

What Should We Do?

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Our scripture today is the end of Peter's Pentecost sermon. We talked last week about the fact that the Holy Spirit had worked a miracle in the life of the Apostles; they had changed from being competing among themselves to being bold witnesses for the Resurrection and the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Today we examine the reaction of the crowd to this sermon and how the Holy Spirit affected those who heard.

Peter explained why Jesus' death and resurrection happened; and we understand that it was to save all sinners. The Holy Spirit took Peter's message and used it to convict (to find guilty) the hearts of the listeners. After all, if they were guilty of crucifying their Messiah, what might God do to them! Note that their question to all the Apostles was well as to Peter, because all twelve were involved in the witness that day, and Peter was only first among equals.

Peter told them how to be saved: they had to repent of their sins and believe on Jesus Christ. They would give proof of the sincerity of their repentance and faith by being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, thus identifying themselves publicly with their Messiah and Savior. Only by repenting and believing on Christ could they receive the gift of the Spirit (Gal. 3:2, 14), and this promise was for both the Jews and the "far off" Gentiles (Eph. 2:13-19).

Acts 2:40 indicates that the Apostles continued to share the Word and to urge the people to trust Jesus Christ. They looked on the nation of Israel as a "crooked generation" that was under condemnation (Matt. 16:4; 17:17; Phil. 2:15). On that day, 3,000 people repented, believed, and were saved.¹

¹Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Ac 2:14

We often debate what part do people pay in salvation and what part is God and the Holy Spirit. I really don't know how to weight this, but I do know that it is the convicting work of the Spirit (John 16:8-11) that made a great difference in their lives. It was the Holy Spirit that helped them to understand what they had done and the fact that they needed a Savior. When they asked what they must do their question had a ring of desperation about it (Acts 16:30). If the Jews had crucified their Messiah and He was now exalted, what was left for them to do? What could and must they do?

Peter's answer was simple. First they were to repent. This verb (metanoēsate) means "change your outlook," or "have a change of heart; reverse the direction of your life." This obviously results in a change of conduct, but the emphasis is on the mind or outlook. The Jews had rejected Jesus; now they were to trust in Him. Now they were to be baptized and join their lives to that of Jesus and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is God's promise (1:5, 8; 2:33) to those who turn to Jesus Christ, including Jews and their descendants and those who are far off, that is, Gentiles (Eph. 2:13, 17, 19). Acts 2:38-39 puts together the human side of salvation ("repent") and the divine side (call means "to elect"; Rom. 8:28-30).

Peter's words in verse 40 look back to verses 23 and 36. Israel was guilty of a horrendous sin; individual Jews could be spared from God's judgment on that generation if they would repent (Matt. 21:41-44; 22:7; 23:34-24:2). They would be set apart to Christ and His church if only they would be disassociated from Israel.

Three thousand in the crowd believed and were baptized, thus displaying their identification with Christ. This group of people immediately joined the fellowship of believers.²

²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:359

One commentator reminds us that we must be careful how we witness:

As believers, we are called to proclaim the message of Christ to unbelievers in the best way we know how, being faithful to the truth. That's really all the Peter did at Pentecost (verses 14-36), but his speech produced dramatic results: the small band of Christ's followers added 3,000 believers that day (verse 41).

In the same way, each of us needs to speak up as best we can when the opportunity presents itself. What we say will reflect our understanding of the faith at the time. We may not sound as impressive as Peter or a minister or some other believer. But at least our message will be authentic.

Notice that Peter did not call for an immediate response. Only after God's Spirit had "cut to the heart" those in the audience and they asked for help (verse 37) did he explain what they ought to do (verse 38).

In the same way we need to offer the "carrot" of truth to others – the facts of the gospel and our experience of it – and let the Holy Spirit wield the "stick" of conviction. We should strive for impact and understanding before pressing for a decision. That might take weeks or years, or just moments. But we need the sensitive timing of a midwife as we assist in the spiritual birthing process.³

So the question comes to us today. We have been guilty of not understanding who Jesus really is. Some of us have thought that he was a wonderful human teacher who got killed by an angry mob or jealous Jewish leaders or a misdirected Roman leader or government. Some think he was just a really nice man. But when the Holy Spirit teaches us through study or preaching that Jesus was much more than a man, he was and is the genuine, divine son of God; we have to make a genuine response to that knowledge. We must reject him or fully accept him. On the day of Pentecost 3,000 listeners heard and were convicted...then asked what should we do? We, like them, must accept Jesus, change our hearts and minds to follow him...and like those of old, submit to baptism, to identify ourselves with him. The scriptures say their sins were taken away and the Holy Spirit sealed them and

³ *The Word in Life Study Bible*, 1993

gifted them. This enabled them to be the church and minister to others. Romans tell us that once we have seriously gone through this process nothing and no one will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Who should we do: Believe, Repent, be baptized, and receive the gift of the Spirit?