

Acts Series Part 6

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[0 : 0 0] . Tuesday, 14th of April, quarterfinal of the Champions League.

Following a 3-1 defeat at home, Liverpool are 2-0 up at halftime at Stamford Bridge. On the brink of a famous victory for the Reds and a humiliating defeat for Chelsea.

The Chelsea players head into the changing room at halftime to be met by the expected sermon from Goose Hiddink, their manager. He slams them for their mistakes.

He reminds them of the game plan. He warns them of the consequences of continuing to play as they have been doing. He encourages them to believe that the cause is not yet lost.

And he impresses upon them passionately and clearly what they have to do as they head out the tunnel for the second half. The second half begins.

[1 : 0 9] And nothing. No change in their attitude. No evidence of greater hunger. No urgency in their play. No following of the instructions given. Is that what happened?

Well, those who saw the game know that, of course, that is not what happened. They came out, a team transformed. Within minutes, they had scored three goals.

They turned the game around. And they were on their way to a glorious result. Why? Why the change? Well, the players responded to the sermon.

They responded to the harangue. They responded to the instructions that they were given by their manager. Now, what about us? The sermon, as a form of communication, is thought by some to be less than satisfactory.

It's considered as a one-directional monologue with one active deliverer and many passive recipients.

[2 : 1 5] That's you, by the way. But that is not as it should be. And as we continue to consider Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, our concern this morning is to explore and learn from how the congregation respond to the sermon.

The sermon has been delivered, but now the hearers must respond. And how do they respond? That is our concern this morning.

Now, as we consider the manner in which Luke describes the scene, the question posed by the crowd and the answer given by Peter, we will discover the elements to be found in their response to this presentation of the gospel.

But as we do, this cannot simply be to satisfy our curiosity as to how they responded a couple of thousand years ago. It must serve to show us how we must respond to the gospel.

Now, before turning to the verses that we'll be considering, which are essentially from verse 37 of Acts chapter 2 through to verse 41. But before we do that, let's just briefly remind ourselves of what has been demonstrated by Peter in the sermon.

[3 : 36] This has been the subject of a couple of sermons already in the past few weeks. Peter in the sermon has established that a new age has dawned. He has shown with the aid of witnesses that the crucified Jesus has risen from the dead and that he is the promised Messiah.

He has shown that this same Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of the Father and has poured out the promised Holy Spirit.

And he concludes his address in verse 36 with the bold assertion, God has made this Jesus both Lord and Christ.

But his final three words, and in the original delivery of the sermon, the final three words of Peter are maybe the most chilling, the most shocking.

And they are these three words, Whom you crucified. This Jesus, Lord and Christ, whom you crucified. Now how are the congregation to respond to this sermon?

[4 : 47] Well, let's simply follow the account and identify the different elements of their response as they are presented to us in these verses in Acts chapter 2.

The first word that we could focus on to describe their response is the word conviction. Conviction. Then in verse 37, what do we read?

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart. When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart. What was it that produced this response?

Why was it that they were cut to the heart? Well, the passage says, When the people heard this. When the people heard this. I wonder what the import of the word this there is.

What does it refer to, when the people heard this? It certainly I think refers to the whole sermon in its totality. All of the message that Peter had presented to them when the people heard this sermon they were cut to the heart.

[5 : 53] But is there not a suggestion that when it says when the people heard this Peter is particularly making reference or Luke here in recording the events is particularly making reference to that final words of Peter, this Jesus whom you crucified.

And when the people heard this they were cut to the heart. They were under what we call sometimes in our religious language conviction of sin.

The people have been persuaded of their guilt and they have accepted that they are guilty and they are described in this way they were cut to the heart.

I want to think a little bit more about this and explore a little more this matter of conviction and what it involved for this original audience and how it can be applied to ourselves.

Who are guilty? Who are guilty? We are making the point that this reaction this response of the people have been cut to the heart is a product of a recognition of their guilt.

[7 : 03] But who are guilty? Well again if we just notice the verse we read when the people heard this they were cut to the heart. There is clearly a collective responsibility implied in this language and yet the word heart makes it personal.

