke's Gospel this morning about the centurion's great faith:

- **When Jesus sees great faith, we should strive to see what it is and what it does!**

Jesus marveled at this man's faith and that should get our attention because it is one of only two places where Jesus as the Son of Man marveled at what He saw during His earthly ministry:

- **He marveled at this man's faith here at Capernaum**
- **And He marveled at the unbelief that He saw in His own home town as related in the sixth chapter of Mark's Gospel: "5 Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6 And He marveled because of their unbelief."**

I think it is safe to say that here at Christ Covenant Church; we would rather have Jesus marvel at our faith rather than our unbelief.

- **So how will we know if we are exercising such marvelous faith?**

Paul puts it this way in Hebrews 11: 1 "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen..."

3 "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

And again in verse six:

6 "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

- **We want to keep these verses in mind, as we listen again to what the Centurion said to Jesus:**

"Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. 7 Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You.

- **He approaches Jesus with a humble and contrite heart: Fearing God!**

"But say the word, and my servant will be healed."

- **The God who framed the entire creation with His Word can speak and heal this servant!**

8 “For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it.”

- **This Centurion believed that Jesus was the one with ultimate authority**
- **Just as the Centurion would obey an order from his general, or just as he could command a soldier to act and he would obey**
- **So Jesus could say the word that his servant should be healed and the very demons of hell would have to obey.**

There is no begging, no emotions, no excuses or rationalizing and certainly NO proud appeals for something that this Centurion deserved:

- **Just an appeal for Jesus to do what Jesus had the power to do!**

Now let us note the reaction of Jesus:

“9 When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"

Jesus says we have seen great faith: Do you want to have great faith?

- **Then you must believe “that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”**
- **We must believe that God is the Creator & we are mere creatures!**
- **To have this great faith we “must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”**
- **To have this great faith we must believe that "All authority has been given to [Jesus] in heaven and on earth.**
- **And we must believe that Jesus wants us to “go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that [He] commanded”**
And we must believe that Jesus is with us “always, even to the end of the age.”

This is what we see here in Luke’s account this morning:

- **A God-fearing Centurion who simply believed that Jesus was who He claimed to be!**
- **He seeks Him bringing a simple request for the servant he loves and his request is granted.**

This is truly where the “foolishness of God” confounds the “wisdom of man.”

-- Surely a man or woman of great faith must study for many years to learn all they will need to have great faith.

-- Surely they will need many long hours in prayer to prepare themselves for such great faith.

-- And surely they must live special lives to demonstrate such great faith!

We have seen this type of thinking in many chapters of Church history where the focus has been on knowledge or emotions or pomp & circumstance...

Rather than exercising the great faith Jesus saw in this Centurion.

- **This is the great faith that should apprehend the promise Peter offers in his sermon!**

It is the great faith that you will witness next week here at Christ Covenant Church when Lord willing little Abiana and Andronico Neto are baptized into the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

- **Great faith is what will cause Isador and Sofia to bring these little children to the feet of Jesus to have them baptized**
- **They will be demonstrating that they do not believe that they are worthy to parent such great gifts, just as the centurion thought himself unworthy of having Jesus in his home!**
- **They will demonstrate that they believe that little Abiana and Andronico were born dead in trespasses and sin – Just as the centurion’s servant was “sick and ready to die!”**
- **They will demonstrate that they believe their covenant children will ONLY be saved through the same gracious gift of faith that has saved them!
- Jesus must say the word!**
- **Lord willing, they will come next week claiming the promise of Jesus that salvation is unto them and their children, asking Jesus to say the word, believing that their children will be healed, made whole and righteous through the blood of their Savior Jesus.**
- **And Lord-willing Isadore and Sofia, and the rest of us as their helpers, will continue to demonstrate this great faith as little Abiana and Andronico grow into strong disciples of Jesus; calling them continuously back to this day of their Baptism and challenging them to live as who they have become in Jesus!**

Some will certainly charge that we are teaching or at least headed down the road toward presumptive regeneration:

- **We are being no more presumptuous than this Centurion who had great faith.**
- **This Centurion believed in the real Jesus and requested that He do what was in His power to do.**
- **This is what Jesus called “great faith!”**
- **He did not presume that Jesus would heal his servant, but asked Him to show compassion just as we will next week with little Abiana and Andronico**

We will be coming to the Jesus who has the power to save and claiming the promise pronounced in Peter’s 2nd Epistle:

“9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”

When we show such great faith, we join with Joshua in saying, “as for my house, we will serve the Lord!”

- **We stand here today believing the words of Jesus just like that faithful Centurion: The one to whom Jesus said “Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you!”**

Luke tells us that “his servant was healed that same hour.” The Angel Gabriel proclaimed to Joseph that Jesus would save His people from their sins! Jesus has commanded us to disciple the nations baptizing them and teaching them all things...

Today, WE are called and commanded to have the same great faith we have seen in this faithful Centurion: By believing that this is so!

Communion Meditation:

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. 2 For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

Genesis 4:3 And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. 4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, 5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering.

4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.