

“What Shall We Do?”

Introduction

The Text

- A. This morning we pick right back up with that narrative we’ve been considering in [Acts 2](#).
1. It’s the day of Pentecost,
 2. the Spirit has been poured out,
 3. the gospel is being proclaimed in the languages of the nations,
 4. the crowds are gathering and wondering amongst themselves: “[What does this mean?](#)” ([v. 12](#)).
 5. Peter, the clear leader of the twelve, then stands up in an attempt to answer and make sense of these things for them . . .
 - a. He talks about the life of Jesus ([v. 22](#)),
 - b. the death of Jesus ([v. 23](#)),
 - c. the resurrection of Jesus ([vv. 24-32](#)),
 - d. the ascension of Jesus ([vv. 33-35](#)),
 - e. and then he leaves them with a devastatingly blow in [v. 36](#): “[Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.](#)”
 6. There’s still more he has to say, but first we come to see now the response of the crowd upon hearing such things.
- B. So we begin in [v. 37](#) . . .

³⁷ 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. ([Acts 2:37–41](#))

Head → Heart → Hand

- A. If you were with us last time, I said that what Peter is doing here in [Acts 2](#) is ultimately trying to persuade or lead these people in the crowd towards Jesus.
- B. And I’ve shown you that, to do so, he engages three different dimensions of the person: namely, the head, the heart, and the hand. All must be involved in a person’s conversion or something isn’t quite right.

1. HEAD: So he begins by reasoning with them on the basis of their own assumptions and values.
 - a. In this case, speaking to Jews, he can use the OT to show them how it's reasonable to see Jesus as the Christ and the Savior and the Lord of all.

 2. HEART: And then here we see the discussion doesn't merely remain somewhere up here in the head, it tumbles down towards the heart. They start to feel deeply, what they are coming to know intellectually.
 - a. So, again, v. 37: "And when they heard this they were cut to the heart . . ." The Spirit stabbed them, as it were. They got it. I'm a sinner in need of a Savior.

 3. HAND: So the head has given way to the heart, but then here now we come to the hand. So v. 37 closes out with them inquiring earnestly of the apostles: "Brothers, what shall we do?"
 - a. Christianity isn't merely about knowing, nor is it merely about feeling, it is also about doing. It changes the life or it isn't the real thing at all.
 - i. "What does this mean?" must give way to "What shall we do?" or something somewhere has gone off the rails.
- C. And so I would just pause here at the outset for a moment and ask you to consider this for yourself:
1. Are you here for a good Bible study merely? "Pastor better teach me something new."
 2. Or are you here to get worked up or touched emotionally in some way. "Worship band better stir my affections. It better be positive, encouraging K-Love."
 3. Or are you here to truly encounter the living Christ and be transformed?
 - a. Are you en route with God from head through heart to hand? Are you willing to walk with Peter from "What does this mean?" to "What shall we do?" Because that's the point.
- D. Now, regarding this third dimension, the hand—I only touched briefly on it last time and I said we'd be circling back to it for a deeper dive this morning. And so that is what I intend to do with you now.
1. And under this broader category of the hand, here's what I want to bring out from our text: There are (1) Two Steps; (2) Four Gifts; and (3) One Underlying Cause.
 - a. In other words, we'll see: two things we have to do; four things that result from it; and one thing that really stands underneath and behind it all. So let's go!

(1) Two Steps

Step #1: Repent

A. Peter answers the question of this crowd straightaway there in v. 38. “What shall you do? I’ll tell you what you should do.” “And Peter said to them, ‘Repent’”

1. That’s where he starts and so that’s our first step. Repent.

What Does It Mean?

A. But, of course, now we have to ask: What exactly does this mean? How do I repent?

B. Etymologically, the word repentance in the Greek is composed of two words **meta** = change and **nous** = mind.

1. So woodenly, then, repentance means to change your mind about something.
2. But the broader idea involves this sense of turning, not just your mind, but your heart and your life—from one thing and towards another.

C. So in the biblical sense of the term, it means to turn from sin and to turn towards God and Christ and the gospel.

1. So in [Heb. 6:1](#), the author can speak of “[repentance from dead works](#).” Your turning from something, in this case, empty religion and sin.
2. But then in [Acts 20:21](#), Paul can speak of “[repentance toward God](#)” (cf. [26:20](#)).
3. And then Peter brings both sides together in [Acts 3:19](#) when he says: “[Repent therefore, and turn back](#)” (cf. [26:18](#)).