The crowd doesn't have a heart. There isn't one heart that all the crowd share. Each individual within the crowd has a heart. And so when it says that they were cut to the heart there is that sense of collective responsibility for the death of Jesus and yet there is also a focus on each individual's responsibility and guilt vis-a-vis the events that Peter has described.

This is personal. This guilt that has been spoken of is personal guilt. They were cut to their heart. Each individual in their own heart was made aware and conscious of their guilt before God.

And 2,000 years on and it remains personal. What about your heart? Do you know something of this conviction in response to the gospel message?

These people they heard the message concerning Jesus and they were cut to the heart. But another question I think legitimately arises from this.

[8 : 33] We might say, well, what are they guilty of? Now the answer to that is both straightforward and difficult at the same time. It's straightforward in that Peter identified their sin clearly.

In verse 23 he mentions it explicitly. This man was handed over to you. And he's addressing his audience. He's addressing the crowd. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

Peter very clearly identifies the sin that they are guilty of. And we've already noticed the manner in which he closes is addressed so dramatically with these words, whom you crucify.

So as I say, at one level it's a very simple question. What are they guilty of? Well, Peter claims that they are guilty of the death of Christ. And I say it's also difficult, this question, what are they guilty of?

Because surely many of those present could have responded, nothing to do with me, governor. Nothing to do with me. I didn't crucify Jesus.

[9 : 39] I wasn't involved in his death. I don't know why you're pointing the finger at me. Yes, I'm not perfect, but I didn't do that. Surely many could have responded in that way.

Surely many could have protested as they were faced with this accusation on the part of Peter. Of the many thousands who heard this sermon, perhaps some would have been amongst those who obeyed for the blood of Jesus, crucify him, crucify him.

But many, I'm sure, would have had no direct involvement in the death of Jesus. And yet Peter says they are guilty. Why is this? Is this fair? Why are they deemed guilty for a death that many of them had no direct involvement in?

I think there's two elements in answer to the question why. Why are they guilty of this crime, of this sin that Peter identifies? The first element does involve the idea of corporate responsibility.

They were part of a people responsible for the death of Jesus. Now, in our Western individualistic society, we are uncomfortable with this. We protest at being laden with the faults of others as we see it.

[10 : 59] And this was illustrated perhaps quite eloquently recently. And so, when you have the shameful conduct of the Prime Minister's advisor that we all know of, and yet, as was so eloquently put, that conduct only grudgingly merits the most constipated apology in British political history.

I don't know if you heard those words from one of the Liberal spokesmen. I thought it was very eloquently put. You see, this reluctance on the part of the Prime Minister to accept any responsibility. Why? Well, because I didn't send the email. Nothing to do with me.

And yet, there is a concept of corporate responsibility, of being responsible for that group of people that you are part of. And there is no doubt that here, Peter is focusing in a measure on that. You are part of this people who have rejected the Messiah.

And so, you are corporately responsible, even if you didn't hold the hammer and bang in the nails in Jesus' crucifixion. But it is not only that.

That is not the only answer to the question, why can we say that these people, this congregation, were guilty as charged? They were guilty also because of what we might call the sin behind the sin.

[12 : 19] Now, what do we mean by that? Well, the headline sin, Peter highlights, and that was the death of Jesus. Jesus being crucified by the Jews. That was the headline sin.

But what about the sin behind the sin? Well, ultimately, Jesus was crucified because of unbelief. The people did not believe his claim to be the Messiah.

There in the upper room on the day of Pentecost, there were 120 people. Of the many thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of Jews, there was just a handful. Why?

Because they did not believe his claims. And because they did not believe, they rejected him. And because they rejected him, he was crucified. Unbelief is the core sin.

And of that sin, the individuals within the crowd were most assuredly guilty. So there is that aspect. And we don't shy away from it, that aspect of corporate responsibility.

[13 : 17] There was also in the part of those gathered there that day, individual responsibility for their unbelief, for rejecting Jesus as the Messiah.

Some, no doubt, were more guilty than others. But all were guilty of this sin. What of us? The Bible makes an accusation towards us also.

Before God, we are all guilty. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There is no one righteous. No, not one. Every single one of us gathered here this morning comes within that accusation and just charge.

You are guilty. You are part of a fallen and rebellious human race. But you are also personally guilty of sin in the face of God, of rejecting Jesus, of refusing to put your trust in Him, of denying Him the government in your life that He deserves and merits of these things.

