

Last week when we were together we were in the first speech of Peter in the book of Acts. We weren't able to finish that sermon, so this morning we will. This morning we learn of the response to Peter's first sermon. I will do my best to make it through all that I'm wanting to achieve this morning. If I can't, I've told Pastor Flora he can clean up for me next week what I'm not able to get to.

We have this morning a picture for us of what it looks like to move from unbelief to belief, to see what it looks like when Christ and his Spirit are working in the heart of a group of people or a person. And what Peter is preaching to this generation, this group of Jews who were gathered in Jerusalem for the high holy days---what he is doing with them is he's teaching them that which they would understand: He's talking to them about salvation. One of the things we need to remember, however, is this was not the only message of salvation that they would have heard. Christianity, as I stated last week, was by no means in any place of power. It's just begun. It's not even on the periphery of cultural power of the Roman Empire in this first century. But the notion of salvation would not have been foreign to his hearers because they lived in the Roman Empire that was full of Roman paganism, and there were many messages of salvation that went out during that time. The kind of salvation, however, that was spoken of was a salvation that was to be experienced only in this life. And there was no talk of sin, but rather there was salvation so that one can have a blessed life, a peaceful life, a healthy life. So there were all sorts of gods and goddesses, all kinds of public and private practices, and one could participate in all kinds of religious behavior and all kinds of spiritual activity.

So Peter comes in---in the most seed form---to lay the groundwork, this message of salvation through this Jesus Christ, and through it begins the church. And it is a message of salvation which is unique. It is a message of salvation that he connects to the history and to the context of his hearers in a way that they can understand. And understand they did. And then they responded. And that's what we find in this passage. Not just a sermon, but we find their response, that I believe, then, is for us instructive. Whether you are a Christian or whether you are not yet a Christian, it is instructive for us.

So let's look together, Acts chapter 2. I'll begin reading at verse 36 where I ended last week and read to verse 41. Hear now the Word of God.

“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

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

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off---for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

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

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. Please pray with me. Heavenly Father, by your Holy Spirit may you bring to us a rejoicing, a remembering, and a renewal in Jesus Christ. By the power of your Spirit open up our hearts that we may both understand and respond to your Word. So Lord we pray, strengthen us today and help us to see just how beautiful and excellent is the Lord Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

So as we look at this passage together we want to see three things, at least. I want you to see that there is a *Surprising Response*, verse 37. There is *Commands and Promises*, verses 38-40. And then

Community Created in verse 41. Surprising Response, Commands and Promises, Community Created.

So together let's begin with a surprising response. Their response to Peter is surprising because, if you will, if we look at first to understand their response, let's look at Peter's approach to them. Peter's approach to them is doing what all good preaching should do. He's addressing both the understanding of his hearers, but is also addressing their will. And he's doing so through truth and grace.

And what he does for them in his approach, is he first appeals to their reason by appealing to truth. And that appealing to truth looks like this---and we don't need to go back through the whole sermon, but simply summarized in this way. He's looking at his audience as a group of Jews who would have had knowledge of the prophets. They had knowledge of King David and of his Psalms. They had knowledge of the idea of the Messiah. So they had the idea of the prophet, the idea of high priest---they are certainly in Jerusalem for the high holy days of Passover, and so forth. They certainly would have been familiar with David as King. And so he goes back and appeals to them through the truth of the Old Testament. And he appeals to them by their reason by saying, you heard these things. And he goes back and he talks about how the last days would have been inaugurated through Joel's prophecy, when the Spirit will be poured out on all flesh---that 'all flesh' are those who call on the name of the Lord. And those who 'call on the name of the Lord' is not indiscriminate---it's those who the Lord calls to himself. And when they do, they will do so as young and old men and women, slave and free, regardless of socioeconomic status. This is what will happen. And the last days will begin when the Lord pours out his Spirit, not on a select few, not on the leaders of Israel, not just on men, but when he pours it out on all flesh.

And here Peter recalls it, and he says, guess what. What you have witnessed today is the beginning of the final days. And guess what. That prophet Joel finds its fulfillment in the prophet of Christ. This is the one you have crucified. And then he unpacks how Christ, the one that they crucified---even though they were not present necessarily at the crucifixion---because of their sin and because of your sin and my sin, they were present. It's what caused Christ to go to the cross. And in so doing, he says okay, that's how the prophecy of Joel will look like: This is the one that you crucified. And then he's also the greater David. He is the king. And Peter comes all the way down in appealing to their reason, in appealing to their understanding, by saying, do you remember this one? This Christ? This is the one.

