

The people asked what shall we do

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Preacher: Alex J MacDonald

[0 : 00] Let's turn now to the passage we read, and particularly verses 38 and 39. In answer to the people's question, brothers, what shall we do?

Peter replied, repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call. What shall we do?

That was the question of the people on that great day of Pentecost, after they heard what really we could consider as the first public preaching of the gospel.

Because it was only after the day of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the church, that the full effect of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ were felt among human beings.

[1 : 14] And Peter, on that tremendous day, preached that first great gospel sermon. And what a sermon it was.

It was a sermon that took in all the historic dimensions of the revelation of God. A sermon that showed how the life and death and resurrection of Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament.

A sermon that was very much to the times in which he was living, because he was referring to the most recent events that had taken place, the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus.

And yet, along with all that, it was a sermon that brought home to the consciences of men and women the implications of the gospel.

A very challenging sermon indeed. And the only adequate response was that demonstrated here by the people when they asked, what shall we do?

[2 : 30] Now I wonder, as that question come to your mind, occasionally, when you've heard the gospel being preached, perhaps here, in this church, perhaps somewhere else, you've been challenged by what the preacher had to say concerning Christ, concerning the implications of Christ's life and death and resurrection for you and for you personally.

And the question was in your mind, well, what should I do? I wonder, did you take it any further? I wonder, perhaps, did that question even occur to you?

Did you see it as applying, perhaps, to someone else, not to you? Well, this is the only adequate response that we can have that the people had here, asking, what shall we do?

Realizing that it was something that had come home to themselves, it was something that they had to deal with, and they were wondering how to go about things. What on earth could they do?

Now, of course, in their particular situation, the question had a particular meaning, because Peter had clearly challenged them with the fact that they had been responsible for the rejection of the Lord's anointed.

[3 : 54] They had been responsible for rejecting the very one that God had sent to them. And now, being pricked to the heart, their consciences being touched, they realized who this one was, that he was indeed the one that he had claimed to be.

demonstrated by Peter here, very forcibly, from the passages he quotes in the Old Testament. They were convinced in their mind, and they were wondering what on earth now they could do about it.

Now, perhaps maybe some people were asking that question almost in despair. Just imagine, put yourselves in their position. There they were, the historic people of God, the chosen people, those who had been the recipients of God's revelation for centuries.

God demonstrating to them by works and by words what kind of God he is and what his way of salvation is.

And they had missed the whole point. And they had missed it so badly that they did not recognize the one he sent to them, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 14] Some might have been almost in despair, wondering, was there any hope left for them? Now again, maybe that thought sometimes tosses your mind.

Perhaps you may never have responded to this message of grace, the love of God through Jesus Christ. And you know that you have heard it perhaps often enough, but you've never really responded.

And you might have reached the stage of a kind of despair and wondering, well, you've missed all the opportunities you've been given and perhaps you feel there's not much hope for you in that kind of situation.

Well, the word of God never gives us any ground for that kind of despair. Every time we hear the gospel, every time we hear the invitation of Christ to come to him as we do this morning, there is our time of opportunity.

And so I would encourage everyone here this morning to ask with those people there, what shall we do? And to ask it genuinely and to ask it from the very depths of your heart, what are we to do?

[6 : 25] What is it that this Christian gospel demands of the person who hears it? This great revelation of God through his own son, through these tremendous events of his life and death and resurrection, what is demanded of it?

Well, Peter answers that question really, first of all, with just one word. He says, repent. I want to look with you first of all that word.

And that is the central word to all of what he has to say. All the rest of it is involved in it, but repentance is the central thing. This word, repent, repentance, is of course a very central New Testament word.

it's one that occurs very often, it occurs sometimes side by side with faith or belief, sometimes on its own, but it's very much connected with it.

Notice that he says, repent and be baptized every one of you. So he's making it quite clear that what he has to say is not something that can be done en masse, it's not something that everyone in a kind of great hysteria can do together, but it's something that each person for themselves has to do.

[7 : 54] And that still is true today. This great thing, whatever it is, this great New Testament word, repent, it's something that you have to do individually and personally.

No one else can do it for you and it doesn't matter what other people you know or who you're related to, you have got to do this for yourselves. I want to look with you at this word and just explain, explain its meaning.

It's quite straightforward meaning from the New Testament. The Greek word literally means a change of mind and that's the first way I want to think about the word with you.

A change of mind. In fact, we could say the change of mind. Now for us, perhaps the expression a change of mind is not as deep or profound as this word actually implies.

