



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 2:37–40

“Baptism and the Way of Salvation”

TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading for today is a very simple and short portion from Acts chapter 2. In a sense, it is the conclusion of the first apostolic sermon, and yet at the same time, it is a response to their response to his message. Acts chapter 2 in verse 37 through verse 40 is our passage. And if you have your Bibles, turn to verse 37 of Acts chapter 2. And will you listen as I read these verses?

“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles; Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them; Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children.”

May I interrupt for just a moment to remind you, that he’s been speaking about the gift of the Spirit, the outpoured Spirit on the Day of Pentecost characteristic of this age, and that is the meaning it would seem, of the expression “the promise is unto you, and to your children;” that is, it is for the Jews, “and to all that are afar off.” And evidently, Peter relying upon Isaiah 57:19, widens the promise to include the Gentiles as well, and then adds, “even as many as the Lord our God shall call.”

Now, in the preceding part of the sermon, Peter had quoted from Joel chapter 2 in verse 32. And in that quotation from Joel, he had laid stress upon the first part of verse 32 of Joel chapter 2, “And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered,” or “shall be saved,” as Peter cites it. But then the remainder of that verse contains something very appropriate for this first sermon, probably given in the temple area in Mount Zion, because Joel continued that verse and said, “For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call.”

And if you were here a couple of weeks ago, you may remember that I commented upon the fact, that in the opening part of verse 32 of Joel 2, Joel had written, “It shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered,” a universal invitation; very obviously for all. But yet as the verse closes, it is evident that there are some whom the Lord calls, and these are the ones whom God motivates to respond to the message, for he says, “For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call.” So “whosoever may call on the name of the Lord shall be saved,” but there are some who do call.

If you have any questions about that, of course, you can settle the question of whether you are among those whom the Lord shall call, by simply calling. That settles the question of whether you belong among those whom the Lord shall call; the remnant. As I’ve so often said, “If you don’t want to do that, then you have no complaint, because the invitation is universal.” “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

You see, the Scriptures, while they preach very strongly and fervently and clearly the doctrine of divine election, do not tell us who the elect are. The elect are those who respond. They are the ones whom the Lord calls. And what a magnificent thing it is to realize, that the invitation is to “whosoever,” and there is the assurance also that there will be individuals who will call. Why don’t you find yourself among them who do call.

So that’s a magnificent little passage, verse 39. “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” And that’s not all that Peter said, as is evident from this next reference in the last verse of our section. Peter had other things to say. Luke did not record them. He simply says, “And with many other words did he testify and exhort saying”—and this is the summary of what Peter added—“Save yourselves from this untoward generation.”

Now, if you were able to read this in the Greek text, and if you cannot read it in the Greek text, but you have a New American Standard Bible before you, or possibly another modern version, you will notice that this is generally translated in the passive voice; not “save yourselves” but “be saved.” And that really is the ten—the voice of the original text. It is in the passive. “Be saved from this untoward, or crooked, generation.” May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we thank Thee for these solemn words that have been given by the Apostle Peter; given first to that crowd upon the temple mount in the days of the apostles when the Holy Spirit was given and came to indwell all believers in our Lord Jesus Christ permanently. We thank Thee for the fact that these words still have relevance for us today, so many hundreds of years later. We pray, Lord, that as we read and listen to the Word of God, we may heed the message, “Repent, and let each of you be baptized for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” What a magnificent promise for those who are concerned about their eternal salvation.

And we thank Thee, Lord, for the privilege of reading, and studying, and responding by Thy grace. And, Lord, we pray today in this meeting, may it please Thee to call some today to faith and repentance in the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask Thy blessing upon each one present. May we leave our meeting in a relationship to Thee that is pleasing to Thee, and satisfying to us. We pray particularly for those mentioned in our Calendar of Concern, as Merrill has mentioned in his announcements to

us. There are so many who are in pain and in difficulty, in trial and trouble, and have friends who are also in the same case, and, Lord, we pray for them. We especially pray for some who are in the hospital right here in Dallas who have great needs, and we pray that Thou wilt minister to them and give healing in accordance with Thy will.

