



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

A Church on Purpose

Acts 2:36-47

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Introduction

1. Given our distance from it geographically and historically, it is hard for us to fully appreciate how much the Israelite society of Jesus' day was about longing and promise. It's equally hard to overstate how much this drove events in that society.
2. Luke 1:67-79 gives us a feel for it. As Zechariah reflected on the significance of the birth of his son John, he expressed the longing that permeated Israelite society.
 - a. At long last, God was arriving to "redeem his people" (v. 68).
 - b. As promised through the prophets of old, and sworn to in the form of a "holy covenant," he had come to "save [Israel] from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us" (vv. 70-72, esp. 71).
 - c. The promises he was fulfilling had been made to the great heroes of a previous age—David (v. 69) and especially Abraham (v. 73).
 - d. The expectation was that, once delivered, Israel would completely serve God (vv. 74-75).
3. Those are breathtaking ideas, but what stands out is the expectation that all of their hopes would be realized in a *person* from "the house of his servant David" (v. 69), a person who would embody and represent the Lord himself (v. 76), who would "give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins" and "light to those . . . in darkness . . . to guide our feet into the way of peace" (vv. 77, 79).
4. It is against that backdrop that Peter preached on Pentecost seven weeks after Jesus' death.
 - a. He too recalled God's great promises for a glorious age (Joel 2:28-32 = Acts 2:17-21).
 - b. He too thought in terms of forgiveness and the Lord's presence to guide them in the right way.
 - c. Most importantly, just as Zechariah had expected, he centered everything in a *person*, Jesus of Nazareth who had shown God through great miracles (Acts 2:22), been handed over to death by crucifixion as part of God's plan (v. 23) and then been raised from the dead as the final act of fulfilling God's promises and the people's expectations (vv. 24-35).
5. Peter's conclusion, that Jesus was "Lord and Christ" (vv. 36), was the declaration of truth upon which the commitment to service Zechariah had envisioned turned. Since it expresses the condition for all who will respond to God's grace and become part of his new covenant community, we are wise review it.

Body

I. The Benefits of Serving (2:38-40).

- A. As Peter told the good news of Jesus, he emphasized the salvation (deliverance) that the people expected would come when God kept his promises (2:39-40).
- B. He did not merely refer to the idea of salvation; he told them specifically what it entailed.
 - 1. They would receive forgiveness, restoration to favor and relationship with God (2:38).
 - 2. They would also receive the Lord's presence to help them live as God intended (2:38), the very thing that Joel had stressed would characterize "the last days" (2:17ff.).
- C. Don't miss the connection between what Peter said and Israel's expectations: these were the things that Jeremiah had said would characterize the coming "new covenant."
 - 1. God would put his law on their hearts and be their God—acts of grace (Jer 31:33).
 - 2. They would come to know the Lord and be forgiven—in response to divine grace (Jer 31:34).
- D. As the people on Pentecost considered Peter's explanation, they accepted its truth and then asked what they needed to do to receive the benefits Peter declared (2:37).

II. A Change of Purpose (Acts 2:38).

- A. Peter told them that baptism was an important part of their response—important enough to require some elaboration. But it is not the most important thing Peter said.
 - 1. Notice that it is the *second* thing Peter told them to do.
 - 2. It is "an expression of repentance and faith, and is itself a confession"¹ of allegiance.
 - 3. As "a result . . . and expression of repentance," baptism amounts to "a pledge of allegiance, an oath of loyalty to Christ" (Ferguson, 181-182).
- B. But baptism is of little use without repentance; so, we need to study that word more.
 - 1. There is a popular understanding of repentance that makes it almost exclusively a combination of guilt and an act of penance over a sin committed; that is partially true, but is not the whole truth.
 - 2. Study the word lexically and historically, and a richer meaning emerges.
 - a) Literally, the word (μετάνοια, *metanoia*) meant "to know after" and so came to refer to the act of changing one's mind.²
 - b) As the Greeks, and then Jews like Josephus and Philo used it, this idea of changing the mind extended to a change of intentions and plans, and to reflection.³
 - c) "The function of *metanoia* is to 'introduce a new form of thought and feeling.'"⁴
- C. The New Testament also shows a more elaborate meaning than often heard in popular telling.
 - 1. 2 Corinthians 7:8-10 shows that more than remorse is involved.
 - a) Notice what Paul says.
 - (1) Seeking a behavior change among the Corinthians, Paul reminded them that he had written some things that led them to grieve (λυπέω, *lupeō* - v 8; also v 9).

¹ Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today*, 179.

² Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, translated and edited by James D. Ernest, 2: 472.

³ Ibid. In a footnote, Spicq illustrates the idea of reflection with this quotation from Philo (*Spec. Laws* 1.58): "Some people are so foolish that they do not even leave themselves any room for a change of heart."

