

**Armagh Baptist Church**  
**Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2009 - 7:00pm**  
**Acts ch.2:36-47 Lessons from the Early Church**

**Introduction**

Have you ever wondered where the idea of Christian Baptism came from? Well Jesus Himself was baptised by John at the age of 30 at the beginning of his public ministry. Three years later he gave the command at the end of Matthew's Gospel, telling his apostles to go and do likewise,

*"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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."*

*(Matthew 28:19,20).*

The passage I'm going to look at with you tonight is Acts 2:36-47, where we see those Apostles beginning to do exactly what Jesus had told them to do – to baptise those who had come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

They obviously practised believers' baptism. In fact it wasn't until a couple of hundred years had passed that the Church began to baptise new born infants.

About 10 years ago I stood in the ruins of a town on the North Coast of Africa in Tunisia - the town of Speitla - that dated from the 1st C. AD. There were at least 7 churches in that one town, and among the ruins of some of those churches it was still possible to see the baptismal tank sunk into the floor. Most of them were in the shape of a cross. The baptisers would have stood in the branches of the cross, and laid the candidate backwards along the main trunk of the cross. They were covered in little mosaic tiles, with pictures of fish etc in the tiles.

Probably 20 years ago now, I visited Lyon in the South of France, where you can still visit the ruins of one of the earliest churches in that country. It dates from about 450 AD and it has an 8 foot wide hexagonal baptismal tank, just outside the walls of the present church that stands on that site.

Why am I telling you all that? Well it simply means that believers' baptism by immersion is not something new, or something that Irish Baptists have dreamed up, it has been around for Centuries.

It was how Jesus himself was baptised in the River Jordan, and it was how he told his disciples to baptise as well.

So what was involved as far as baptism was concerned? Well, let's come to Acts ch.2 and let's learn some lessons from the Early Church tonight.

First of all let's take one step backwards and...

## 1. Let's Learn Lessons about Their Conversion. (v.37-41)

With so much easy-believism around today, the importance of Conversion to Christ can be watered down. Some evangelists try to tell you, "Just believe, and everything will be OK, all your problems will disappear if you just come to Christ!" That's not necessarily so. In fact very often the opposite is true. Many a convert to Christ faces persecution that an unbeliever wouldn't know anything about. Sometimes becoming a Christian brings with it its own problems. But nevertheless conversion to Christ is SO important. So how were the first Christians converted to Christ? Well we can see three things about their conversion:

### (i) Conviction (v.37)

*"When the people heard this (what Peter was preaching about) they were cut to the heart (they were pricked in their heart)."*

Peter had just been preaching a powerful sermon all about Christ, and he finished with a great climax in v.36 by saying:

*"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, **whom you crucified**, both Lord and Christ."*

They had just crucified their Messiah!

Israel had – the one they had been waiting for, for so many years!

But so have you and I. Isaiah 53:4,5 says,

*"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows.  
Yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for **our** transgressions, he was crushed for **our** iniquities; The punishment that brought **us** peace was upon him,  
and by his wounds **we** are healed."*

Yes the Jews and the Romans might have physically nailed Jesus to the cross, but in a deeper sense, he was only hanging there because of your sins and mine. It's our fault!

But when the Jews in Peter's audience that day realised what they had done, they were cut to the heart, they were convicted about what they had done. They realised they had sinned, and were convicted in their hearts about it.

I wonder does it convict you or trouble you that you were guilty of putting Jesus on that cross, because of all the things you have done wrong, said wrong and thought wrong throughout your life. *"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."* And that includes you and me. And if we're ever to be converted to Christ then we need to feel the weight of our sin, and feel that conviction of sin in our own hearts. The first thing that led to their Conversion, was Conviction of Sin. And without it, without realising you're a sinner in the sight of a Holy God, you will never truly be converted to Christ.

*“So these people were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers what shall we do?” (v.37)*

To which Peter replied:

*“Repent and be baptised, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (v.38)*

Here we see the other two aspects of their conversion

– **Repentance** and **Baptism**.

### **(ii) Repentance (v.38) (See Acts 20:21)**

Sometimes this is left out of Gospel preaching too! But what is repentance? What does it mean? Well Repentance simply means to do a U-Turn. A complete turn about.

***Repentance is a turning from sin and all that you know to be wrong, and a turning to God, and all that you now know to be right.***

It's a complete change of heart. It's a step change!

Forsaking your sin and accepting God's standards from now on.

According to this verse, their repentance brought two things:

1. The forgiveness of their sins. (v.38)
2. And they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. (v.38)

Holiness and sinfulness cannot abide together. Sin grieves the Holy Spirit. Therefore it must be forsaken if the Holy Spirit is to be received into your life. But notice that the Holy Spirit was received at the point of conversion. He comes to live in your heart as soon as you are saved. It's not some second experience you have to wait for. He'll come into your life now, and that's what will make the change in your life!

But Peter said, ***“Repent and be baptised!” (v.38).***

### **(iii) Baptism (v.38,41)**

Notice here that baptism was preached as part of the Gospel (v.38). It wasn't kept from them and then slipped in later when they got used to the idea. Peter preached it up front. I wonder sometimes do we? But don't get me wrong:

**Baptism is not essential for Salvation; but it is essential for Obedience.**

How do I know? Well just think of the Dying Thief on the cross beside Jesus. He'd lived a terrible life, he was a notorious sinner. Now he was bound hand and foot and nailed to a cross. And yet as soon as he said the words,

*“Lord remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”*

Jesus replied, *“Today you will be with me in Paradise.”* (Luke 23).

