

The Saving Power of the Gospel

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[0 : 00] Let's turn back into Acts chapter 2 and we are going to focus our thoughts around verses 36 through to 47.

And we are going to do this in considering the saving power of the gospel as it changed this large crowd.

The saving power of the gospel. Now we know from the scripture accounts that we have a situation where the day of Pentecost had fully come.

That is the 50th day from the second day of Passover. And as it happened, our Savior had been 40 days from his resurrection.

And then they were told to wait a further 10 days. And when the day of Pentecost, of Shavuot, the Jewish festival, had fully come.

[1 : 18] Verse 1 of chapter 2. And before we get into this, I want us just to think about Peter himself.

Because Peter, you recall, had been something of a write-off. He had denied the Savior prior to the Savior's death.

He had denied him with oaths and cursings. And yet the Lord Jesus had wonderfully restored him, you remember, by the Sea of Galilee.

He had brought him out of that terrible state he had been in. And he restored him. And he was now using him to gather this great harvest of Jews and proselytes into the true Israel of God.

And with what amazing power the Spirit of God must have endued Peter. Because under this sermon, Peter had been allowed to see thousands added to the church.

[2 : 47] We read there that about 3,000 souls were added to them. So with what tremendous power the Spirit had endued Peter.

And gave him this wonderful ministry to bring people in. A harvesting ministry. And it seems to me that there is some important instruction for us in this passage.

There is instruction about the amazing power of the Holy Spirit. The saving power of the Gospel. And the fact that God, when he so chooses, can work in such a mighty way, changing people.

He can elicit this believing response from people. And I think, therefore, it is helpful for us to think about this and to ponder in our hearts whether, in fact, we believe the Gospel.

And secondly, whether we believe in the Gospel. And there is a difference. We need to both believe it, receive the Christ of the Gospel, and continue to believe in its power.

[4 : 06] It is the power of God, said Paul to the Romans, and to salvation, operative, and to salvation to everyone who believes. To the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.

And it is always that way. And it is important, as we look at this passage concerning the saving power of the Gospel, which changed this large crowd.

It is important to reflect on whether we believe this in our hearts. And whether we believe in the Gospel as the power of God and to salvation.

I want to think about four things briefly. First of all, what the crowd there assembled, what the crowd had to understand. Now, we read in the earlier part of chapter 2 that there were people in Jerusalem at the festival of Shavuot, Pentecost, as we call it, the 50 days.

And they were there because this was the second of the appointed feasts of Israel. And they were obliged by the law to come up at this time to this festival.

[5 : 22] And they were there in their thousands. Many Jews from all over the Roman Empire, together with the Jerusalemites, And they were all concerned to understand, to hear about the wonderful works of God.

We have it there, and we read it in the passage. They wanted to know. They were concerned to know the wonderful works of God.

To be sure, they found it in their hearts to come and listen. But they were there. That's the point. They were there to listen. They were there to understand what this was all about.

They wanted to know. They wanted to know what this message about Jesus of Nazareth was all about.

And they wanted to know the blessing of the Holy Spirit upon them. That doesn't mean they would readily approve what they heard.

[6 : 34] But they wanted to know. And whatever else the crowd heard on that occasion, We know that they heard the preaching of the Messiah crucified.

This was central. You see it there in verse 36. After Peter had penned down what the mission of Jesus was all about, how salvation was accomplished through him, through his death.

And that that death was approved of by God, and that he raised him from the dead. And then he says, Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.

So he sets out the core, the heart of the gospel, and he tells them that, Ineffectively you've made a dreadful mistake, but God planned it this way.

He planned that by the atoning death of his Son, salvation would come both to Jews and Gentiles, whosoever would believe the report.

[7 : 53] But he does make the point that they had taken and crucified the Lord Jesus by the hands of the Gentiles.

You people, let all the house of Israel know, verse 36, notice that, let all the house of Israel know, assuredly, that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, people and leaders, and you did it at the hands of the authorities, the Gentile authorities, that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, in whom salvation is found.

And they had to accept that. They had to recognize that, that what they did in their ignorance, and their antagonism to Jesus, God intended to use for his saving purpose.

And the proof of his saving purpose, is that he raised, in verse 32, this Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.