D. You’re not just turning from, you’re turning towards. It’s a bi-directional reality. We do an about face on the road to destruction and begin walking back towards the God who made us, the God who loves us, the God who sent his only beloved Son to die for us.

1. Turning from and turning towards.

One or the Other

A. Now, I want you to understand: the world can really only do one of these two at a time, but never both.

TURNING FROM

A. So, on the one hand, we’ve seen in recent days—especially with the rise of what I guess is being called “Cancel Culture”—that our culture, with all of its trumpeting of relativism and eschewing of any notion of absolute truth, still does have a certain orthodoxy they expect you to adhere to. And if you don’t conform, they’ll try to punish you into repentance.

B. You see it on either side of the political spectrum, really.

1. So, for example, you've probably heard: the more conservative folks won't buy Bud Light anymore. Why? Because the company sponsored a transgender individual. And they wouldn't have it. Folks are mad. They want the parent company Anheuser-Busch to repent. So they're punishing. They've lost some estimated \$395 million in U.S. sales because of this.
 2. But the same is true on the progressive side of things. If you don't support the LGBTQ+ movement, if you have the audacity to state you're not in favor of such a lifestyle, well they'll cancel you, they'll punish you into repentance. Some of you have probably faced some of this around the Bay Area here.
- C. But, notice, here you have repentance as turning from something. But there's no hope of turning towards grace.
1. Cancel Culture has no resources for real atonement and forgiveness. You try to pay them back to get on their good side, but when is it really enough? And how can you ever be trusted again? No one's sure. Because there's no grace.
 - a. It's turning from but not turning towards.

TURNING TOWARDS

- A. On the other side, we see our culture, and even churches, talking about turning towards . . . but there's nothing to turn from.
1. This is all grace but no law. Where we just accept you as you are. We won't tell you you're wrong, and we certainly wouldn't dare call you out for your sin. That would be judgmental, that would be unkind.
 - a. It's tolerance that wins the day.
- B. But this too falls flat. Because we all know there's stuff that's broken with us. And love sometimes points that out.
1. We all get this, even though we act like we don't. Think about it. It's like if I go to the doctor, like I'm going to on Tuesday for a regular checkup, and let's say he does bloodwork and finds something terribly off in the numbers or whatever.
 - a. What does true love do?
 - i. "Well, I would really ruin his day if I called and told him I'm concerned. I don't want him to worry. We'll just let this slide." That's not loving me. That's letting issues we might be able to deal with now worsen until perhaps there's no turning back.
- C. This is turning towards, with cheap grace and sugar-coated love and all this, but there's no turning from. There's no honest evaluation and help.

ONLY THE GOSPEL!

- A. Don't you see? Only Christianity and the gospel can bring both together so that repentance is really all that it's supposed to be.
1. Yes Christianity calls you out and says in no uncertain terms that you are a worse sinner than you even know and you are on your way to hell, rightly.
 - a. You might not like it, but it's true. Your blood tests are jacked up. There's a problem. You know it. I know it. Stop beating around the issue. Repent.
 2. But, it's not just turn from, is it? Like Cancel Culture: clean up and pay back and hope maybe you can get back on God's good side? No!
 - a. It's turn from and turn towards. He's already made a way back. The door is open. The table is set. He makes it easy to come. We're the ones who make it hard.
 - i. It's like the song we're going to sing after this sermon: "Bring it all to the table / There's nothing He ain't seen before / For all your sin, all your sorrow, and your sadness / There's a Savior and He calls / Bring it all to the table." The only thing that's keeping you from coming is you. He knows how filthy you are. And he loves you anyways.
- B. There's truth and grace. It's turning from and turning towards. It's true repentance.

