

"What Should We Do?"

Acts 2:37-47

On the night before He died Jesus said some things that were very puzzling to the disciples because they had not received the Holy Spirit yet. One of them was in John 14 when Jesus said,

¹² I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

"Greater things" than casting out demons, healing lepers, making bread appear from thin air and bringing people back to life? What could be greater than those? How about preaching your first sermon and 3000 people get saved? For all the crowds that followed Jesus, He never had a mass conversion. And as we've been studying Acts 2 now for 3 messages we see how amazing the power of the Holy Spirit is. The apostles spoke the gospel in languages they didn't know and then Peter explains it by quoting 3 Old Testament passages and boldly confronted the 1000's gathered there for Pentecost and instead of Peter being stoned to death or arrested and crucified himself, they are convicted by the Holy Spirit and plead with Peter 'What shall we do?'

As we look at Peter's answer and the people's response we see that the most important thing we must do when we are confronted with the gospel is we need to change; from unbeliever to believer (but change doesn't stop there). We also need to continually change and grow as a Jesus follower.

As Peter wrapped up his brief message in vv.33-36 this is what he challenged his Jewish audience with:

³² God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. ³³ Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. ³⁴ For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

"The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand

³⁵ until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

³⁶ "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

After he presented a biblical argument that Jesus was the Son of God, proven by His resurrection, affirmed in the Old Testament and by the eyewitness accounts of the disciples, Peter confronts his audience with their responsibility in the death of Jesus. We must remember that most of these same people were in Jerusalem as obedient Jews would have been, 50 days prior at Passover. Many of them may have been involved in the very crowd that yelled 'crucify Him'. Some of them may even have waved palm branches on his entry into Jerusalem. But Peter very clearly explained that they all were to blame for the death of Jesus.

As are you and I. A presentation of the gospel at some point must point out this reality: that we are all to blame for the death of Jesus. He willingly died for our sins. My sins and your sins put Jesus on that cross. Most of us listening have already understood that and can recall that time when we had a

A Change of Heart **(2:37-41)**

And, like v.37, our hearts were “pierced”. Literally the word means ‘stun’. There was a moment where the Spirit of God opened our hearts (a summary of mind and emotions) to the reality that I am partly responsible for Jesus’ death because He went to Calvary for me and you.

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

This is an emotion packed moment – as it should be. These people just realized from Peter’s message that a) they are responsible for Jesus’ death and b) should they reject who Jesus is (Lord and Messiah) they will suffer the judgment of God. Now, every gospel presentation is different. But, these are the essential truths we must convey at some point. All of us have sinned and Jesus died for our sins and each one of us must choose whether we want Jesus’ forgiveness or not. And the consequences are not pretty.

Their hearts were ‘stunned’ or pierced by the Spirit with the Word of God – this makes sense according to Heb. 4:12 which says God’s Word is

living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

But an emotional response does not necessarily indicate our heart has been changed. How do we know if we’re saved? Our heart will change. How? If we’re truly convicted of sin then there will be an initial and ongoing ...

Repentance of our sinfulness (vv.37-39)

‘What must we do?’ Peter answers,

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. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

“Repent” means to go in the exact opposite direction. It means to change one’s mind but also to change one’s behavior. Baptism is not necessary to receive the Holy Spirit, but as we’ll see baptism is the first sign to show you have changed your heart. Genuine faith in Jesus is validated by the results of a changed life. The initial act of confessing Jesus as Lord and believing in one’s heart that Jesus died for our sins results in our being justified by God. A positional declaration that we are now right with God and the Spirit of God comes into our life at this point.

“Every person’ must make this decision for themselves. The promise is for you and your children doesn’t mean if the parent repents the children are saved. No, the promise is for all who are far off (each one of us) and each one of us must choose to call on the Name of the lord or not.

A change of heart must begin with repentance. This repentance of course involves

Asking for forgiveness of sins (vv. 38-39)

Accepting responsibility for our own role in Jesus' death, we ask Jesus for forgiveness and we are forgiven. It is interesting that the people say to Peter 'What must we do?' and the what you need to do is spiritual and emotional and a willful choosing of Jesus over oneself. Not do more good works or pray more or attend synagogue more. But change from the inside.

The initial act of confessing our sins and asking forgiveness results in that very thing; our incurred debt due to our sins has been wiped and we are united to God in Christ Jesus. We will still sin and we are to still ask forgiveness not to get us saved again (an impossibility) but to maintain fellowship with God as His children. If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). So this is something we continue to work on in our life.

⁴⁰ *With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."* ⁴¹ *Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

Notice he continues to warn them to save themselves from the rest of the culture around you which us going in the wrong direction. It is often the culture around us that deters us from turning to God. We're afraid of what people think so we resist turning to God through Jesus. And then we don't receive forgiveness of sins and must pay for our own sins which is eternal separation from God. But a changed heart begins with repentance and forgiveness and shortly followed by baptism which is

Identifying ourselves with Jesus (vv.40-41)

As we know from John the Baptist, baptism was full immersion and a public statement that you believed Jesus was the Messiah. This practice continued and continues today because Jesus commanded us to *make disciples of all nations [how] baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. [Matt. 28:19-20]*

Baptism followed salvation. You have to be old enough to understand your need for salvation and you make that decision for yourself. Someone else didn't do that to you before you were saved or when you were unaware. Biblical baptism is something we agree to have done to us after we accepted Christ to publicly identify ourselves with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The longer we wait to do it, the harder it becomes to obey.