So, the preaching of Peter, centered on Jesus, the crucified, and risen, and exalted Lord, in whom alone, salvation is found.

[9 : 19] And he emphasizes, that what they did wickedly, and in ignorance, the Lord purposed to use, in a saving way.

Jesus' death is an offering for sin. Jesus' resurrection, is a guarantee, of a right standing with God, to all who receive him, and it is the way, to be reconciled to God, and so on.

But you see, they had to understand, that their actions, in crucifying him, were reprehensible, leaving aside what God had purposed.

What they did, they did wickedly. What they did, they did in rebellion, and sin. And they had to recognize that. And the preaching, you see, emphasized, this aspect too.

It convicted them, of sin. They had to face up, to their rebellion. And the truth of what God has done, demonstrates his love and grace, over against the rebellion, and antagonism, and sin of the people.

[10 : 35] And this is how he presents it. And they had to understand it. And they did. The second point, concerns, what the crowd felt.

Verse 37, Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart. You see? They understood, it was difficult to take, but they understood it, and they were cut to the heart.

This is what they felt. They were pained. The word, to cut to the heart, is their minds were stung. They were stung in their hearts.

They were really convicted. They felt the genuine sting, of guilt and shame, at rejecting Jesus, the Messiah.

And they felt that Peter was justified, in what he said. You crucified him. They recognized the reasonableness, of what Peter was saying.

[11 : 49] The commentator, Alexander, says here, in this, they recognized, they were guilty, not only of, of judicial murder, but of blasphemy, and treason, against their rightful sovereign.

This same Jesus, whom you crucified, God has made, Lord and Messiah. See the point? And we say that, not with bitter antagonism, against them, not at all, God forbid, but we have to recognize, the weight of what they did, the seriousness, of what they did.

And they had to recognize it too. And they felt pain, and they were convicted, that this is what they had done, this dastardly deed, they were complicit in.

They couldn't simply blame Pilate, or blame the soldiers. They had a hand in it too. And that they felt it keenly, is borne out, by the second part of verse 37.

First of all, now when they heard this, they were kept to the heart, and said to Peter, and the rest of the apostles, men and brethren, what shall we do?

[13 : 19] Something needs to be done. And this is true. It was true then, and it's true now. Over 2,000 years on, it's true now.

The death of Christ, ought to convict us, as we contemplate it, of our own sin, and guilt, and shame. We would have done no differently than them, had we been there.

And songwriters, spiritual songwriters, hymn writers, have captured this again and again. Because this is at the heart of the problem, that we would have been there, doing the very same thing.

It's not about blaming the Jews. That is a total distortion. Whilst we recognize their part in it, we recognize our own part in it, as sinners of mankind.

We might say, that we, when we contemplate that, we should feel shame, and confusion of face, that we ourselves, would have done the same thing.

[14 : 44] Our own voices, would have cried out, among the scoffers. And you see, we need to feel, that sense of, of guilt ourselves, and shame.

Died he for me, said Wesley, who caused his pain, for me, who him, to death, pursued. He saw his hand in it too.

And a true understanding, and a true response, under the Spirit, to the death of Christ, brings us to that place, where we see, that we had a hand in it too.

We look upon him, whom we pierced, and we mourn. And there is a place, therefore, you see, for feeling, our own guilt, and feeling, that we are under, the condemnation of God, as sinners considered, apart from Christ, because we had a hand, in that death.

And therefore, it's relevant, to think about, whether you have had, that sense, in your own heart, that, here, wait a minute, I was involved, in this.

[16 : 06] I was as guilty, as they. They lived then, and there. But my own, response, would be the same.

Indeed, I see, that it, it was the very same, as that. We pierced him. He was pierced, on account, of our transgressions.

And we need to see that. that we had a hand in it, and, more blessedly, it was for us. And, seeing these things, and feeling what they felt, we want to consider, what the crowd, was then commanded, to do.

Verse, 38, tells us, then, Peter said to them, repent, and let everyone, if you be baptized, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift, of the Holy Spirit.

