

Sermons
The Biblical Priority of Baptism
Acts 2:37-39
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This week I was reading some about water. I don't know if you've ever thought much about water. If you haven't, you should. You should be praying for it here in Texas as we see the desperate need of it. But water is the most common substance on earth. It covers over 70% of the earth's surface. It's in the ground beneath us. It's in the air we breathe. In fact, all living things are made mostly of water. For example, the human body, they tell us, is 65% water. An elephant's body is 70% water. The body of a chicken, 75% water. The same is true for the food we eat. A potato and a pineapple are both 80% water. The tomato is 95% water. Water is absolutely essential for sustaining life on this planet.

As I read about it this week, there were just a number of interesting facts that jumped out at me. You're aware of the one, of course, that water is the only substance naturally occurring on earth, in the normal range of temperature, that can be a solid, a liquid, or a gas. But the fact about water that fascinated me most, and I think the most remarkable thing about the water on this planet, is something I'd never really thought of before. Scientists tell us that because of the hydrological cycle, the water cycle that keeps water moving on this planet, there is as much water on earth today as there ever has been on earth or ever will be. We never really lose any water from our planet. It simply changes from one form to another and moves from one place to another. The water that you showered or bathed in this morning might have flowed in Russia's Volga River last year, or it might have been the glass of water that Alexander the Great drank 2,000 years ago.

In the physical world, water is one of the greatest of God's creations. So, it's no surprise that when you come to the spiritual world, God chose water to be a sign of the radical change that occurs in the believer in salvation; a sign that points to a great spiritual reality through one of the two ordinances that Christ gave His church, the ordinance of baptism. Now for a variety of reasons, baptism has become far less important among contemporary Christians than it was in the early church. I think our attitude, our sort of weak attitude toward baptism, shows itself primarily in two ways. I think for those Christians who have already been baptized, we tend to either not to really understand its meaning, or we certainly fail to live in the light of its implications on a weekly basis in our Christian lives. I think another way this weak attitude

toward baptism shows itself is in the amazing statistic that many professing Christians have never been baptized. Understand that baptism was foundational from the very beginning of the Christian faith.

Turn back to Matthew 28. You're familiar with what is commonly called the Great Commission. After our Lord's resurrection, probably a week and a half to two weeks after the resurrection, He gathered with His followers on a mountain in Galilee. We're told; Matthew tells us the eleven were there. It's also possible, and many Bible scholars believe, that it was on this occasion that the 500 witnesses mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15 were also present. So, you have this large group. Perhaps all of the followers of Jesus from His ministry gather with Him on a mountain in Galilee. And as they gather, verse 17 says,

When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were [still] doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."

The Father has given Me universal authority, and in light of that, here's what I'm telling you to do: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." To make a disciple is to communicate the gospel and to see them come to follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This is like saying, take the gospel and see people converted to be My followers. Once you have made disciples, then you are to baptize "them in the name of the Father ... the Son and the Holy Spirit." And then you are to teach them, not only "all that I commanded you," but "to observe all that I commanded you." And as you carry out these instructions, "lo, I am with you always."

And then He makes it clear this is not just a mission for the eleven and when they die, or the 500 that are alive at that time die, the mission's over, He says, "lo, I am with you" as you carry out this command or this commission "even to the end of the age." So, what Jesus commanded on that mountain in Galilee a week and a half after His resurrection is still incumbent on us as well. We are to make disciples, and when a person becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ, then he is to be baptized, and then he is to be taught.

Now, that command that our Lord gave on that mountainside begins to be fleshed out immediately in the life of the early church. The church actually began on the Day of Pentecost. By the way, the word "Pentecost" simply means "the 50th." It means the 50th day after Passover. So, Jesus died on Passover in April of, probably, 30 AD. And 50 days later came the next required feast for Jewish males, and that was Passover (Pentecost). And it was on that day that

the church was born. And so, to see how important this ordinance of baptism is, I want us to look at the very beginning, the day the church was born.

Turn with me to Acts 2. Acts 2. And of course, Peter here preaches a sermon, and much of it, or some of it's recorded here, not much, but some of it. I want to skip through a couple of sections. Let me just give you some sections that summarize it. Look down at Acts 2:22. Peter says—now understand the setting. Peter is on the temple grounds talking to a great crowd of people, who have gathered for the celebration of the Feast of Pentecost. And he says to them,

“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.”

