

Lesson 2

They Asked the Right Question

Acts 2.36-37

Therefore, since he has been exalted to the right hand of God and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, he has poured out what you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into the heavens, but he himself says: The Lord declared to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.' "Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah." When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?"

– Acts 2.33-37

Introduction

Beginning in Acts 2.14 Peter proclaimed the good news to the great crowd assembled in Jerusalem for Pentecost. The firsthand testimony of the apostles and the weight of the prophets have come together for a bold statement of truth: God has made the crucified Jesus of Nazareth both Lord and Messiah. It really could not be a greater contrast when one compares the treatment Jesus received from those with earthly power verses the One with supreme power. God vindicated Jesus' claim as true, bringing Him back from death and exalting to heaven on high.

Peter says it was Jesus, who was responsible for what they saw and heard that day. It was all a fulfillment of what God told the prophet Joel¹ when He said the coming of the Spirit would kick off the age of salvation. That moment had now come. Jesus was sitting at the right hand of the Father in power and control, in the highest place heaven affords.

For the Jewish audience, this is powerful and overwhelming evidence from the life of Jesus of Nazareth, his death, his resurrection, and exaltation that the man they saw hung on a cross fifty days earlier was the Son of God, the Messiah. They were guilty as charged. They had opposed God and rejected their King.

What is said in 2.36 should not be overlooked. *Jesus is Lord*. Some have identified this as the first apostolic creed.² This is not merely a title, Jesus holds the *name that is above every name*, Philippians 2.9. To the Jew there was only one name like this, i.e., Almighty God, the God of Israel. Tying this back to Joel's prophecy quoted earlier in the sermon, "all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved," 2.21. Jesus fulfilled this prophecy in every way.

The Response of the Crowd

When those in the crowd heard Peter's sweeping conclusion they were *pierced to the heart*, 2.37. Couple that with the scene they were witnessing and his fiery words. What Peter had just said would have been devastating. He made it clear that those in the audience were guilty of executing the Messiah ... the one

¹ Joel 2.28-29; John 7.39.

² See also Romans 10.9; 1 Corinthians 12.3; Philippians 2.11.

God had made Lord and Christ. Some of them may have even been in the crowd fifty days before calling out for His execution. Many others, no doubt had heard about Jesus but had never cared enough to investigate for themselves. Still others may have believed but due to pressure for the religious establishment refused to follow, John 12.42-43. But now in this moment they suddenly understood. They were stunned. To be *pierced in the heart* is a figure of speech that describes their great emotional distress. To put it lightly, they were deeply troubled in their heart.³ Someone has rightly said, they were deeply convicted, with their conscience in tatters.⁴

But there is more. They were filled with alarm. At that moment everything came crashing down with the realization they had killed the Messiah, the one promised to them for centuries. They were complicit in the crime. They were in danger of judgment. The Messiah was now alive, at the right hand of God, and Lord. Would they now be vanquished? They were in a helpless situation. Totally guilty and no way to get out of it. They needed to be saved from the wrath to come and they needed to be saved *now!*

The Question of a Convicted Heart

In their greatest and deepest despair, remorse, and guilt those in the crowd cried out *Brothers, what should we do?* Is there a way out of this? How can we escape our fate? This is the picture of a convicted sinner. The only thing they see in front of them is their own personal guilt and the only feeling in their heart is a deep sense of fear over the pending wrath of God. There is the greatest urgency to remedy the situation. There is a desperation for deliverance, i.e., *salvation*. There is a strong desire to do the will of God. At that moment nothing else matters.

Although it is involved, genuine repentance is more than a simple fear of the consequences for sin. Repentance sees sin for what it is (an affront to God) and comes to regard it in the same way God does ... thus turning in total commitment and dependence on Christ.⁵ Earnest and sincere repentance will always result in two things: turning from sin and turning to God.

Conviction of sin is an essential part of any conversion. People need to understand the breadth and depth of their sin before they will see the need for a savior. No matter how moral a person believes themselves to be, they are still guilty of sin, Romans 3.10-23. A person is brought to conviction via the Spirit who uses the Word of God to pierce the heart:

For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart, Hebrews 4.12.

The Word of God is the great tool of conviction. It will do its work if we will use it.

³ Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996, definition 25.281, Volume 1, p. 318.

⁴ Osborne, Grant R. *Acts: Verse by Verse*. Osborne New Testament Commentaries. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019, p. 57.

⁵ MacArthur, John F., Jr. *Acts*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994, Vol. 1, p. 73.

What About Us?

Have we gotten away from powerful and convicting preaching and teaching? Ours is a time where the world demands the message to be soft coated and palatable. We hear how important it is not to offend someone. Yet, Scripture goes out of its way to describe sin as a vile and polluted thing. It is pure rebellion against God. Those who are not with God are against God, Luke 11.23. There is enmity. There is no peaceful co-existence. The life of rebellion must be walked away from and surrendered to God. We need to preach and teach the word of God, without apology.

When we preach with conviction, there will be a reaction. Certainly, there will be some who respond like those did in Acts 2.37-41 ... positively. But there is another passage in Acts that mentions a crowd being pierced in the heart. Only on that occasion they gnashed at Stephen with their teeth, carried out out of town, and stoned him to death, Acts 7.54-60. The bottom line is that we must preach no matter the reaction.

As time goes by and our culture gets farther away from God ... the message will be met enthusiastically ... with some who have been mired in sin rejoicing that finally there is the hope of deliverance. Others will be just as enthusiastic ... only in a negative way and resort to slander, malice, and maybe even violence to impede the message. Our job is to teach ... moving in faith ... and trusting in the work of God who has promised that His word will never return void.

For just as rain and snow fall from heaven and do not return there without saturating the earth and making it germinate and sprout, and providing seed to sow and food to eat, so my word that comes from my mouth will not return to me empty, but it will accomplish what I please and will prosper in what I send it to do."

– Isaiah 55.10-11

Thinking back to the time of your conversion, what did it feel like to be pierced in the heart?

In those moments, what was the most important thing?

What is repentance? Why is the conviction of sin connected so tightly to it?

What happens when we preach the gospel with conviction?

What can we do to bolster our faith and boldness as we allow the word of God to do its work?