We perhaps think about somebody changing their mind as something that can be done quite easily and sort of on the surface because we use that expression about all kinds of things from trivial things to quite important things.

[9 : 08] But this word certainly not being about trivial things, yet it does emphasize the importance of the mind. Now this is an emphasis that needs to come home to us today particularly and particularly in terms of Christian faith because there has been a determined effort over at least the last hundred years to divorce Christian faith from the mind.

to divorce Christian faith from really a thorough going intelligent grasp of what Christian doctrine is. And that is one of the great dangers of our age.

To adopt something of the language of Christianity, something of the emotions of Christianity, even something of the outward experience of Christianity, even something of the standards of Christianity, but yet not have this deep-seated grasp of Christian truth upon which all the other things depend.

Because unless we have this change of mind, unless we have a whole new mindset, then all the other things are empty and without foundation.

A change of mind. Now here we may link it with the other New Testament word, which is the verb to believe. People came to believe in Jesus Christ.

[10 : 58] Now of course we know that this word believe and the noun faith have got the two uses and we'll look at the other side of this in a minute. Because believe in someone implies more than just believing something about them.

It means also trusting. But believe in its first use does mean believing something about someone. And this word repentance is just the same.

If you have a change of mind, you change your opinions, you change your ideas, you change your beliefs, from one set of things to another. And that is in fact what Peter is challenging the people here to do first and foremost, if they have not already done so.

He's saying, you have had a whole way of thinking and looking at the world, and that way of thinking and looking at the world is wrong. you have had certain opinions that you have entertained concerning the Christ, concerning the long-awaited Messiah, and they are wrong.

You had certain opinions and ideas concerning Jesus of Nazareth, and these opinions are wrong. And thus, in that way, you missed this great opportunity when the Son of God came amongst you.

[12 : 26] that is how bad wrong thinking is, wrong belief is. That is what led them to their now almost despairing cry.

Brothers, what shall we do? Wrong thinking, wrong beliefs, wrong doctrine. So Peter is saying, you need to change your mind.

You need to change your mind concerning what the Old Testament says concerning the Christ. Christ. You really need to focus on those passages that talk of the great events concerning his coming and the effect of his death and resurrection.

You need to change your mind concerning the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and to see that indeed he is the one who fulfills perfectly all of what the Old Testament says concerning the Christ.

Not maybe your ideas concerning what the Christ ought to have been, but concerning the Christ as revealed by God. You need to change your mind.

[13 : 33] And that is the same for every one of us here today. If we have not already done so, we need to change our mind concerning the Lord Jesus, first and foremost.

maybe we have thought of him as a good man, as a good teacher, as a great prophet.

Maybe we have even thought of him as the Son of God. But yet maybe we have not seen him as the scriptures reveal him to be, as the only Savior, the only God-appointed way to come to God, the only God-appointed way to come to heaven.

There is no other way. No good works, no good ideas, no practicing of religion of any kind will bring us to heaven unless we are focused upon the Lord Jesus as the only way, unless we have our beliefs concerning him to be correct.

it. And that's what I mean by saying that belief really implies believing some things to be true. If you believe in Jesus Christ, you believe that he is indeed the Son of God, that he is indeed the God-appointed Savior of the world.

[15 : 05] And if we have not already changed our opinions concerning Jesus, that is what the scriptures challenge us to do. And that is what the scriptures give us evidence concerning, so that we can make this decision, not just as a result of an emotional upsurge, but on the basis of the hard and fast evidence of eyewitnesses concerning this man.

People who said, who is this that even the winds and the waves obey him? What kind of man is this? Constantly we are being challenged by those eyewitnesses themselves to see in this man, someone absolutely unique, someone they concluded was the son of God, and someone yet who died and died the most miserable and dark death to take away our sin.

The one who rose again from the dead to newness of life, and the one who gave to his dispirited, defeated disciples the same kind and quality of life, so that Peter, whom a few weeks before was cringing and cowardly and frightened for himself, someone who was in abject despair was changed into this man who stands here boldly before the most expert and the most intelligent and also the most antagonistic people of people of his day and was able to challenge them so clearly on the basis of the Christian good news.

A change of mind then is required, a change of mind concerning Jesus, but also a change of mind concerning ourselves, because perhaps up until this time we've thought of ourselves as pretty good.

Those people would have done so, no doubt. they were good Jews, they kept, as they saw it, what religion ought to be. But in one blinding flash they saw that if what Peter was saying was true, they

were very different from that.