And then Peter goes on to defend from the Scripture, why the Messiah had to both die and be raised from the dead. You get to his conclusion in verse 36:

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!” So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added [to the church] about three thousand souls.

Now the thrust of Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost was the person of Jesus Christ. And that was because the Jews who were listening to him, who had gathered for the Feast of Pentecost, they already knew the rest of the gospel. They already knew that God is the righteous

Creator, who has given laws whereby His creatures are to live. They understood that. They understood that man is a rebellious sinner, that they had violated God's Law. That's why they were there to make sacrifice. That's why the Temple existed. But what they didn't understand at all was that Jesus of Nazareth was the righteous Savior, whom God has sent to die and to be raised again with reference to sin. So that's where Peter spends his time in this sermon. He proves that from both eyewitness testimony (his and the other eleven) as well as from the Old Testament Scripture.

Peter said much more that day than Luke records. Look at verse 40, "With many other words he solemnly testified." You can read this sermon here that Luke's recorded in just a few minutes. (Thankfully, as a preacher he said a lot more than that. Sort of justifies me doing that I suppose.) But there were other things he didn't mention that he could've mentioned. For example, Luke doesn't record any mention in Peter's sermon of why Jesus had to die. It's clear that His death and resurrection were somehow related to the forgiveness of sins, but Peter probably explained the nature of the substitutionary atonement of Christ as he did in his first letter where he says, "He Himself bore our sins in His [own] body on the cross ... that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds [we are] healed." He probably explained that that day.

But regardless of what he said or didn't say, look at his conclusion in verse 36. Here is the point: "... let all the house of Israel know [and know] for certain that God has made Him both Lord and [Christos]." The Greek word is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "mashiach", the Messiah. He's "made Him both Lord and [Messiah]—this Jesus whom you crucified." He is the Sovereign One and He is the Promised One the Old Testament said would come to deal with sin.

Now when he finished, look at the response of a large number of his audience in verse 37: "... when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart." Can you imagine if you had been there that day, and perhaps you had been present at the Feast of Passover, and you had at least tacitly approved the death of Jesus? Maybe you just wrote it off as, "Yeah, He's a troublemaker, and He may not have done anything worthy of death, but it's certainly understandable why the authorities want to get rid of Him." Or perhaps you were in the crowd chanting, "Crucify Him!"

Can you imagine now to be standing there 50 days later on the Day of Pentecost, hearing a sermon, God convicting you of your sin, and you realize the enormity of what you did 50 days before, that you actually participated in the murder of Israel's Messiah? So, their question is "What shall we do?" How can we now be made right with the God of Israel, whose Messiah we just killed? How can we be saved from God's just wrath against our sins?

You know, that's a very good question, isn't it? If you're here this morning and you know that you are not right with God; you know that you have sinned against your conscience and against His Law again and again and again and again, listen up. Because Peter is about to tell the people who actually killed God's only Son how they can be right with God. And whatever you've done, it's not worse than that. It's equal to that, because before we come to Christ, we are rejecting God's offer of salvation, we're rejecting His Son, and so our guilt is equal to theirs. But it's not worse. And so, there's hope, just as there was for those who heard Peter's sermon that day in May of 30 AD. Maybe you're asking yourself in light of your own guilt, what can I do? Look at Peter's answer in verses 38 and 39:

Peter *said* to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and [for] your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."

Now in this amazing passage, Peter tells the people gathered there that day, and he tells us, how we ought to respond to the gospel. It's really two responses, and I want us to look at them together.

The first response that we should have to the gospel is this: repent and believe the gospel. In verse 38, Peter simply says, "Repent." That's his shorthand version of how we must respond to the truths that God is a righteousness and holy Creator who demands obedience, that we are rebellious sinners who have spurned His Law and rebelled against it, and that Jesus is the only Redeemer. How do we respond? Simply, "Repent."

By the way, this was Jesus' message. In Matthew 4: 17, it says from the time of His baptism, "... Jesus began to preach and [to] say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is [near].'" In fact, this is how Jesus summarized His entire earthly ministry. Listen to Him in Luke 5:32, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Jesus says I came to earth for the express purpose of calling those who are sinners, and know they are, to repentance. This was His ministry.

