

The sermon

Intro

Before we get to Genesis, I wanted to give us several weeks in the Psalms. To help us walk through suffering. To help us express our suffering to God. To help us process our suffering with truth. To help us beg for God's help in our suffering. To help us remember God is present in our suffering. God acts for us in our suffering. God acts in us in our suffering.

Before we get to Genesis, I had this idea to stress the importance of the local church. I chose Acts 2:37-47 to highlight the local church. But, because I need to follow the direction the Scriptures I'm teaching take me, I really won't get to the local church till next week. So I'm going to take two weeks to work through Acts 2:37-47.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Point 1: Preach repentance (2:37-41)

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" – 2:37

Alright, not the best preaching practice. Beginning in the middle of the story. Let me tell you what's been going on.

It's the day of Pentecost (2:1). 50 days after the Passover. So about seven weeks after Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead.

Many foreigners were gathered for the feast (2:5, 9-11). And they heard Jesus' disciples speaking in tongues (2:4) = speaking in the actual languages of the people visiting Jerusalem (2:11).

Some were amazed, others mocked thinking the disciples were drunk (2:12-13).

Peter explained these tongues:

1. Fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32.

Old Testament promises are being fulfilled in your presence today.

2. Peter talked about Jesus.

God endorsed Jesus' claims by empowering Jesus' signs and wonders (2:22). Jesus was delivered up to crucifixion "*according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God*" (2:23). On one hand it was God's plan. It had to happen. On the other hand, "*you [Jews] crucified and killed [Jesus] by the hands of lawless men*" [the Romans] (2:23). God planned it. And you're guilty of shedding innocent blood. Then God raised Jesus from the dead (2:24).

3. Jesus' resurrection fulfilled Psalm 16:8-11 (2:25-28).
4. Peter continued, asserting that Jesus is the promised descendant of David who would sit on the throne of David (2:29-31).
5. Having been raised from the dead, Jesus was then "*exalted at the right hand of God*" (2:32-33).
6. These tongues are in fact Jesus pouring out the Holy Spirit among his disciples (2:33).
7. Jesus fulfilled Psalm 110:1 (2:34-35). Jesus is David's Lord who sits at the Father's right hand.

Peter concludes his explanation:

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." – 2:36

In short, Peter told his Jewish and international audience that Jesus is the promised Jewish Messiah whom God raised from the dead. Having been raised, Jesus is ruling with the Father and working the miracles you see today. Jewish people, you crucified your Messiah!

Jews, you killed the one who's going to rescue the Jews from the nations (Ezek 34:27-28). You killed the one who's going to execute judgment on the nations and shatter them in pieces (Ps 2:7-9; 110:5-7). You killed the one who's going to reign forever and ever (Ezek 37:24-28).

At this point, some of Peter's audience are getting it. I was there that day. I demanded the release of Barabbas. And I cried out "Crucify him! Crucify him!" These people heard in the synagogues all about what the Messiah is going to do to his enemies. I want you to see the weight of this here. They're thinking, what is Jesus going to do to me? I've rejected the wrong guy! Thoughts racing. They get it. So they ask Peter, what do we do now?

Illustration: talking bad about the owner of the company without knowing you were talking to the owner themselves.

And Peter said to them, "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." – 2:38

Your fate isn't sealed. There's a way out. Mercy's possible. Your Messiah whom you crucified stands ready to forgive you and bless you. But there's something you need to do. You need to repent.

Forgiveness of sins comes to sinners through repentance.

Repent

The Greek word for repent means to change one's mind. To change our mind about Jesus. He's God. So he's in charge. What he says goes. He'll judge me one day. So I need to care about what he says. He died on the cross for my sins. So I ought to love him. To change our mind about God's word. God's word is the standard for religious belief and practice. If something contradicts God's word, I need to oppose it. If the Bible tells me my behavior is unacceptable, I need to receive its correction. The Bible is life-giving words of life. To change our mind about sin. Sin is heinous rebellion against God. Sin is bad. My sin makes me worthy of God's judgment. Sin ruins my life. I need to turn from sin. To change our mind about ourselves. I've broken God's commands. I'm worthy of judgment. I'm a slave to sin. I need to be set free from bondage. I have worth because I'm created in the image of God. Not because I'm the smartest, the strongest, the best-looking, the richest, most stuff, the coolest, etc.

When a person repents, they change their mind about God and themselves and a bunch of other things.

Application

In order to be right with God and experience forgiveness of sins, we need to change our minds about a bunch of stuff. When we view life differently, our heart and our conduct change. We see life differently. So we do life differently. We see Jesus differently. So we respond to Jesus differently.

Like Peter, when we speak the gospel to sinners, we need to challenge them to repent. Friend, what you really need to do is to start seeing life differently. You need to view Jesus this way. That's repentance.

Practical question: do I encourage repentance when I speak the gospel to sinners?

Point 2: Preach baptism (2:38, 41)

"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." – 2:38

Peter instructs his ***"cut to the heart"*** audience to repent and be baptized. Let me work through verses 39-41. Then we'll get back to baptism, ***"forgiveness of your sins," "the gift of the Holy Spirit,"*** and repentance. And how they all fit together.

"For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." – 2:39

"For" means Peter's explaining what he just said.

The promise would include forgiveness of sins, the indwelling Spirit (***"rivers of living water"*** within – John 7:38), and all the promises associated with the Jewish Messiah (e.g., dwelling in a world without end where there's peace and sin is no more and there's nothing to fear because Jesus is on the throne – Isa 9:6-7; Ezek 34:25-31; 37:21-28).

Anyone who repents (you, your children, ***"all who are far off"*** = Jews scattered among the nations and Gentiles) receives the promise.

