

## What Shall We Do? - Acts 2:37-41

### I. INTRODUCTION – Read Acts 2:1-12

#### A. *Mark Twain*

1. Though Mark Twain was a committed & often hostile agnostic, he occasionally attended church.
  - a. Despite his resistance, he found certain aspect of the Christian faith appealing.
  - b. His wife was a Christian and he would infrequently attend with her.
2. He tells the story of *one preacher* he was particularly impressed by.
  - a. In those days, the offering was taken after the message. So after 15 minutes Twain was so inspired he decided to give \$20 to the offering. (A lot in those days.)
  - b. But 10 minutes later as the sermon began to drag on, he decided to give only \$15.
  - c. After *another* 10 minutes, he'd cut the original 20 in half.
  - d. At 45 minutes, he decided to give only \$5.
  - e. And after an hour & 10 minutes when the minister finally ended, as the offering plate passed by, Twain took *OUT* \$20.

#### B. *The First Sermon*

1. Most of us have probably heard sermons that went on long after they ought to have ended.
2. I know I've preached my share.
3. What's fascinating is that the *first Christian sermon* preached was only a few minutes long.
  - a. We find it here in Acts 2. It was preached by Peter.
  - b. If we read it now, we'd see it only takes about 2½ minutes.
  - c. But it was *so powerful*, it resulted in some 3,000 getting saved.

#### C. *Set The Scene*

1. Last week in ch. 1 we read Jesus' instructions that the disciples wait in Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Spirit which would *empower* them to fulfill the task of carrying on His mission of making disciples.
2. He said it would take place in just a few days.
3. Here in Acts 2, 10 days have passed.
  - a. Pentecost, one of the 7 most important Jewish holidays had arrived
  - b. And Jerusalem was filled with people from all over the world who'd come to celebrate it.
4. While most of them were going up to the *temple* to worship, the followers of Jesus were huddled in a house; praying & waiting.
5. Then bam! A sound of a strong wind filled the place & flames of fire appeared over their heads.
6. This was *the fulfillment* of the promise Jesus had made 10 days before; the baptism of the Spirit.
7. God made it crystal for them this was it by the 3 signs accompanying it; *wind, fire, tongues*.
  - a. The word for spirit, breath, & wind, are one word in both Greek &

- Hebrew –
- 1) Greek – *Pneuma* / Hebrew – *Ruach* / It's the idea of something unseen in motion.
  - 2) God caused the **sound** of a **strong wind** to fill the place so they'd think of the Spirit coming in power.
- b. The flames of fire that rested on each of them linked what was happening at that moment to something they remember John the Baptist had said about Messiah – that He would baptize His followers in the Spirit & fire.
- 1) In the Jewish mind, fire was an emblem of God's holiness.
  - 2) They understood one of the most important works the Spirit would do was to **make them holy** by consuming all that within them that was outside the will of God.
- c. The third evidence the Holy Spirit had come upon them in power was that they found strange words forming in their hearts they wanted to speak out.
- 1) They were sounds that carried no intelligible meaning; they were incomprehensible words, other languages.
  - 2) And as they spoke them, knowing well the words of Isaiah, they realized they were seeing a fulfillment of prophecy. [1 Cor. 14:21 cf. Isa 28]
  - 3) Know this! As soon as they opened their mouths to speak a foreign language, the weight of what was happening to them was huge! Here's why . . .
  - 4) **We think** the sound of wind, & little flames of fire sitting on their heads would be **the major signs**, but in the disciples minds, those were **nothing** compared to the tongues they spoke.
    - a) As Jews, their historic heroes were the **prophets**.
    - b) Men through whom God had spoken, & NOTHING was more important than God's Word.
    - c) To be a prophets, an instrument of God's revelation, was seen as the **ultimate honor**.
    - d) But they knew what enabled the prophets to speak was the unction, anointing, inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
    - e) Well, here they are, gathered together, praying & waiting on God when all of a sudden, syllables begin to form within them they know need to be spoken out, even though they don't understand the words.
    - f) As they open their mouths & speak, their spirit soars with the realization their speech was being prompted by God's Spirit, they'd just entered the league of their most cherished heroes.
    - g) This would be like some kid on a T-ball team suddenly being called to play short-stop for the LA Dodgers.
8. As the realization of what was happening to them grew, their speech, which had probably begun rather quietly, grew in volume until they were making quite a noise.
- a. Because Jerusalem was crowded with pilgrims there to celebrate Pentecost, it wasn't long until a crowd had gathered round to find out what was going on.
  - b. The believers were overjoyed & loudly exalting God in the very languages