It was also the message of the Apostles, obviously, here in Acts 2:38, but let's look at some other examples. Turn over to chapter 3, and look at verse 19. This is Peter's second sermon. He comes back to this same theme. This was also in the temple courts after they healed the lame man. And in verse 19, here's how he concludes: "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins

may be wiped away....” Look over in chapter 14 of Acts. Chapter 14:15. Paul is in Lystra, and you remember they are treated like gods because of the healing miracle that they perform. In verse 15 of Acts 14, Paul says, “... ‘Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and [we] preach the gospel to you.’” And here’s the response to that gospel: “... that you should turn from these vain things....” That’s another word for repentance. “... turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM.” Over on Mars Hill, in Acts 17, Acts 17:30, as Paul concludes his sermon on the Areopagus there in Athens, he ends it the same way:

“Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man [and He showed who that would be] by raising Him from the dead.”

Look over in Acts 26. Acts 26:20. As Paul summarizes his ministry to King Agrippa, he says, “King Agrippa, I ... kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, [And here was my message.] that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.” Repent, and show the fruit of repentance in your life. So, repentance, then, is how a person, a sinner, can be made right with God.

You say, well, in other places isn’t the issue faith? Isn’t faith made the right response to the gospel? The answer is yes, that’s true. For example, in Acts 16:30 you remember the story of the Philippian jailer. After the earthquake he comes running out, and he says to Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And Paul responds to the Philippian jailer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus [Christ], and you will be saved.” So, there’s, in some places, faith is the right response to the gospel, in other places repentance is the right response to the gospel, and in some places the two are combined. Look over at Acts 20. Acts 20:21. Here as Paul’s talking to the Ephesian elders telling them goodbye, as he’s on his way to Jerusalem, he says, when I was with you, verse 20,

“... I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable ... teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks [And here’s what the essence of my ministry was.] ... repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” [Repentance and faith.]

Now, what I want you to see is clear, is that repentance is an essential part of the gospel message. In fact, you remember, after His resurrection in Luke 24, our Lord was explaining the Old Testament and Himself in the Old Testament to His disciples. And in Luke 24:46, Jesus said to His disciples,

Thus it is written, that the [Messiah] would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations....

Jesus said this has always been the mission. It was prophesied in the Old Testament, and it's the mission today. Repentance is the essence of the gospel message.

You say, why do you belabor that? Are there those who question that? Absolutely. Sadly, there are those who question whether or not repentance should be a part of salvation. One of the founders of Dallas Theological Seminary, Louis Sperry Chafer, in his *Systematic Theology*, writes, "The New Testament does not impose repentance upon the unsaved as a condition of salvation." Now frankly, I have a hard time figuring out what Book of Acts he's reading, because it seems very clear. But in fairness, here's why. Chafer and others like him would say this. They would say, repentance is a work, a human work, so if you demand that the sinner repent to be saved, you're creating a works-based salvation. And if that were true, if repentance were a work, that would be true. But that's not what the Scripture teaches. The Scripture teaches that repentance is in fact not a human work, but a gift God gives the sinner.

Look over at Acts 5. Acts 5:31. Here, Peter says to the Sanhedrin, verse 30,

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, [Now watch the rest of the verse.] [and He grants] repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

Just as God gives forgiveness, He also gives repentance as a gift. Look over in 11:18. Peter recounts to his fellow Jews what happened with Cornelius and all that happened in the salvation of Gentiles in Cornelius' household. And their response in Acts 11:18 is this, "When they heard [Peter's report], they quieted down and glorified God, [And this is what they said.] 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also ... repentance ... to life.'" God has granted them repentance. He's given repentance to them. So, repentance then is not a work. It is a gift God grants the

sinner.

Now, why is repentance necessary? Why is it required to be right with God? Listen carefully, because I think this is absolutely crucial to understand. Genuine, saving faith is faith in Christ for salvation from what? Salvation from sin and its penalty, God's wrath. Right? So, salvation is all about being saved from sin and its penalty. If faith longs for salvation from sin, then there must be what? A hatred of that sin. There must be a desire to be rescued from that sin. So, faith goes together with repentance. Faith without repentance could simply be called a false faith, an easy believism, not true faith. A biblical faith always repents, and a biblical repentance always believes. So, faith and repentance are inseparably united. They're two sides of the same coin. That's why Paul said to the Ephesian elders, my message was "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

So, what does it mean to repent? Peter says, "Repent." What does that mean? The Westminster Shorter Catechism has a great definition. Question 87 defines it like this:

What is repentance unto life? Answer: repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God with full purpose of new obedience.