We thank Thee for the blessings given to some through operations this week. We thank Thee for the way in which Thou hast responded, and, Father, we pray that Thou wilt minister to all, and minister to them not only physically, but also spiritually. Give encouragement and comfort and consolation, and give, Lord, the sense of Thy presence with them in their trials. We ask, Lord, that the Word of God, as it goes forth over the radio, and through the tape ministry, and the Bible classes, and the written ministry, that the Holy Spirit may bless it for salvation and edification. We pray for our elders and for our deacons and for our members and friends and for the visitors who are here today. O God, work in their hearts and lives to glorify the Lord through them. And be with us through the remainder of this service. We ask, Lord, that it may be a service that lifts up our Lord Jesus Christ and instructs us in the faith that the apostles proclaimed.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Our subject for today is “Baptism and the Way of Salvation.” The first apostolic sermon reached its climax when the Apostle Peter, in the 36th verse said that the Lord Jesus Christ has been seen to be both Messiah and Lord, and the conviction was produced by the spirit that some, at least, were guilty for they re—for they respond, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Professor Bruce has said, “The first apostolic preaching leads up to the first apostolic creed; Jesus is Lord.” Of course, Peter has said that he is not simply Lord, but also Messiah of Israel. And one of the things that has stood out in Peter’s message, as I mentioned last week, is that in this great evangelistic sermon, there is no sentimental pleading. There is no belaboring of the audience. There is no begging that they respond, which so often defeats itself, but Peter simply preaches the divine truth in all its power, and the effects take care of themselves.

His answer has raised the question, “Is water baptism necessary for salvation?” For he has said in answer to, “Men and brethren, what shall we do? Repent, and let each of you be baptized for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Now, this is no mere academic matter, as one might think at first glance, because the salvation of many present and past believers would appear to be at stake. If, for example, it is necessary that an individual be baptized in water in order to be saved, in the light of the preaching of the past generations, one might wonder about the eternal destiny of many who have been known to be outstanding in the Christian family. In fact, the words that the apostle writes concerning the doctrine of the resurrection, and the fact that if we do not believe in the doctrine of the resurrection, and if the resurrection has not taken place, then of course, there lies before us something that is not very happy. As Paul puts it, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” And so how would it be to be taught that baptism was not essential for salvation, and then to find out afterwards, that it was.

Think of John Calvin, for example, who taught that baptism was not essential for salvation, although we should never forget this; that when we say that baptism is not necessary for salvation, we’re not saying that baptism is not necessary. Baptism is a very important profession of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and every Christian should be baptized in water, in testimony to his faith. It’s a simple response to the gospel, that all of us can make, and when we do not make it, it tells a great deal about our responsiveness to the Word of God, and our responsiveness to the gospel of the Lord Jesus. What we are talking about is not the importance of baptism, the desirability of baptism, but is baptism necessary for salvation? Calvin taught that it was not. John Wesley, who stands on the other side of the theological dividing line also agreed, that it was not essential for salvation. George Whitefield, who stood with Calvin on the other side of the fence also preached that baptism was not necessary for salvation, but important. Spurgeon, Moody, and countless others have proclaimed the gospel with great fruit, but at the same time, have affirmed that it is not essential or necessary for salvation.

We notice this from the study of human nature—and human nature in the Bible as well—that men tend to idolize the emblems of the faith. That’s one of the reasons perhaps, we carry around crosses around our neck as an ornament. But think for a moment of Israel’s experience in the Old Testament. At one point in Israel’s disobedience, because they were not responding to the things that Moses was giving them from the Lord God, the Lord sent serpents in the midst of them, and the serpents began to bite them, and many people were dying. And then Moses appealed to the Lord, and the Lord said, “Moses, make a brazen serpent, and set the serpent upon a pole, and if anyone looks, having been bitten, at the serpent on the pole, you shall be healed.” The Lord Jesus studied that passage. He makes reference to it in John chapter 3 in the words that he spoke there. He said, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” It’s striking isn’t it, that the Lord Jesus should be likened to a serpent of brass? But of course, it’s a representation of our Lord as the sin offering. “He hath made him to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us.” So the serpent of brass was the means of physical healing for many, who having been bitten, and were on the verge of dying, looked off in a simple look. It’s a beautiful illustration of what faith in Christ is. It’s a look off at the cross, and the merits that he wins by virtue of the shedding of his blood for the people of God, and as a result of that look—that simple look—men were delivered.

