

Broken by the Word

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 February 2019

Preacher: Rev John Maclean

[0 : 00] I'd like to turn your thoughts to the passage we read in Acts chapter 2. And the words that we have at verse 37. When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart.

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart. Someone asked the question, Have you read a good book recently?

One that gripped you and one that held onto your attention. A book that you didn't want to put down. Maybe a book that was full of intrigue, lying, cheating, murder and so on.

The Acts have all of that. And what they tell us is the work of God the Holy Spirit.

How the Lord reached into individual hearts and blessed each one. Now when you look at the beginning of the book of Acts, a number of things that I want you to notice.

[1 : 15] First of all, there were a number of days before the day of Pentecost. So you can put it like this. First of all, there were days of preparation.

And then there was the day of Pentecost. And then we are told that the power of God's Spirit was at work.

And this young church was beginning to progress. Many were being added to the church. And then later on we are told about times of persecution.

There were problems within the church. But all the time you see how the hand of God was at work. And when you look, especially on the day of Pentecost, then what you find is this. God's Spirit was poured out upon the church.

[2 : 24] And as a result, many people came to believe and trust in the Savior. So the Spirit was poured out.

And we are told about the opportunity that Peter had to preach to the vast crowd that were before him. And what you notice is this.

He preached the whole counsel of God. It's very interesting to see the, you could say, his point of contact.

The people round about, or some of the people round about, were accusing the disciples of being drunk. And Peter latches on to that. And he says the people are not drunk.

And he went on to proclaim the Word of God. He told them about the Messiah. He told them how he would be crucified. He told them that he would rise again from the dead.

[3 : 25] He told them all that. And as Peter was speaking to the vast multitude, what we are told is this. When they heard these words, they were cut to the heart.

What was happening? The Spirit of God was taking the words of Peter and applying it to the hearts of individuals with a power, and we'll notice later on, with a conviction.

Now maybe you've been aware of something similar. You've sat and you've listened to God's Word. And you've been aware of the Spirit of God taking those words and applying them to your heart.

And maybe sometimes you wondered, why was the minister preaching that? How did the minister know about my situation? It was God the Holy Spirit that was blessing His Word to individuals.

And when we are told here that they were cut to the heart, what does it mean? God's Spirit was at work.

[4 : 44] What does that mean when it says they were cut to the heart? Well, it means, first of all, that all those people who were listening to what was said, they were convicted by the Spirit.

God's Holy Spirit had so challenged them, they were convicted. What does that mean? Well, it means this, that they couldn't react.

Or put it another way, they were so wounded or so affected by what they heard, they couldn't argue. They couldn't defend themselves.

What they heard really bothered them. It troubled them. The Word of God was reaching into their hearts. God's Word was like a sword.

It was penetrating into their hearts. This sharp sword. And what did it do? It cut and laid open their hearts.

[5 : 53] convicted by the Spirit. They could not react. Then secondly, they could not recover.

They were so wounded, they were so affected, that they couldn't recover unless they were converted.

But what it shows to us is the power of God's Word. It shows to us the power of God the Holy Spirit that took these words of Peter and applied them to these hearts and the people were so affected by what they felt and by what they heard.

But the third thing is this, they couldn't repress how they felt. I'm sure, especially when you're younger, if you're maybe in your bath or maybe in the swimming pool or out in the sea and you had a ball and you tried to put that ball down under the water and the minute you took your hand away then the ball rose to the top again.

Now, that is a picture of what was happening here. these people could not control, they could not keep down what was happening to them.

[7 : 25] They couldn't repress it. In other words, they were going through an experience that in one sense was not pleasant.

An awful experience. What was happening? their sins were being exposed and especially to themselves.

But I think that they would have thought also, everyone else is seeing into my heart. But it was only God that knew their hearts and was seeing right into their hearts and it was God who was the all-knowing one and he knew exactly where they were and he knew exactly what they were going through.

But these people, they saw themselves as guilty before a holy God. They felt the pain in their hearts.

They were wounded in their spirits and they couldn't keep down they couldn't repress what they were feeling at this time. I want to pause there for a moment.

[8 : 47] It must have been a wonderful time for Peter and for the other disciples when they were being made aware of what was happening. They knew that God by the power of his spirit was at work.

What a wonderful experience. And there they were in the midst of this and they were seeing the hand of God at work.

But then there's another thing and it is this. They couldn't reverse what they had done. In other words, they couldn't turn the clock back.

What was convicting them the most? Oh yes, their sin. But that they had crucified the Savior. And I'm sure they were wondering all that we could have turned the clock back.

And you know there are many that feel like that. All that we could turn the clock back. 30, 40, 50, 60, maybe longer.

[9 : 57] If we could only turn the clock back. But we can't. And here these people were living with this. We crucified the Savior.

