

REPENTANCE/FAITH

Acts 2:37

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Dr. James Boice of Philadelphia has written that there is a tragic error in contemporary evangelical Christianity, "that one can be a Christian without being a follower of Jesus Christ. It reduces the gospel to the mere fact of Christ's having died for sinners, requires of sinners that they acknowledge this by the barest intellectual assent, and then assures them of their eternal security when they may well not be born again."

I am concerned that there may be many of you young people and many of you adults who regularly attend our times of worship and church activities who are not Christians.

I say that not as a threat but as a warning - the kind of warning you would give to someone about to step in front of a moving bus.

ON what basis do I say such a thing?

In Acts 2 it is recorded for us that Peter stood up before a large crowd of people on the day of Pentecost and in essence told them that they were NOT okay. Contrary to their belief that they were God's people, they were in fact sinners desperately in need of repenting and trusting Christ.

When we think of a "sinner" we think of a "bad person". And we usually think in terms of what they have done or are doing wrong. We think of the gross activities in which they engage, or the way they treat people, or their disregard of others. We think in terms of abusive, dishonest, immoral, and/or hateful people. We think in terms of such sins as habitual drunkenness, murder, flagrant child abuse, major theft, or wholesale dishonesty,

People in Jerusalem in A.D. 30 had the same idea. The crowd that gathered around the disciples that day recorded in Acts 2 did not see themselves sinners.

Now notice the description of the crowd Acts 2:5.

They are called "God-fearing Jews"

Studying that term "God-fearing Jews" we can conclude some things about these people:

They believed there is a God

They have a fear or awe of God

They are religious people

They scrupulously obey the laws of their religion and have a nervous caution about not breaking those laws

These are people who are so religious that they have made a trip to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost - a holy day.

These are the "good" people of the day.

These are the "church" people of the day.

These are not the derelicts, the murderers, the thieves, the abusers, or the immorals.

But follow with me in this Text what Peter says of them:

Try to put yourself in the place of one of them:

You are 35 years old, married, have two children.

You are a salesman for an import/export firm.

You were raised in your religion and went to a religious school for your training.

You believe in God, never considered it any other way.

You know there are certain things you aren't supposed to do and you try real hard not to do them.

You observe the Sabbath as carefully as any of your friends.

You don't work on the holy days and you even make a trip to Jerusalem at least once a year to celebrate your religion.

You know you aren't perfect but you aren't bad either.

You are, frankly, rather pleased with your life - you've done all right.

God should be pleased with you.

There you are minding your own business that day near the Temple when all of the sudden you hear this loud sound and then these men start talking in loud voices and (according to verse 2:2.) they are telling about the "wonders of God".

And most amazing is that though you are from another country, you can understand them because these obviously uneducated men are speaking in your language. And as you look around it become apparent that others are experiencing the same thing.

Since it doesn't take much of a "side-show" to attract a crowd on a holiday - the people begin to come and before long a great crowd of people is gathered around.

But this is no average side-show, something very unusual is taking place here. At least 15 different languages are being spoken by men who wouldn't know anything other than Hebrew and Greek and maybe a little Aramaic.

So you put aside what you had planned and you step in closer to listen as one of them steps forward and speaking out loudly begins to explain what is happening. His speech went something like this:

“Are you amazed at what you hear happening here today? Being religious people, you of course remember what the Prophet Joel said was going to happen in the future. He said that God was about to pour out His Spirit on people and they would be very different than before. Well what Joel said was going to happen is precisely what is happening. People, listen up! I know that you have all heard of Jesus of Nazareth and the miraculous things that God did through Him. Did you know that it was God's purpose to hand Him over to you so that you would kill him by nailing him to a cross?”

At that point you are offended and think to yourself: “I didn't kill him, I just got into town a week ago. Oh, I get it. He means people just like me killed him. Well, I suppose if I had been here I would have approved. After all, He did claim to be God and that's blasphemous isn't it? I can't deny he did some good things, but from what I heard, he was asking people to believe him and obey him like he was God. Even If I wouldn't have killed him, I know that I wouldn't have followed him - like some of those fanatics I heard about. But he's still speaking so I had better listen.”

“People, hear me, God raised this Jesus that I've been talking about from the dead. The Scriptures said that was going to happen. King David, 1000 years ago, foretold that one of his descendants would not

stay in the grave and that his body would not decay. Because King David's body is buried here in Jerusalem, we know he wasn't talking about himself. He was talking about the resurrection of Jesus.