- of the pilgrims who'd traveled hundreds of miles to celebrate Pentecost.
- c. Their joy was so strong, some skeptics concluded they must have been tipping the bottle.
  - d. Peter, seeing the crowd of curious spectators turned to them & preached his first sermon.
9. He began by telling them that what they were seeing was the fulfillment of prophecy.
  10. It was being fulfilled **because** their long-awaited Messiah had come; His name was Jesus.
    - a. And though the nation of Israel ought to have recognized Him for Who He was & welcomed Him,
    - b. The leaders & most of the people had **rejected & conspired to kill Him**.
    - c. But death could not hold Him. He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven & was even then reigning in glory.
  11. We see the response of the crowd in v. 37 -

## II. TEXT

### A. V. 37

1. While Peter's message wasn't long, every word was inspired by the Spirit & went straight to their hearts.
2. Hebrews 4:12 says that God's Word is sharper than any two-edged sword, & pierces to our core.
3. When the Spirit came upon Peter, he began speaking in tongues, but then switched to his native language & spoke words that were no less inspired.
4. Those who heard were convicted of their need for salvation & asked the disciples what they should do.
5. I wonder if the disciples remembered Jesus' words; He said the Holy Spirit would convict people of sin, righteousness, & judgment.
6. They were seeing the fulfillment of that promise here.

### B. Vs. 38-39

**Then Peter said to them, "Glad you asked. You see, we're just starting a new church here in Jerusalem and we want you to join. We'll be holding a 6-week member class on Wednesday evenings from 7 to 9. Attend that, then you can become a card-carrying member and have the guarantee of eternal life."**

### NOT! [vs.]

1. When the crowd asked what the next step was, how they could rightly respond to the conviction they were feeling, Peter called them to **repentance & faith**.
2. These are two sides of the same coin.
  - a. Repentance is turning **from** sin.
  - b. Faith is turning **to** Christ.
3. Peter's answer is the **template** for how to become a Christian.
4. First, there's the need to **repent**.
  - a. That simply means to turn around & go the other way, to do a spiritual '180.'
  - b. The Greek word is **metanoia** = to **change** the mind; the key being "**change**."

- c. Repentance is a change in thinking that results in a change of behavior.
  - d. It begins with realizing *you've been wrong*; your assumptions, opinions, ideas, & views are goofy, not aligned with reality.
  - e. You *realize* you've been wrong because you're *now* confronted with what's right, & the *power* of that reality dispels the lies & deceit of your errant past.
  - f. In the light of what's right & true, *having* it, *living* it is the only reasonable & acceptable option.
5. Genuine repentance is accompanied *sorrow*.
- a. The first two beatitudes are –
    - 1) Blessed are the *poor in spirit* – those who *realize* they've been wrong.
    - 2) Blessed are those who *mourn* – they're broken by the realization of their spiritual state.
  - a. The sorrow that marks repentance isn't *sadness* for the *consequences* of sins. It's comes from the sense you've offended God.
  - b. It isn't *regret* for coming judgment; it's *distress* for being out of fellowship with the Lord.
6. Let me use an illustration. Mary & John have been married for 10 years & are doing well. But they've both gotten a bit lazy in the relationship.
- a. While John works out & stays in shape, Mary's put on a few pounds.
    - 1) She feels bad about it because she knows it's important to her husband.
    - 2) One Saturday evening, after a week of particularly bad eating choices, she decided to make herself a huge hot fudge sundae.
    - 3) She knew she shouldn't, but did it anyway.
    - 4) As soon as she placed the empty bowl in the sink, she felt terrible.
      - a) *If* she feels that way only because of the lbs. she's going to add on, and all the work it's going to take to shed them, that's not repentance.
      - b) But if she feels bad because it hits her how *unimportant she's treated John* by choosing to gorge herself like this, when she knows how important her appearance is to him, so she goes to the freezer & pantry and cleans out all the junk and makes a commitment to work out and get back in shape – *that's repentance*.
  - b. But what about John? He knows how hurt Mary is if he looks at another woman.
    - 1) They go out to dinner Sunday evening where one of the waitresses is a looker.
    - 2) As she passes their table every few minutes, he let's his gaze linger longer than he should.
    - 3) After the 4<sup>th</sup> pass, when he turns back to Mary sitting across from him, he can see the hurt on her face & he feels terrible.
      - a) *If* he feels that way because he knows Mary is going to be angry & withdrawn & that he's gonna' be sleeping on the couch for the next couple nights, that's not repentance.
      - b) But if he feels bad because his lack of self-control has wounded his wife & caused her to see herself as *less desirable*, & he apologizes,

affirms his love for her & determines to prove it by getting her a massive diamond necklace, *that's repentance*.