⁴ Ibid. The citation here is from the *Tabula of Cebes* 10.

- (2) He says that their grief caused him to “regret” (μεταμέλομαι, *metamelomai*), i.e., to feel remorse for his words, but only for a short time (v 8).
 - (3) The reason his remorse turned to joy was because their grief eventually led them to “repent” (μετάνοια) with the result that they were again following the right course (v. 9).
- b) Verse 10 shows the process and helps us understand the nature of repentance.
 - (1) Repentance was not grief; that was merely the emotion to start the process.
 - (2) Nor was repentance equal to or finished at the point of regret (Paul uses ἀμεταμέλητος, *ametamelētos*, the negation of *metamelomai*).
 - (3) Rather, godly grief led to a change of mind (and behavior) without regret.
2. That analysis helps us understand the nature of repentance as we see it elsewhere.
 - a) It is a change that will be produced by a sense of godly grief or sorrow.
 - b) It is a change that, if genuine, will lead to a reformation of life (cf. Acts 26:20).
 - c) What stands between the sorrow and change of life is a change of the will, or purpose for which one lives.
 - (1) We see it illustrated in the command in Acts 17:30 (cf. 14:15), in context a reference to a necessary change of mind about the way the Athenians were to see and respond to God.
 - (2) We see it in a negative way in Galatians 4:9, a verse that does not use the word “repent,” but does use the companion idea of turning (see below): they had changed their course once; why would they change it again to pursue the inferior way they had left behind?
 - (3) Repentance, then, amounts to a change of will with regard to God and the way of sin that stands against and moves away from God (cf. Hebrews 12:17).
3. This is clarified by a study of the related idea of conversion (ἐπιστρέφω, *epistrephō*).
 - a) In Acts 3:19, a parallel to Acts 2:38, Peter stresses a change of direction.
 - b) Jesus’ instructions to Peter after his denial call for more than remorse; Peter was to do something for his brothers (Luke 22:32; cf. Matthew 27:3 where Judas regretted his actions—*metamelomai*—but did not turn and follow again).
 - c) Acts 14:15; 26:18, 20; and 1 Thessalonians 1:9 also illustrate the change of mind, intent, and plans.

D. Repentance, properly understood, is “that change of mind or heart, produced by godly grief, which leads to a reformation of life. . . . Repentance involves a fundamental reorientation of the whole personality” (Ferguson, 175-176).

III. Putting a Face on Repentance (Acts 2:42-47).

- A. Once they had changed their mind about Jesus and been immersed by his authority (v 41), the people who heard Peter demonstrated a complete reorientation of their lives.
- B. First, they did not have a “religion” (as the word is commonly used today) but lived a committed life that included duties designed to strengthen them spiritually (42, 46).
 1. Notice the word “devoted” (προσκαρτερέω, *proskartereō*) in v 42, meaning:
 - a) “To stick by or close at hand, *attach oneself to, wait on, be faithful to someone.*
 - b) “To persist in someth[ing].
 - (1) “*Busy oneself with, be busily engaged in, be devoted to.*

(2) "*Hold fast to, continue in, persevere in.*"⁵

2. Other verses illustrate the meaning – Acts 1:14; 6:4; Romans 12:12; Colossians 4:2.
 3. Significantly, *proskartereō* is used twice in our text: in v 42, but also in v 46 where we read that they were "continuing with one mind in the temple" (NASB) on a *daily* basis.
 4. They understood their commitment to Jesus meant that their *daily* lives required a commitment to all that was involved in learning and practicing discipleship: "to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (v 42).
- C. Second, their commitment to Jesus saw them live with a different sense of what matters ("awe" translates φόβος, *phobos*) (v. 43).
- D. Third, they saw and treated people differently (vv. 44-45).
- E. Fourth, there is evidence they were intentionally seeking to be influential (v, 47; cf. Acts 8:4; 11:19, 20).

Conclusion

1. The title I chose for this lesson is "A Church on Purpose."
 - a. I had in mind the idea that it is fundamental to following Jesus to *decide* to live for Jesus, to make it our *purpose* to commit ourselves to imitate his words and deeds.
 - b. But I also intended "on purpose" to refer to a second idea, parallel to the term I heard often while working as an educator: we were encouraged to make sure our students remained "on task."
2. Repentance is not a one-time feeling of guilt and determination to "do better." It's a commitment to live the life of Jesus. Does it call for complete and total commitment? Yes. But with that commitment comes the greatest of benefits: our response leads into forgiveness and the life Jesus described as "abundant" (John 10:10).
3. Have you committed to this purpose? Are you remaining "on purpose"?

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⁵ Frederick William Danker, rev. & ed., *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Third Edition, 88