Two Ways to Be Crooked

- A. Now, let me say a quick word about just what we should turning from, what we're called to repent of. Because there may be a surprising twist in here for us.
- B. To help you see this, I want you to consider with me what Peter says down there in v. 40: "And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation.'"
1. It's that word "crooked" I'm interested in.
 - a. It's the Greek word *skolios*. It's where we get the word scoliosis from. A crooked spine. It should be straight, but it's all bent up and gnarled.
 - i. This provides a vivid picture of the sort of thing Peter is referring to here in a spiritual, ethical sense.
- C. And he says we're supposed escape from this crooked generation. In other words, we're not supposed to go that way. We're supposed to turn from their influence, and turn from our own participation in it, to repent of it.
1. But here's what I want you to see: in the Bible there are two ways to be crooked . . .

CROOKED WAY #1: IRRELIGION

A. Of course, we're all probably thinking immediately of blatant sin—like breaking some of the ten commandments.

1. You're lying, you're stealing, you're committing adultery. What are you doing on the internet late at night man? Repent of that. Be saved from this crooked generation.

B. This is one way to be crooked. We'll call it the crooked way of irreligion and immorality.

CROOKED WAY #2: RELIGION

A. But there's another way to be crooked. And I would say it's actually the more prominent issue in the context of [Acts 2](#).

1. Here now we're dealing with what we might call the crooked way, not of irreligion, but of religion, not of morality, but of morality.

B. Remember, Peter is talking to Jews here.

1. He's talking to outwardly religious people. This is the day of Pentecost, a Jewish festival, and they are here in Jerusalem to celebrate that.

C. So I ask you, what is the crooked generation they need to watch out for, to be saved from?

1. They're not primarily influenced by the Gentiles here, the Romans? They despised them.

No!

2. They're being led astray by the religious leaders, the chief priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. Here's the crookedness they've been most susceptible to.

a. Again, it's the crooked way of religion—where you get all cleaned up on the outside, you look so straight, but inside you're twisted.

i. You've got scoliosis of the soul.

D. Here's where you do the right thing but with the wrong motive and heart.

1. I hope people see me as I serve the poor.

2. This makes me feel better about myself.

3. I'm not like them.

4. Now God is in my debt, I came to church, I did what you asked, now do what I ask.

E. What is that? It's the crookedness of religion. And it's equally if not even more detestable in God's sight.

1. If there's one thing Jesus gets angry about in the gospels, this is it.

a. He's not flipping over the tables of the tax collectors and sinners, he's sitting around them eating with those guys.

b. But he is flipping over tables in the temple, why?

i. Because there you've got the pretense of religion, of being right and clean. It looks good on the outside, but it's nasty on the inside.

(1) They're using God to steal from God and his people.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

A. So what about you?

1. Do you have the crooked way of irreligion to repent of? You've been giving in to some stuff that's clearly wrong? Turn from and turn towards. There's grace.

2. But maybe you've got the crooked way of religion. You haven't been giving into the blatant sins like these other folks, and you know what, it makes you feel better than them, you look down at them, you're disgusted by them instead of brokenhearted for them. We gut the gospel of all its glory when we do that. Turn from and turn towards. There's grace for you too.

3. Or maybe you're a special kind of sinner like me, and you've got a bit of both to repent of, right? Some sins, I just shouldn't be there and I know it. Other stuff, I look good on the outside but my hearts wrong.

a. If there's room for a jacked up guy like me at the foot of the cross, there's room for you too.

B. So the crowd asks: "What shall we do?" The first thing Peter identifies here is this: "Repent." It isn't popular. It isn't fun. But it is kind. And he's right.

Step #2: Be Baptized

A. But now we come to the second step. And that's what Peter goes on to say if we keep reading along back in v. 38: "And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ . . .'"

B. Baptism is obviously a very broad and complex topic.

1. I don't have much time to deal with all that here, but let me at least bring out two aspects of it that I think are especially worthy of our consideration at this point: baptism is Picturesque (aspect #1); and it's Public (aspect #2).

Aspect #1: Picturesque

A. By picturesque I just mean that baptism pictures a number of gospel realities for us.

1. It brings some of the spiritual dimensions of our faith and conversion into the physical, makes them tangible. You can see it. You can touch it.