7. Repentance is *realizing* the direction we've been going is wrong, *being bummed* about the fact that it's harmed & hindered our fellowship with God, then *determining* to alter course so that what did the damage is no longer a problem.
8. Charles Spurgeon once said, "Christ & me will never be *one*, till sin & me are *two*."

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9. I'm concerned that the importance & place of *repentance* has been left out of much of modern preaching.
    - a. I do a bit of reading, & one of the most common themes of preaching in earlier generations was *the call to repentance*.
      - 1) Greats like Moody, Finney, Whitfield, Spurgeon, Edwards, Torrey, Lloyd-Jones, G. Campbell Morgan – laced their sermons with a liberal dose of repentance.
      - 2) But with rare exception, you don't hear it much these days.
      - 3) Contemporary church-growth philosophy avoids any mention of sin, lest visitors feel uncomfortable & stop coming.
      - 4) Well, if you're not going to mention sin, then you don't really have anything to call people to repent of.
      - 5) Some church growth groups go so far as to say *never* use the word "repent" because it conjures up images in people minds of wild-eyed fanatics who walk the streets with sandwich boards proclaiming the end of the world.
    - b. We should be less interested in getting people into our church & more interested in getting them into heaven.
  10. When the crowd asked the disciples what they should do, Peter didn't hem & haw, reluctant to use the word "repent" because repenting is exactly what they *needed* to do.

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11. Let me be clear – **being a Christian means turning away from sin.**
    - a. If you really believe Jesus died *for* your sin, then you will want to die *to* it!
    - b. If you rationalize, justify, or excuse sin – *then you don't really understand the cross.*
  12. Very simply – there is no such thing as an *unrepentant Christian*. That's an oxymoron.
  13. There's a well known story from the career of Billy Graham that illustrates this.
    - a. In 1954, a famous gangster named Mickey Cohen was invited to attend a special private meeting of some Hollywood celebrities with Billy Graham.
    - b. Graham shared the Gospel then finished with prayer & asked anyone who wanted to receive Christ to raise their hand. Cohen raised his.
    - c. Someone was assigned to follow up on Cohen to make sure he grew in his faith.
    - d. But he failed to keep the appointments or get plugged into a church.
    - e. In spite of that, he continued to show up at meetings where Graham was

- speaking & appeared to be a genuine convert.
- f. But word got back to Graham that Cohen was still active in organized crime, still thick with the mob.
  - g. He sent someone to talk with him and to tell him if he was sincere about following Christ he needed to repent & turn away from his sinful lifestyle.
  - h. His response was, “Look, I’ve been to lots of Billy’s meetings & I’ve heard testimonies from Christian athletes, Christian rodeo riders, Christian salesmen, Christian movie stars, even Christian politicians. Why can’t I be a Christian *gangster*?”
14. Compare Mickey Cohen’s attitude to that of John Newton.
- a. Newton was a hard-drinking & harder-living English sea captain of a slave ship in the mid-1700’s.
  - b. He was converted to Christ & left the sea to become a minister.
  - c. Where once he’d made a living by the evil trade of selling souls, he became a staunch abolitionist.
  - d. Deeply regretful for his past, he determined to do what he could to end slavery.
  - e. He was a close friend of William Wilberforce, & convinced him to *stay in Parliament* instead of training for the ministry.
  - f. Because of Newton’s influence, Wilberforce nearly single-handedly led the abolitionist movement that saw the end of slavery *throughout* the British Empire.
  - g. You & I know Newton as the author of *Amazing Grace*.
15. *Along with* repentance, Peter told them they needed to be baptized in Jesus’ name.
16. Remember who he said this to – Jews, who would think of baptism as *they knew it* – something Gentiles did when they converted to Judaism.
  17. Baptism was an outward symbol of an inner belief & choice. It was evidence of faith in God.
  18. So really, what Peter is calling them to do is to turn *away from sin to faith in Jesus*.
    - a. He’s not saying getting dunked would save them.
    - b. He’s saying true faith will move them to take *specific steps of obedience* to God.
    - c. And one of those will be to cleave to Christ as their Savior.

**D. Vs. 40-41**

**And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.**

1. There was more Peter went on to say that day.
2. But notice he did this *after* they’d been converted.
3. Peter immediately began training them *as disciples* – the abiding command Jesus had left them & was still ringing in their ears.
  - a. This was a massive harvest!
  - b. But Peter didn’t see this as a time to throw a victory party for the success

- of their first Jerusalem evangelistic campaign.
- c. He wasn't interested in just *converts* or *statistics*.
  - d. His aim was *disciples* – more men & women who were just like Rabbi Yeshua.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

#### **A. Repentance Important**

Let's not miss or forget *how important repentance* is in what it means to **BE** a disciple of Jesus.

Repentance is to leave  
The sin we loved before  
And show that we in earnest grieve  
By doing sin no more.