"But not only did the Scripture say this was going to happen, we too are eyewitnesses of the resurrection. We saw him and talked with Him after he rose from the grave. He is alive!

"Not only did he rise from the dead but he also ascended to the right hand of God. Remember when King David said "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand"? We know that King David didn't ascend to heaven to the right hand of God - again, he was talking about Jesus.

"Based on the miracles you saw Him do, based on his intentional death on the cross, based on his resurrection, and based on His ascension to heaven, I can assure you of this: This Jesus whom you crucified is both Lord and Savior."

Most of you will recognize that I have been following the text of Acts 2:22-36 fairly closely in describing what happened that day in Jerusalem.

I want you now to see the response that Peter's speech got from these very religious people: 2:37 "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the other apostles, brothers, what shall we do?"

Our imaginary 35 year old salesman, present that day in Jerusalem, was speechless. The very center of his being, his mind and heart and emotions were pierced. He was defenseless - indicted and convicted.

The implications of Peter's words were exactly right about him.
HE HAD DISREGARDED JESUS.

This Jesus is the Christ/Savior that was promised, the one who would forgive sin based on His death for us and yet he didn't care,

BUT that was not all: This Jesus is Lord and this man had acted like it didn't matter. This Jesus has absolute right to govern his life and he has continued to govern his own.

Those people in Jerusalem had done what people for centuries have done and what people down to this very day have done and what some of us have done - We have disregarded Jesus as Lord.

Too many sitting in this room right now have treated Jesus like some kind of smorgasbord taking what we like and leaving the rest.

Theologian Richard Lovelace has said that our characteristic bent in life is toward independence from God. We may give the appearance of being people who seek for God and the truth BUT what we have actually done is create a false portrait of God that is agreeable and manageable to us and then we pay our respects to that vague idea of God by showing up in church and doing things for the church.

The portrait of Jesus that has been created by many church people today looks like this:

I believe in God

I believe that Jesus is God

I believe that Jesus existed before he was born here on earth.

I believe that Jesus did miracles.

I believe that Jesus died on the cross for sins

I believe that Jesus rose from the dead and went back to heaven.

I believe that if I ask Him he will forgive me for my sins and take me to heaven when I die.

The picture is of a Jesus who is a truly nice guy and would certainly forgive me for the things wrong that I have done and will kind of stand by and take care of me when I die - or so I hope.

And because He is such a nice guy I feel compelled from time to time to stop what I would otherwise be doing and attend church or some other religious activity just to prove that I am grateful or maybe to prove that I'm doing my part so that He'll be more inclined to do his part when the time comes.

We treat Jesus like a genie in a bottle:

We believe he's there

We believe that we should be careful not to overtly offend him.

And we then have him available to help us whenever we choose.

Do you know what “cut to the heart” of those Jerusalem listeners?
They realized that they had been treating God and His Son Jesus as heavenly bell-hops instead of as the Lord of the universe. They finally saw Him for who He was: Lord and Christ.

And they saw themselves as having lived throwing the bones, the leftovers, of their lives to God instead of following Him as master of their lives.

They understood that their root problem was not whether they did or did not commit sins. Their problem was not first of all immorality, or lusts, or hatreds, or conspicuous consumption, or jealousies, or anger, or cheating on taxes or spouses. **THEIR PROBLEM** was first of all **REBELLION AGAINST GOD!**

Now that is a strong word but anything less than submission is rebellion. They had created their own religion. They had a religion that included what they liked and rejected what they didn't like.

Let me illustrate that: It is popular in our day to determine whether certain sexual conduct is legitimate by asking two questions: Is it a relationship between consenting adults and is anyone being hurt by it? In the minds of too many any sexual conduct is o.k. if it is enjoyable, no one is hurt, and it is done by adults.

But suppose we judge sexual conduct by God's standards instead! Where did we get the idea that we determine right and wrong by our enjoyment, our statement that it is o.k. and by our evaluation of whether anyone is hurt? God lays down the rules, not us.

Do you see that the biggest problem here is not that certain sexual conduct is immoral (They might have come to the same conclusion about certain conduct as God did). **THE BIGGEST PROBLEM** is that they decided what was right and wrong. They usurped the place of God. That is rebellion.

