

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor  
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18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834  
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## Acts 2:37-41 “What Must We Do to Be Saved?”

Intro. Here in Acts chapter 2 we have been looking together at the message that Peter preached on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit had manifested His presence in a marvelous way, and a tremendous crowd had gathered to find out what was going on. Then Peter began to preach to that crowd a message that was summarized for us in vv. 14-36. He told them that Jesus had been affirmed with many miracles. He told them that He died on the cross, not just as a result of wicked men, but because God sent Him to die in our place. On the third day Jesus rose from the dead and later ascended to heaven, which proved that God accepted His sacrifice for us. A further confirmation of Jesus was the fact that He fulfilled many prophecies. Add to all of that was the large number of eye witnesses to these truths. Based on the evidence presented, the climax of Peter’s message is found in v.36, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

So as the audience heard this message from Peter, many became keenly aware that the Nazarene whom they had crucified was actually their Messiah. What a blunder! What a crime! They were guilty of judicial murder. I can imagine that thoughts began to race through their mind. Sudden anguish and alarm gripped them. What will God do to them for committing such a great sin? Will He pour out some terrible wrath upon them immediately? So the Greek text implies that they kept on asking [imperfect tense] Peter and the other apostles, “What shall we do?” In other words, “Is there any way to be saved from such a great sin?”

Now I realize that the vast majority of people gathered here today have already professed faith in Jesus Christ. So if you are truly saved, the purpose of this message is to help you tell others how to be saved. Yet at least some here today need to hear this message because God wants to save you from your sins, and so I will tell you from God’s Word what you must do to be saved.

So let’s examine first of all:

### I. THE QUESTION PEOPLE SHOULD BE ASKING

Again, look at the question found in v.37, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Based on the context, they were essentially asking, “What can we do to be saved from God’s wrath?” That is the same question people should be asking today. So consider with me:

A. The Rightness of the Question – When the Word of God is preached, the Word of God should be responded to. So notice that they were willing to “do” something in response to the Word of God. The Bible says that we are to be doers of the Word, and not hearers only. We are not to listen to a sermon and only regard it as information.

Have you resolved to do something in response to this morning’s message, as God directs? Too many are not doers of the Word.

B. The Reason for the Question – What prompted them to ask this question? The reason is found in the first part of v.37. When they heard the message, “they were cut to the heart.” Simply put, they sought an answer to this question because they were under deep conviction. Do you know

what it's like to feel convicted of sin? Luke uses a descriptive word to tell of the conviction the people experienced. "Cut" is from an intensive form of the word (*katanusso*) which means, "to be pierced or stabbed." Have you ever been pierced with a knife, or thorn, or some other sharp instrument? Figuratively it is used of the feeling of sharp pain connected with conviction and remorse. They became keenly aware of their sin. They were stung with the Word of God that Peter preached.

That's what should happen when people hear the Word of God. Heb. 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, ... and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The preaching and teaching of the Word of God ought to cut and expose what is in your heart and mind, so that you are painfully aware that God knows your sin, and you can see your sin in all its ugliness. Not only that, but you feel like the preacher knows what you have been doing wrong! I've actually had people tell me that they felt like I was preaching right at them.

But one of the great problems in our day is that people are not very conscious of their sin. People treat it lightly because sin is so widespread in our society. All kinds of sin are commonly portrayed on TV, movies, and the Internet (give examples). Furthermore, our society denies the reality of sin because they say there are no moral absolutes. Most people rarely hear about the 10 Commandments or other moral laws of God's Word. Somehow we need a new awakening of the seriousness of our sin problem.

Back in the days of the First Great Awakening, when John Wesley went to an area, he had a strategy of preaching "the law" so as to bring about the conviction of sin. Then, once people had been convicted of sin through the preaching of law, he went on to emphasize the grace of the gospel.<sup>1</sup>

Now when the Holy Spirit brought conviction to the audience, He was just doing exactly what Christ said He would do. Turn to John 16:8. There Jesus said, "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." First, the Holy Spirit would convict the world:

1. Of Sin - Jesus said that the Spirit would convict the world of sin "because they do not believe in Me" (v.9). They were now convinced that Jesus is in fact the Messiah, and thus their unbelief in Him was a great sin. They crucified Christ because of unbelief. Well might they cry out in anguish of heart, "Brethren, what shall we do?"

There are people all about us who are committing the great sin of unbelief in reference to the Lord Jesus. They have never truly placed their faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. People today need to be convicted of the great sin of unbelief. Most people do not realize that failing to believe in Jesus is the greatest sin of all (cf. Rev. 20:15, "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.")