I love that definition. Listen to the components. He really understands the severity of his sin. He really understands that there's hope and help for him in Christ. He is overcome with grief and hatred about his sin: what his sin has done to himself, what it's done to the people around him, and ultimately what it's done to God his Creator. And with all of that understanding, he desires to turn from his sin and pursue obedience to God.

So, then true repentance includes three elements. It is an intellectual change. In 2 Timothy 2:25, Paul defines it like this: there is "... repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth..."

Repentance involves an intellectual change: you understand your sin for what it is like you didn't before, you understand Christ like you didn't before, there is a change in your thinking about the truth.

But it's more than that. There's also an emotional change. In 2 Corinthians 7:10 Paul speaks about the godly sorrow that produces repentance. Where there is genuine repentance, there is godly sorrow over sin. A person can't be flippant about their sin and have experienced

repentance. There is (as we'll learn in the Beatitudes) a mourning over sin in the heart of a true Christian. So, there's an intellectual change that is involved in repentance; there's an emotional change.

Thirdly, there's a volitional change. In Acts 8:22 Peter says to Simon the Sorcerer, "... repent of this wickedness of yours," of what's going on right now in your life, Simon. And of course, John the Baptist does that over and over again. He says, you know, if you're extorting money, if you're a soldier extorting money from someone, stop doing that; show the fruit of repentance. So, there has to be a decision of the will to desert your sin, to turn from your sin. Repentance is not a perfect life; repentance is a willingness to leave all that you know to be sin in your life.

So, the first response to the gospel is to repent of your sin and believe in Christ and the gospel. But let's look at a second response that Peter gives us here, and it's to publicly confess Jesus as Lord. You're going to respond to the gospel, you must repent and believe, but you must also publicly confess Jesus as Lord. Look again at Acts 2:38. Peter replied, "Repent." And then he says, "And ... be baptized [every one of you] in the name of Jesus Christ." Now let me see if I can bring out the meaning of that expression.

First of all, consider the word "baptize". That is a Greek word that has never been translated into English, and honestly, I think that's unfortunate. Instead, it's the Greek word "baptizo", simply transliterated into English and not translated. This is the only word in the New Testament used to describe believer's baptism. Every classic lexicon of the Greek language that I have in my library defines the word "baptizo" as meaning "to dip or to plunge, usually under water." To dip or to plunge, usually under water.

Now in the New Testament, you have to be clear in your thinking. There are several different types of baptism. So, think with me just for a moment about the kinds of New Testament baptism. I think this can be confusing for people, so let me just sort it out for you very quickly. Essentially, there are three different kinds of baptism in the New Testament.

First of all, there's John's baptism. John the Baptist baptized people, including Jesus. What was that about? Well, by the time of Jesus, if a Gentile wanted to become a true proselyte to Judaism, he had to undergo what was called proselyte baptism. He had to be baptized. He went into the water as a Gentile. That old life was, as it were, bathed away from him, and he came out new, now with a new spiritual relationship to Israel. Into that background comes a man name John, that we know as John the Baptist. And John's baptism was very much proselyte baptism. It was

a baptism of repentance, turning from idols to the true God. But it wasn't for Gentiles, it was for Jews. When John baptized those Jews that came out to him, you know what he was saying? He was saying, you are no closer to the kingdom of the Messiah that's coming than the Gentiles are; if you want to truly be a part of the true Israel, you need proselyte baptism, you need to repent of your worship of false gods and idols and get ready, because the Messiah's coming. Understand that John's baptism was not Christian baptism. That's why in Acts 19 when Paul comes to Ephesus and finds men there who have only experienced John's baptism and nothing more, he teaches them and then rebaptizes them in the name of Jesus Christ.

But John's baptism was preparation for Christian baptism. Because in Acts 19:4, this is what Paul said: "... John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is ... Jesus." So, he said you need to get ready, you need to become a true Jew, as it were, a true believer in the God of Israel, and get ready, because the Messiah's coming. That was the baptism of John.