Now, it’s not surprising that the serpent of brass should have a history in Israel. Later on in 2 Kings chapter 18 in the reign of King Hezekiah, many years after the wilderness experience, we read this about Hezekiah who, “did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to David his father. He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made, for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it, and he called it Nehushtan.” In other words, the serpent of brass had become a kind of ornament in the midst of Israel, and they actually were burning incense to it, as if it were a kind of

god now; a little god. That’s the way we do with the things that may have been used by God. We tend to want to idolize them and make them something they were never intended to be.

In Old Testament times, when a male son was born, he was to be circumcised on the eighth day as a testimony to the relationship of the children of Israel to the Abrahamic Covenant. It’s not long, however, before people confused this in their minds, because we don’t study the Scriptures, and so circumcision came to be the means by which an individual was converted and made a necessity for salvation. So when the apostle preached, and the Galatian believers came to the Lord, Judaizers came in among them and said, “Paul told you a lot of good things, but he didn’t tell you everything. He should have told you, not only should you believe in Jesus Christ, but you should be circumcised in order to be saved.” And so that, which in the Old Testament was designed to be a sign and a symbol of a relationship of faith, has now become the means by which people come into the possession of salvation.

It’s not surprising then, that baptism in the Christian era should have also undergone a change from the purpose that it was intended to have in the early days of the Christian church.

Now, before I launch into what I want to say this morning, I want to say this; there is a need for courteous consideration of various views, although at the same time, only one of these views can be right. When we discuss the question, “Is baptism necessary for salvation,” it either is necessary for salvation, or it is not necessary for salvation. We cannot say, “Some people say this, and other people say this, and so therefore it doesn’t really matter.” It does matter. In fact, Christianity is called not “the ways to God,” but as you know in the book of Acts, it is spoken of as “the way”—“the way” singular—“the way to God.” So we must, of course, be courteous with our professing Christian friends who differ with us, but at the same time, we must have the firmness that comes from a right understanding of the Word of God.

Now Peter is preaching, and his preaching has led to a magnificent conclusion that, “God has made this same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” In other words, the Lord Jesus is alive, and he is alive in bodily form, and further, he is the one to whom the Old Testament

Scriptures pointed as the messianic king. That’s the conclusion that he makes in his sermon. He’s alive. He’s alive in bodily form, and he is the promised Messiah.

One might ask when they respond, “Men and brethren, what shall we do? What is the divine cause of this appeal that they make? Well, look at verse 37 carefully. It begins with the clause, “Now when they heard this.” In other words, it was the Word of God. The sermon’s success is traced to the Word of God. In fact, as you go over this sermon, you will note that Peter really is giving what we would call in a theological classroom, a rather pointed exegesis of certain key passages of the Old Testament as they point to the ministry of the Messiah to come. He cites from passages like Joel chapter 2. He cites, or makes allusion to Isaiah chapter 57. He cites Isaiah cha—I mean, Psalm chapter 110—the 110th Psalm, that great and important Psalm. And there are some other allusions as well. So what he has done is taken the Scriptures. For him, the Scriptures were the Old Testament Scriptures. They were the Scriptures of the early church, and from them, as they compared the things that happened in our Lord’s life with what the prophets and others had written, they pointed to the fulfillment in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. So the sermon’s success is traced to the Word of God; to the prayer of the saints, as suggested in chapter 1, and fundamentally also, to the activity of the Holy Spirit who has now been given. So the Word and the Spirit point to the Lord Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophetic Word.

Now, the human source of this appeal, “Men and brethren, what shall we do,” is the fact of their conviction. For we read, “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart.” As I said last week, they were stabbed. They were pierced in their hearts. You can see what may have been going on in their minds. If Jesus of Nazareth is Lord and Messiah, and if we have put him to death, then there is no greater guilt that we could possibly have, for we have been responsible in the death of the messianic king, and the one who is also the Lord. And so you can see, that as this came home to them, they realized the tremendous burden of guilt that they were bearing.