2. Of Righteousness - "because I go to my Father, and you see me no more" (v.10). Peter placed great emphasis on the return of the Son to the Father (vv.34-36). He was thus proved to be in the right. The exalted, holy Christ should bring about the same experience as we find in Isaiah 6. When the prophet saw the Lord "high and lifted up" (v.1), he said, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips..." (v.5). The more you realize how righteous God is, the more you realize your own sin.

3. Of Judgment - "because the ruler of this world is judged" (v.11; cf. Acts 2:40). We live in a world largely ruled and deceived by Satan. But Satan has been judged and sentenced

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<sup>1</sup> Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), p.116.

to hell. He is only awaiting the *execution* of that sentence. Do you want to share in this judgment of Satan? If you do not repent and trust in Christ as Savior, you will!

Why is it that we see so little conviction of sin today? I have given a couple of reasons, but let me tell a story of the time many people in Colonial America were brought under great conviction. Perhaps you have heard of Jonathan Edwards's sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." While he preached he had the manuscript held up so close to his face that they could hardly see his face. He went on and on until the people in that crowded church were moved almost beyond control. One man sprang up, rushed down the aisle and cried, "Mr. Edwards, have mercy!" Others caught hold of the backs of pews lest they should slip into the pit of hell that he was so vividly describing. Most thought that the day of judgement had dawned on them, and many were saved after hearing that message.

However, the secret of that sermon's power is known to few Christians. Some believers in that vicinity of Enfield, Mass. had become alarmed that, while God was blessing other places, He should pass them by. And so they met on the evening before the sermon—and spent that whole night in agonizing prayer. The rest is history.<sup>2</sup> So if we engaged in more earnest prayer, we could see God do His saving work in our midst as well. Pray that the Holy Spirit will continue this convicting ministry in our midst.

So when sinners are convicted of their sin, they should ask what they can do to be saved from their sin. So what is the answer to the question that every sinner should ask? Well let's move on from the question to:

## II. THE ANSWER TO THE SIN PROBLEM WE FACE

So what should you do when you are convicted of your need to be made right with God? You should:

A. Repent – That's what Peter says in v.38. The call to repentance, already sounded by John the Baptist and by Jesus in previous years, remained an essential element in the proclamation of the Christian gospel. Peter likewise said in Acts 3:19, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..." Paul said in Acts 17:30, "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent..." In Acts 20:21 Paul describes his practice of "testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. (cf. 26:20 also). Yet, repentance is lacking in too much modern preaching today. Yet as we have seen, this emphasis on sin and repentance was a consistent theme in the evangelism of the early church. It must be so today too.

What is repentance? The verb denotes an inward and complete change of mind which is rooted in the fear of God and sorrow for sin (2 Cor. 7:10). Such a change of mind, of course, expresses itself not only in a change of attitudes but also in a change of conduct, a change of life (Mt. 3:8).

We can see an illustration of repentance in the physical realm. If you develop heart disease, the doctor will warn you of what could happen if you do not change your diet and lifestyle. You probably would change your mind about eating foods high in cholesterol and salt, and thus change your eating habits. Well, Cheryl and I went through a health screening at the Southern Baptist Convention over 12 years ago. My results were not good! In fact, I was tagged with a red dot! They

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: #5074* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979), Illus.#C-2808.

said I needed to change my diet and exercise more. One habit I did change is that when I visit the hospitals, I walk fast and usually take the stairs. Listen, when you are confronted with a significantly increased risk of an early death, you are motivated to change your ways. Even so, the doctor of souls, Jesus Christ, has told us that sin will condemn us to hell! So you had better repent, and turn from your sin. [Illus.#C-1359].

Now when we repent, we must not only repent of personal sin, but also evil associations. Peter told them in v.40 to “be saved from this perverse generation.” The generation to which his hearers belonged had been rebuked by Jesus Himself as a “faithless and perverse generation” (Lk.9:41), as an “evil generation” (Lk. 11:29; 17:25). Peter now exhorts those who repent of their sins, to break away and save themselves from that group that was spiritually dead and had crucified Jesus. They were to take no part in their religion or way of life. This same message is given by Paul in Eph. 5:11, “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” Paul also said in 2 Cor. 6:14-17, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?... Therefore come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord.....” (cf. also I Jn. 2:15-17; James 4:4). We must always try to *avoid* temptation, and that means stop associating with people who tempt you to do wrong. You must be willing to turn back on this evil world. You need to be willing to be a non-conformist. That does not mean that we withdraw from unbelievers completely, but it does mean we draw the line when it comes to participating in their ungodly practices and beliefs.