Many of us here today are also guilty. Conviction. Who are guilty? All of those gathered there that day, what are they guilty of?

[14 : 40] They are guilty of the accusation that is presented to them, but ultimately guilty of that greater and deeper sin of unbelief. But then, there is another question I just want to explore under this general heading of conviction in the response of the congregation there on the day of Pentecost.

And it is this, are all equally convicted? And by this question, I am probing the idea of the intensity of the conviction of sin experienced.

And it seems clear that even on the day of Pentecost, not all shared the same intensity in their experience of conviction. The verse says that they were cut to the heart.

And certainly, the language is very intense. It speaks of profound conviction, of being cut to the heart. And yet, as we explore the passage, I think we can legitimately recognize that among those who gathered, there was a diversity of conviction.

It was not a uniform response in that regard. Why do I say so? Well, some experienced no conviction at all. That is the implication of verse 41 at the end.

[15 : 50] What do we read in verse 41? Those who accepted His message were baptized. Now, what's the implication there? Well, the implication is that there were those who did not accept His message. Of those who gathered, of those who heard the sermon, there were those who rejected the message.

They were under no conviction. So, not all responded in the same way. There were those who did not experience conviction at all. Others, it would seem, required a greater measure of warning and pleading on the part of Peter to produce the sought-for conviction.

What do we read there in verse 40 in Luke's account? We read, with many other words, He warned them and He pleaded with them, Save yourselves from this corrupt generation. Now, it seems reasonable that this reference that Luke introduces here isn't to be understood chronologically, that having preached his sermon and having had the response of some, he continues to plead and to warn.

That wouldn't seem to be what's being suggested. Rather, what we have here in verse 40 is a summary statement of all that Peter preached on that day that is not recorded for us.

We have a summary here. And in that sermon, he pleaded and he warned and with all the rhetorical skills available to him, he sought to persuade this people that they would repent.

[17 : 14] And it seems reasonable to presume that for some at the very first presentation of these truths, they were cut to the heart, but others not so. And so he continued to warn and he continued to plead until others too were brought to the point of recognizing their guilt and coming under conviction of a sin.

But no doubt, a great diversity in regards to the intensity of it. Some indeed, as is recorded for us, cry out in desperation.

Brothers, what shall we do? Then in verse 37, there is an intensity in their crying out. But did all cry out in unison? Surely not. Well, whatever view we take of the inward experience of conviction of sin of the hearers of Peter's sermon, we can certainly state that being brought to repentance in the experience of Christians can involve and does involve a very varied and diverse experience of conviction.

Some are indeed cut to the heart and give testimony to being enveloped in a profound and deep sense of their own sin and guilt.

That has maybe been your experience. That is the experience of some. And it is, of course, valid and legitimate. But for others, the experience is considerably less intense.

[18 : 40] And maybe that was so for you in being brought to the point of repentance. Some only experience a fuller and more disturbing appreciation of their sinfulness and guilt having repented and come to faith.

And in many ways that is healthier as we are made more aware and have greater discernment into the teaching of Scripture. So it is a reasonable thing that following our coming to faith we are made more aware of how sinful we are.

And really all I'm saying is that there isn't a one size fits all. Conviction of sin is necessary in coming to saving faith in Jesus and being brought to the point of repentance.

But there can be a diversity of experience as regards its intensity and the manner in which it manifests itself. It's interesting that this phrase that is used in verse 37 a cut to the heart it's the only occurrence that we have of this phrase in the New Testament.

And yet its Old Testament equivalent is a word that has a wider variety of meaning. It can speak of anger of being humbled of sorrow and when we consider the experience that different men and women can have in being brought to faith and in this particular element of conviction so too there can be a variety of expressions if you wish.

[20 : 04] But the bottom line and this is maybe the most important thing that I would stress the bottom line is that we are persuaded of our guilt and we accept that we are guilty.