But guess what. He then talks about grace. And that's why I read verse 36, when he says: "Therefore let all Israel..." Now he's appealing to this, his audience---Jews. Hear this, all Israel. Be assured, "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." So in that final statement, he gives them both truth and grace. The truth to appeal to their understanding of who Jesus was, what he came to do, and how he is the fulfillment of everything that the Old Testament was pointing towards. He's the final sacrifice. He's the ultimate sacrifice. He's the perfect sacrifice. He is the one through whom the Spirit will be given. He is the greater David. Ok, there. But then he says this is one you crucified. But then he says it's this one that God has made Lord and Christ.

So what he says in that final sentence of that sermon, prior to their response, connects to what he said in verse 21, when he said, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Do you see the grace? He's saying the one that you crucified, the Lord has now raised---He is that Lord. And so the Lord is saying to you, though you crucified him, his door is open, and he says come unto me. Call on his name. So he appeals both to their understanding, their reason, as well as he uses grace to move them in their will. And the Holy Spirit works.

And then we hear verse 37, when they say, "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" That phrase, 'cut to the heart,' encompasses what it looks like to move from unbelief to belief. This is important because one of the things for Peter and for the writers of the New Testament, and for Paul---one of the things they would teach is this: the heart, the heart is the seat of understanding. You see, in our modern sensibilities we separated the two. We separate mind and heart. We say this is how I think; this is how I feel and act. We've driven a separation between those two, but I don't believe that ultimately they are in opposition. Yes, surely there are times when our minds and our hearts are all kinds of disheveled, but indeed I do believe they are far more in tune with each other than we think.

I learned this not only through my professors in seminary, but also post-seminary, as I continue to unpack my seminary degree. And one of those was Jonathan Edwards. I will tell you---Jonathan Edwards I have a hard time reading. He wrote in the eighteenth century. It's really old English. It's hard. He uses unusual concepts. And so I'm thankful for people who help me understand him. One of those is John Gerstner, a great theologian and teacher. And one of the things he teaches about the human heart is this. You don't do things against your will.

One illustration would be like this. If you're out traveling somewhere, and someone comes up to you with a gun and says, Give me your wallet or I will shoot you. We tend to think, in our modern sensibilities, that if we give him the wallet, we're doing something against our will. But actually the truth is, we're really not. Because what we would say is this. That actually what you are saying at that moment is that you would rather live than die. So you'll do whatever you need to do to stay alive. That's not doing something against your will. Because what you've done in that moment, in that flash of a second---your heart, which is the seat of understanding, the mind---and for Jonathan Edwards the mind and the heart are one and the same---in your heart you've focused on something: I want to live. And your heart says and your will says, Yep! What do I have to do to do it?

We do that all the time. As human beings our hearts, our minds, seize on things which are beautiful and those things which are horrible, and our wills follow accordingly. Children with spinach. Me with guacamole. It looks good. It sounds good. But...bleh...no. So I'm doing that which is according to my will. That's how the human heart works.

So therefore we need to be aware that if indeed the heart is the seat, that when this says here, 'cut to the heart,' it means that both their understanding and their will have been cut to the very fundamental level of their existence. At the most fundamental level of the heart is both understanding and the will. But here's the challenge. It's possible to have understanding of who Christ is and what he has done, and yet not be moved by your will. Said another way, it's very possible to come to church on every Sunday and know a lot about Jesus, and yet not have your chief love, your chief concerns, find a home in him.

Example like this. If one says I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ will care for me and my family. Statement number one. Say I believe that. Yet on the other side of my will I find myself constantly in a cycle of anxiety and fear. The question comes, what do you really believe, then? If the heart is the seat of both understanding and will, and we don't do things against our will, if you are living in anxiety and fear and yet you say that you believe that the Lord will care for you, then question needs to be: Do you really know him? Do you really know that he will care for you? Because if you believe and live in trust, and not in fear and anxiety, then that means you believe in the Lord. It's consistent. But you can have the understanding without the will. Said another way. If you say that I believe that the Lord forgives sin, yet you tend to live in your own treadmill cycle of guilt and shame of trying to work your way back to the Lord, then the question is, do you really know that he has forgiven you of your sins.

