

38 Peter answered them, “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. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call.” 40 He testified solemnly with many other words and was appealing to them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added.

In the Old Testament, 2 Kings chapter 10, King Jehu gathered all of the prophets of Baal and told them he wanted to worship Baal. When they all came together, he instead gave the order to slaughter them all. What a contrast happened when God gathered the people together on Pentecost! Jews and converts to Judaism had come from all over the world in order to worship at Jerusalem. The Festival of Harvest was one of three mandatory worship festivals that the men were supposed to attend. (Exodus 23:16) God used this Festival as the means through which He would bring many of them to a full understanding of the Old Testament prophecies of the Christ.

By the way, God is always trying to direct people to see Him and find Him. Sometimes you may think it is just a random occurrence that you run into someone, but God doesn't deal in a random way. He has everything planned in order that as many as possible can find Him. (Acts 17:26-27) Don't forget this in your life. Perhaps He has put you in your specific situation to give you an opportunity to witness!

It started with the sound of a wind, but it was a strange thing, because nobody's hair was getting messed up. The trees weren't swaying. It reminds me of how in the Old Testament, God had fooled the Arameans into fleeing when He made a sound of chariots and horses as they waited on the outskirts of Samaria. (2 Kings 7) They fled in fear from just the sound of an army. Here, God used the sound to draw people IN instead of scare people AWAY. You might think of how people are attracted to Hawaii as they see the volcano erupt. Even though it is naturally, it doesn't happen very often. It has grabbed our attention, and we watch.

Here is where another anomaly happened. Tongues of fire came from heaven and landed on the disciples heads, but they didn't burn their hair. There was more to this fire than just fire, for hidden within the flames of the fire the Holy Spirit came and landed on them, and enabled them to do something unnatural with their tongues. They were able to speak in a wide variety of languages, languages that they had never spoken before. It was a miracle, no question about it. God had gotten their attention.

The devil didn't want this, so the people mocked. Mockery enables you not to take something seriously. “You believe in an eternal hell? Ha! You must be a rube! You actually believe in a six day creation? Wow!” So here, the people tried to make a joke of it and claim the disciples were drunk. Now, I've heard and seen some drunk people do some pretty strange things. They say things they shouldn't say and try to do things that they shouldn't do. Alcohol loosens a person's inhibitions and also impairs their ability to do them. One thing alcohol doesn't do is make someone smarter, enabling them to speak in a different language they had never heard nor spoken. I've had to learn Hebrew, Greek, German and Latin in my life. It took hours and hours of vocabulary study and grammar study in order to try and figure it out. Never in my life did I say to myself, “I'll

just get drunk today so I can do better on my test.” This was the most foolish and unintellectual explanation you could have for such a powerful miracle.

The disciples had been given a wonderful gift, the gift of communication. God had lifted a barrier between them and the visitors from around the world. Now the question is, “What would they do with it?” Jesus said in John 15, **“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify ABOUT ME. 27 And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.** Toby Keith once sang a song that complained about his girlfriend, who only wanted to talk about frivolous things such as her boss, her skin, her nail polish, and her crazy ex-lover. But Toby Keith said, “I wanna talk about ME.” Jesus says, “I want you to talk about ME and what I have done.”

Why? Peter says why. **He testified solemnly with many other words and was appealing to them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”** I always find it interesting to stop and think about the words that the Holy Spirit chose to use to describe the situation to us. Peter used the word “crooked.” Crooked is not straight. It is something that used to be straight, and somehow has been turned and changed and perverted into something else. C.S. Lewis once mentioned this - that Satan never uses anything that HE has made. He didn’t create humans. He didn’t invent sex. He didn’t design parenthood. What he does is to take these good and God pleasing things, and to TWIST them, to make them CROOKED. So where God naturally designed a man and a woman, who are so much DIFFERENT, to come TOGETHER as one, the devil says, “No, marriage is not only for a man and a woman. It can be between a man and a man or a woman and a woman.” Sinful thinking makes a man want to be a woman, and a woman want to be a man, even though their physical parts make it impossible to actually be what they want to be. But these aren’t the only things that are twisted. It’s twisted that people are so obsessed with sports. It’s twisted that we spend so much time watching television. It’s twisted that we don’t take more time reading our Bibles or praying; that we think that God should cater to everything I want instead of thinking that I am here to serve God and other people. It’s easy to see the crookedness out there in the world. But this crookedness has affected us in here too. How crooked is it to know and believe that many people are on the pathway to hell, but then to say nothing or do nothing to try to reach out to them? There are so many things that have gone crooked in our generation, and this angers God tremendously.

Think about that concept of that term - saved. We don’t need to be corrected. We don’t need to be straightened out. No matter how much we try to improve, we’re still sinful. We need to be saved: saved from His wrath and from hell. We need to be saved from our own sinful flesh. There is no other option. Beam me up Scotty. Get me out of here. There’s no hope for this generation. We’ve got to escape. If we die having been lumped in together with the generation that we are born into and live with, we are heading to hell.

Peter doesn’t mince words with the visitors to Jerusalem. What had they done that was so crooked? He said, **Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. 23 This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.**

Now here was the kicker, right before today’s text. Peter said that according to Old Testament prophecy, **God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.** Notice how often Peter said the word,

“YOU.” In their own language Peter made it clear, it was their fault for Jesus’ death, and now Jesus was alive and well. He is the Messiah. He has sent His Holy Spirit to speak through them, and, by the way, He is coming again. Gulp. It took courage to speak these words. It took boldness. Stephen tried it earlier and was stoned to death. But Peter didn’t mince any words. He spoke the truth.