If that is true then we are under conviction of sin however we may feel. Now this is important and it's important because some people you might say rather perversely not consciously perversely but nonetheless perversely postpone a response to the gospel as they wait for some deep crisis or profound and heart-wrenching experience of guilt.

maybe that's true of you. You say oh yes I will repent I will put my faith in Jesus but I'm waiting until I come under conviction of sin then I will do so. If you accept the arguments that Peter presents here that you are guilty if you recognize that you are guilty before God then that's conviction enough for you to repent of your sins.

Don't wait for some road to Damascus experience because maybe you'll never be on the road to Damascus. Maybe you'll just stay in Aberdeen all your life and you're waiting for this experience that others have had well never mind what others have had if you recognize before God your condition that you stand guilty before him that's enough.

Repent and believe. Conviction. That is what we have here in the response of the congregation to sermons the sermon preached by Peter but also as we move on we find that there is urgency in their response there in the second half of verse 37 words that we've already commented on the people reply or certainly some of them brothers what shall we do?

[21 : 54] What shall we do? You see they can't simply go home and ponder on things. The crowd can't simply say well this is mind blowing stuff this Jesus he really was the Messiah and we crucified him well I really want to go home and think about this you know I've really got to give some serious thought to this business no no they can't with the Athenians of old determine to hear Peter again on this subject you remember when the gospel was preached in Athens and some are said to say well we'll hear you again on this subject they can't do this that's not good enough they must do something brothers what shall we do?

They must act but they don't know what to do for them it would seem that the evil deed has been done Jesus has been crucified there would seem to be no way back it's surely too late and Peter has good news for them and in a moment we'll see what the good news is but what about you?

As you are presented with the gospel message as you are persuaded of your guilt and of your need of a savior as Jesus is presented to you as the only and sufficient savior will you go home and ponder on things?

Will you go home and think about it a little more? Will you hear me or others again on this subject? Is that how you will respond? No rather with the the men in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost that the words on your lips would be what shall we do?

What can I do? What must I do now? Perhaps you fear it it's too late you've squandered too many opportunities you're too old to find forgiveness well Peter has good news for you too as he had good news for the men in his audience so he has good news for you because we're brought to the next element in the congregation's response as Peter answers their question how does Peter reply?

[24 : 00] there in verse 38 Peter replied 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 this is the reply that Peter gives to this this desperate question that is posed what shall we do?

what do they have to do? they have to repent they have to repent and they have to make public profession of their faith in Jesus two things are needful repentance and baptism first of all repentance repentance involves the mind and the will it involves changing the way you think it involves changing the way you think about yourself up until now you thought that you were fine that you didn't need forgiveness that you didn't need to be saved but now you realize that you do it changes the way you think about Jesus up until now maybe you thought of Jesus as yes the son of God and a good man and the savior but just at arm's distance thank you very much and now you have to change the way you think he has to be your savior he has to be the one in whom you put your trust and repentance involves changing the way you live and about turn from living with your back to God to living in the face of and for God this is what they must do this is how they must respond

Peter replied repent repent repentance involves confessing sin and seeking forgiveness in Jesus and it involves resolving with God's help to leave sin behind and live a life of obedience to God now given that repentance involves turning and walking in a new direction and keeping on walking in that direction it is and should be a permanent part of our Christian experience let us not consider wrongly that repentance is a one-off thing that well yes twenty years ago I repented no repentance is a constant element in our Christian experience not a one-off thing and yet though it is not a one-off thing we can say on the basis of Peter's reply here to those who pose the question what shall we do we can say that when we are first brought to repent of our sins that repentance must be accompanied by public profession

Peter says repent and be baptized every one of you you see it wasn't sufficient for the hearers on that day of Pentecost in their own hearts to say yes I recognize I am a sinner and in their own hearts to raise a prayer to God God forgive me I'm a sinner forgive me I want to follow you they could do that but that was not enough because they also had to be baptized repent and be baptized it was also necessary that that inward conviction find outward expression in public profession of faith in baptism now for the hearers of Peter's sermon here on the day of Pentecost the opportunity that was afforded for public profession was indeed the sacrament of baptism it was to be baptized that was the manner in which they could publicly indicate to all the crowd gathered that they had accepted the message that they had responded to the message that they were putting their trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior that was the manner in which they could do so and they were baptized they were baptized we are told in the name of Jesus Christ and these words quite helpfully explained by one commentator in this way when we read that they were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ by his authority acknowledging his claims subscribing to his doctrines engaging in his service and relying on his merits and we might add invoking or confessing his name repentance and public profession we're told was for the forgiveness of your sins and there we have to be careful and clear in what we say this is not at all suggesting that baptism was necessary for forgiveness or indeed that forgiveness was automatically secured by the rite of baptism but rather that repentance and baptism together reflected the actions of one who had placed his or her trust in Jesus and so enjoyed the forgiveness of sins and for those who repent and are baptized

