

³⁷ Now when the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Gentlemen, brothers, what should we do?”

³⁸ Peter answered them, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your^[a] sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

⁴⁰ He testified solemnly with many other words and was appealing to them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”

⁴¹ Those who^[b] accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added.

⁴² They continued to hold firmly to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of the bread, and to the prayers. ⁴³ Awe came over every soul,^[c] and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

Cut to the Heart

A few weeks ago our littlest was trying to cut a pear on her own. It ended up being a late night and a learning experience for us and for her. There was a lot of blood and it didn’t stop until we were in the ER for about a half an hour. It wasn’t life threatening but when a cut is deep and even more serious there is a moment when you question, “What have I done?” The hopelessness sets in and you realize, “I can’t fix this on my own. I need help.”

Peter’s sermon cut to the heart, or literally those to whom Peter preached were stabbed with a dagger. A life threatening blow to the heart occurred as they realized the full extent of their sin and consequences. They failed to recognize the Christ, the promised one of God, and instead of worshipping him as God, they had him crucified. They were cut to the heart and questioning, “What can we do? Is there any hope?” They realized “We can’t fix this on our own. We need help.” And that’s why they asked Peter, not looking for something they could do, but because they knew the serious situation in which they found themselves.

Maybe you know the feeling, you’ve been there holding a bloody rag, wondering, “What have I done?” or maybe you own the T-shirt that explains, “It’s not my fault. I was left unsupervised.” Either way you know the feeling. You’ve been there. After the law has done its work, it’s time to hear the good news that Peter proclaims, “Repent, be baptized, receive the Holy Spirit who is for all people.

This chapter of Acts is one of the most exciting in the book. It covers the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church and the apostles preach in the temple as everyone hears them speaking in their own language. They are moving from a small group of 120 to 3,000 all in a day. But until someone is hurt, they don’t recognize the need to be healed. And that’s the way it was for the Jews visiting Jerusalem during the feast of Weeks. It’s Pentecost, 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and yet they are acting like nothing has happened. They didn’t know the severity of

their sin and rejection of God's chosen one. They have no idea what they've done but that's all about to change with Peter's Pentecost sermon.

He crushes them with one blow of the law after another, "*Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.*"²³ *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.*"²⁴ *But God raised him from the dead.* Peter told them, "You did this. You are responsible." But they weren't there. Only a limited number of people were influential and demanding of his death.

Although there were specific instigators and executioners, the rejection of Jesus that led to his death was based on ignorance (Acts 13:27). Humanity as a whole failed to recognize what God was doing through Jesus; his resurrection and exaltation now leave humanity without excuse. But ignorance of the law does not excuse the consequences of the law. Just try explaining to the officer that you didn't know the speed limit. It doesn't matter. You're still accountable for your actions.³⁷ *When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"* This is like David's confession, "I have sinned against the Lord," They had the sensation of being stabbed by a dagger. They were horrified. They realized the utter helpless situation into which they've fallen. They can't see a way out. They don't know what to do or if there is anything they can do. At this time, Peter doesn't take another stab at them by requiring them to get down on their knees and beg for mercy.

Peter immediately answers, "*Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" This wasn't just something reserved for a few people but for all people, near and far. This is the second part of repentance: faith that holds on to the promise as the most precious treasure we have. That being said, this along with 1 Peter 3:21 is one of the most debated passages in scripture. Why? Because of what Scripture clearly says. There are two verbs "Repent," and "Be baptized," followed by a prepositional phrase, "for the forgiveness of sins." The prepositional phrase is usually attached to the closest verb, "Be baptized." But the verbs are joined by the little word, "and." It can be argued that for the forgiveness of sins should be applied to "be baptized" alone or both verbs but not "repent" alone. It is unreasonable to attach the prepositional phrase to the word 'repent' alone. If that's the case then Peter has just said, "baptism forgives sins." And no one debated Peter. And I'm not about to start either.

They understood what Peter was saying, baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Not something they're doing but something that is happening to them. This is passive. Just as they are baptized by someone a gift is poured out on them, the Holy Spirit.