And Peter he put it like this. You took him and with cruel hands you crucified him. And you can imagine these words getting to their hearts, reaching into their minds and into their hearts.

And they were beginning to realize, yes, we crucified the Savior. It was us that did that. And they were thinking to themselves only if we could reverse the situation.

Only if we could turn the clock back. But it means something else. It means that they couldn't resist anymore.

Maybe in their hearts before this they had resisted the word of God and the law of God, but now they couldn't. They were so convinced of the truth that Peter was preaching, they couldn't resist anymore.

[11 : 12] Now maybe that is something you experienced yourself in coming to faith. You look back and you see the times when you resisted.

The times when you walked out of the house of God saying that this wasn't for me, you resisted. And over and over again, maybe you can remember the times when you resisted the gospel.

But then there came that time when you couldn't resist anymore. And that is what was happening here.

The people couldn't resist what they heard. Where are you today? Are you still resisting? Are you still saying no to the gospel? Are you saying it's not for me? There was what we would call a mission conducted in Northern Ireland.

[12:20] Conducted by one of our ministers who has passed on a few years ago. And at the end of the service, it was decided that they were going to sing words, a hymn that included these words about following the Savior.

God's God's ministry. And this minister was watching. And the words were, I do believe, I will believe, that Jesus died for me.

And this minister watched a particular person, singing with all, he seemed to be singing with all his heart. But when he looked, when he was looking closer and looking at the man's lips, what was he saying?

I don't believe, I won't believe that Jesus died for me. And this minister shuddered. And he waited down at the front of the church while everybody streamed out.

Then suddenly, somebody came bursting in to say that there was an accident. and this minister knew right away what had happened, at least to an extent as to what had happened.

[13:44] And this young man that was sitting in the front of the church saying, I don't believe, I won't believe that Jesus died for me, crossed the road and suddenly, he was knocked down and into eternity.

You see, there are so many, that resist the spirit of God. Now, these people had reached the stage, or it had reached the stage in their hearts where they couldn't resist.

But remember, God's word reminds us, my spirit will not always strive with man.

In other words, you don't know when God is going to speak to you for the last time. You don't know when the spirit of God is going to strive with you for the last time.

You don't know when God is going to say, enough is enough. And you've crossed that line. there is a time we know not when, a place we know not where, that seals the destiny of man for glory or despair.

[15:17] God is going to God is going to resist. But the other point to remember is this, they wouldn't have wanted to resist.

Or they knew that they had probably resisted before, but now they have reached the stage, we don't want to resist. resist. You see, what happens in our lives, when God is truly speaking to us, we're aware of God's love reaching out to us and drawing us to himself.

We don't want to resist the drawing power of the love of the gospel. so when you think of these people that were listening to what Peter was saying, they were convicted by the spirit.

But secondly, because of that, we know that they were concerned about their soul. One leads on from the other.

If somebody is convicted about their sin, then they become concerned about their soul. And that's why they said, brothers, what shall we do?

[16:42] Now, there are a number of things that they want us to notice. First of all, their unanimity. What shall we do? They all knew that they were guilty.

They all knew that they were in this together. They were aware not only of their own need, but they were aware of the needs of others. What shall we do? Now, the point to remember is this.

Although collectively they were so concerned, each one of them would have come individually to the place of belief.

And God would have dealt, the spirit of God would have dealt with each one separately, but they all felt together at this stage, we are guilty.

The unanimity that they felt. What shall we do? But then there's a second thing and that's the urgency. See, here are these people and they're thinking, my need, our need requires immediate action and attention.

[18:02] In other words, they were saying, we don't want to delay anymore. We don't want to put off, we don't want to procrastinate. And there is this urgency, and it was the spirit of God that brought them to that place, the urgency.

They felt that what was to happen, they wanted it to happen right away. Lord, save me, they might have said. Lord, have mercy.

Here they are in this situation, and there is this urgency that they would be blessed. What shall we do?

But there is something else that I want us to notice, and that is their uncertainty. because I'm sure that there were some of them thinking, after what we have done, we crucified the Savior, after what we have done, can we be forgiven?

Can we be helped? Can we be saved? Will God reject us? God forgive me? And I'm sure there were times when God was dealing with us and speaking to us, we thought to ourselves, or maybe you're thinking that today, will God ever forgive me?

[19 : 33] When I think of what I've done, will God ever forgive me? Will he ever save me? Will I ever find the help that I need?

If we ever, if you're ever in that situation where you think that God could not help you, or that he couldn't save you, then you are making God a liar.

Because he says that he is able to help us, to do for us more than what we could ask or think. He's able to do all that. He's able to forgive us, and if we confess our sins, he will forgive us, cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So here are these people, and they're so concerned, they do something about it. Are you sitting here today, and you're feeling concerned?

Or you can ask someone, but you can turn to the Lord, God, and you can seek him, and you seek him with all your heart.

