

February 4, 2024  
As You Are Going: Cut to the Heart  
Acts 2:37-41  
Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction. Theme, “As You Are Going: The Church on Mission.” As I’ve had conversations with a few of you I feel it beneficial to remind us all that “the mission” and “missions” are not the same thing. “The mission” is the command the Lord gave us to “go and make disciples.” This applies to everyone of us right where we are. We are to share the good news of the Gospel with our families, our friends and neighbors and our communities; everyone the Lord gives us opportunity to share with. We need to begin to see our lives as Christians as not just what we do here in the Church building but what do in the grocery store aisle and as we sit at a ball game. Hopefully, as we’ll see in our passage today, the people we share with come to know the Lord Jesus as Savior and then we are to disciple them by teaching them everything the Lord has taught us.

This is different than “missions” which is the actual act of going, most often to other countries, to share the Gospel. “Missions” is definitely included in “the mission” but its only one aspect of it. Yes, we are to be involved in reaching the world for Christ and we do that in a variety of ways. But that doesn’t exclude us from the work of sharing Jesus with those closest to us and that’s “the mission.” Sometimes, its much easier to put money in an offering plate for missions than it is to walk across the street and share the Gospel with a neighbor.

As we saw last week, Peter delivered his sermon with a boldness that came from being empowered by the Holy Spirit. Unlike Peter, in today’s world we have been so careful to try and make the Gospel attractive to the world that we have been afraid to proclaim the actual truths of the scriptures and call the world to repentance. What many in the Church, universal, need to understand is that our mission is not to try to keep up with the world’s standards and adapt to its culture, we are to be “set apart” from the current culture and call it to repentance. Revival does not come by conforming the objective truths of God’s Word to the subjective standards of the world. No, revival comes when people, confronted with the good news of the Gospel, understand that they have sinned, are in danger of God’s judgement and realize their need of a savior.

Throughout Peter’s sermon in Acts 2, we saw that Peter did just that. He reasoned with the crowd and told them to examine God’s Word alongside what they were experiencing by being eye witnesses to the miracle at Pentecost, namely the coming of the Holy Spirit. He told them, and I’m paraphrasing here, “You know about this Jesus. You know about the miracles he did. You know that he died. Many of you saw him crucified! God raised him from the dead. And we saw him alive and risen from the dead! We also watched him ascend into the heavens, where we know that he is sitting at the Father’s right hand until his return. And now the Father given the Holy Spirit which he has poured out upon us, the event you yourselves are seeing and hearing! This is the Jesus you killed!”

In Peter’s bold proclamation of the Gospel, he doesn’t sugarcoat anything. He simply spoke the truth with compassion, love and a real concern for his listeners. Today we’re going to look at how the crowd responded to the message and in it, hopefully, find hope and encouragement as we seek to share Christ with those around us. If you are able, please stand with me as I read the Word of God found in Acts 2:37-41.

[Read Passage]

When Peter had finished preaching, we're told the people were overcome with guilt. [Read vs. 37] The Greek word translated here as "cut to the heart" is a rare verb, used only here in the entire NT, meaning "to pierce, to sting sharply or to stun." It literally means, "to be stabbed (as with a knife)." In other words, Luke records for us that when the crowd first heard the gospel presented, they were "stabbed in the heart" by the truth and fell under conviction. Their hearts were pierced with conviction. Conviction of what? Conviction of their own guiltiness and their need of grace and mercy.

Peter told the crowd that God sent his Son to the world and that they had killed him. How could this not break their hearts? In truth, how can it not break ours? After all, as was said last week, we are no less guilty. The reality is that Christ hung on the cross just as much for my sin as for theirs. And he hung there on that cross for you as much as he did for them. We're all guilty before a Holy God. The Bible tells us, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23) And in James 2:9-10 it says, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." We're all guilty. The same guilt and remorse that "pierced" their hearts is the same guilt we are confronted with today. Shouldn't our reaction be the same?