B. Publicly Identify with Jesus Christ – In v.38 Peter also says, “let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ...” Peter calls on them to do something that will separate them visibly from this nation that is under condemnation. As John’s converts were required to receive baptism in water as the outward and visible sign of their repentance, so Peter’s convicted hearers were now required to submit to it as evidence of their repentance. In the mind of the apostles, repentance and baptism were generally inseparable. The former could not be genuine without manifesting itself in the latter. When a person is baptized, they are saying that they have died to the old way of life through repentance, and they have identified with Jesus Christ, and they are pledging to follow Him as Lord and Savior.

But it is extremely important to note that it was not merely an external rite that they were to submit to. The outward act of baptism will do you no good unless it is preceded by genuine repentance and faith. As for the faith connection, this baptism was to be literally “Upon the name of Jesus (the) Messiah.” To be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ,” then, is to acknowledge Him to be all that His name implies. The name “Jesus” means “the Lord saves.” Christ means “Messiah.” So baptism also means that you acknowledge that Jesus is your Savior. Peter had challenged his audience to accept Jesus as Messiah and Lord (v.36). Their baptism in the name of Jesus Christ would be a public acknowledgement that they had come to believe in Jesus as their Messiah. That was a big step for these Jews to make, especially considering the fact that their baptism would likely lead to their expulsion from Judaism. In Islamic society to accept Christian baptism often results in expulsion from the family, the community, and to face persecution. Yet if we believe that Jesus is indeed Lord of the Universe, we should fear and obey Him more than what man may do.

Have you repented of your sins? Has there come a decisive moment in your life when you have turned from sin and turned to Jesus Christ as your Savior? Have you followed the Lord in baptism as an expression of repentance and faith in Jesus as your Savior? If not, how can you have any assurance that you have truly repented? So why not present yourself for baptism today. Don’t delay. Some of you may have been baptized years ago, but you know that it was not an expression

of both repentance and faith. If that is the case, then you need to undergo Scriptural baptism. Baptism should follow your salvation experience.

Now contrary to what some believe, Acts 2:38 is not teaching that baptism is necessary for salvation. In the original Greek the command to repent and the command to be baptized are not equal commands.<sup>3</sup> Literally, Peter commands all to repent, and then he who repents must be baptized. Baptism is just the public evidence of repentance. As we compare Scripture with Scripture we know that water baptism has nothing to do with redemption. In the home of Cornelius, those present received the Spirit and spoke in tongues before they were baptized (10:44-48). Tit. 3:5 says, “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” He didn’t say that He saved us by the washing of baptism. There are tens of thousands of people today who are depending on baptism to get them to heaven, and they are headed for tragic disappointment!<sup>4</sup>

So we have seen the question about salvation that people should be asking. We have seen the answer to the sin problem we all face. Now let’s move to the third point:

### III. THE REASONS YOU SHOULD REPENT & BELIEVE IN JESUS

Peter did not simply tell them how to be saved. He exhorted, warned, and made appeal. In v.40 Luke said, “And with many other words he testified and exhorted them....” As Paul said, “We persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11). He not only told them that they should be saved, but also gave them some good reasons to be saved. He made appeal to bring them to a point of decision and commitment. Too many people come to church and sit like a knot on a log. They don’t respond. So we preachers need to give them reasons to respond. That’s what Peter does here. So based on v.38 and following, you should repent and receive Christ because:

A. You Will Receive Forgiveness – He says in v.38 that we should repent “for the remission of sins.” Peter assures them that their sin of rejecting Jesus, and all other sins, can be fully forgiven. Notice that no works are required to “make up” for past sins. The grace of forgiveness is freely given. Oh sinner, place your faith in our loving, merciful, and gracious God!

What a blessing it is to know that your sins are forgiven! The meaning of the word “forgiveness” is pictured in the literal meaning of the word. It means to send away or to leave. God takes our sins and sends them away from us.

As already noted, the physical world is full of illustrations of spiritual truth. Sin is like dirt. But God promises to wash it away. It’s great to be clean. After describing several different sinful lifestyles, Paul said in 1 Cor. 6:11, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified....”

Don’t you want to be forgiven of all of your sins? Don’t you want the peace of knowing that your sins have been forgiven, and that you are right with God?

