

Bible Study 8 – Acts 2:37-41 – God’s grace in repentance and faith!

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” 38 And Peter said to them, “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. 39 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.” 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

1. The Apostle Peter’s preaching Christ crucified and risen provokes a reaction or response in many of those who had listened to him: Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

a) Preaching Christ calls for a response. It purposefully elicits a reaction – and we desire a positive response. Peter in addressing the crowd on that Pentecost Sunday was in effect saying, ‘hear and heed’ this Word. And that should be true for every preacher. Preachers are called to herald God’s word. They are merely messengers communicating God’s revealed will.

The Apostle Paul would later write: For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2Cor.4:5-6).

b) Preaching Christ calls for conviction. In the one preaching and in those who hear the good news. The gospel is designed to convince us that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour. And hence crucified and risen – he died for our sins and rose again for our justification. It reveals our need and the remedy for it in Jesus Christ. Therefore, there is the bad news of our sin and its effect upon us and our relationships with God and others but there then follows the remedy for it in the person of the Saviour. Thus, our guilt is met by God’s amazing grace in Jesus whom we are called to believe in.

So, the gospel’s primary purpose is to route us to and root us in Jesus. We are called to receive and rest in him through faith.

c) Preaching Christ calls for comprehension and commitment. It is a matter of the heart. It demands a change of heart. And it produces faith and repentance. The heart in the Bible depicts not only the affections, emotions, and intellect but it also includes the will. And therefore, the word by the Spirit works in us a transformation summarised by these key words, faith and repentance.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb.4:12).

Faith receives and rests in God's grace, love, and mercy in Christ's gospel. And it is accompanied by repentance meaning to turn to God – to reorientate one's life in a God-ward direction. It is akin to a U-turn. To live before the face of God. This in a nutshell is what the gospel is designed to do.

2. The Apostle Peter prompts and pleads with all to repent, be baptised, and receive God's grace: And Peter said to them, "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. 39 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."

a) Baptism is a sign and seal of God's grace to us. And hence of his covenant promise and faithfulness. And therefore, the sacrament was instituted by God. It is a fitting symbol not only of God's promise but of his grace at work in us producing the fruits of repentance and faith. For it ritually symbolises cleansing and hence the use of water. It visually communicates the new birth. It symbolises our taking hold of God's promises for ourselves and our children.

It marks our association with Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the living God. And therefore, our turning to God in the name of Jesus in whom we have forgiveness of sins. It communicates communion with God the Father in and through the Son by the Spirit. And therefore, in the words of institution found at the end of Matthew's Gospel it is in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And that is through faith in Christ. For only in him do we come to know the Father and receive the gift of the Spirit. Only in Christ is God's grace made effectual in his people.

b) Note how faith and repentance are sealed with the gift of the Spirit. Paul writing to the church in Ephesus says of Christ: In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory (Eph.1:13-14).

Now, without entering a lengthy theological discourse here, it is evident from the Bible that the Spirit is active in enabling people to believe in Jesus. And so, while regeneration and faith are different things, they accompany one another by God's grace.

The Spirit indwells us. He illuminates the word in scripture to reveal the Word Incarnate and unites us to him. He is our Helper. He aids, assures, and assists us. He comforts, convicts, and counsels us. He equips, enables, and encourages us. He works faith in us and its resultant fruits: the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control (Gal.5:22-23a).

c) Note too how this gospel call is for men and women, boys, and girls. It is for parents and their children. It is for Jew and Gentile alike. It is for all. 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." Trusting in God's grace, Peter bids all believe and belong.

God's covenant promises are yes and amen in and through and because of Jesus, the Christ, the one and only Son. Great is God's faithfulness towards us in Christ. God calls people through Christ's gospel. He draws us to himself with cords of love in Jesus the Son. We

receive Jesus, the Spirit, and sonship (the gift of adoption to fallen humanity) by God's glorious grace.

3. The Apostle Peter's reward for his labours is the reception of three thousand new members to Christ's church: And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

a) Peter preached passionately – with heart, soul, mind, and strength. He did so for love's sake. Just like Paul he could have said: For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again (2Cor.5:14-15). And Peter enjoyed fruit for his labours by God's grace.

If the church is to grow and expand then the gospel must be communicated near and far. And we are reminded of this in the Letter to the Romans: How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" 16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "LORD, who has believed our report?" 17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom.10:14-17).

b) Peter participated in God's plan and purpose in bringing salvation to some three thousand people that day. Through preaching Christ crucified and risen these people received life, light, and love who received and responded positively. For Jesus Christ is the source of all three. He is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the Light of the world. He is not only God the Father's love gift, but he is love personified.

c) Peter played a vital role in building and expanding Christ's church and God's kingdom of love. Because baptism is into Christ it also marks our entry into Christ's body which is the church. While we are individually recipients of God's grace in Christ which is seen through our faith and repentance, we also become part of something much bigger than ourselves. We enter communion with God and one another. We become part of a community. We enter a fellowship as God's family by the Spirit of adoption in Christ. We are called to be God's children rooted and built up in love.

Questions

1. How important do you think is preaching to the church today?
2. What place do faith and repentance have in the Christian life?
3. How faithful are we to communicate the Christ of the Bible?
4. What evidence is there for the Spirit's presence in our lives?