Now, as the apostle, under the power of the Holy Spirit preached the Word of God, and the Spirit gave understanding and gave conviction, and under the burden of their conviction in their lost

condition—guilt, condemnation—they cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” In a sense, contrary to the kind of preaching that often characterizes the church in the 20th century when the preacher gives the invitation, in this case the crowd gave the invitation, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

Well, that’s a sign of a true activity of God the Holy Spirit. After all, it’s terrible to be judged by the Law, for the Law was given to show us our sin. The Apostle Paul said, “Cursed is that one who does not continue in all things written in the book of the Law to do them.” Everything written in the whole book of the Law to do them, and if we do not do them, then we stand under the curse. So it’s terrible to be judged by the Law of Moses; perhaps more terrible to be judged by the Sermon on the Mount, for that is a more intense interpretation of the Mosaic Law. Everything that our Lord said was probably in the Mosaic Law, but he laid stress upon the internal side of it.

And as I said last week, there was one man who finally said, “O God, deliver us from the Sermon on the Mount,” because it too points to our sin and guilt, but if these things are things that are terrible to be judged by, the cross is the most terrible of all things to be judged by, because the cross says that men, both Jews and Gentiles, are guilty of the death of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah and Lord of God.

So it’s not surprising then that they say, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” And Peter doesn’t respond by saying, “Give the four spiritual laws to all of the individuals who are standing in the audience today,” but rather, a very simple message to the point, “Repent, and let each of you be baptized for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” You know, that must have been unusually and unspeakably reassuring to them, because if they cry out of the passion and anguish of the realization of their guilt, to have Peter say to them in effect, “There is such a thing as the forgiveness of sins for people such as you,” that would have been unspeakably reassuring.

I think about the man who appeared before James II of England, and as he stood before him, having been hauled in by the king’s men, the King said to him, “Now, you know of course, that it is my power to pardon you.” And the man is supposed to have responded, “Yes, I know it is in

your power to pardon me, but I know also, it is not in your nature.” But when we have a God such as is revealed in Scripture, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, what a comfort it is to realize that there is forgiveness for those who are guilty of the ultimate sin, guilty of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, as one looks at Peter’s answer, the first impression that many people obtain is, “Does not Peter specifically say that there are these things that we must do in order to be saved? We must repent, and we must be baptized, and if we repent and if we are baptized, then we receive the forgiveness of sins.” I would grant that taking this text by itself that that text seems to say simply that.

Now of course, I do not say that is what this text really teaches, but I grant that it is possible for an individual to look at this, and reasonably say that that is what the text seems to teach. If a person was a reader of the Bible, and if he were a reader of the whole of the New Testament, he would be, however, puzzled. For, in the Old Testament, as you read through the Old Testament, you never find any case in the Old Testament, in which the gospel is related to some physical act that men are to do. In the Old Testament, as Paul will say in the New Testament interpreting the Old Testament, a man is justified by faith and not by the works of the Law. And then of course, if he reads the New Testament and reads statements like those made by the Apostle John in the gospel of John, he notices a rather interesting thing, that John says, “I have written this gospel that you might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that in believing you might have life through his name.” In other words, John says, “I’ve written my gospel that you might believe and have life.” But then when you read the gospel with that in mind, you will discover that, while ninety-eight times the Apostle John relates salvation to “faith in Christ alone,” he never once makes any statement that might suggest that baptism is essential for salvation. In fact, baptism is very rarely mentioned in the book, and so that would seem to be a rather strange thing.

Then when we come over to writing of the Apostle Paul, we find much the same thing. Take, for example, the things that he wrote to the Corinthians. He said to the Corinthians that he

had “begotten them through the gospel.” In other words, he had come to Corinth, he had preached the gospel to them, and through the preaching of the gospel, he had brought them to life. He had begotten them.

Then in the 15th chapter and the second verse—second and third verses he said that, “The gospel is, that Christ has died, and Christ is burial and—buried, and Christ has been raised from the dead, and Christ has been seen,” and he says that, “it is through the gospel that men are saved.” So he said, “He had begotten them by the gospel. It is by the gospel that men are saved.”