And in this passage we see the difference actually between a nominal Christian and someone who's

becoming a true Christian. A nominal Christian says I believe these things, but I still live in bondage to these, and those beliefs are not radically reorienting my will. The true Christian says I am utterly undone. I am cut to the heart. I not only see who Christ is and what he has done for me on the cross, I also know that now I can live with a deeper joy, a real peace. Not that it's not going to be tried, or buffeted, and so forth, but that it is something you go again to again and again.

Which is why, my friends, if you are a believer---which is why we come to....and here's an application point for the first main point---it's rejoice. This is why we come to church every Sunday morning: to rejoice. We need to rejoice every Sunday morning in the beauty and the promises of Christ. Because very easily, because our hearts are fickle, we can say we believe one thing, but during the week our hearts begin to find different loves, different things to latch onto, that begins to provide a very large gap between what we say we believe and how we live. Which is why we come every Sunday morning and go, Lord, help me to rejoice. Help me to believe. Help my will to be changed. Help my heart at the fundamental level of my loves, my desires, to be changed because of the truth of what Christ has done.

So let me use the words of Peter from his letter, 2 Peter 1:8-9, particularly the end of verse 9 where he says, Have you forgotten that you were forgiven of your former sins? I want to appeal to the believers here this morning. Have you forgotten? Or are you rejoicing this morning that the Lord, because of his crucifixion and his resurrection, has provided for you forgiveness of sins. Do you believe it? This morning we need to rejoice in it. As I said last week, one of the reasons I'm so grateful for my charismatic brothers and sisters is because when they come to church, they expect the Lord to do something. And on Sunday mornings when I wake up, one of the things I first pray is Lord, would you help my heart to worship this morning and not just preach. Help me to worship and not perform. Help me to believe that you are a God of forgiveness and grace, and not to forget it. Help me believe that it is your power and nothing I do. And then I pray for you. Lord, will you come? Will you help your people rejoice in the truths of the Scriptures that it might radically reorient how we live. Though we may stumble and fall, it is God's grace that multiplies. Where sin abounds, grace abounds. And though we stumble and fall, the Lord is there with his grace. That is what we get to rejoice. Are you rejoicing?

This group of people who heard this message through Peter's preaching---through both the truth and the grace of it---were cut to the heart. And in their own way they began to rejoice, and they look and they said, what do we need to do? And so he lays it out. Here are some commands and some promises. The commands are right there in the text. First, repentance; baptism in the name; and then he says, save yourselves from this wicked generation. And then there are promises: receiving the Spirit, forgiveness, and the covenant effects.

So let's quickly walk through those. Repentance. Repentance is a very old biblical word which means to turn from and to turn to something else. Biblically speaking, repentance is to turn from sin---one, that's one thing---but there's also another turning, which would have been particularly applicable to Peter's audience. You not only turn and repent from sin, you repent of anything that you are trusting in to gain merit before God. And it can look like all kinds of religious activity that you use as a form of righteousness, that you then present to God and say, see? So repentance isn't just turning from sin, it's turning from anything that we're setting up as a means to work our way to God.

And then it's turning to. That turning to is placing our trust, at the fundamental heart level, in who Christ is and what he has done and what he remains doing as our Lord and King, sitting at the right hand of God the Father. And so remember, as a review of last week, it's saying I'm resting in who Jesus was, what Jesus did, who Jesus is, and what Jesus is going to do. And so he says to them 'repent.'

He then says for them to be baptized in the name. One of the things we need to say here for just a moment is, neither Peter, nor the writer of Acts, Luke, nor the Bible is setting up baptism as something that has to happen to be saved. Rather, it was from the beginning of the church a natural part of the repentance. And that is, when I say I'm turning from my sin or my own self-righteousness and pride, and I'm turning to place my trust in Christ, I do so by giving public profession. Jesus taught his disciples to 'go and to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.'

