

1. What shall we do to be saved? (Acts 2:37-38)

Q. 85. What does God require of us, that we may escape his wrath and curse, due to us for sin?

And Peter’s answer is simple:

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ
for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Our Catechism says this very similarly:

A. To escape the wrath and curse of God, due to us for sin, God requires of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption.

There are two main parts to the catechism:

“what man is to believe concerning God” (questions 3-38)
and “what duty God requires of man” (questions 39-107).

The first part of the catechism also has two parts:

First, the history of salvation – the *historia salutis* – the accomplishment of redemption – the story of creation, fall, and redemption through the work of Jesus Christ.

And second, the order of salvation – the *ordo salutis* – the application of redemption – which explains how the Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ.

Then the second part of the catechism also has two parts:

First, the Ten Commandments – the law of God.

And second, the means of grace – the way of salvation – the *via salutis* – which is summarized beautifully in question 85:

A. To escape the wrath and curse of God, due to us for sin, God requires of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption.

This now becomes the outline – the pattern – for the rest of the catechism.

Over the next couple weeks we’ll look at faith and repentance.

Then we’ll turn to the “outward means” that Jesus uses to save us – the Word, the Sacraments, and Prayer.

And really, if you want a text that works out the implications of question 85,

you could not do better than look at Acts 2.

Acts 2 is where Luke shows us the connection between the *history of salvation* and the *way of salvation*.

And we see that in Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost.

2. The History of Salvation and the Way of Salvation (Acts 2:14-36)

What would get you to just drop whatever it is that you are doing,
put your life on hold,
and focus entirely on that one thing?

If you were on a trip,
what could convince you not to come home?!

Because, you see, that's what happens at Pentecost.

The reality of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is so profound,
that it radically alters the lives of those who repent and are baptized.

Jesus had said in Acts 1:8

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem,
and in all Judea and Samaria,
and to the end of the earth."

On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit *did* come upon them,
and now the apostles -- and through them, the church --
will bear witness to Christ to the end of the earth.

Peter's sermon has three points:

first, the coming of the Holy Spirit demonstrates that the last days have come (v14-21)
and he cites the prophet Joel to prove this.

Second, the death and resurrection of Jesus was planned by God,
and there was no way for death to hold him (v22-28),
and he cites Psalm 16 to show this.

And third, Jesus is the Son of David who has been exalted to the right hand of God,
where *he* received the promised Spirit (v29-35),
and he cites Psalm 110 to show this.

And therefore Peter concludes that the coming of the Holy Spirit
demonstrates that Jesus is the anointed Son of David (the Christ, the Messiah)
who has now poured out the Spirit on his people:
Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain

*that God has made him both Lord and Christ,
this Jesus whom you crucified.*

If Jesus is both Lord and Christ –
in other words, if Jesus is both King and Messiah,
the Son of David, whom God has seated at his right hand,
in fulfillment of his promises to Israel and David,
then you need to drop whatever it is that you are doing,
and serve him.

And those who heard Peter's sermon realize this--
they are faithful Jews.
And they know that if Jesus is the Messiah,
if he is the Davidic king,
then he will not only restore the kingdom,
but he will also judge those Israelites who do not follow him!
The prophets had said that God would pour out his Spirit on his people in the last days.
They understood that the last days had come,
and what was worse, that they had not received the Holy Spirit!

And so they are cut to the heart and they ask,
Brothers, what shall we do?

How can we participate in this last days outpouring of the Holy Spirit?
How can we be part of this glorious work of the Spirit of God?
Is it too late?

There are two basic parts to the apostles' one response.
You need a new identity,
and a new community.
And these two are really one thing.
Because your new identity includes participation in this new community--
and this new community involves each individual's new identity in Christ.

3. New Identity and New Community – the Way of Salvation (2:37-47) **a. A New Identity: Repentance and Baptism (2:37-41)**

The importance of this new identity is found in verses 37-41.

Who is Peter talking to?
Jews.
For that matter, these are *faithful* Jews—for the most part.
Jews who have diligently traveled to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost.

They are part of God's covenant people.

Why does Peter say to God's covenant people,
*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. ?*

Why does Israel need to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins?

Peter has just said in his sermon that Israel has crucified the Son of David.

God had promised that he would restore Israel.

How?

By the son of David.

So if Israel turns against the Son of David,
and hands the Son of David over the Romans,
what will the result be?

What will the Son of David do to those who betrayed him?

This helps us understand their question better:

Brothers, what shall we do?

Repent.

Obviously!

To repent means literally to change your mind.

Repentance means an entire turning from one purpose and direction to another.

When Peter says "repent!"