[17 : 14] They had crucified the Lord of glory. And when the gospel comes to us, it tells us the very same thing. It tells us instead of being all right, instead of being quite good, instead of being pleasing to God, we are poor and wretched and miserable and blind and naked.

It tells us that we indeed need to be changed and transformed. It tells us that we are sinners against God. Now, of course, that message is just as unpopular and as unpalatable as it was when Peter first proclaimed it.

But yet, for us to truly have faith in Christ, to truly have Christian faith, we need to change our opinions, our ideas concerning ourselves. We need to see ourselves as lost and helpless and we need his help and his salvation.

We need to see ourselves as those who are culpable, those who are guilty because that's what Peter was saying to the people there. He was saying you have crucified the Lord of glory. We need to see ourselves as culpable, as belonging to a sinful human race that rejected God's own son and has gone on rejecting all his overtures of love to us, perhaps up until this moment.

We need to change from that direction to accepting what he has done for us, thankfully. But then also there is, of course, in repentance a change of heart.

[19 : 00] And we use that expression to imply something else about this word that's perhaps not apparent in our expression of change of mind. Because to us, in English language, the heart implies something more than just the intellectual workings of the mind, just the belief about what is true.

the heart implies that first of all you have now a revulsion to those things that before you loved. And you have a trust now in those things or in that person whom before you did not love.

A change of heart. You see, the people there were being challenged very much with having that true and deep change of heart. not only were they to change their opinions and ideas, but those opinions and ideas were to be changed upon the basis of a deep and profound revolution in their own lives.

So that the kind of thing that really appealed to them before, the kind of thing that gave them satisfaction, happiness before, war.

And with many of these people it would have been a kind of religiosity that would have done that. Peter was saying to them, you must change your heart. You must view those things now with revulsion.

[20 : 30] Just as the Apostle Paul came to do in his time. He was able to say that he had all those things that those people boasted about. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees and so on.

Yet he says, I count all these things but done. Not a very nice expression but that's what he said. Very blunt and straightforward about it.

He says, I count it just rubbish. It's worthless to me. In fact, it's worse than that. It's repulsive to me now. That's what's involved in a change of heart.

that means that we view all our own efforts, perhaps up until this stage, to try to make ourselves pleasing to other people, pleasing to God. We view it as all very hollow and empty.

We view it as trash. We also view all the things that we held dear before that the word of God clearly forbids. All the sins, perhaps, that we held close before, we now view those things with revulsion.

[21 : 38] that doesn't mean to say that you suddenly become perfect or that you suddenly gained victory over every one of those sins, but it does mean there is a change of heart, that you hate those things that before you once loved and cherished.

So there's a negative side to it, a change of heart, there's a revulsion, but also, of course, in a change of heart, there is a trust. And involved in this repentance, in this turnaround, that is now a trust set upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, trust implies more, as I've said, more than belief. It implies that when you believe something to be true about someone, you are prepared, in fact, you are committed to that person.

the illustration I usually give of it, especially to children, is this. I get one of them to come out and to stand in front of me with her back towards me.

And I say to them, if you fall backwards, I'll catch you. Now, you see, a child could conceivably sort of believe that in the abstract, that, well, he would catch someone who would fall back.

[23 : 04] But to actually trust me to do it, they actually have to fall back, to demonstrate that they actually do trust me, that I'm going to catch them.

And they do so, they do so on the basis of what I've said, and of what they know concerning me. Obviously, a child wouldn't do that just to anybody, because somebody might be wanting to play a trick on them, or want to hurt them.

But someone who trusts you will do that. Now, it's something like that in our trust in Christ. We come to the position where we know certain things to be true about him.

And then, in this change of heart, we trust him. We commit ourselves to him. We say he is reliable, he is trustworthy, he has done the things he came to do, he is not ultimately going to make a fool of me, he is not going to hurt me.

He died upon the cross to take away my sin, and never again will those sins be raised up to accuse me, or to make a fool out of me.

[24 : 19] I trust him. That's involved in this change of heart. Have you come to that point where you've actually changed your heart, or your heart has been changed?

You feel revulsion to the things that are opposed to God, and distracting from God, and you feel a trust, a love, towards the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is what's required in repentance. But also, of course, repentance is a change of direction. And that's where, again, this expression that's used, this Greek word, metanoia, repentance, is deeper than perhaps any of the expressions that we use.

Because it's also a change of direction, or a change of lifestyle. It's not just something that goes on in your head. It's not just something that you feel, but it is something that you do.

When you repent, that repentance is evident by the kind of life that you live. Just as the example I gave a few minutes ago of the child falling backwards to be caught, that child could go on saying forever that it trusted me, and nobody would believe it unless it actually fell backward.