He got no opportunity to be baptised as a believer, and yet Jesus gave him the assurance he was going to heaven that day. So that’s why I say, baptism is not essential for salvation. But nevertheless it is still essential if we want to obey our Lord, because here in v.38 and in Matthew 28 it is a command to be obeyed.

*“Repent & be baptised!”*

*“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them.”*

New converts are commanded to be baptised, and we are commanded to baptise them.

That’s why I say it is essential if we want to obey our Lord and Master – to be baptised!

And notice clearly that Baptism took place after conversion, not before (v.41). They accepted the message of the Gospel first, and then they were baptised second! It’s the church that reversed this order, and that’s why it’s in the state it’s in today.

It allowed unconverted people to be baptised and join its ranks, and so we have churches today made up of mixed multitudes, some saved, some not, and the church has been emptied of its power!

For many it’s just another club they either choose to belong to, or not, as the case may be! What should have been Christ’s Kingdom on earth, has just become another empty human institution.

So this was Believer’s Baptism that was practised in Acts ch.2, and I also believe it was Baptism by total immersion in water.

There is no evidence one way or the other in this particular passage, but from other portions such as Jesus’ baptism in Matthew 3, and the Baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8 it is clear that a river or a pool of water was used. So why restrict it to a few drops?

**In fact, the word ‘to baptise’ means to dip or immerse: *Baptizo (Gk)*.**

The word was used when talking about dipping a piece of cloth into a basin of dye in order to completely change its colour. You wouldn’t just sprinkle a few drops, you would totally immerse the cloth if you were going to dye it!

So to Baptise means to dip or immerse.

**And the method of total immersion in water is a visual aid to show what baptism really means.**

\* It signifies our identification with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection.

\* It also symbolises us dying to our old way of life, burying it, and then rising to walk in a new way of life.

\* It's an outward expression to the world, of the change that has happened in your heart.

*"The idea of an un-baptised Christian is simply not entertained in the New Testament."*

Are you saved? I hope you are.

But if you're not, realise tonight that you need to be, and thank the Lord for dying on the cross for you, and ask Him to save you from your sins.

If you are saved? Are you baptised?

If you not, why not? You should consider it seriously and speak to me or one of the other elders here in the church about it as soon as possible.

But baptism isn't the end, it's only the beginning. Notice v.41-42:

*"Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about 3000 were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."*

Those who got baptised were then added to the church.

Are you baptised, but maybe not yet a church member?

You should think about that too. What does membership involve?

## **2. Let's Learn Lessons about their Devotion. (v.42-47)**

*"They continued steadfastly"* (AV) can also be translated

*"They devoted themselves."* (NIV)

Or as we would say, *"they entered into it with a heart and a half!"*

The Christian life doesn't begin and end at conversion, or even at baptism, there are 4 things mentioned here to help keep a new believer going on with Christ.

**(i) Apostles' Teaching:** This is the preaching and teaching of God's Word.

These new converts were hungry for it – I wonder are you?

When God's Word is being preached in the Sunday Services or in the mid-week Bible Study, do you come expecting to hear God speaking to you?

e.g Samuel, *"Speak Lord for your servant is listening."*

Is that your attitude? God's Word is spiritual food to build you up – you need it, you can't do without it!

**(ii) Fellowship:** This is the importance of meeting with God's people – other Christians. In the early church it involved sharing spiritual and material possessions. But it simply means that we need encouragement from each other along the way as Christians. The Lord never expected any of us to make it to Heaven alone – We need each other! So be there for each other at church. If you're not out, you're missed in more ways than one!

**(iii) The Breaking of Bread:** This is the importance of remembering your Lord. It was a solemn request from a dying friend, *“Do this in remembrance of Me.”* Well how do you treat the last request of a dying friend? Do you try to do what he says, or do you ignore it? If you’re a believer, and especially if you’re a member of this church you should be at the Lord’s Table. He is the One who asks you to be there. It’s a regular weekly reminder of all that Jesus did for us on the cross, and it reminds us that we’re not going to Heaven because of something we have done, but because of Jesus’ work on the cross *for us*.

**(iv) Prayer:** This is what Spurgeon called *“the Power House of the Church.”* Private personal prayer is important for every Christian, but the prayer mentioned here is corporate prayer – The church meeting together for prayer. Expecting your church to be strong and to see God’s blessing if you don’t come to the prayer meetings is like expecting a car to go without an engine! Without this kind of prayer a church will die.

I know this church has all these things, but the question I want to ask each of you on this anniversary Sunday is,

***“Can you really say that you are devoted to them?”***

- the Teaching, the Fellowship, the Lord’s Table, Prayer?

If not, why not?

If you’re not devoted to these things, are you really devoted to God? There’s a lot more we could say about the devotion of these early Christians, but there’s just one final lesson I want us to learn tonight:

### **3. A Lesson about Their Expansion. (v.41, v.47)**

In Acts 1:15 there were only 120 disciples.

In Acts 2:41, 3000 souls were added to the church.

In Acts 2:47 there were daily additions as other people got saved.

And by Acts 4:4 there were 5000 men not to mention women and children.

The church was expanding rapidly, because they were all taking one step forward.

What’s the next step for you?

***Are you...***

Convicted of your sin? Converted to Christ? Is it time to be baptised?

Have you been added to the Church as a member?

Are you devoted to the life of this church?

***Wherever you’re standing tonight along that line,  
Why not take one step forward?***