- a. It's like the Lord's Supper in many ways. It's sacramental in that sense. It's physical but it portrays something spiritual, something much deeper.
- B. But what is it a picture of? Well, to give you a few . . .
- 1. OUR SURRENDER: It pictures our surrendering to Jesus—as we are going under the waters of baptism we are giving our whole self to him, we're wanting to associate ourself with him fully, right?
 - 2. OUR UNION (cf. [Rom. 6:3-4](#); [Col. 2:11-12](#)): And that leads to another thing it pictures. Being baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ” as Peter says here is a picture of me being united with Jesus in his death and resurrection by faith.
 - a. I go under the waters with him.
 - b. I come out of the grave, as it were, a new man.
 - i. It pictures the new birth in that sense. I've been born again. I've been brought into his name, into his family.
 - 3. OUR CLEANSING (cf. [Acts 22:16](#); [1 Pet. 3:21](#)): And the last thing I'd say it clearly pictures is this idea of being washed of my sins.
 - a. The water cleans my skin.
 - b. But it reminds me that Jesus and his Spirit, as we'll consider more in a moment, cleans my heart and soul.

Aspect #2: Public

- A. But the second aspect is that it's public.
- 1. Baptism is not something that's administered in secret or privately. It's not something we do “with all heads bowed and all eyes closed.”
 - 2. It's something we do out in the open. It's a public declaration to the watching world that you're with him.
 - a. Like Paul says in [Rom. 1:16](#): “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”
 - i. And baptism says: “Not only am I not ashamed of Jesus, I desperately need him. And if you want to laugh at me or kill me so be it. I'm with him.”
- B. This is why baptism becomes the rite of entry in the church. It's how you know where people stand with Jesus. Are they out or are they in? Are they against him or are they with him?
- C. And so these questions should be set before you this morning . . .
- 1. Where do you stand with Jesus? Have you been baptized? If not, why not?

- a. Talk to me after if that's a step you want to take or if you have any questions (we have a Next Steps Booklet in the back on this as well that you could pick up if you're interested).

(2) Four Gifts

- A. Now here's the amazing thing: when we take these two steps as Peter outlines here, he goes onto talk about four gifts that we receive from God as a result. Let me briefly show you these one by one . . .

Gift #1: A New Record

- A. First, we receive a new record.
 1. I'm not talking about a vinyl from your favorite rock band or something.
 2. I'm talking about a new record in the courtroom of heaven. Your sin is forgiven. Your name is cleared of all wrongdoing. Though you've committed grievous offenses against a holy God, you get to walk free.
- B. I'm getting this of course from where Peter goes next in [v. 38](#). Let's keep following along with him: ["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 . . .'"](#)
- C. The big issue in your life today (if I could so bold)—it doesn't have to do with your job, or your health, or your family, or your finances, or your spouse, or your city, or your country, or global warming, or whatever.
 1. There may be and likely are legitimate issues across all those domains of your life, but whatever they are, however painful and hard, they are still superficial compared to this deepest issue: namely, God is holy and you're a sinner. The issue of forgiveness of sin is the issue in your life.
 - a. You could have everything else put together nicely, but if you don't have forgiveness of sin, there will come a day sooner or later when the bottom will drop out and everything comes undone.
 - b. On the flip . . . if you have forgiveness of sin, everything else in your life right now might be just one big mess and heartache, but there will come a day sooner or later when God will intervene in Jesus and make all the wrong right and all the sad things untrue.
 - i. It all hinges on this. Forgiveness.
- D. But now how exactly does this happen for us? Well, I'll tell you . . .
 1. God doesn't just wave his magic wand.

2. He crushes his only beloved son. He puts your sin upon Jesus and makes him suffer the consequences, the judgement, the wrath . . . in your place. He took it so you don't have to.
 - a. And rest assured, brothers and sisters, there's no double jeopardy in the courts of heaven. God will not come demanding from you what he's already received from Christ on your behalf.
- E. I say he didn't wave a magic wand and make your sins disappear, but there is something magical about all this isn't there?
1. With one move at the cross God can both uphold his perfect and thoroughgoing justice on the one hand and extend his tender mercy and gentle leniency to us on the other.
 2. He both judges sin and forgives it at one and the same time.
 - a. I'd say that's a deeper magic than Harry Potter or Gandalf could ever conjure.

