

Saved: God's Plan of Salvation

Week 7: Baptism for the Forgiveness of Sins -- Acts 2:36–41

It is the birthday of the church, and Jerusalem is packed. Pilgrims from a dozen nations crowd the streets, and something has happened that no one can explain. The followers of a crucified teacher are suddenly proclaiming, in language after language, that this Jesus, dead and buried seven weeks ago, is alive. Peter, the man who only weeks before had denied even knowing Him, stands up and preaches the first gospel sermon ever delivered. He builds his case carefully, and then drives it home like a nail: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

The word lands like a blow. These are some of the very people who, weeks earlier, had shouted for His blood. And now they learn that the man they crucified is the Lord of glory and the long-awaited Messiah. Luke tells us they were "cut to the heart." It is one of the most honest moments in the Bible. They do not argue, they do not make excuses, they do not walk away. They cry out the most important question a human being can ask: "Brothers, what shall we do?" When the truth about Jesus finally pierces a heart, that is the question it leaves behind. Not "what do I now believe," but "what shall I do?"

Peter's answer is so clear that no one in that crowd could have misunderstood it: "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." There it is, the plan of salvation in a single sentence, spoken on the very first day. Turn from your sin, and be immersed into Jesus, and your sins will be washed away, and the Spirit of God will be given to you. This was not offered as a suggestion for the spiritually ambitious. It was the God-appointed answer to a desperate question, and three thousand people answered it that day.

And notice the promise that frames it: "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." That is you. That is us. The same answer Peter gave on Pentecost is the answer still. So this week we stand in that Jerusalem crowd, cut to the heart, and we ask the same question they asked. Read these verses slowly, and listen for Peter's reply, because it is meant for you.

Group Discussion: When the crowd was "cut to the heart" and cried out, "what shall we do?" Peter answered, "Repent and be baptized... for the forgiveness of your sins" (vv. 37–38). Why do you think Peter gave such a specific, action-oriented answer rather than simply telling them to believe or pray? What does that tell us about how a person responds to the gospel?

Personal Reflection: When was the last time the truth about Jesus genuinely cut you to the heart and moved you to ask, "what shall I do?" Has your own heart grown comfortable and unmoved, and what would it take for the wonder and weight of the gospel to pierce you again this week?

Study Questions

1. Peter's sermon climaxes with the declaration that "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (v. 36). Why is this the high point of the whole sermon, and what does it mean to declare that the crucified Jesus is now both "Lord" and "Christ"?
2. The crowd was "cut to the heart" when they realized the truth about Jesus and their own guilt. When the gospel cuts that deeply, it always demands a response. Where in your life has God's truth recently pierced you, and how have you responded, with action, or with excuses and delay?
3. To the question "what shall we do?" Peter answered, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (v. 38). Walk through Peter's answer step by step. Why is it significant that this clear, specific response was given on the very first day the gospel was ever preached?
4. Three thousand people that day did not merely agree with Peter; they "received his word" and were baptized (v. 41). Is there a step of obedient response to the gospel that you know you should take but have been putting off? What is keeping you from doing it?
5. Peter says to be baptized "for the forgiveness of your sins" (v. 38). What does this teach us about the purpose and meaning of baptism, and how does it fit with everything Scripture says about forgiveness coming through the blood of Christ?
6. Forgiveness is one of the deepest needs of the human heart. What would change in the way you carry yourself day to day if you were fully assured that in Christ your sins have truly been washed away and forgiven? Where do you still live as though your guilt has the last word?
7. Luke records that those who received the word "were added that day, about three thousand souls" (v. 41), and the Lord kept adding to their number (v. 47). What does it mean that the saved were "added," and how does this show that responding to the gospel brings a person not only forgiveness but membership in the one body, the church?
8. Peter said the promise was "for you and for your children and for all who are far off" (v. 39). Who in your life is "far off" and needs to hear that this same promise is for them? What is one step you could take this week to carry Peter's answer to someone who is asking, even quietly, "what shall I do?"
9. Peter commanded baptism "for the forgiveness of... sins," yet Scripture is equally clear that forgiveness is by the grace of God through the blood of Christ, never earned by anything we do. How does Acts 2:38 present baptism as the God-appointed response of faith, the moment a believing, repentant heart receives the forgiveness Christ purchased, rather than as a meritorious work that earns salvation or as a mere symbol added after a person is already saved? And what does it mean that this same day, with these same words, the Lord's church began and people were added to it?
10. Look back over this scene, the piercing word, the desperate question, the clear answer, the three thousand saved and added to the church. Name one specific way Jesus is calling you

to respond this week. If you have never repented and been baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, what is keeping you? If you have, how is He calling you to live as one forgiven and added to His people?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Acts 22:16, be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name; Mark 16:15–16, whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; Acts 2:42–47, the life of the first church and the Lord adding to it daily; 1 Corinthians 12:13, by one Spirit baptized into one body; Ephesians 1:7, redemption and forgiveness through His blood.