Now, he also said something else, however, that would be, to my mind, in flagrant contradiction of the idea that it’s necessary to be baptized in order to be saved. For while he links salvation with the gospel, and regeneration with the gospel, he says, “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel; not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.” Now, if the gospel includes baptism—and surely that’s what we would have to say—the gospel includes baptism, because it’s essential for salvation—Paul’s statement, “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel” could not possibly be understood. That is logically impossible. The gospel does not include water baptism. That’s why Paul says, “He didn’t send me to baptize. He sent me to preach the gospel.”

So with all of this in mind then, we would take a second look at Acts chapter 2 and say, “Wait a minute.” The Apostle Paul in effect says, “I thank God”—in 1 Corinthians 1 he says, “I thank God that I baptized none of you except”—and he mentions two or three people that he had baptized in water. It’s almost as if he were saying, “I thank God that I regenerated none of you.” “Well, how can we possibly believe that baptism is essential for salvation,” one might say at this point. So we need to analyze the text a little more carefully. You’ll notice, first of all, that Peter says there is a “twofold responsibility.”

Now, you’ve seen that, so I won’t have to stress it because time is pressing. You may be surprised. You might get out on time today, because I have to catch a plane at 1:08 at the airport. [Laughter] So anyway, take comfort in that. Peter says, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in

the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” The twofold responsibility is very plain. They are to repent, and they are to be baptized.

Now, in order to forestall a lot of discussion, I’m going simply to say, that “repent is one side of what it means to believe. “Believe,” the broader term; “repent,” a narrower term, but a term nevertheless that is related very closely to faith.

Now, we could say a lot about that, and perhaps later on, for this will come up again in the book of Acts a number of times. We’ll say something about it later on, but it’s not necessary for what I want to say today, so we’ll drop it. Notice now, that while there are two responsibilities, there are two results promised. He says, “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” In other words, a twofold responsibility; repent, be baptized; a twofold result; remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. So it’s important for us to see that. I’ve already made reference to the fact, that this gift of the Holy Spirit is something that is “for all,” as the following words go on to say.

Now, for the text itself. Does this text, then, teach the necessity of baptism for salvation? Let me broaden the inquiry just for a moment, because I think it’s always important to ask, “What did the early church believe? What did the early church say?” Now, what the early church said, and what the early church believed is not so authoritative as what the Scriptures teach, of course, if we can show from sound exegesis, what the Scriptures do teach. But it’s always interesting and always worthwhile to ask, “What did the early church believe about questions like this?” And I think we can say this; the earliest of the apostolic fathers—Polycarp, Clement of Rome, Ignatius—all of these who have written, portions of whose writings we possess—all of them may be said never to teach a baptismal salvation. Polycarp did not. Clement did not. Ignatius did not. However, when Justin Martyr, in the latter part of the second century, begins to minister, this great apologist, in many ways began to speak about regenerating people through baptism. In other words—I’m going to put it this way, just to make it rather general—there was confusion in the early church over the relationship between baptism and salvation. In fairness, we can say that. While the earliest of the apostolic fathers

do not seem to teach the necessity of baptism, nevertheless, in a very early time that doctrine arose, and it was found also in the writings of even that great man of grace Augustine, who never seemed to understand, that if you believe in the sacramental system, you’re violating your own principles of grace to which he so dearly held.

Now then, what may we say from the standpoint of theology? Well, of course, in the Bible we never have any physical act saving us, since it’s always—there’s always someone who cannot perform a physical act. In fact, we have some of the earlier church fathers, and the one that Augustine knew saying that, he was hoping to get an individual to be baptized, but he was unable to do it. And he speaks about having lost him because he was unable to baptist—baptize him. Let me read you what Ambrose said. He talks about—he was writing to the—about the emperor Valentinian who died and was only a catechumen; that is, he had not actually come to baptism. And Ambrose says with reference to him, “I lost him whom I was about to regenerate.” In other words, he was going to baptize him and regenerate him. But then he adds, “But he did not lose the grace that he sought for.” In other words, he died before he could be baptized, but even Ambrose admitted that he was not going to lose the grace of regeneration. You see, there are always people who cannot perform a physical act. If, for example, a person is unable physically to be baptized in water, but yet believes, there is hardly anyone who would not say that God would accept them.