But do we understand the need for us to be baptized? You didn't hammer the nails or crack the whip. You didn't stand in the crowds shouting, "Crucify him...Crucify him!" Until someone is hurt, they won't recognize the need to be healed. Until we recognize the seriousness of our sin – there is no need to talk about the good news of what God has done for you.

Maybe we don't realize who Jesus is. For some, Jesus is just the guidance counselor doling out good advice but never actually expecting you to repent. Then there is the Jesus who is example for us to follow. If only you could be more like him you'd be saved. For some Jesus is like their fairy-god mother who has come simply to grant wishes and make this world a wonderful place. But rarely does society get Jesus right. He is Jesus the Christ – The one in whom all the fullness of the deity dwells. He is God. The one who created and still holds this world together and the one we stand in defiance against when we continue in sin. Fail to repent.

Repentance means more than regret or feel sorry as if we need to work up in ourselves some sort of guilt and shame and feel really really bad for a long time. Repentance is a total change from one direction to another from thinking Jesus is an imposter that should be put to death to fully realizing the depth of your sin and what you have done in disobeying God. It means you move from living like a pagan to like that of a Christian, from hypocrite to the real thing.

Do we gladly hear and learn the Word or are we just pretending? Are we devoted to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and prayer? The sad fact is we often come up with silly excuses for missing out on the body of Christ. It's too hot. I'm too tired. I get more out of nature than I do in church. The music isn't my style. I can watch a TV preacher, nothing like the warm glow of a TV screen to keep you company or to encourage others. We do livestream but that in no way is a replacement for gathering together with Christians, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer. Can you imagine a marriage that only meets on livestream? It won't last long. They're something to be said for being devoted to one another, "to stick by or be close at hand, *attach oneself to, wait on, be faithful to someone.*" There is something to be said for building up the body and being there for others.

For this we should be cut to the heart but there is hope.

Peter announces God's plan: repentance, baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and the Holy Spirit. A great change had taken place among the Jews that day, 3,000 were added to their number. Formerly they were involved in putting Jesus to death, now they believe he is the Messiah, their savior from sin, who has come to bind up the broken hearted. And this repentance, this turning is more than just saying they are sorry. They truly believed it. verses 42-47 will make clear, it entails a complete change of lifestyle. It's no surprise that they met together, those who have gone through traumatic events in life generally tend to join together. Look at those who serve in the military, those with similar struggles, even those who went through heart surgery. They all have something in common and so does the church. They've been there. They know. They support one another. They are there for one another. They point one another to the one thing needful when everything is falling apart.

Our needs are truly met in the one thing needful, Jesus. The first Christian church got that right, "*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*" The teaching to which they devoted themselves was the message about Jesus proclaimed by his apostles. Jesus, the divine Son of God and our Savior, was crucified and buried, but he rose

from the dead. The apostles' teaching included the words, actions, and teachings of the Lord Jesus. The breaking of bread is a reference to the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion that they observed regularly. Teaching, fellowship, praying, and Holy Communion were the focal points of the first Christian church.

This wasn't a "see you next Sunday" kind of fellowship. Their lives were completely devoted to each other because they were all devoted to their Savior. Just think of the dangerous times in which they lived. They supported one another. They were built up by one another. And that makes sense. So hear the Word of the Lord. Listen and let that word take root. Talk with others you don't know. Talk with those older and younger than you. You may not have much in common but you do have something that binds you together. Plan some meals. Plan to come. Remember the writer to the Hebrews words of encouragement, *"Do not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encourage one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching."*

Remember your baptism There we find forgiveness. There you will find that your sins have been washed away. Your baptism connects you to Jesus' death (Rom. 6:3). The very death your sins brought Jesus is the same death that Jesus used to take away your sins! You are right with God again! You want to be renewed? Look to your baptism! The Holy Spirit is still at work in you, renewing you and building you up even when you've been pierced to the heart or finger. No matter the situation and how hopeless it may seem we have hope because we are baptized. We are forgiven. We have added to those who are being saved. Amen.