They were commanded. They heard the call, to repentance, to turn from seeing things, their own way, to seeing things, God's way, and to receiving, God's saving package, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[17 : 29] Now, many of them saw it, of course, and, and they responded negatively, and we'll look at that, in a moment. But, there were those, who were genuinely convicted, and they saw the, they saw the, the rightness, of repentance, of coming clean.

They saw, that this was the right thing, to do. This was the God-ordained thing, to do. Now, I know, and you know, that sometimes, when people get to the place, where they're told, to turn from seeing it, their own way, and to embrace, God's way of it, they don't like it, they feel it's, it's medicine, they don't want to taste.

But, you see, we're wise, and we're made wise, unto salvation, when we receive, God's, package, his saving package, in Christ, when we, recognize, what he has done, for sinners, and rebels, and for us, who would have, had our hands up, and our, our voices raised, against, the Lord Jesus, away with him, crucify him.

And, I say again, the more, we recognize, that it was true, of ourselves, we see, what repentance, is about, that we turn, from seeing, things our way, to seeing, things the Lord's way, and to be glad, that he has shown us, love, and grace, and he has not, dealt with us, according to our sins, but he has laid, our burden, upon the very one, we crucified.

so that, those who, as it were, savingly, receive, the Lord Jesus Christ, know, the power, of the gospel, they know it, in their lives, it, changes, their way, of seeing, things, and the word, repent, and, believe, the gospel, or as it is here, repent, and let every one of you, be baptized, well, we repent, and we believe, we are baptized, when we believe, and so on, there is that, that welcoming, of the terms, that God, gives us, he commands us, to repent, and to believe, the gospel, and it is apparent here, that that's what people did, they turned, from their own way, to God's way, and they received, the message, now of course, there are those, who think, well, they didn't, turn, simply, on their own, and there is no denying that, they were made willing, to turn, the spirit of God, so convicted them, but you see, they had to see it, and respond to it, and that's our business, and even when we feel, a certain reluctance, that we can ask, the spirit of grace, to break down, the barriers, that we, we, we, we erect, in our hearts, so that we do, receive, the truth, we change our mind, we are willing, to receive, the terms, of salvation, in Jesus, we believe, the report, and we embrace, the Christ, and when Peter, of course, said to them, and be baptized, in the name, of Jesus Christ, there is a reminder, to us here, that we need, to wholly identify, with Christ, most of you here, if not all of you, were baptized, as infants, and, when we, become members, in the church, by profession, what we are doing, is where, we are making, our own, the baptism, that, we were baptized, in as infants, we are, we are, we are seeing, we are identifying, with what the baptism, meant, we are, proclaiming, that what was done, for us, by parents, or a parent, who believed, is now, our own, by faith, we are, making, our own, public, commitment, to the Lord,

[22 : 05] Jesus Christ, and, that is, necessary, it's, necessary, I think, having, spent time, ten years, worth of it, among Jewish people, and having listened, and read, and reflected, on Jews, who, sometimes, very eminent, Jews, who, professed faith, in the Lord Jesus, some of them, simply, were not baptized, wouldn't be baptized, and they, they drew back, from that, for various reasons, but I think, ultimately, it is, obligatory, upon us, that if we, profess the Lord Jesus, then we should, follow out, the truth, that's here, and be baptized, baptism, need not be, a great, pompous ceremony, it's simply, taking, the, the word of God, and being baptized, in the name, the sprinkling, or the pouring, or the dipping, in the water, it is a declaration, of our, commitment, to the truth, as it is in Jesus, and Jesus, who is the truth, as to the way, of salvation, he is salvation, that's what we're seeing, and it's important, therefore, to, to, see, today, as you reflect, on your own baptism, all those, decades ago, that, that you make your own, what was done there, upon you, as a child, you're declaring, that your faith, is in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died in your room, instead, on the cross, and who rose up, to give you a right, standing with God, what a thing to have, no condemnation, now I fear,

Jesus is all, and he is mine, that's what we're seeing, we repent, we believe the gospel, we are baptized, in the name, one last thing then, to consider, what many, of the crowd, did, well, we read in verse, 41, though, then those, who gladly, received his word, were baptized, and that day, about, three thousand souls, were added, to them, and what we discover here, is, that, they went on, listening, to what, was said, you notice verse 40, I perhaps should have read that, verse 40, is a very, revealing, verse, and I confess, it is often overlooked, by us, and with, many, other, words, Peter, testified, and exhorted them, saying, be saved, from this, perverse, generation, they were, helped, to understand, more, of it was, to come out, on Christ's side, to separate, themselves, from the ways, of the world, and, they were, helped, to understand, that there must, be a break, doesn't mean, like old,