Peter assures them that it is not only the promise of forgiveness of sins but the promise of a gift that will enable them to live as disciples of Jesus and this gift is the gift of the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit himself is the gift that is given that they might continue in the way and this is a comfort and an encouragement to us as we maybe ponder on what we will do will we respond will we repent will we publicly profess our faith in Jesus and sometimes our obstacle is well what if I don't continue what if I let the side down what if I'm not up to the challenge and Peter says rest assured he will receive a gift the Holy Spirit himself will be with you and will help you and will enable you to be true to Jesus to be faithful to your Lord you will not continue walking in your own strength you will not have to abandon sin in your own strength you will not have to live a holy life in your own strength no this gift is given to you the gift of the Holy Spirit and so these original hearers on the day of Pentecost as they respond they recognize their guilt they are under conviction in whatever measure it was they ask what they must do they are told that they must repent and be baptized and so they do so and what about us well we too of course must repent but then what of public profession well if you have not been baptized then you must be baptized if you have come to faith in Jesus if you have repented of your sins then it is important that you be baptized as Peter makes it clear if you have not been baptized then you would like to be baptized and speak to me but of course most of us in our tradition most of us gathered here this morning

[30 : 45] I suspect have been baptized as infants are we thus relieved of the duty of making public profession of our faith in Jesus ah well I don't need to make public profession because I've already been baptized so I can't do what Peter tells me to do here but by no means public profession which is at the heart of this sacrament of baptism or certainly integral to the sacrament of baptism is still required for those who would repent and believe in Jesus Christ and in our tradition we do so by taking our place at the Lord's table that is the manner in which we make public profession of our faith that is the manner in which we respond to these words of Peter as it were repent and make public profession announce to the world that you are the Lord's and that you are trusting in Jesus and we do so as we gather around his table to celebrate his death that is the manner that is presented for us to be faithful and to respond to the exhortation that Peter here addresses to his original audience have you done so have you done so have you made public profession of faith in

Jesus Christ have you repented of your sins and publicly declared that that is so that is what you must do that is the manner in which you must respond to the gospel invitation that is the manner that has been established in the scriptures if you have not done so why not if your answer is well I haven't repented yet well repent repent even this morning why do you delay will you go home and ponder these things will you listen to me again on this matter no today is the day of salvation today is the day when you can repent and if you have repented but have not yet made public profession well the time is now now is the time to profess your faith in Jesus to lift up your banner and to declare whose you are what are you waiting for that people respond in repentance and in public profession and finally as we come to the close of the passage we find one final element which is really involved or a summary of what has gone before there in verse 41 we read those who accepted his message were baptized and about three thousand were added to their number that day and it does seem superfluous to lay too much stress on this but it is crucial the people are exhorted to respond and they do respond

Peter is not left with the words hanging in the air repent and be baptized and then nothing happens no he exhorts them to repent he exhorts them to be baptized and that is what they do they we are told accept the message they accept the message they recognize the message to be true and they concede that the call to repentance falls rightly and justly upon them does this describe you do you accept the message are you able to say yes I agree I accept that this is true I accept that I am guilty I accept that Jesus is the one who is presented to me as my savior I accept this is so I accept that I need to be forgiven do you accept the message well if you accept the message then you must act upon that acceptance the people there on the day of Pentecost recognize that the message was true and they act they are baptized they identify publicly with

Jesus they make public profession of their faith does this describe you and as we close I would simply highlight two solemn words at the close of this account that we've already made reference to in another context but I close with them now in verse 41 the verse begins those who accepted his message those who not all accepted the message not all were baptized not all were willing to publicly profess their faith in Jesus Christ no not all took heed of the warnings not all were moved by the pleadings of Peter not all what about you let's pray later go go go go go go go go go