But that raises the question of the necessity of baptism. Like the old story about the great drought out in West Texas, you know that it was so—such a large drought, that the Baptists were sprinkling, and the Methodists were using a damp rag, and the Presbyterians were giving out rain checks. [Laughter] Well, this is a—this only illustrates the fact, that it might be impossible to carry out some physical act if that was necessary for salvation. That’s not to appeal to the fact that the Scriptures say very plainly that a dead person cannot do anything to please God, and, therefore, to expect that a person could do something that pleases God—be baptized in water in order to be saved—goes against Paul’s statement, “The mind of the flesh is enmity against God.” It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

But you will ask me and you will say to me at this point, “I hope, but what does exegesis or interpretation say about this text?” Well, I wish it were possible for me to refer to about six different interpretations that have been taken of these words; many of them attempts to explain away what seems to be obvious to some people; that baptism is essential for salvation. Now, I hope you won’t misunderstand me, but I have some former students who have written some interpretations of this text that I would consider to be very exotic; that is, to my mind they do not command truth. For example, one of them looks at this text and says, “The word ‘repent’ is in the plural. The word ‘be baptized’ is in the singular. And so we should take the next words ‘be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ’ as a parenthesis, and we should take ‘repent’ with ‘remission of sins’, and thus ‘remission of sins’ is related to ‘repent.’” Well, I can only say, “That’s ingenious, but it’s not convincing,” because while it is true, that the term “repent” is plural, and the term “baptized” is singular, it’s quite obvious that the singular is intended to refer to a plurality of people. Notice, “Let each one of you.” *humōn* in the Greek text. Plural. “Let each one of you be baptized.” So the difference is purely stylistic and doesn’t have anything to do with a parenthesis in Peter’s thought. He says, “Repent, and let each of you be baptized for the remission of sins.” That interpretation will not stand.

One of my colleagues used to teach that the term “for” in “for the remission of sins” is a Greek preposition that may mean “because.” Well, Greek prepositions occurring so frequently do have various meanings, and this one may mean “because.” You can find perhaps two illustrations in the New Testament of it, when the term occurs hundreds of times, so a simple exegetical and interpretive rule is this—which a good interpreter should always follow—always use the common meaning of a term if the common meaning makes good sense. Do not go to some unusual meaning in order to satisfy some doctrinal presupposition that you may have. So we may reject that. I wish that we had time to talk about some others, but they are just weird. [laughter]

Let us look at what the text says, and let us look at it carefully, because really, there is a—I think—an evaluation of this text that is important for us to note. First of all, remember, you cannot

solve every doctrinal problem by every individual text. In other words, you should never expect a book like the Bible to be able to prove Calvinism from every verse in the Bible, though it's plainly taught in the Scriptures, you understand. Or the other way around. If you're an Arminian, you cannot prove your doctrine—parenthesis in any text of the Bible, but anyway [laughter]—but anyway, if you have an Arminian viewpoint, you shouldn't expect to be able to prove it in every verse, which—all Arminians can raise your hands. This is a common sense rule. We do not expect to prove every doctrine from every individual text.

So I would like for you to notice simply this; that this text says there are two things that they are to do, and there are results that are to follow. If you just look at it simply, there are three options at least. Number one, salvation is by repentance. “Repent, and be baptized for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost,” but the important word is “repent.” You could interpret it that way. It's like a man who says, “Will you take your hat and go over to Prestonwood and buy me this?” Well, taking your hat is not essential to what's to follow. It's just something to accompany what you are doing. The important thing is to go over there and make the purchase. It's possible to look at it that way.

On the other hand, it's possible to say that baptism is the important thing. “Repent, and then undergo baptism for the remission of sins.” That's a reasonable way to interpret it, too. That's one—a second option. The third option is to take both of these as necessary things. “Repent, and be baptized,” and as a result of carrying out the twofold responsibility, the twofold result will follow. You can see from this that logically, you cannot solve the question of, “Is baptism necessary for salvation?” from Acts 2:38. It does not, of itself, permit a solution.