Gift #2: A New Intimacy

- A. But we don't just receive a new record, we get a new intimacy, a new sense of God's presence. I see this in the way that v. 38 concludes: ". . . and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."
1. God doesn't just do away with our sin in a forensic sense and then send us on our way.
 2. He clears our record so he can move towards us in relationship. He deals with the legal for the sake of the personal.
 - a. He deals with our sin at the cross so he can then come and dwell in our hearts. We "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Gift #3: A New Community

- A. I get this from what Luke records for us in v. 41: "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls."
1. All these people were "added"? Added to what? To the church. To this new community God is establishing in and around his Son.
- B. We'll likely talk about this further in upcoming weeks, but you've probably seen, the Surgeon General recently declared there's an epidemic of loneliness impacting our country. We're distant and divided and lonely.
1. And the bottom line is this: in Jesus we're given a new community. We're brought back into relationship with others in deep and meaningful ways. You're not alone. At least you don't have to be.

Gift #4: A New Ambition

- A. By new ambition here, I just mean you have a new reason to live, a new mission, so much bigger than yourself. And I get this in particular from v. 39 where Peter says: "For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off . . ."

1. When Peter says that this promise of salvation is for “all who are far off” it is likely, in his mind at least, he was thinking of Jewish people who were scattered outside Palestine.
 2. But I think in this we have an instance where, it would seem, Peter is declaring in the Spirit more than he was truly aware of in and of himself.
- B. Because this word translated “far off” here, **makran** in the Greek, it’s used elsewhere to refer to the gospel reaching not just the Jews, but the Gentiles.
1. So Paul recounts how Jesus had called and commissioned him saying: “Go, for I will send you far away [Gk. makran] to the Gentiles” (Acts 22:21).
 2. Or it gets even more explicit in Eph. 2. Paul, writing to Gentile believers says: “[N]ow in Christ Jesus you who once were far off [Gk. makran] have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (v. 13).
- C. So when Peter says back in Acts 2 that this promise is for those who are “far off”, he cracks open the door that the Apostle Paul will later barrel through.
1. It’s not just for the Jews who are far off, it’s for everyone everywhere!
- D. And such a thing becomes our ambition. Those who have been reached with the gospel find their hearts burning to reach others with it as well.
- a. So is it your ambition? Is that what you’re living for, what I’m living for?

(3) One Underlying Cause

Consider Your Calling

- A. Underneath all of this, the steps, the gifts, the people who respond to the gospel, there’s one underlying cause. And it’s made evident to us there at the end of v. 39, but let’s read it in full now: “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.”
1. What is this underlying cause to which I refer? The call of God.
- B. It’s very interesting, for here at the end of his sermon, Peter circles back to Joel’s prophecy which he had begun to quote back at the start from Joel 2:28-32.
1. It talks about the last days and the outpouring of the Spirit and all this.
 2. And what’s interesting is that, in this first reference Peter pulls up short in his quote and cuts halfway through v. 32 which begins as follows: “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved” (Joel 2:32).
- a. He quoted that up in Acts 2:21. And that’s where it ended.

- C. He broke off from the quote and only now returns to it, it would seem, to strike one final note . . .
1. Here's Joel 2:32 in full now: "And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls."
 - a. I love the tension in this text. Am I calling on the Lord or is he calling on me?
 - i. Yes! But according to the Scriptures, the latter underlies and enables the former. In other words: I call because he calls. His call awakens my call.
- D. This is what Paul makes crystal clear for us in 1 Cor. 1: " ²² Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God" (vv. 22-24).
1. You preach the cross—one person scoffs at it, the other falls to his knees and repents for joy. What accounts for the difference?
 - a. Was one smarter than the other? Was one better than the other? Not at all.
 - b. What accounts for the difference? The call of God: "but to those who are called." Ears unplug. Eyes open. Heart softens. "I get it!" It's sovereign grace.
 - i. And lest there be any doubt, Paul comes down and concludes at the close of the chapter: " ³⁰ [B]ecause of him [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord'" (vv. 30-31).
- E. Oh I love this! Our whole discussion this morning began with a concern for what we should do. That was the question of the crowd.
1. But now fittingly, we end our time with Peter here drawing our attention, at last, not to what we can do, but to what God can do.
 - a. That's the decisive piece. We don't save ourselves. He saves us. We call on the name of the Lord, but only because he's first called on us in mercy.