And so in Jerusalem that day they understood that they stood convicted, with no excuse, and helpless. God had every right to render them out of existence. They were rebels against God. They

would expect to be eliminated for such insubordination, for such disregard for God.

This rebellion, this insubordination, this independence from God may not always feel like rebellion.

In many people their unconscious independence from God and the unrelieved guilt for their past failures feels more like insecurity and aloneness.

A man may have gotten an education, may have been married, may have fathered children, attempted to care for them, been a good citizen, even has gone to church but he knows that he's alone - no real connection with anyone else and certainly not with God.

Oh, he has knowledge of Jesus, he believes it, but no relationship.

He knows of no one who can really walk in his shoes. No one knows his heart, his fears, his thoughts.

No one can tell him what is ahead for him and why. He is alone.

And the insecurity of that is overwhelming at times.

The PAIN may be insecurity but the PROBLEM is independence from God, an unwillingness to bow fully to his sovereign authority and receive his forgiveness and life.

And so in Acts 2:37 verse we hear them expressing that helplessness - "Brothers, what shall we do?"

And Peter's response is as appropriate and convicting today as it was 2000 years ago: "REPENT"

He did not say, "ask Jesus to forgive you for all the wrong things you ever did and guarantee that you will go to heaven (though in Jesus you will have that guarantee).

He did not say, "come and find Jesus who will be the greatest friend you have ever known and will meet your every need" (though in Jesus you will find that).

And he certainly did not say, "Come and link up with Jesus so that all of your dreams can come true and all of your endeavors will be successful. "

He said, REPENT! Or in other words: Change Lords!

Repentance involves a fundamental change of your whole life: Before you were the judge of God (what you wished to include in your religion). Now God is the judge of you.

Repentance is an inward change of the mind: I now know that He is Lord not me

Repentance is an inward change of the affections: I now have a love for what he loves and a growing hatred for what he hates.

Repentance is an inward change of intentions: I now intend to let him call the shots in my life.

Repentance is an inward change of commitment: I am today and each day resolving to follow Him.

And when that Repentance is coupled with a FAITH in Jesus -

a reaching out to him to forgive you for your rebellion.

a reaching out to him to turn you around in your heart, mind and will.

a reaching out to him to give you a new life and to give you his presence in the person of the Holy Spirit,

That REPENTANT-FAITH results in a CONVERSION!

By God's grace you become a Christian.

And according to this text and others, that REPENTANT-FAITH results in a willingness to be identified with Jesus by being baptized.

I began this message today by saying that I believe there are far too many who attend our church regularly who are not truly Christians because they have never repented - They have never turned from themselves to Jesus as Lord.

Their basic orientation is still toward what they want from life, not what Jesus wants for them.

Their choice of education and career is not based at all on what Christ wants for his Kingdom.

Their decisions on promotions are not based on Christ's will for their lives.

Their decisions on how their money is spent never takes into consideration the will of God for that money (beyond maybe a token amount given to charity or the church).

Their relationships are not picked and sustained by the desire of Jesus for their lives.

They will flirt with the limits of what they believe is proper for a Christian and find it titillating. The jokes aren't the worst just a little off-color. The movies aren't NC-17 just R; and they don't drink to get drunk just to loosen up a little. Entertainment is not determined by the Lord Jesus but by their own standards.

I ask you, "With such evidence, who would you say is Lord of their lives?"

I ask you, "With such evidence, would anyone dare suggest that a turning from self to Jesus has taken place?"

I ask you, "with such evidence, would anyone say that such people have repented?"

My call to some of you today is the same as Peter's call to his audience:

Be done with your poor imitation of Christianity.

Be done with your self-made portrait of Jesus the bell-hop.

Be done with your token attention to religious things.

Be done with the independence of I can make it on my own.

Be done with the aloneness such independence brings.

Be done with charting your own life.

Be done with deciding alone what you will and won't do.

Be done with being your own "lord"

REPENT!!

THIS JESUS WHO WENT TO THE CROSS BECAUSE OF YOUR SINFUL/REBELLION IS BOTH LORD AND CHRIST.

Will you turn to Him today?

Will you follow Him?

Will you decide today, to reorient your life to Him as Lord?

If you will turn to Him as Lord today, he will forgive you for your rebellion and the resulting sins, and he will give you the person of His Holy Spirit so that you may today begin to live a new life - a life that follows after Him and increasingly does what He wills.