[25 : 48] Now that's exactly the same about the Christian faith. You could go on saying forever that you feel sympathetic towards the church, perhaps you attend church, but until people actually see a change in your lifestyle, a change in the direction of your living, then, well, people will be pretty cynical concerning your kind of religion.

And this is exactly what Peter is saying here, and this is perhaps the main point of what he's saying to those people because a lot of them may have already made the first two steps. A lot of them may have already believed what he was saying concerning Jesus.

A lot of them already obviously were pricked in their conscience. They felt something of the sin that they had committed. But what Peter was challenging them with here was a change of lifestyle. That was the hard bit. They had to recognize that they had been wrong, and they had to move in a new direction. And as one of the first parts of that, they were to be baptized.

And we'll look at that just in a moment. What exactly was involved in that? But it involved a great step, a great public demonstration that they were changing their lifestyle, and that they were now going to live their lives, not according to their own ideas, not according to their own religious traditions, but they were going to live their lives under the authority of Jesus, and following the teaching of his word.

[27 : 29] Well, then, I want to look with you at what is done for you, and to you. We've looked at what you have to do, that is, repent.

That was Peter's main word that he spoke, repent. That's his first word, the emphasis upon it. But then also he says that for the person repenting, there are other things that are involved in this. And the first one is what we may call ceremonial. Ceremonial. Here I refer to baptism. Repent and be baptized, every one of you, he says.

Now baptism is a ceremony. Baptism is something that is done, we may say, externally. It's something that people can see. We can't see what goes on in a person's heart or mind.

We can see their lifestyle, certainly, and we can also see baptism. We can see the sacrament, because really that's what a sacrament is. It's a visible, tangible demonstration of the grace of God in a particular way.

[28 : 44] Now, what exactly is baptism? And why is it stressed here and throughout the New Testament? It's stressed particularly in the great commission of Jesus, when he says, go make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them concerning all the things I've commanded you.

It's right there in the heart of that great commission. Why is it so important? Well, when you put together all the various pieces of evidence, and we haven't time to sort of slot all the jigsaw together

here this morning, but when you put it all together, you see this.

You see that in the Old Testament time, there was indeed, an Old Testament church, with all the outward forms of a church, the people of God, it had a priesthood, and so on.

And when you look at how people entered into that church, or entered into that covenant community, you see that the symbol or sign of it, the sacrament, if you like, of it, was circumcision. And that lasted right through until the New Testament time. But you discover a very strange thing in the New Testament. you discover quite clearly that circumcision is no longer a viable sign of entry into the covenant community of God.

[30 : 12] It had become so corrupted with other extraneous Jewish ideas, and particularly related to the Jewish race as constituting the people of God.

So that Paul quite clearly in Galatians says that no longer is circumcision of any importance. But we discover that there's a new sign, a new symbol of people entering the covenant community of God, and that is of course baptism.

That whenever someone entered that community, they were baptized, and it was therefore as a sign of entry, a sign that they had entered this people of God.

God. Now that is the understanding particularly which we in Presbyterian churches have of baptism. That it is not something just arriving on the scene in a kind of unique way in New Testament times. It's got all the Old Testament background of the covenant of God behind it. And it fits in, it replaces circumcision, which really had to be abandoned because of all the corruptions attached to it.

[31 : 28] So there we have our basis, quite plain and simple, for our baptizing of children. Because in the Old Testament covenant, children were included, and they were never been excluded by any command of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So if they are not excluded, they are still included, and they are to have the New Testament sign of entry, that is baptism. But then also, there is cleansing here involved, as well as ceremonial, and it's tied together, because baptism is a sign of cleansing.

But the cleansing that I particularly refer to is that when we are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, it is so that your sins may be forgiven. the repentance with the baptism as the outward sign of it, has this effect that our sins are forgiven.

In other words, our sins are cleansed away. So baptism, as a sign, not only signifies the entry into the covenant community, but it also symbolizes cleansing.

Now that is perhaps the most obvious thing about baptism, because of course, the element of baptism is water. And water, of course, is what we use for cleansing.

[32 : 58] When we splash water on us, it's usually to wash our faces or something like that. So baptism is saying that we need cleansing. But remember, a sacrament is an outward sign or symbol of something that is spiritual.

Just as sitting at the Lord's table and eating the bread and drinking the wine is not trying to teach us something about food and what we need for our bodies. It's teaching us something about spiritual realities, that we need to depend upon Christ's death, his body and blood, for our eternal life, just as we need to depend upon ordinary food for our ordinary physical life.