The second kind of baptism in the New Testament is the baptism of the Spirit. There's no water in this baptism. The baptism of the Spirit. We read about it in 1 Corinthians 12:13, "... By one Spirit [Paul says] we were all..." Now he's talking about all believers. This is universally true. Every believer has experienced this. "By one Spirit we were all baptized ...": past tense, past event. That means at the moment of salvation this happened. "We were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." Paul says this is something that happened to every Christian at the moment of salvation. We were immersed into the body of Christ. We were united to Christ. And you are still united to Jesus Christ. And thank God that can never be severed.

The third kind of baptism is Christian baptism. What we normally call *believer's baptism*, that's what Peter is referring to here in Acts 2.

Now that raises the next important issue. What is the relationship between baptism and salvation? How are they related? There are churches that teach that baptism is the *cause* of our salvation. Theologians call that view "baptismal regeneration"; that is, by baptism you are regenerated, you are given new spiritual life, it is the cause of that new life. New spiritual life is either effected by baptism, or it can't be effected without baptism. That's what baptismal regenerists believe. Now, the churches that teach this view of baptismal regeneration are the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, here's a quotation from the Council of Trent: "If anyone says that baptism is not necessary unto salvation, let him be damned." Pretty clear.

The other churches that hold this view are the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Anglican Church. If you pick up the “Book of Common Prayer” of the Anglican Church, you can read very clearly in the “Book of Common Prayer” that baptism is necessary for salvation. And some Lutherans believe this—not all of them. In our area, another prevalent church that teaches this doctrine is the Church of Christ.

Now, those who teach this view have a few passages they like to use, but this one, Acts 2:38, is their favorite. In fact, the Church of Christ, some of the teachers in the Church of Christ like to call their version of the gospel the “Acts 2:38 gospel.” So, look at that verse for a moment, because at first glance it does appear to say that a person needs to repent and be baptized for forgiveness. Now, their entire argument hangs on the Greek preposition here translated “for.” They say it must mean, be baptized *in order to receive* forgiveness. But that’s absolutely not what this verse is teaching. Let me briefly give you several arguments against that interpretation.

Let’s start, first argument, with the preposition, the Greek preposition and the very meanings of that preposition. In Greek, most prepositions have a lot of meanings, just like our own English prepositions do. They can be widely varied. And so, to nail a doctrine on one preposition and its use is a dangerous thing. Let me give you an example. You don’t need to turn there, but in Matthew 3:11, this same preposition occurs. John the Baptist says this: “I baptize you with water for repentance.” Same preposition: “eis”. It looks like “eis” in English. “Eis”. Now if we take the preposition in Matthew 3:11 the same way they want us to take it in Acts 2, here’s how it would read. John would be saying something like this: I baptize you in order for you to receive repentance. Is that what John the Baptist was saying? No. If you know anything about John’s ministry, you know he baptized people *because* they had repented.

In fact, he refused to baptize some because he didn’t see them yet bringing forth the fruit of repentance in their lives. So, in Matthew 3:11, the preposition means exactly the opposite of what they want it to mean in Acts 2:38. Consider another example, Matthew 12:41. Jesus says the men of Nineveh “repented at the preaching of Jonah.” “At” is again that Greek preposition translated “for” in Acts 2:38. So, if we take it the way they want us to take it in Acts 2, then Jesus was saying this: the men of Nineveh repented in order to receive the preaching of Jonah. You think that’s right? I don’t think people like preaching that much. No, of course not. Obviously, the men of Nineveh repented *because of* the preaching of Jonah. So, what happens if we interpret the preposition “eis” in Acts 2:38 like it’s used in both of those passages? Listen to how it reads: repent and be baptized each of you because your sins have been forgiven.

Now, we can't be sure of what sense of the preposition is intended in that passage, because as I said, there are a lot of varied senses of that preposition. It could be something vague like "with reference to" or "with connection to." In which case, Peter's not telling us what the relationship is between baptism and forgiveness in this passage. But regardless, you cannot build a case for baptismal regeneration on that verse.

Another argument I would use against the position that says baptism saves is the order of the Great Commission we looked at in Matthew 28. Jesus says, make disciples, then baptize them, then teach them. The making disciples comes first.