But there is another principle of biblical interpretation, and that is the analogy of faith; that is, we should look at what the Bible says about various doctrines; all that the Bible says. And particularly, if you can point to a passage in which the same author has some—said something about the same doctrine, and I would like in conclusion—for it's now getting close to time to leave—I'd like for you to turn over to the 10th chapter, and in the 10th chapter I think we have the solution to

our problem about what is meant by, “Repent, and let each of you be baptized for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Remember Cornelius, having had word that he should send for Peter at Joppa, sent for Peter at Joppa because he was told that Peter, when he come—when he—when he came, would preach words by which Cornelius and others might be saved. And so he sent for Peter, and Peter came from Joppa to Caesarea, and evidently prepared his message along the way, because he had a whole message to give; just like I have a whole message to give, and I’ll only give part of it today. But anyway, he had a whole message to give. He had all day to prepare it, and I know he had a whole message to give, because in the 11th chapter when he records in Jerusalem what happened to him on this trip he said, “It all happened when I began to speak.” But unfortunately, you see, he gave the gospel in his introduction, and the Holy Spirit said, “That’s enough Peter. Just step aside. You’ve given the gospel, and I am now able to work.”

So he begins in verse 34, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.” But in verse 43—still in his introduction—he says concerning the Lord Jesus, “To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”

Ah, there’s the same expression Peter used on the Day of Pentecost, “the remission of sins;” this time not “repent,” but “believe.” And remember, we said that “believe” is probably the broader term; “repent” the narrower term, pointing to a change of viewpoint that results in a change of conduct. So, “Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remissions of—remission of sins.” And then Luke says, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.” Now, that was the second thing, remember, that was said to happen when they repented and were baptized. They should receive remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Well, there’s no question about the gift of the Holy Spirit falling at this point. “And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many came with as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost, for they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then answered Peter”—the man that gave Acts 2:38—“Can any man forbid water that these

should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost as we?” In other words, they’ve already received the Holy Spirit before they have been baptized in water. It’s obvious that baptism in water is not essential for the reception of the Holy Spirit, and other texts, of course, make it quite plain. It’s not also necessary for the remission of sins, for individuals are not baptized if they have not received remission of sins.

So Acts chapter 10, verse 43 through verse 48 makes it very plain, that the key term in, “Repent, and let each of you be baptized for the remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit,” is the term “repent.” And it is not the term “baptize,” nor is it—nor is it the combination of “repent and be baptized,” but the key term is “repent.” But that’s not taught in Acts 2:38. Clearly, one must see in Acts chapter 10, verse 43 through verse 48, the simple solution to the question, “Is baptism essential for salvation?” Well, there are other passages in the New Testament which one might point to, but so far as Acts 2:38 is concerned, Acts 2:38 does not, in the light of Acts 10, teach that baptism is essential for salvation.

Baptism is important, but salvation comes through the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ, who offered the sacrifice on the cross for sinners, and on the basis of that, Peter offers the universal invitation, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

If you’re here this morning, and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, if you have never called upon him, you may call upon him and be saved. May I put words in your mouth for you? All that is necessary is for you to bow your head in the presence of the Lord God—not in our presence, but in the presence of the Lord, for you’re dealing with him, and say to him simply, “I recognize, Lord, that I’m guilty; that I am a sinner; that I am guilty of rebellion against Thee, and I know that the Scriptures teach that the wages of sin is death. But the Scriptures also teach that the Lord Jesus came as the sacrifice for sinners, and I’m surely a sinner. And if he came and died for sinners, I am the object of his activity, and I appeal to Thee, that I may receive as a free gift, for, Lord you promise it as a free gift, eternal life, remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

And if that decision is made from the sincerity of your heart, you may proceed out of this meeting with the assurance that on the authority of the Word of God, you have passed from death unto life, from darkness to spiritual light. May God help you to come. Come to Christ. Believe. Be saved. May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for these magnificent words from the Apostle Peter, which we have so falteringly expounded. We thank Thee for the fact, that the Holy Spirit still works, still convicts, still saves, and if there are some in [End of tape]...