

ACTS 2: 37-47 – NEW LIFE, NEW LIFESTYLE

A friend of mine's son worked for a govt department; he said he had a new job; it's actually sort of the same job but it's a different dept now, it has a new name. So govt dept people have to get used to the idea that they are a new dept; got to change the letterheads on their letters; so if you ask the question, "Who do you work for?" The answer is, "Well, I still work for the govt but I've got a different title now. And I'm in a different dept now but I sit at the same desk." – so in a way it's a little bit similar for the Jews in Acts; they're still Jews worshipping the same God but it's just that the name of the dept has changed, in fact there is a huge difference because of Jesus. But it does take a while for the people who have worked in a dept for 10 years to get used to the new dept. It's a bit like this in Acts for the Jews. There's obviously some big differences and the big difference is Jesus and his resurrection. There's a lot of changes and they're still getting used to it.

We left off last week with v.37 – the Jewish crowd gathered before the first Christians, or we might say at this point, Jesus Messiah followers, has cried out to Peter – "What shall we do?" Let's put our Jewish thinking caps back on.

Peter's answer comes back very simply but powerfully – Repent; turn to God; be baptized; be forgiven; receive the Holy Spirit.". There are basically 4 clauses. Every one of those clauses is saying the same thing -not a 4 step thing but a one-step thing described in 4 different ways – all different facets of the one thing.

Peter doesn't say, "You should go to church." Or "You should pray more." Or give more money. No, simply repent, turn to God and be baptized. These Jews are to be "turned back people"; or as I like to think of it they are to be "coming home people".

So this all seems simple enough. But what does it mean to repent, to be baptized?

The Greek word has the idea of changing one's mind or purpose, and always it's a change for the better, and generally in the NT it means a turning from sin and a turning to God. It is very much a change of allegiance. For us today repent often just has that idea of turning around, well turning around to what? If we said to someone today 'you have to repent'. Their next question would be, 'What does this mean?' How do I do that? So I say - You have to turn around your life – but that puts the onus back on me. So conversion becomes something I do – turning around, well I'm not very good at that. That's why I want to get saved because I'm no good at turning my life around.

Repent clearly has the idea that we are to stop rebelling against God – from now on when God speaks to you you're going to listen to him and not turn your back on him. There's been a change of allegiance – you are now listening to God, acknowledging his right to be your master.

It's interesting to note that when Peter says "Repent" he's not asking people to make their lives better so that they can be saved. This is not a precondition. I think a lot of us sometimes have the view "I'm not good enough, I am not worthy enough, my life is not good enough; I'm trying my hardest but I can't just measure up. I'm really trying to repent.

Here's one way that might help you to think about this: Someone who doesn't believe in Jesus, deep down in the bottom of their heart as a non-believer they want to do things their way – they might occasionally do good things, they might do bad things, but the thing that characterises them is that right down in the bottom of their heart they want to do it their way. Ok if you're a believer in Jesus you might occasionally do good things, you might occasionally do bad things but the thing that characterises you is deep down in the bottom of your heart you want to do things God's way. And you're pleased when you do something good and you're appalled when you do something bad. Neither of those 2 things are indicators of who you are. The thing that you are is that down in the bottom of your heart as a believer you are now someone who wants to please God.

The next clause is “be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ”. It’s clear from reading the rest of Acts that the kind of water baptism that John the Baptist did was carried on in the early days of the church. The difference now though is that they are baptised “in the name of Jesus Christ”. John the Baptist called the Jews to a baptism of repentance – it wasn’t enough that they were born Jews. John's baptism was a sign of personal, individual repentance, not a sign of birth into a covenant family. It is hard to overstate how radical this was in John's day. The Jews already had a sign of the covenant, circumcision. John came calling for repentance and offering a new sign, baptism. This was incredibly offensive, because the Jews thought that their ceremony of circumcision of infants guaranteed them entry into God’s kingdom. What Peter is now saying is be baptised partly in response to your repentance but now there is a whole new meaning. Christ’s death and resurrection

Now means we are baptised in the name of Jesus Christ – it’s pointing to the fact that Jesus has performed the act which frees us. He is the Saviour, he is the Rescuer. And he brings us forgiveness of sins.

One thing is clear though. Baptism is not a requirement for salvation. As we saw in Galatians Jesus has done everything on the cross and in his resurrection that rescues us. We cannot add anything. We don’t need any rituals or circumcision to be saved. It seems here then that baptism was a sign of what Jesus had done in a person’s life.

Just sticking with Galatians for the moment, I had a look through the whole book to see if there was any mention of baptism. There’s just one mention in the very middle.

*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. **Galatians 3:26,27***

“You were baptized into Christ” – yes it could refer to a water baptism but it could also mean that God is doing something in our lives through his death on the cross. There is a baptism that Jesus does in our lives, apart from the baptism of the Holy Spirit. A baptism that links us

to his death and resurrection. I'm still thinking about this. I'm not going to say any more about it now but I've put some passages from the New Testament for you to think about this week as you consider the whole meaning and understanding of baptism. Ultimately, though, the thing that counts is what God does to us and for us.