And so what that looks like, then, as they profess faith through their repentance, then the church has no other means whereby that public profession happens aside from receiving the outward sign of what the Lord is doing internally. And that is, when it says be baptized, as he says, in the name. He says to be baptized, every one of you, in the name. So the key is not the water, it's what the water points to. When it says 'in the name,' therefore, it's a recognition that it is through Christ that my sins are forgiven. Through his shed blood do I receive eternal life. Through his body given for me do I find strength and power. Through his resurrection do I find victory. All of that is symbolized in the baptism with water in the name of Christ.

He says to them, repent, be baptized, and then he says, save yourselves from this wicked generation. That's not an unusual phrase to be used in either the New Testament or the Old Testament, but Peter's the first one to use it here. And one of the things it means is this. It's not something that was particularly inherent with that generation. What he's joining to is this. He's saying separate yourself from the ideas, the thinking, and the way of this generation. And the thinking and the ways of that generation were essentially one thing: the rejection of Christ. He's not suggesting that they are to then go out into the desert and not be around people who don't know him. He's saying turn from anything that does not glorify Christ. Anything that does not point you to him, turn from it. If you do not, and you seek to both worship and walk with the Lord, while at the same time believing and following the worldly practices and principles of this generation, then there will not be salvation from the Lord's judgment on the last day.

And so it is for us. What are the institutions, the ideas that are being generated in our own day that do not lead us to glorify or to put our trust in Christ, but rather lead us away from trusting in him, that lead us away from loving him and enjoying him and finding our great satisfaction in him. Whatever those things are, we must turn from them. Because we cannot, as the Scriptures teach, we cannot say that a fig tree can also produce---these are my words---bananas. You can't have a saltwater spring producing freshwater. You can't have both. And there is a 'choose you this day' element to their discipleship. Notice what he says to them. It says, "With many other words he warned them." He was warning them. As I warn you. As I hear the warning of my own heart. The Lord is coming again, and in his hands will be condemnation or salvation. The call is for us to do the hard work, by his Spirit, of turning.

But there are promises, promises here. He says you will receive the Holy Spirit. Now another thing we need to be aware of---we'll see this as we go through the book of Acts---that there are times when those who receive the Spirit before they are baptized, there are times they receive the Spirit after they've been baptized. We don't need to get hung up on the order there. But he's referencing the baptism that was given to him. He baptizes with the Spirit because of what the Lord has sent them to do. He says when you repent and are baptized in the name---speaking of the trust, speaking of the turning---you receive the Holy Spirit, the presence of God.

And here I want to say to you, if you are a believer, here's the application point. Remember. Remember that this walk with Christ is never done in our own strength. Our rejoicing, our worship, our practice, our life, is not done outside of Christ. For Jesus says, "Apart from me you can do nothing." Which is the one that unites us to Christ? It is his Holy Spirit. We can do nothing apart from Christ.

Therefore, everything we do is by the strength, the grace, and the presence of God's Spirit in us. Remember that. Remember that when you're growing weary, when you are tempted, when you are battling guilt or shame---whatever it may be---it is at that moment that you call on the name of the Lord. Call on his Spirit to remind you of the promises that are yours in Christ. It is by the Spirit.

The forgiveness of sins, I've already referenced. Perhaps too early, but I had to do it there. But it's this: It is forgiveness. When Christ died he said, "It is finished." No amount of your beating yourself up or shaming yourself or others will move them to a greater depth or move you to a greater understanding and an experience of his forgiveness. Have you tasted that the Lord is sweet. Edwards, as I was referring to earlier, said this about the heart that is transformed. He says these words. He says there is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of his loveliness, beauty, holiness, and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet and having a sense of its sweetness.

You may know that the Lord forgives sin, but have you experienced the sweetness of his grace. This word 'experience' is in our vision statement, that we would be a church that experiences and extends the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to Columbia, the region, and the world. The reason why the word 'experience' is there is because it encapsulates both the fundamental understanding of the heart and the will of the heart together. That we would be a people every week rejoicing, because in the worship service, every worship service is a re-presenting of Christ in prayer, in song, in word, of what Jesus has done. And when we do that, we are...what? We are remembering that the Lord is forgiving. We are experiencing that grace. And when we experience that, we will then be a people who cannot help but extend that grace.

