

"One Response to Law/Gospel Preaching"

by Pastor Jeffrey Miskus

Preached on the 7th Sunday after the Epiphany

Text: Acts 2:37-41

DATE: February 27th, 2011

IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST, OUR CRUCIFIED, RISEN AND ASCENDED LORD, WHO IS NOT DEAD BUT ALIVE, WHO IS NOT IN THE TOMB, BUT IS WITH US HERE, NOW WITH HIS LOVE AND HIS POWER AS HE LIVES AND REIGNS AT THE GLORIOUS RIGHT HAND OF GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER. DEARLY BELOVED CHILDREN OF GOD...

Today we continue our study of the Book of Acts, the book of the New Testament covers what happened to the church after Jesus rose from the dead. Chapter 1 of Acts revealed to us that the risen Lord Jesus Christ was still leading, guiding, and directing his church. After Jesus rose from the dead he appeared to his disciples over a period of 40 days and spoke to them about the Kingdom of God. He's also told them to wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then the disciples watched as Jesus ascended to God's right hand.

Soon after Jesus sent the Holy Spirit upon his followers in the form of tongues of fire. Every believer was given the ability to speak about God's works in different languages. Then Peter got up and began explaining to the thousands of gathered people that this was all part of God's plan. Last week we heard Peter's sermon in which he demonstrated that the Old Testament clearly predicted that the Messiah would die and rise from the dead. Peter's points were that Jesus' miracles, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension to God's right hand were all part of God's plan.

His last line to the audience he was preaching to was, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." In your blind sinfulness you rejected God's Messiah and participated in the crucifixion of God's promised Saviour. But God raised him from the dead victorious over your enemies of sin, death, and hell.

Peter didn't take courses on 'how to make friends and influence people.' His sermon is personal and accusatory. Yet it also proclaims the saving work of God through Jesus.

How would the people respond? This is something we are going to get to observe a great deal as we walk through Acts... how people respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of Jesus' apostles. I believe it will bring into question some of the commonly held beliefs we have today about presenting the Gospel.

So let's listen to the response of the people to Peter's sermon... When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted

his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day." Acts 2:36-41

When the people heard that they were responsible for the rejection and crucifixion of God's Promised Messiah they were 'cut to the heart'. They knew in the depths of their hearts that they were sinners in need of God's forgiveness. Brothers and sisters without this cutting, this conviction wrought by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of God's Law, there can be no true faith. If you don't consider yourself a sinner – you don't need a Saviour from sin and Jesus' death for you on the cross is meaningless. But if you are cut to the heart – and enlightened by God's Law regarding your sinful condition, then you will know you need a Saviour – and the news that Jesus paid for your sin will be music to your heart and ears.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ you know this cutting to the heart... you've experienced it time and time again. It is why we confessed our sins at the beginning of this service. It is why we are completely humbled before God. It is why we can forgive others that sin against us. We know we are spiritually helpless against sin apart from Jesus and his redeeming love. These days I find that many in the Christian church want to avoid this cutting part of conversion at all costs. It's too offensive – don't say it. It's not loving – don't say it, It will cause people to reject the Christian faith – leave it till later.

And so despite the results of Peter's sermon – we shrink back from calling people to repent. Perhaps that's why the church is withering in North America. God forbid we say or believe anything that offends anyone.

Listen brothers – no matter what you believe and no matter what you say, someone, somewhere, will be offended. So you might as well speak the truth about what you believe and not worry about who you offend. God will see to it that people get the message and are cut to the heart.

Listen – love reaches out and takes risks. If someone is running towards a cliff, the loving thing to do is call them away from it. If that means you have to reach out and grab them, startle them, and even offend their sensibilities then love demands you must!!!

If your child was running out into a busy street where they would be struck by a car – you'd say anything, do anything, and throw anything you could to shock them into stopping and realizing that they were in terrible danger. The human race is spiritually dead, blind, enemies of God, headed for a godless eternity. Sin drives people to hate each other, nations to war, families to break up. Sin causes addictions, depression, hurt and harm to those we love. Sin works against love and is the cause of all the suffering in the world. But God has loved our human race and reached out and saved us through Jesus – He has broken the power of sin by taking our sins away through Jesus' crucifixion. And God has offered his us presence, peace, joy, and life. Should we not be screaming this from the roof-tops – not caring who we offend only that some might listen and be saved?

The people cut to the heart cried out, "Brothers, what shall we do?" AC 2:38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins..." Notice it is the same message

as Jesus and John the Baptist. Repent for the Kingdom of God is near. Peter says repent and become part of the Kingdom of God through Jesus.

'Repent' means 'turn.' It means, 'change your mind your heart about Jesus and what he taught.' Instead of being proud – humble yourself and admit your sinfulness to God. Instead of rejecting Jesus – believe in Him. Instead of rebelling against Jesus – follow Him. Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. This is the way into the Kingdom of God, Faith in Jesus and baptism into his name. Just before he ascended into heaven the final word to his disciples was

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28: 19-20.

Baptism was to be done in Jesus' name... that means the person being baptized... Becomes a child of the God that Jesus revealed as His heavenly Father. Baptism in Jesus name means that the person believes the message that Jesus revealed. Baptism in Jesus name means that the person receives the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life that are promised to us in Baptism The power of Jesus name healed sicknesses, cast out demons, and raised the dead. It could certainly also forgive sins.

Peter replied, "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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day." AC 2: 38-40

The baptized are promised – forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit. And – this promise is for all who follow Jesus, young, old, male, female, slave, free, Jew or Gentile. With many other words Peter continues to witness and encourage them to follow Jesus. Incredibly 3000 people accepted his message and were baptized that day. Today as a church we continue to do as Peter and the Apostles did. We continue to preach and teach and witness about Jesus to our friends and families. We continue to call the world to repent and follow Jesus. We continue to baptize all who accept the message. And we continue to bring God's forgiveness, God's Spirit, God's life, and salvation to the world.

We continue to do all these things because the same Jesus who was leading and guiding the church 2000 years ago is leading and guiding us today.