My question to you this morning is, "Has your heart broken before God?" They were "cut to the heart." They were literally "stabbed in the heart." Have you felt the heart piercing love of God? A love that wounds so deeply, yet gives hope to your burdened heart with the promise of forgiveness? The truth of the Gospel lays us bare, showing us who we are and who God is! Their hearts were pierced, they were "cut to the heart," and all they could do was to cry out, "What shall we do?"

Peter answers their question. [Read vs. 38] We see here their conviction led to repentance. The first word Peter uses is "Repent!" It's been called the first word of the Gospel, as it was the first recorded word of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel when he said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:2) Responding to their question, Peter literally gives them something to do, to "repent." This indicates that our salvation doesn't just happen, we have a part to play in the process. Don't get me wrong, God is the author of salvation. He initiates it and opens our eyes to the truth that leads to conviction and to our repentance as we'll see later in our text. But it is at this moment, the moment of repentance, when our free will to choose and the sovereignty of God meet. Scripture makes it clear that without the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer we would not choose God on our own. But scripture also makes it clear, as it does here, we must make the choice to follow Jesus or not.

The commentator David Guzik says, "To repent does not mean to feel sorry, but it means to change one's mind or direction. They had thought a certain way about Jesus before, considering Him worthy of crucifixion. Now they must turn their thinking around, embracing Jesus as Lord and Messiah." To repent is means to make a U-turn in life. You were going one way, thinking and acting one way and now you have made a decision to go in the complete opposite direction. It means to have a change of heart and mind, to determine to be something radically different than what you once were. In this sense, repent is a word of hope. It says, "You don't have to continue the way you've been going, you can turn to God."

Notice the order here, conviction leads to repentance. Only those under the conviction of God can repent because only those under conviction realize they need to repent. Repentance is the natural response of one whose heart is truly broken with the knowledge that they are guilty before a Holy God. It's the first step in the process of salvation.

Peter continues by pointing to the fact that repentance then leads to obedience. He says, “Repent and be baptized.” For them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ was an outward expression of their belief and complete trust in Him. Baptism made a clear and public statement. In that day, Jews were not commonly baptized, only Gentiles who wanted to become Jews. For these Jewish men and women to be baptized demonstrated their genuine faith in Jesus. And that’s what baptism is, the outward expression of the faith and complete trust in Jesus that has already taken effect on the life of the believer. And this is in direct obedience to the Lord’s command in our theme verse to be baptized.

Now, I just want to take a little bit of time here and point out the fact that Peter adds the words here “for the forgiveness of your sins” after he says, “Repent and be baptized,” and there has always been some controversy surrounding this phrase. Basically, at issue, is the idea that one must be baptized in order to be forgiven of sin. This is an important issue, and one that we could spend a lot of time talking about, but instead of doing that, let me simply offer a few reasons why I believe it is a mistake to take this one verse to mean that a person cannot be saved unless they are baptized.

First, let me be clear, you cannot be an obedient Christian if you have simply decided not to be baptized. This seems clear enough by virtue of the fact that Jesus’ command to us. But to say that one cannot even be saved unless he or she is baptized goes beyond what scripture actually says. In this verse we’re looking at, the word “for” is the Greek word “eis.” For our purposes today, one of the meanings of this word, “on the ground of,” or “on the basis of,” which would indicate that the forgiveness of sins is “the basis,” or “the grounds for” being baptized. Which fits in with other passages that also mention repentance and baptism without mentioning it resulting in forgiveness of sin. But also, it fits with Peter’s flow of thought here in our passage that conviction leads to repentance, which results in forgiveness and salvation, which leads to obedience to the commands of Jesus, which includes baptism, on the basis of our salvation.

So clearly, I believe that Peter did not mean that one must be baptized in order to be saved. But that being obedient to the Lord’s command to be baptized is the result of their having been saved. Our hearts are broken and we repent. We are redeemed and now we are freed up to follow Jesus through obedience, an obedience that includes baptism.