[20 : 49] You find him in his word, but if you're aware of this situation, if you're in this situation just now, you're concerned about your soul, you didn't bring yourself to that place.

It was only God, the Holy Spirit, that brought you there. if you're concerned today, then you know that God is speaking to you.

And that's why Isaiah said, seek the Lord while he is to be found. Call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Today, the Lord is drawing near. This could be the moment when he is to be found. But then, there's a third thing I want us to notice.

Yes, these people were convicted, and that led to concern. So, what was the word of counsel that Peter gave them?

[22 : 03] What were they told to do? They were told to repent. Derek Prime, a famous minister, commentator, he said, repentance is a turning from sin to God as a result of a change of mind and heart about sin.

They were to confess their sin. There had to be a sorrow for sin. They had to admit that they had done wrong. They had to, they had come to this place where they really wanted to be right with God.

They didn't want to be a stranger to him anymore. And Peter is saying to them, they have to be forgiven. Now, repeating what I said earlier, there would have been a personal confession.

Oh, earlier they asked, what shall we do? But each one of them had to make that personal confession. They had to, as individuals, ask the Lord, or as individuals, repent of their sin and ask for forgiveness.

But it's very interesting that after their personal confession, you have this public confession, one followed on from the other.

[23 : 33] And on the basis of their forgiveness, forgiveness of their sin, then they wanted to make this public confession. They wanted to take this next step, openly professing that they were believers in the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

So they were told to repent. But then also, they were told what the result of this repentance would be. And you notice two things, and one I've mentioned already, they are told that they would be forgiven.

Imagine. Here are these people, they're so convinced, and they're so concerned about their sin, and they're being told, you can be forgiven.

No matter who you are, or no matter what you think you have done, you can be forgiven. Repent. for the forgiveness of sin, but also, they were told that they would be given the Holy Spirit, and you will receive the Holy Spirit.

And you see, what was happening in their hearts is this, they were aware of the working of Almighty God.

[24 : 53] They knew that it wasn't of themselves. And another thing you notice is they were given a reminder of the promise of God, for the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are afar off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

Now, notice a number of things. Peter is saying for your families, the promise is for you and for your children. They come to that, they must come to that place as well, where they know the blessing of the Lord in their hearts as individuals.

And then he mentions those who are afar off. Now, it may be physically afar off. It may be spiritually afar off.

They could be on the other side of the world, far off. But God's Spirit can reach out to them. Or they may be far off because of the kind of life they're living.

That awful life. And the promise is to them that they too, although they are separated from God, remember the words of Paul in Ephesians, he came and preached peace to you who were afar off, and peace to those who were near.

[26 : 23] And this was the promise that everyone whom the Lord calls through his word, if they repent, they'll be forgiven.

Think of these two things, for our families, and for those who are far off. Do you believe that? do they know that? Do your families know that? That they can be forgiven?

Those who may be physically, spiritually far off, do they know that they can be forgiven?

So what happened? These people were converted. They were convicted, they were concerned, they were told what to do, they were counseled, and we are told that they were converted.

[27 : 34] Those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about 3,000 souls. A number of things I want you to notice.

So important, they accepted the word of God, because that is what was being proclaimed. They accepted the word of God, those who received his word.

Those whose hearts were opened to receive his word. Those who didn't want to resist any longer the word, they accepted the word. And then we are told that they acted in obedience.

obedience. Those who received his word were baptized. They took that next step. They were baptized. They acted in obedience.

And another thing you notice is this, that they were added to the fellowship of God's people. There were added that day about 3,000 souls.

[28 : 39] That is so important. added to the fellowship of God's people. And then the last thing you see about them is this, they adhered to the teaching of God's word and they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship.

But what a wonderful picture that it gives us. Days before or weeks before they were crying out, away with him, crucifixion, him.

We don't want this man to rule over us. And as Peter said, and some of you, you took him and with cruel hands you put him to death. What a turnaround.

What a change. Because God the Holy Spirit worked in power. What can we learn?

God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

[29 : 52] The God who worked then and the God who has worked down through the ages, around us, throughout this island, throughout our land, is the Lord, the Lord who is the same, can work again in power.

He's the same. power has not changed. But there's a second thing that we must learn. That it is God the Holy Spirit that takes his word and applies it to the hearts of individuals.

And that leads on to the third thing. Pray to that end. As individuals, collectively, pray that as individuals are hearing the word of God, that God's spirit would take that word and apply it to them with power.

Pray for that. And also, accepting or being part of a fellowship. It's a wonderful thing being in fellowship, not just with God, but being in fellowship with one another.

Make the best use you can of fellowship. It strengthens you, it strengthens others, and it can be a blessing to the world how God's people are in fellowship, the one with the other.

[31 : 25] So I leave these words with you, and we pray that God would bless them to us. When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart.

Amen.