So, the water of baptism is reminding us, and ought to be a constant reminder to us, that we need cleanse from sin, not by water, but by the precious blood of Christ, cleansed by his death upon the cross, and by our trust in that death alone for salvation.

Now then, you may ask, well, that seems to make sense when we apply it here to the people living at that time. They repented, and they were baptized, that's the sign of that.

They were repentant people, and they were baptized. But what about a child? A child, we can't see in it any sign of repentance. Well, that's very true.

[34 : 30] But, because it is the child of someone who is in the covenant community, then the Old Testament law still applies because it has never been taken away, that that child also is to be introduced into that community, the community of the Christian church.

And the outward sign is a symbol of what God's promises are concerning this child to the parents, to the whole congregation.

And for our part, we are also taking promises. And we are saying that we are going to be contributing to the welfare, the Christian welfare of this child.

And God, in his grace, is promising to bless the child. And we have a basis for our prayers in that promise. When we pray for this child, and when we teach this child, we are accepting by faith God's

promise, and we are claiming it, that is the whole usefulness and point of the doctrine of the covenant in practical terms concerning the child.

So that we're told here quite clearly that when someone repents, and that's the central emphasis, when someone repents, baptism is the outward sign of it, when someone repents, their sins are forgiven.

[36 : 01] that is cleansing of sin. Now, if you are bothered by a bad conscience, and perhaps you are burdened down by a sense of your own guilt, maybe about one particular thing, maybe in general, there is no other way for that to be removed, but by the blood of Jesus Christ, through your repentance and trust in him.

yes, there may be ways of pushing that sense of guilt down, repressing it, it will bubble up again and bounce up again, here, there, and everywhere. Yes, you can push it down again.

You can try to ignore it and pretend that it's not there, but it will always come back to accuse you, and one day all these things will come out to accuse you in the presence of God. There's only one way for them to be removed, to be erased forever.

that is through what Jesus did on the cross, through our faith and repentance, our faith in him and repentance towards God.

But then finally, there's this point. There's also something charismatic here. There's ceremonial, there's cleansing, but there's something charismatic.

[37 : 18] He says, you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now, I use the word charismatic here in its proper sense. That is the sense that it is a gift by the grace of God.

Now, you'll notice here that the emphasis is not upon all the marvelous gifts that the Holy Spirit may give to you or to the church. The emphasis is upon the Holy Spirit himself.

That is really the true sense of the word charismatic and the true doctrine concerning gifts. The greatest of all gifts is the Holy Spirit himself.

And that is the gift that the Lord Jesus Christ has received for his church. If we look back here, we see in verse 33, Peter says quite clearly, exalted to the right hand of God, he, that is Jesus.

Jesus has received from the Father the Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. Jesus received that most glorious of all gifts, the third person of the Trinity.

[38 : 35] He has given this gift to his church. And that's what those people received that day. They received the whole work and ministry of the Holy Spirit, which is to make Christ known to us, to apply Christ to us in all his righteousness and holiness and love, to be received by faith.

So how is it possible for anyone to say that you can't have Christ and not the Holy Spirit? If you have Christ, if you trust in him, then Christ has the Holy Spirit.

You have the Holy Spirit too. Yes, maybe. Your life is not all that it ought to be. It may be very far from what it ought to be.

And mine too. That doesn't mean to say that God has had any failing on his part. Doesn't mean to say that he is holding back something from us.

Doesn't mean that he's niggardly or miserly. He has made everything available to us in Christ. We are to appropriate it.

[39 : 45] To receive it. To live on the basis of what he has done for us. So then when we repent, we have a ceremonial as a sign.

We are cleansing the removal of sin. We have also the charismatic, the gift of the Holy Spirit to us. To equip us individually and collectively as the people of God.

To serve him wherever he may call us and lead us. Let us pray. Our gracious and loving Heavenly Father, we do thank you and bless you for your gracious and loving gospel invitation.

We pray that you would please enable each person here today to respond to that invitation. We ask also that you would bless the words of challenge to every Christian person here.

That you would please enable us to appropriate the good things that you have given to us in Christ. And by faith to receive them more and more into the very fabric of our living, our lifestyles, and of our being.

[41 : 16] Gracious Lord, forgive us for all our many sins and our rejecting and neglecting of your way and of your truth and of your love.

Turn us now, Lord, to yourself. That we may be indeed truly repentant. And go on being repentant people day by day. We ask all this in the name of Jesus.

And for his sake. Amen. Thank you.