A third argument would be those New Testament passages that downplay baptism. How could Paul in 1 Corinthians 1, if baptism is necessary for salvation, how could Paul say in 1 Corinthians 1, "I thank God that I baptized none of you," and, "[Jesus] Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel"?

Another argument is Romans and Galatians. The entire books were written to argue that justification is by faith alone.

A fifth argument: Galatians teaches that adding to faith, even a ceremony that God commanded like circumcision, produces, according to chapter 1 of Galatians, a false gospel, and according to chapter 2 of Galatians, false brethren, not genuine Christians. So, you add even a ceremony that God required (like circumcision or baptism) to salvation by faith alone, and you have a false gospel, and you've produced false Christians. That's what Paul said in Galatians 1 and 2.

Another argument though is just the context of the rest of Acts. If you look at what Luke says in the rest of Acts, it becomes clear that he doesn't mean here that baptism saves, because in the rest of Acts, baptism follows other important things. Look at Acts 2. Acts 2:41, "So then, those who had received..." Peter's words, his message, they received it, they're the ones who "were baptized..." You say, well, what does that mean? Well, look down in verse 44, "... all those who had believed..." In other words, the exercising of faith in Jesus Christ came before baptism.

Look over at 8:12. You see this same thing in the ministry of Phillip: "But when they believed Phillip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized..." When they believed, then they were baptized. Look at 18:8. In Corinth, Paul's ministry in Corinth, a man named "Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed

in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and [then they were] being baptized.” Faith preceded baptism. By the way, look back at 10:47. When Peter’s in the house of Cornelius, something else precedes baptism, 10:47, “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have [already] received the Holy Spirit just as we *did*, can he?” In other words, they received the Word, they exercised faith, they received the Spirit—all before they were baptized.

So, water baptism is not a cause of salvation; it’s not a component of salvation. So, if baptism doesn’t secure our salvation, here’s the big question. Why did Peter bring it up in this message to a huge crowd of unbelievers? Why did he even bring up baptism at all? Well, that brings us back to the meaning of baptism. Several years ago now, I preached a message on baptism, and I brought out that there are three different meanings behind baptism.

You can listen to that if you want, but one of those meanings really helps explain why Peter would bring it up in this message to a crowd of unbelievers. And it’s this. Here is one of the primary purposes of baptism: baptism is primarily a public confession of faith in Jesus Christ. It is primarily a public confession of faith in Jesus Christ. In fact—history is very clear. In the early church, from the beginning, even in New Testament times, baptism was accompanied by a verbal confession. Just before you went down in the water, you said to everyone gathered there, “Jesus is Lord.” That’s what the expression “be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” means.

In fact, over in Acts 22:16 it says Paul was baptized “calling on” the “name” of the Lord Jesus; that is, in an open and public confession that he was a disciple, a follower, of Jesus Christ. So, to be baptized in Jesus’ name means to be baptized by His authority, acknowledging His rightful claims, submitting to and subscribing to His teaching, engaging in His service, and ultimately relying on His merits alone as your only hope.

Now, this is very important. You say, why is this public confession thing even an issue? Is it important? Listen, both Jesus and Paul insist that salvation is not genuine when there is an unwillingness to publicly confess Jesus as Lord. It’s not real salvation if you’re not willing to publicly confess Jesus as Lord. Listen to Jesus in Matthew 10:32,

Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men [public confession], I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

He's not talking about a one-time denial like Peter's, or even three or four times like Peter did on the night of His crucifixion. He's talking about a lifelong unwillingness to publicly confess Jesus as Lord. Turn over to Romans 10, because Paul makes this same point in Romans 10. In verse 8 he says, here's the word of faith, the message of faith, that we're preaching; this is the essence of our message. Verse 9,

... that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved [you will be spiritually rescued from sin and its penalty]; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Now, these aren't two different activities. It's not like confessing is one activity and believing is another activity, in the sense that they can be divorced. They go together. If you really believe in your heart that Jesus is everything He said He is, and that He accomplished everything we're told He accomplished, then you will be open and willing to confess Him publicly. That's the point.