So, what does Peter say next? ...and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (vs. 38) He gives you the gift of the Holy Spirit. A gift, by its very nature, means you cannot earn it or deserve it. It is freely given to us who believe as a gift from our Heavenly Father.

In John 14, Jesus told the disciples what the coming of the Holy Spirit would mean for them and for us. Listen carefully to what Jesus promised about the Holy Spirit. [Read John 14:15-26]

What an amazing gift! And the Spirit is promised to all who would come to Christ, from all the generations until the Lord Jesus returns. Peter makes this clear in vs. 39. [Read]

Peter specifically states here that the promise of the Holy Spirit, that’s the promise he is speaking of, would be given to all who believe in all succeeding generations. They saw the glorious work of the Holy Spirit among the disciples, and Peter told them that it was something that these people could take part in; they didn’t only have to be observers. And since the promise is for all who are afar off, it includes all people up to the present time, which includes you and me.

And it’s available to “everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” Here we find stated clearly what we talked about earlier, it is God who initiates, who pursues and draws us to himself. The Bible says in 1 John 4:19, “We love because He first loved us.” We must make a choice and repent, but we are unable to make the choice to follow Jesus unless he first draws us

to himself.” So, when we pray for others who do not know Christ, we are to earnestly pray that God would start the work in their hearts and lives and use us to accomplish what he intends. Only God can bring about the work of salvation in their lives.

Peter uses the phrase “far off” here to indicate anyone who was not present during his sermon, as well as, those who have yet to embrace the message of the Gospel. Does this “far off” language sound familiar? Well Luke, the author of the book of Acts, has used this type of language before in his Gospel when he records one of Jesus’ most well-known parables, the parable of the prodigal son. In this story we learn of a son who left his father’s house, rebelled, hit rock bottom, came under conviction, then determined to return in repentance to his father’s house. In Luke 15:20, we read, “And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, or far off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.” Obviously, the father in this parable is God and the prodigal Son is everyone who has come to a place of repentance in life and has turned to find forgiveness in him.

This promise of salvation, of the gift of the Holy Spirit, is for you and all who are far off.” I’ve got good news for you today, you are not “too far off” to come home. If you are here today and you have not received Christ as savior, then listen to the invitation of Jesus to repent of your sin and you will receive forgiveness and life everlasting with Jesus.

[Read vs. 40-41] Peter’s sermon didn’t end there. We’re told that “with many other words” he continued to urge the crowd to come to Jesus in repentance and to “Be saved from this crooked generation.” In other words, now that you have received the Spirit, your lives must change. You must look different from this crooked generation. Save yourselves from it. The same is true for us. If that generation was “crooked” how much more is ours today? Yet, we must stand out, set apart, from the world around us and call it to repentance by inviting them to know the God who demonstrated his love for them through his Son Jesus.

Our passage concludes with the amazing result that 3,000 people heard the gospel and were saved and baptized that day. Only God could have brought that about. The church went from the 120 people we read about in ch. 1 to 3,120 people in one single day. What would that look like in our context today? Do you believe that something like this could take place here at our small, little, country church? A few years ago, we had a demographic study done of the immediate area around our church. The results were that there are approximately 2,500 people within a five mile radius of our church that indicated that they do not have any “religious affiliation.” Accounting for those that might have checked the box, but equate church affiliation with salvation, that could be hundreds, if not 1,000 more that do not know Jesus. What would it take to reach these people for Christ? It would take a mighty work of God for sure. But it’s going to take all of us, being obedient to his command, being willing to be used by him and taking our mission seriously by stepping out with the boldness of Peter and sharing the message of repentance with those who are otherwise perishing. May the Lord help us to go, and as we are going, to be the church on mission. Let’s pray and prepare our hearts before we share in the Lord’s Supper together.