We'll get to God's call next week.

And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." – 2:40

We only get a small portion of Peter's message that day. Many words were left unrecorded. Peter's message was ***"Save yourselves from this crooked generation"*** = reject the majority, reject the religious leadership, and repent. Follow Jesus. Your countrymen are crooked, bent, twisted. They got it all wrong. Don't stand with them and place yourselves under God's judgment. Escape from the wrath to come by changing your mind about Jesus.

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." – 2:41

"received" = repented. They agreed with what Peter said about Jesus. They changed their stance towards Jesus.

Added to what? The church.

Having repented, they were baptized. Having been baptized, they were added to the church.

Some make incorrect deductions from 2:38:

1. Baptism gives us forgiveness of sins.
2. Baptism gives us the Holy Spirit.
3. My repentance makes me born again.

What's going on here? For Peter, repentance, baptism, forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit, the church, they're all one package that go together in beautiful harmony. People who repent get baptized. People who repent are forgiven. People who repent are indwelt by the Spirit. People who repent join the church.

"those who received his word were baptized" = baptism follows repentance. They weren't baptized until after they believed. It's not forgiveness and regeneration by baptism. It's repentance, then sins forgiven, then baptism, then added to the church. At the point of repentance, our sins are forgiven. Then we obey Jesus in baptism.

Repentance and the Holy Spirit

As for repentance and the Holy Spirit, Christians debate what comes first, repentance or the Spirit. Technically, repentance and the Spirit come at the same time. There's no indwelt person that hasn't repented. And there's no repentant person that isn't indwelt.

Jesus can say, if you believe, you will be indwelt by the Spirit.

*Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' "*³⁹ *Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. – John 7:38-39*

Jesus was talking about Pentecost. Every believing person experiences the indwelling Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, Paul can emphasize God's work in creating faith.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved- – Ephesians 2:4-5

God, because of his love, made the Ephesian believers spiritually alive when they were spiritually dead.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. – Ephesians 2:8-9

Paul can say the whole concept, salvation by grace through faith, isn't our doing. Meaning we have faith because God first made us alive.

All that to say, we don't make ourselves indwelt by the Spirit by our repentance. God makes spiritually dead people alive.

Application

So baptism follows repentance. Baptism follows belief. It's my duty to ensure that those who have repented have been baptized. It's your duty to heed biblical instruction and be baptized after you believe.

After he rose from the dead, Jesus said this:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." – Matthew 28:19-20

Note baptism is first and foremost obedience of church leaders.

Peter commands those who repent to be baptized because Jesus first commanded Peter to baptize everyone who became a disciple. It's make a disciple, then baptize them, then instruct them in Jesus' commands. If Peter failed to baptize those who became disciples, he would be disobeying Jesus. It's Peter's duty to ensure, to the best of his ability, that every disciple made (every person who repents) is baptized. Peter shifts the burden to his audience: ***"Repent and be baptized."***

I don't want you to wind up embarrassed like me. A seminary student training to pastor churches that believe in believer baptism who has never been baptized himself. Sounds like a joke. But it's true. Before I was baptized, I was a church member. Before I was baptized, I was sent to seminary by a pastor. The church I was saved in never talked to me about my salvation. Never talked to me about baptism. Never talked to me about church membership.

When I moved to Virginia, a church welcomed me as a member without talking about baptism. I left that church because the church didn't teach the Bible. Or there was very little actual Bible teaching. The pastor's sermons were stories about his mother's experiences in the past. No joke. I had a number of Christian co-workers. When they asked me, what was

your sermon about this morning? My answer was, “The pastor told stories about his mother.” Having traveled home to New England visit and attended services where the Bible was actually taught and having enjoyed it, I said to myself, “I need to go to a church where they’re teaching me Bible.” The church I wound up at sent me to seminary without talking about baptism. The seminary accepted me as a student without asking if I was baptized. And every church and the seminary were believer baptism churches. Crazy!

You can slip through the cracks too. You believe. You keep coming. No one talks to you about baptism. No one talks to you about church membership. Then you’ve been a believer for five years and you don’t want to get baptized because you’re so embarrassed you never got baptized. I get it. Happened to me. If you’ve believed and you weren’t baptized as a believer, talk to me.

The shame is often on the church, not the unbaptized Christian. I felt ashamed in part. Baptism is supposed to be celebration, not torment.

Practical question: have I obeyed Jesus in baptism?

Practical question (for the elders): are we leaving it to the people to figure out baptism for themselves?

Conclusion

A stunning picture of the mercy of Christ. You said, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Jesus says, if you change your stance towards me, it will be like it never even happened! Jesus offers total forgiveness to those who said, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” One might expect one with all power to hold a grudge and do whatever he could to make their lives miserable. Instead, Jesus offers pardon.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." – **John 3:16**

Jesus died as a substitute such that those who cried out “Crucify him! Crucify him!” would be forgiven...if they repented of their sins. Same with us. We’ve sinned against God by breaking his commands. As a result, we’ve willingly placed ourselves under his judgment. Like the Jews of Peter’s day, we need God’s forgiveness. We need the guilt of our sins removed. If you trust in Jesus, Jesus took your sins away at the cross.

Don’t stand with the majority. Stand with Jesus. Turn to Jesus as Savior and Lord. See sin for what it is. Heinous rebellion that ruins your life. Acknowledge your sin. Acknowledge your only hope for God’s mercy is Jesus’ death. Ask for God’s forgiveness on the basis of Jesus’ death. And trust you’re accepted because God forgives all who turn to Jesus. Then be baptized and added to the church.

Tell us if you repent. It’s our duty to help you follow Jesus’ commands.