What does it mean to confess Jesus as Lord? I wish I had time to take you back to John 13. You can read it in your own leisure. But in John 13 Jesus defines it, because He says you call Me Lord—and He says you're right to do so. He says if I'm your Lord, your "Kyrios", then you are My "doulos", My slaves. That's what it means to confess Jesus as Lord. It means being His slave, and His being your Master. It means Jesus is your rightful Master.

So, when Peter says repent and be baptized, he was saying repent and believe the gospel and then publicly confess Jesus as Lord in baptism. By the way parents, can I just say to you who have kids, that this is part of the reason, not all of it, but this is part of the reason that we believe that although children can be saved, our church has not historically baptized children. We usually wait until they're old enough to make, to understand, and to demonstrate in their lives a public confession of lifelong allegiance to Jesus Christ. Now for each child that time differs with their own maturity, but usually it comes as they reach a level of maturity and independence with their junior high years. To confess Jesus as Lord.

Notice what comes from this repentance and faith and public confession. Verse 38, "The forgiveness of your sins; and [you'll] receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." You'll receive the Spirit and what He produces: new life. By the way, those are both wonderful benefits that are promised to us in the New Covenant. And according to Hebrews 8, that New Covenant is ours in

Jesus. It promised forgiveness and the Spirit, to replace our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh, and to enable us to obey God.

Now notice verse 39. This promise, this New Covenant promise of forgiveness in the Spirit is for three groups: “you,” that is, the Jews who were listening; and “your children,” their Jewish descendants; and for “all who are far off.” In Ephesians 2, Paul says that’s the Gentiles. So. The invitation of the gospel, then, is to Jews and Gentiles, to all Jews and to all Gentiles. But the end of verse 39 makes it clear that the promise of the New Covenant is only for (Notice.) as many of those Jews and Gentiles “as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” That’s what theologians call the *effectual call*. That’s what happened to Lydia. You remember when she was listening to the gospel in Acts 16, and it says, “the Lord opened her heart” to believe what Paul was saying.

This morning you’ve all heard, everybody in this room this morning has heard the general call of the gospel. You’ve heard the gospel, and you’ve heard the invitation of the gospel. But perhaps there’s someone here this morning, through that message of the gospel, God is effectually calling you to Himself. You are being drawn to Him. You say, how do you know? Well, have you heard the gospel? Do you believe what it says? Do you desire to be right with God? Are you willing to repent and believe? If so, then you’re being called by God to Himself.

If you’re here this morning and you’re a Christian who’s already been baptized, let me encourage you, don’t lose the importance of your baptism. It was a public confession of your allegiance to Jesus Christ as your Lord, a lifetime commitment of allegiance. Let me ask you, are you living like that commitment is true? Are you living as though He were your Master and you, His slave? Are you living out what He’s commanded you to do in His Word?

Maybe you’re here this morning and you’re a Christian who’s not been baptized since believing. You need to be baptized. The New Testament knows absolutely nothing of a Christian who can make a public confession of his faith in baptism and who doesn’t. Now, whether you’ve recently come to Christ or whether you’ve been a Christian for many years, you need today to start pursuing the act of a public confession of Christ as Lord in baptism. As you leave this morning, out at the information counter they’ll have packets, baptism packets that have an application in there. You can begin that process. Let me encourage you to act on what the Scripture has said. We don’t want to downplay, as many do, the importance of baptism. Don’t delay another day your public confession of Jesus Christ as Lord.

Let’s pray together.

Father, thank You for Your Word, for how clear it is, for how it confronts us.

Lord, I pray for those here today who don't know Christ. Lord, I pray that in addition to the general invitation of the gospel, that You by Your grace would be effectually calling them to Yourself; that they would respond in repentance and faith and ultimately a public confession of their faith in Christ.

Father, I pray for those believers here today who have not yet been baptized. Lord, help them to see how completely out of step that is with Your prescription, with Your command, and with the practice of the church. Lord, help them not to delay, for whatever reason, pursuing baptism.

And Father, I pray as well for those of us who have been baptized as believers. Lord, forgive us for not taking it seriously. Forgive us for acting like it has no lasting repercussions. O God, remind us, that as we stood in the waters of baptism that day, we made a public confession of You as Lord, as Master, and we as Your slaves and followers. O Lord Jesus, help us to live that out in our lives today, this coming week, and in the years ahead, until You come, and we're in Your presence.

We pray it in Jesus' name, Amen.