He is saying that you need to reorient your whole life around Jesus.

That's why he says:

Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ.

Israel had been baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the Red Sea (1 Cor 10).

But Israel rebelled and was cast into exile.

And now Israel has gone so far as to crucify their Lord and Christ.

And so now Israel is called to a new baptism.

If you would turn away from the rebellion of your fathers—

if you would seek first the kingdom of God—

if you would participate in the glory of the new creation—

then you need to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Your old Jewish identity is not enough.

If you would identify with the Son of David—the Messiah—

then you must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ,
for the forgiveness of sins.

The Jews understood all about the forgiveness of sins.

But the forgiveness of sins was dealt with through the sacrifices at the temple.

Why does Peter say that repentance and *baptism* is for the forgiveness of sins?

It's not clear that Peter had worked out his full theology of the atonement yet!

But it is clear that Peter already understood that the forgiveness of sins
is firmly connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And so therefore, if you would have your sins forgiven,
you must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

How often have you heard a pastor say,

“Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins”?

When someone wants to know how to be saved,
we often say simply “repent and believe.”

I suspect this is largely because we don't really understand what baptism is all about.

The question for Peter's hearers was (in effect) how do we participate in this last-days
outpouring of the Holy Spirit?

How do we participate in what Jesus has done?

Peter's answer is repent and be baptized.

Why does Peter say that we must be baptized in order to participate in Jesus?

Because we are not disembodied souls!

We are not Gnostics!

Jesus was raised *bodily* from the dead.

How do we participate in this new reality

that is found in the resurrection of Jesus?

By being baptized *bodily* into his name.

Peter says that we participate in Pentecost—

we participate in the powers of the age to come—

by repentance and baptism.

Both sides are crucial—

the outward sign of water

and the inward disposition of faith/repentance.

Christ puts his seal – his mark – on all those who are baptized.

So all those who are baptized become members of his church.

But without faith and repentance, baptism remains purely external.

As Gregory of Nyssa once said:

“the water is but water, for the gift of the Holy Spirit in no way appears”
in the one who is baptized apart from faith. (Gregory of Nyssa)

But without baptism, faith and repentance are not substantive.

What do I mean by that?

Let's say that someone is convinced by Peter.

He believes Peter's message.

But he doesn't want to be baptized.

So he goes home to Alexandria, Egypt.

Does he in fact participate in this last-days outpouring of the Holy Spirit?

According to Peter,

No.

Think of it this way,

if an Israelite at the Passover in Egypt had said, “Yes, I believe the promises of God,
but I'm not going to bother sacrificing a lamb,”
what would have happened to his firstborn that night?

The sacraments are not just nice, useful signs that God has given us as helpful things.

They are seals.

They are God's mark that identify us as his,
and communicate to us his grace.

God stamps us with his seal and says, “this one is mine!”

As John Calvin put it,

As God communicates to us his riches and blessings by his word,
so he distributes them to us by his sacraments.

Of course, as we've already seen,

baptism with water does not automatically convey the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It is repentance *and* baptism.

Even as God created us body and soul,
so also he recreates us body and soul.

It is the whole person that God saves,
and so our salvation incorporates both the physical and the spiritual.

And then Peter then adds:

For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off,

everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

First it is important to understand what the promise is:
the promise must be understood as the opportunity to participate in Pentecost–
the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit.
–in other words, this new identity with the Messiah.

That promise – the promise of repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and the gift of the Holy Spirit –
is for you and for your children and for all who are far off.

To a Jewish audience, this means that your children are included in the covenant promise.
To “for you and for your children” is good Abrahamic language.
To say “for all who are far off” probably meant (in Peter’s mind)
the Jews of the diaspora and Gentile converts to Judaism.
(After all, it’s only in chapter 10 that Peter discovers
that Jesus has other plans for how to include the Gentiles!)

But we recognize what Peter did not–
that those “far off” includes us Gentiles!

Everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

Notice the emphasis on God’s sovereign work in salvation.
It is God who calls us to himself,
and that call is an effectual call.

And yet that call comes through the voice of the preacher speaking to everyone:
Save yourselves from this crooked generation.

Moses had complained about the crooked generation in Deut 32.
And now Peter warns that if you do not heed his call,
you will go down in judgment like the wilderness generation did.
God’s judgment is coming upon those who crucified his Messiah,
and if you would escape the wrath to come,
then you should save yourself by heeding the call!

Verse 41 tells us that Peter’s preaching was rather effective:
*So those who received his word were baptized,
and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

b. A New Community: Being Devoted to the Means of Grace (Acts 2:42-47)

So three thousand people joined the apostles and the 120.

What are you going to do?