Alec McRae, of, of fond memory, from, Loch Arran, doesn't mean, you have to go, and drown, your bagpipes, when you're, converted, or stop, listening, to certain music, he did that, by the way, you're smiling, but he did it, he did it, he told me himself, and, sometimes, that's an, extreme thing, but sometimes, you see, it's what the bagpipes, stood, for, in his mind, and, it would always be, a sneer to him, that was his view, but it doesn't mean, we cease to enjoy music, and things like that, what it does mean is, there is a break, there is a decision, albeit, under the gracious power, of the spirit, that we step out, on Christ's side, we, we step into, the faith, and we step away, from the world, when he says, be saved, from this perverse generation, he's, he's reminding us, that there is a, there is a step to take, and it's important, what the Israelites, would not do, often, is they wouldn't take, their stand, for the Lord, they corrupted, themselves, and, and Peter says here, save yourselves, from this perverse generation, and he, of course, he doesn't mean, we have the capacity, to save ourselves, it's that manner, of speaking, it's saying, by taking this step, we are identifying, with Christ, as distinct, from the perverse, way of the world, that's what he's saying, and we need to take, and we need to take, that step, if we're not, professing Christ, publicly, we need to think, about this in a way, whatever it is, that holds us back, we need to, step out for Christ, and not be afraid, to do that,

Peter tells us, it's interesting, in his first letter, he says, they think it's strange, that you don't indulge, in all these, parties, like you used to, and he mentions, that specifically, don't worry about it, don't get strung, about it, it's part, of identifying, with Christ, we're not going, that way, they think it's strange, that you don't run, in excess, like you used to, you don't worry, about it, that's what you do, you step out, we're not the losers, for doing that, not a bit, and they received, Peter's words, gladly, there was an acceptance, of them, they received them, and they rejoiced, as is apparent, from what follows, three thousand, were baptized, well we haven't got time, to look into that, but just note, the reality, they stepped out, and they became, aware, of receiving, the Holy Spirit, he empowered them, thus they became, true children, of Abraham, through faith, in the Messiah, and you see, it's an interesting thing, and it's a bit, of a revealing thing, to us, in our, free church tradition, in our, adherent, mentality, there was no delay, there was no delay, they believed, they were baptized, and in a flash, we're told, they continued, steadfastly, in the apostles, doctrine, in the fellowship, in the breaking of bread, that's the Lord's Supper, they partook, in the Lord's Supper, they didn't wait, a year, two years, three years, four, ten, twenty, thirty, before they partook, the Lord's Supper, no, they were admitted, by the apostles, it was part, of their life, in the church, and our tradition,

I'm afraid, has hindered, many an adherent, because it denies, them the blessing, that's there, we believe, we repent, and believe, or believe, and repent, they're the inseparable twins, as John Murray called them, we separate ourselves, from the world, we take our stand, for the Lord, we involve ourselves, in the living life, if I can put it that way, of the church, we enter into, its privileges, holy, part of which, is partaking, of the sacrament, of the Lord's Supper, and so, it's important, to simply, think about, these things, in the good, apostolic tradition, rather, than, the way, we do, through our own, spectacles, of free church tradition, let us, take our part, in the life, of the church, with joy, and thankfulness, and let us, make our contribution, here, at best, the oldest, person here, will tell you, at best, the time has gone, so quickly, and it seems, oh so short, so we're only here, for a while, and we need, to make the best, of serving, the Lord, with heart, soul, mind, and strength, and may it be, that we will, see, in our own experience, such a response, and that, the day may not be, far away, when, the spirit of God, will come in such power, upon our own minister, and ministers, of the church, friends, we need to pray, for that, that, we who are charged, and tasked, with preaching the gospel, may do it, as Peter did, in the mighty, transforming power, of the Holy Spirit, of God.

[32 : 06] May he bless, his own word to us. Amen.