B. You Will Receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit – Peter goes on to say in the last of v.38, “and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Forgiveness will take care of past sins. The indwelling Holy Spirit will give the new Christian victory over present and future sins. Paul said in Gal. 5:16, “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (cf. Rom. 8:4). Some

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<sup>3</sup> The command to repent is 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural, a command to all. But the command to be baptized is 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular.

<sup>4</sup> To show that baptism is not essential for salvation, see I Cor. 1:17; Acts 10:47-48 (note that they received Holy Spirit prior to baptism.)

people do not place their faith in Jesus out of fear that if they do follow Him in baptism, they will end up doing the same old sins again, and be a hypocrite. But that's why the Lord gives you the Holy Spirit once you are saved, to help you live right.

For clarification, the gift of the Holy Spirit is the Spirit Himself. The people could see and sense the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. Here, the people are offered the same Holy Spirit to indwell their lives as well.

Now notice with me several truths about this offer of the Holy Spirit.

1. The Offer of the Spirit Is a Gift, just as Peter says in v.38. You do not have to do good works to receive the Spirit. The Spirit is simply received as a gift by faith.

2. The Offer of the Spirit Is a Promise – In v.39 Peter says, “For the promise is to you and to your children...” God *promises* you this gift. You can be absolutely sure that God will keep His promises. He is faithful to do what He says He will do. So if you will repent and believe in Jesus, you can be sure that you *will* receive the Spirit of God into your life. God is true to His Word, and you can count on Him to keep His promises.

3. The Offer of the Spirit Is to All - Peter assures them, that since they are the people of the covenant, the offspring of Abraham, the gift of the Spirit is offered to them. This is in line with the covenant promise to Abraham (Gen. 17:7). But the promise of the gospel was extended not only to those present on that occasion, not only to the contemporary generation, but to their descendants as well; and not only to the people of Jerusalem, but to those Jews in distant lands.

Yet Peter also defines who is offer of the Spirit is for at the end of v.39, “as many as the Lord our God will call.” In time it would be clear in Acts 8 and 10 that God would save and grant the Holy Spirit, not only to Jews, but to Gentiles as well (cf. Eph. 2:17). Indeed, all who receive the call of God to salvation through the gospel (2 Th. 2:14) may receive forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. Remember also the “whosoever” of v.21! It doesn't matter who you are or what you have done, you may receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

#### IV. THE RESPONSE WE SHOULD FOLLOW

The gospel is a message that demands a personal response. Luke tells us the response of 3,000 people. He says in v.41, “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.” I don't know where the 3,000 were baptized, but perhaps it was in the pools in and around Jerusalem. Two are mentioned in John's Gospel (5:2; 9:7). Now based on their example, we also should:

A. Receive the Word (cf. Mt. 13:4, 19) – The word translated “received” (*apodechomai*) means “to welcome.” But Luke adds that they “gladly” received it. Have you visited someone and they gladly welcomed you into their home? Well, that is the attitude we should have toward the gospel message.

I can still remember like yesterday my first exposure to the expository preaching of God's Word through Dr. Jerry Vines. I never heard preaching like that in the church I attended. I ate it up! I leaned forward on my seat and hung on his every word. That is how it should be with us as well. And that's the way it was with 3,000 who responded positively!

Have you received the Word this morning?

Now receiving the Word also means that they believed God's Word and they obeyed it. After all, Jesus has been proven to be Lord! So how else should we respond to the call of the gospel?

B. Be Baptized - Baptism must follow repentance and salvation. It is an outward expression of allegiance to Christ. Indeed, baptism is so important. How can you know that you are saved if you have never followed the Lord in baptism?

C. Be Added to the Church - The 3,000 converts were formed into a distinct community, the apostolic fellowship, constituted on the basis of the apostolic teaching. When a person repents of sin, receives the Lord Jesus as Savior, and experiences the new birth, that person should unite with a local assembly of believers in Jesus Christ.

I know that churches have their problems. You are not going to agree with everything that goes on in any church. You may get hurt in your relationship with a local church. But the same can be said of you and your spouse. Your spouse has problems, you don't always agree, and you can get hurt. But that doesn't mean you should never get married, or end the marriage! As a Christian you need to be a part of a local church, and I will talk more about that in my next message.

Appeal: What about you today? Have you repented of your sins? Have you trusted in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? Have you followed the Lord in believer's baptism and active church membership? If not, don't reject this message, but truly receive it and act upon it. Repent, believe the gospel, and demonstrate your faith with obedience.

Sources: F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954); Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); Oliver B. Greene, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 1 (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1968); Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975); H.A. Ironside, *Acts* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1943); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Curtis Vaughan, *Acts: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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