But the Holy Spirit WORKED through these harsh words. Here is the miraculous response. **When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”** They didn’t try to make excuses. They didn’t say, “We weren’t even there! How can you blame us?” They didn’t say, “We didn’t know any better.” They must have thought to themselves, “This Messiah is going to be MAD! He’s going to come back and wipe all of us out!” Why wouldn’t he? When Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor, coordinated in an attempt to kill Hitler, he was put in a concentration camp and put to death. These people were afraid that Jesus would do the same. Peter pointed the finger at them and blamed them for killing Jesus too, and they didn’t deny it. What shall we do?

We are no less guilty. The Holy Spirit has said this to you in plain English. **“He was crushed for OUR iniquities. The wages of sin is death. We are by nature objects of wrath.”** You need to be saved too. But how? How can we be saved? First of all, we remember why Jesus went to the cross in the first place. He went there by God’s set foreknowledge. (vs. 23) He went there on purpose, to suffer and pay for the sins of the world under the wrath of a holy God. The payment has been made. The barrier has been broken. The question isn’t as to whether God is holding a grudge against us. You could say that He has saved us already, saved us from the payment that was needed to a holy God.

But not everyone is saved. Many people end up in hell. So Peter said, **“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”** (vs. 21) Is it really so simple? I just need to say, “Lord, save me,” and I’m saved? Jesus didn’t seem to say that. He said, **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.”** (Matthew 7) There’s this idea out there that as long as I profess myself to be a Christian, well then I must be a Christian, and nobody else can tell me otherwise. A young man can be living an openly adulterous lifestyle and yet a parent will still say with confidence, “He still believes in Jesus. He’s still a Christian.” In other words, as long as HE says he’s a Christian, well then God has to be happy with that. This confession of Jesus as Lord is not supposed to be used like a magical password to get to heaven.

How then can one be saved? Peter went on to say, **“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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call.”** Here He places the saving in God’s hands and through this simply amazing thing called baptism. He chooses to save people through baptism: a little bit of water splashed on the sinner in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What is so powerful about it? Well, the Holy Spirit is there, and wherever the Holy Spirit is working, He is opening up minds and hearts so that people can see and cling to Jesus. Baptism also washes sins away in God’s sight. God looks at the baptized sinner as having been baptized in the death of Christ.

What beautiful thing to use! Water! Water flooded the sinful world, but saved Noah and his family. Water drowned the Egyptian army but saved the Israelites from slavery and death. Water cleansed Naaman of his leprosy. Peter promised that God would use this simple thing to forgive and save not only the people that had gathered at Pentecost, but also their children, ALL who are far away, as man as the LORD will call.

I think of when I was on my honeymoon traveling on the way to Yellowstone Park. It started snowing out in the mountains and my wife was afraid as we drove right on the edge of a cliff. It made her cling to car and move away from the window, begging me to drive safely. The Holy Spirit puts you in the car of faith when you are baptized. Jesus is the car. He is the ride to heaven, free of charge. You don't want to hang out the window. You don't want roll it down. You realize the danger you are in. The word shows you the wrath of God and the hell you've deserved. So you naturally pray and you cling to Christ. The Holy Spirit is in the driver's seat. You beg Him to lead you and drive you through life slowly and safely. You don't take the driver's wheel. You trust His driving, as long as you are in the trustworthy car of Christ on the way to heaven.

It's so simple and so beautiful, and it's a shame that so many don't believe it and don't trust in it. They talk about "water baptism" as if it were merely a symbolic gesture, a lesser type of baptism. They speak as if they had a special baptism where they can speak in tongues. And isn't that a strange thing? At Pentecost God used tongues to clearly speak Christ and bring people to repentance, so that they would be baptized by water and the Spirit for the forgiveness of sins. Now people want to poo-poo that and say that baptism is nothing, that their baptism enables them to speak gibberish which nobody can understand. Or they tell us we don't use enough water, it's not a legitimate baptism because our children just don't get it. I wonder what the disciples would have said if someone told them the Holy Spirit didn't use enough fire on Pentecost? It's really just sad, because God's Word tells us that this is where His power and forgiveness is found.

But it was this simple message that changed hearts and lives on that Pentecost Sunday. **Those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added.** They knew they needed to be baptized. It was essential to them. Do you feel the same way about your baptism? Does it matter to you if your children or grandchildren have been baptized? Just think, every time a child is baptized, we have a little Pentecost. The promise lives on. Souls are saved. Just think, every time that we confess our faith with repentant hearts, the Holy Spirit is still at work. Pentecost continues as we speak in a tongue we were not born to speak, we confess things that are not natural to believe. "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord."

When the early settlers went out to settle in Nebraska, one of the first thing they realized they would have to do would be to plant trees. It was too hot and windy for their crops to grow. They needed something to break the wind if they wanted to survive. So they planted the trees and watered them, and they grew, and they survived. Those trees are still growing and producing more trees yet today. Nebraska's landscape and farming has changed because of it.

There is a hot wind of sin and death that is blowing upon us. We are withering and dying. Pentecost provides a shelter from the wind and water from the heat. God provided a way to connect you to Jesus and His salvation. So you say to Him, "Have mercy on me, for I am weak and withering." It is not a call of pride. It is a call of humility. It is a call of faith. Someday, this God, who brought brought in a harvest of believers at Pentecost, and raised a harvest of believers through this day, will bring His harvest home. Amen.