The chapter could have ended here, but it doesn't, which is good. Because the goal of the gospel is not just to get you saved but to get you to follow Jesus. So now from vv.42-47 we see a snapshot of how the early church grew. How individuals grew in their walk with God and relationship with fellow believers. Because responding by faith in the gospel results in a changed heart that is marked by

A Change in Priorities **(2:42-45)**

If we have truly had a change of heart about our sinfulness and have accepted Jesus as our Saviour then the change of heart will also result in a changed lifestyle. The things that used to matter or that we used to live for no longer hold the same appeal they once had. We realized we were living for the things of the world or the goals that people without Jesus live for. Things that don't last and as we find out only bring us temporal satisfaction. Now we have a change in our priorities because we want to live a life that pleases God and glorifies Him. So we develop a

New goal: spiritual growth (vv.42-43)

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

While there was no manual on how to grow a church, they already had the spiritual disciplines of a dedicated Jewish life as their background. They just adjusted the things they already knew how to do to their current context. So just as Jesus followers devoted themselves to Jesus' teaching, so new believer listened to the apostles teach about Jesus and the Scriptures. Notice this is the first thing mentioned; grow in the Word of God. What's the first thing you do with a new believer? You give them a bible and encourage them to go to a Bible believing church where they will learn and grow with a like-minded group of believers. Notice this is all done in a group setting. That's how we grow. Not isolated from a community of believers but involved with a community of believers.

So they grew in 'fellowship'. The word means the things you hold in common. Here it's Jesus and the truth of God's Word. The breaking of bread could mean communion or more likely sharing meals together that included communion as a way to hang around more and develop stronger friendships. And they gathered to pray as a community regularly. As we'll see in Ch.3 the early church continued to practice a Jewish model of worship. So they gathered at the 3 times a day for prayer. 9, 12, 3. And as they grew spiritually their prayer life grew as well. As the Scripture took greater root in their life their prayer life would have reflected that. So not surprisingly, spiritual growth was the first priority for new believers.

Another major change in one's life when we accept Christ is our priorities change about our stuff. We change our priorities by developing a

New attitude: Share our resources (vv.44-45)

⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

Some have suggested that the early church was a commune and that these people all lived together. That can't be true because v.47 says they met regularly in each other's homes. When we get to Ch. 5 we'll see that a very few were able to sell their homes or land to meet the needs of others. Here it simply says possessions and goods.

'Had everything in common' isn't so much communal living but united in mind and heart. They were sensitive to each other's needs and were willing to let go of their stuff if it helped meet the needs of others in the body of Christ. The whole point of vv.44-45 isn't a model to mimic but an attitude to adapt. When we accept Christ our priorities change. We look at our possessions and finances differently. We ask "*Lord, how can I use these to glorify you and meet the needs of my fellow believers or the needs in our community or world?*" My priority changes from how much can I save or buy to who can I help with what I've been blessed with?

So a changed heart results in salvation as seen in repentance of attitude, forgiveness of sins and identifying with Jesus. It also results in a change of priorities. We want to grow spiritually and want to help those around us. A lot of this results because we've had

A Change in Relationships **(vv.46-47)**

The focus in these verses is the unity of the people of God. Once saved, we connect to a church family we develop new friends. Sometimes we lose friends who we once hung around with but now see they are not interested in Jesus and their lifestyle choices will just drag us down and deter us from following Jesus. And this is hard. Sometimes we're able to bring some of these to faith in Christ too. But there's two basic ways our relationships will change:

Uniting with believers (v.46)

⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,

Every day you would find a group of Jesus followers meeting in the large open courtyard teaching and praying and fellowshiping. There was a consistency to gathering together to a centralized location as well as individually having people in your home to get to know them more. This is one of the biggest losses we've experienced as a church during the pandemic, to not being able to get together as we normally would. But it just means we have to be creative in how we fellowship. Our connectivity to our fellow believers directly affects our spiritual growth. We need each other.

But what I find fascinating is this last verse. As they lived out their changed lives these believers

Impacted unbelievers (v.47)

⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Obviously, even the unsaved community around them saw these Jesus followers as benefitting the community, not a cancer or being detrimental in any way. And many of these people got saved as a result. As a result of what? Believers growing in the Lord and living out faithful lives in their community for Jesus in such a way that's making a difference where they live. And for sure they would have shared the gospel. But the sharing of the gospel results from people seeing you are genuine and your life is attractive to them.

These verses at the end of Acts 2 describe what happens when people get saved and are serious about growing spiritually. They change. First their hearts. Then their priorities and their relationships. People matter more. Things matter less. Fellowship and spiritual growth are things we naturally seek.

If you've been saved for a while, does this describe you? Is your heart still changing as you grow more in your relationship with God? Does your life revolve around God's priorities? And whose lives' are you impacting; believer and unbeliever? This passage gives a clear outline on how to come to Christ. And if you are listening and don't know Christ, please understand that your sins put Jesus on the cross, as did mine. As such, you need to accept Jesus as your Saviour, ask forgiveness of your sins and seek to be baptized soon to identify your changed heart.

But our life doesn't end there. Salvation is not the goal of your life. Spiritual maturity is. Christlikeness is. That's why those of us who know Christ need to look at this passage and say, 'Lord, my life used to look more like this but I've gotten side-tracked. I've made things of this world more my priority than you. I'm my priority not others. I've let fellowship and spiritual growth slip. And I'm guessing I'm not helping other believers grow nor is my lifestyle really attracting anyone to Jesus.'

Then we need to renew our commitment to Jesus. Ask forgiveness. Turn around again. Repentance isn't only at salvation but an ongoing attitude to make sure we're walking in the right direction. Ask forgiveness for our selfishness and align our priorities with God's. Because don't you want v.47 to be said about you and me? That our consistent meeting together praises God and receives the favour of our community resulting in more people being saved? Of course we do.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us
at olivet@rideau.net