Jesus' death and resurrection are central to our relationship with God – he's done everything for us, there is nothing we can do that can add to us getting rescued.

We still haven't got off v.38. I want to mention one other striking thing- Peter says "be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" – remember that you are a bunch of Jews listening. "In the name of Jesus" !! – this is a new expression. We're now to go to Jesus – he's the one who has the authority, the power. Keep looking out for this expression in Acts. We'll see it again next week. Something new has happened.

Another thing, You respond to God; but it's also God who calls you (v.39) both things are here.

Note in v.39 & 40 how Luke reminds us that it is both God's activity in our hearts and minds – "all who have been called by the Lord our God"; God calls us. And we see this, too, in v.47 where we are told that "the Lord added to their fellowship." Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and as he talked to the eye-witnesses of these events was convinced that this was the work of God in people's lives. And then he says to them, in v.40, "Save yourselves" – get away from the life you are living at the moment – you need to make that step. So repent, turn, believe, be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit.

We only have part of the sermon – v.40 – "Peter continued preaching for a long time". So it ends up that there are 3,000 more Christians that day.

Just quickly: v.42 - 4 things that they do – 1. listen to apostles' teaching 2. Fellowship – in Greek normally mean "to share with someone in something" above and beyond the relationship itself, or "to give someone a share in something". It could mean sharing material

blessings but it's also a practical expression of the new relationship that they had. They have all things in common 3. Sharing in meals. - to "break bread" if you have in the NIV translation – simply to eat together 4. Prayer – probably involved the Temple prayers but also the prayers as they gathered for a meal; as they gathered for teaching. They devoted themselves – this wasn't just a thing to do. They wanted to know what it meant to know and follow Jesus – they devoted themselves. This wasn't just an added extra if you felt like it – it becomes a central part of their lives.

An expansion of this in v.43 – 47 – apostles performed miraculous signs and wonders; believers met together in one place (Temple?) or another large hall; they shared everything they had – sold their property & possessions, shared with those in need; worshipped together at Temple; met in homes for Lord's Supper; shared meals with generosity and joy; praised God; enjoyed the favour of all the people; more being added each day.

This is unusual numbers – we don't see anything like this in the remainder of Acts – it was a significant day, God was moving.

What does this say to us today in our context?

In one sense they kept it pretty simple - meet together; share what we have; hospitality;

What we want to look at in the coming weeks is what are the principles of the early church? What can we see as ways in which we need to live? This is a different time. There are no instructions here that we should do the same. But there are principles. One thing is for sure – they were changed people

That v. 44,45 is a big challenge to me. Should I sell everything? It's important to note that this sharing of possessions was voluntary and occasional. People still had their houses so they could meet to have those meals described before. They might have sold the holiday house they had. There would have been those among them who suffered economic hardship

becoming followers of Jesus – so others in the church could help them. But it's good to ask the question – this house I live in; these possessions they're entrusted to me; they're God's. I want to hold on to the things that I have loosely, be ready at any time to share what you have with those in need. I have so much. Note what Luke says in other parts of his gospel when he's telling us what Jesus says about money. Keep working on this one

BUT also work on the other things – meeting regularly; even during this time of coronavirus I need the fellowship of others; I think at the moment we may not be able to meet in larger groups, and it's important that we adhere to the gov't's rulings. But maybe we can meet more like the Pentecost believers, these first believers, meeting in homes in small groups

Here's another thought that came to me. People ask me “What do you do?” – my normal response is I used to be a school teacher; now I'm a pastoral assistant at a church. If we had asked one of these early Christians the same question what would have been their response – “I'm a witness to Jesus and his resurrection” or “I follow Jesus”.

what is the mark that identifies me? My job? where I live? Surely it is my relationship with God! Instead of “Oh, I'm a teacher” or “I'm a truck driver” or whatever and oh yes, I go to church and I play sport. It should be “I'm a follower of Jesus” and oh yes I have a job as a teacher and I play sport. What is central in my life?

Where did these new believers meet? The kingdom of God had come with Jesus. They were part of this new kingdom. But there were no churches to go to – no Pressie church down the road, no Anglican, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Salvation army, Pentecostal church. They just went to the tabernacle and the Temple to meet. Later, they would be chucked out of those. God's kingdom wasn't in a church building or in an organisation. It was God ruling in the hearts of these first believers and they had the testimony of the Holy Spirit in them to remind them that they were God's adopted children.

I am thankful to God that we are not all able to meet in a building at the moment. It reminds us that first and foremost we are God's people in a relationship with Jesus. God's church was there as they met in twos and threes around the meal table in homes; as they met for teaching in the Temple; as they met in twos or twenties to pray; as they shared their possessions. There is only one church and Jesus is the head of the church. It's an invisible church and if we've repented, turned to God, we've received forgiveness of our sins and received the Holy Spirit and then we are part of the one church. Yes, we might meet at a building called Tregear Presbyterian Community church and we have some great friendships, but ultimately the key thing is that we're part of God's kingdom, his invisible church made up of all God's children.