I was sharing this morning with our high school Sunday School, before I was a believer my tongue and my words were so heinous. There are things I wish I could forget that I ever said. I was vicious and mean and cruel and rude. But I am so thankful that the Lord's Spirit enabled me to experience that grace that caused me to see that this part of my life was [?] directed towards him. And the fact that I can stand before you and say anything which is of value or good or point you to Christ is because the Lord moved in and was able to transform not only my speech, but helped me to taste the sweetness of forgiveness. And I can take those words, and I can go and make amends. That had nothing to do with me and my own power---alone by the power of his Spirit. I'm asking you this morning, have you tasted of that sweetness?

Finally, it is the creation of a community. We see there, verse 41: "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day." What's so great about this passage is we're going right back to the beginning. You know where this church was planted, CPC? It was planted in Jerusalem, and we read about it in Acts chapter 2. Because right there what we see happen is we see the visible church coming into existence. The membership which we just celebrated with the Shogers goes all the way back to that verse. Why? Does that mean that everybody there had those same vows? No. But they professed faith. They were baptized. And then it says three thousand were added to their number. That means, number one: Somebody counted those who became Christians that day, and someone knew the number. We learn about that in chapter 1---there were already a hundred and twenty. Now that's what I call church growth.

Can I say a sidebar on church growth? Notice it had nothing to do with the worship service. It had nothing to do with a church program. It had nothing to do with the building. It had everything to do with the Holy Spirit blowing through. Which is why we need to pray for that. Not because we uniquely need the Spirit---we all need the Spirit, every church, every one of us. Because we go right back here, and we say why do we do membership at this church? Because they did it there. Why do we do baptism? Because they did it there. This is how the church begins. This is what the Lord instructed.

And then there's something even more important than that. When we gather together we must recognize the Bible does not---let me say this loud and clear, particularly to young people and to some of you who are baby boomers or Gen Xers who are just cynical about the church---the Bible does not understand someone who says they are a Christian and are not a part of a body of Christ. Certain churches do membership in certain ways, different than we do. That's not the point. If you are simply hanging out on the periphery, and you're not a part of any body, or you float, I will tell you, my encouragement to you is that your soul is in danger. Because you're not receiving the grace that the Lord is wanting to give to you. He means to save you individually---each of us are brought to Christ as individuals. We repent individually. We are baptized individually. But we are brought into a body. And that body needs one another. That's why the New Testament is full of encourage one another, love one another, exhort one another, confront one another---all that, all the one-anothering. And there's a lot of it. Why? Because the New Testament, the Bible, only understands the Christian faith being in community with other believers.

So if you're cynical about the church, let me encourage you to say, welcome to the club. If you're cynical about the church, then your eyes are on people and not on Christ. Let me challenge you to take your cynicism and place your trust in Christ who's the one who formed the church. If your eyes are cynical and are jaded about other Christian people, let me encourage you to take that energy and plug it into praying for God's Spirit to move in your heart to change you and to change Christians' hearts, to change the church.

But let me challenge you one final thing. Maybe those who are jaded and who are cynical, perhaps, are the smartest among us. Maybe you recognize that being a part of a community has a cost. It will cost time. It will cost talents and investment. It will bring joy, and it also brings potential pain. Because when you're in a relationship with other sinners...hooo! Right? But guess what. May the Lord give us a greater hope in the transforming power of his grace that wants to use broken relationships, that wants to use crooked sticks to strike a straight line to Christ to bring you to a new place in your life. He's created a community for a purpose, and he prayed for this church. Jesus prayed for this church, he prayed for our church, he prayed for the church of Christ across the world. And he said that they may love one another and in their loving one another may the world know that I am the Lord. And it is precisely in the divine, blessed-ness of Christ's church that the love of Christ is displayed.

So I've talked about rejoicing. I've talked about remembering. Then therefore let me just say, then let us renew, let us renew, by God's Spirit---ask him to renew our love for his people and for one another and for his church. That he may display Christ and make him more beautiful and more excellent through you, through each other, that we might be a great testimony, a witness to the world. That if it were not for Christ, many of us would never be in the same room. But look what he's done. Look what he has done. And look what he can do in your life. May the Lord do that. Let's pray.

Father, come. By your Spirit renew us and add to our number those who are being saved. Lord, testify at the fundamental level of our hearts---both our reason and our wills---to remake us and change us. And Lord, help us to rejoice that you are a God of forgiveness, because the debt has been paid in full. May you be glorified, and may you be beautiful to our sight. In Jesus' name. Amen.