You have the twelve who have been commissioned
as a witness to the resurrection of Christ.
You have about 120 people who have pretty thorough knowledge,
and 3,000 who are fairly ignorant.
Many of these 3,000 are from all over the diaspora.
They will need to go home at some point.

But they have repented.

They have been identified in baptism—marked as disciples of Jesus.
They have forsaken all to follow Jesus.

Notice how Luke puts it:

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship,
to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

This new community is a community that is marked by three practices in verse 42:

1) the apostles' teaching and fellowship

It seems clear that Luke wants us to see teaching and fellowship together.
It is not that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching,
and to some sort of fellowship.
Rather it is the apostles' teaching and the apostles' fellowship.
You cannot just read the Bible by yourself and call yourself a Christian,
you have to be part of the apostolic community.

Notice that they don't just hand out copies of the scriptures and send them home.

Those who repented and were baptized
now stay in Jerusalem in order to be disciplined.
The preaching of the word – more precisely, the *apostolic* preaching of the word –
is at the very heart of the church.

2) the breaking of bread

throughout Acts, the breaking of bread refers to the Lord's Supper—
though it seems likely that the Lord's Supper was celebrated
in the context of a full meal.
(That seems to be what Paul is responding to in 1 Corinthians 11,
as he insists that it is not necessary to have a full meal).
But as Jesus has been made known to his disciples in the breaking of the bread,
so also they continue this meal in remembrance of him.
As with baptism, the breaking of bread is important
because it is a participation *bodily*
in the Christ who was bodily raised from the dead.

3) and the prayers

The ESV translates this correctly.

It is not just that they devoted themselves to “prayer” in general,
but to *the prayers*.

Every Jew (and any Gentile that knew anything about Jews)
would know that the Jews observed certain hours of prayer.

When it says that they devoted themselves to “the prayers,”
it means that they devoted themselves
to the regular pattern of corporate prayer in the temple.

We still need to work on this one!

I hope you all are praying regularly together as families—
because that may be all we can do right now.

But for centuries the church maintained daily corporate prayer,
morning and evening,
as a part of the daily routine of the people of God.

What does it mean that they devoted themselves to these things?

Given that many of these 3,000 were no doubt pilgrims,
it means that these 3,000 + stayed in Jerusalem longer than they had planned.

They realized that the coming of the Messiah meant more than their jobs,
more than their families,
more than anything else in the world.

Do you?

Sometimes people wonder why they had this communal lifestyle in Acts 2—
and whether it was intended to be permanent.

And all who believed were together and had all things in common.

*And they were selling their possessions and belongings
and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. (2:44-45)*

They did this because many of them were travelers.

They hadn’t planned on staying weeks or months in Jerusalem,
but this was too important,
and so they took care of each other.

*And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes,
they received their food with glad and generous hearts,
praising God and having favor with all the people. (2:46-47a)*

While this is certainly an extraordinary situation,
the basic principles of Christian community are clearly set forth:

it is a community that is oriented around the means of grace:
the apostles teaching and fellowship,
the breaking of bread,
and the prayers.

The first order of business in this community is worship.

But secondly this is also a community that takes care of each other.

This is a family.

Their new identity in Christ makes them see that this community is their real home.

Since they share in one Spirit,

they have the same mind in them that was also in Christ Jesus,
and they put the needs of others ahead of themselves.

The second order of business in this community is taking care of each other.

And thirdly this is a community that bears fruit.

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Preaching and worship,
service to one another (the life of the body),
evangelism and witness.

This is the model that the Holy Spirit gives us for the life of the church.

For those of you who have around awhile,
you may recognize the pattern that we have followed at Michiana.

We started with developing a clear vision for preaching and worship.
The session's study papers on worship were designed to lay that foundation.

Then we turned to diaconal ministry and service to one another –
and while we can always improve,
I must say that I have rejoiced to see this develop in the life of the church
over the years.

When you have the worship of God and the service to one another
developing hand in hand,
the invariable result is a community that attracts,
indeed, that seeks out those who are lost.

But that's why we needed the worship and the body life first.
As John Piper has said,
"Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church.

Worship is.

 Missions exists because worship doesn't.

Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man.

Worship is the fuel and goal of missions.

When the flame of worship burns with the heat of God's true worth,
 the light of missions will shine to the most remote peoples on earth."

 (John Piper, Let the Nations Be Glad, Baker, 1993, pp11-12)

Participating in Pentecost means that you have a new identity—

 Jesus has poured out his Spirit upon his church,
 and you are no longer who you once were.

Because you have been made a part of a new community.

 You have a new family.

And when this family is functioning properly,
 this is a family that adds to its numbers those who are being saved.