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Going All-In with Jesus (Acts 2:1-41, ESV)

INTRO:

It's going to be a great day—We are wrapping up our series in the Book of Acts this weekend and having a baptism celebration. We have ___ people who have already made the decision to be baptized this weekend. Two came last night, a husband and wife. We have ___ ready to be baptized right after the 10:45am service. You can still be a part of that. I'll tell you how a little bit later. Our goal is to answer three questions this morning:

Why do we baptize?

Who do we baptize?

How do we baptize?

Turn to Acts 2. The Book of Acts picks up where the Gospels leave off. There are four books in the Bible that tell us about the life of Jesus. We call those books the Gospels. Gospel means "Good News." They take us all the way to Jesus' death on the cross and then his resurrection from the dead. Acts picks up from there and tells us about the response to Jesus' resurrection and the birth of the church.

Acts opens with Jesus' followers asking if now that Jesus has come back from the dead if he's going to do all they expected he would do. Is he now going to make life all they dreamed it would be? Is he going to establish God's way as the way for all people? And Jesus says, "That's not for you to know." It's not for you to know when life is going to calm down, when your dreams will be realized, when God is will right the wrongs of the age. But he says, "I promise you, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth."

We see that begin to take place in Acts 2. Acts 2 will help us answer the question, why do we baptize?

Acts 2 starts with Jesus' followers all huddled up together in a private place. There are only about 120 people who are loyal to Jesus at this moment. Jesus has told them to wait where they are in Jerusalem, that they will receive the Holy Spirit, and then they'll get to work. They are in Jerusalem for what is called the Feast of Pentecost is taking place in the city of Jerusalem. In the Old Testament it was called the Feast of Weeks. During that feast, Jerusalem's population would swell to over 200,000 people from all over the land.

So these 120 people loyal to Jesus are gathered together in private when all the sudden the Holy Spirit falls upon them and they begin to speak in other languages. Now this is one of those things that troubles a lot of people for different reasons. If you're familiar with something like this it might kind of weird you out. If you are familiar with something like this you might be frustrated that as a church we don't talk more about it. Here's what you need to understand for today. The New Testament does talk about the use of spiritual language, a sort of prayer language people experience where they speak with God. I've never experienced this before. I know people who have. What we need to understand for today is that in Acts 2 is not speaking of that type of spiritual language. These 120 followers of Jesus are speaking in languages of other nations or other dialects that aren't their native tongue. And we know this because when the 120 go outside and the travelers who have come to Jerusalem hear them talking about Jesus in their own language. They understand what was being said but they didn't understand how or why it was happening.

It's so unique that a few people in the crowds become dismissive. They say, "This doesn't mean anything; these guys are drunk and crazy." So in v. 14 Peter stands up for the first time to address the crowd:

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. 15 For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day (Acts 2:14-15, ESV).

- * He goes on to tell them that what's happening was actually predicted in the Old Testament by the prophet Joel. God said he would pour His Spirit out on His people. He ends with a quote from Joel in v. 21, *21 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'*
- * "Lord" here means Jesus. He's telling them it's time to recognize Jesus, i.e. to call upon Jesus, and find true life. He continues in v. 22.

22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. 24 God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it (Acts 2:22-24, ESV).

- * Two things I want you to notice. First, there is a bit of irony here. Peter contrasts the innocence of his group with the guilt of his audience. Remember, some of the people had suggested Peter and his friends were drunk. If you saw people out in the market at 9:00am talking really loud about God you might think the same thing. But he says, "No we're not drunk." We're not guilty of tipping the bottle at 9:00am. We're innocent. You're guilty of killing the Messiah." He flips the script on them.
- * Second thing I want you to notice comes in what Peter says. In his statement, there is a tension between human freedom and God's will. In one breath Peter says, "You killed him." And in the next he says, "But God gave him up."
- ✓ Look again at v. 23, *this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*

- ✓ We see here an important truth that we find throughout the Bible. We have freedom in making our own choices but that freedom rests within God's will/plan. The Bible holds our freedom and God's sovereignty in tension. We're going to see the same thing in a moment when it comes to our response to Jesus. God offers you salvation through His Son. That is God's decision. But you still have to make the decision to accept that gift.

36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." 37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37, ESV).

- * They understand what Peter is saying, not just in their head but in their heart. They are convicted. Jesus was the Promised One they were expecting and yet when he came to us, they killed him. When they ask what shall we do they are saying, "What hope do we have?"
- * This is important because what Peter is about to give them are not hoops to jump through to satisfy God. They are the paths of grace God has laid out before them. When you're truly repentant because of your sin and you recognize your need for God the things God asks of you don't seem burdensome. They don't seem like hoops. They are not things you go, "I can't believe I have to do this." They are simply the response to what God has already done. It's been my experience that the people who say, "Why would I ever have to confess Jesus, repent, or be baptized," are not truly convicted of their guilt before God. It's more about them still then it is about Jesus. They're not ready to go all-in. Peter is calling the crowd to go all-in.

38 And Peter said to 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 off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." 40 And with many other

words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls (Acts 2:38-41, ESV).

We’re going to focus on these vv. 38-41. Peter’s speech has four key parts.¹

1. Call to repentance.
2. Call to baptism.
3. Promise of forgiveness.
4. Promise of the Holy Spirit.

Repentance means we agree with God that we have a sin problem we need to turn from and we need Jesus’ help for that.

Baptism was already a part of the Jewish faith at the time. They would practice baptism by walking down into large pools where they would rinse and bathe themselves. They would do this on a regular basis to cleanse their bodies from impurities so they could go to worship. The baptism Peter is calling them to is different. It’s not a baptism to cleanse the body; it’s a baptism to cleanse the soul. It’s not something you do to yourself; it’s something someone else does to you. It’s not something you repeat; it’s something you do once and then rest in.²

There are four things you’re acknowledging at baptism.³

1. *You’re publically acknowledging that Jesus is Lord and Savior—he was crucified, buried, and raised to life.*
2. *You’re acknowledging your personal need for repentance on account of your sin.*

¹ See Schnabel, 160, who includes a fifth part: a description of the scope of the promised Spirit.

² See Schnabel 160-63; Witherington, 156, for a description and dimensions of the large pools available in Jerusalem.

³ Taken from Schnabel, 164.

3. *You're acknowledging Jesus as the one who can give the forgiveness you seek.*
4. *You're acknowledging Jesus' work in your life and your desire for his ongoing presence through the Spirit.*

Acts 2 describes baptism as part of our faith response to the Gospel message. We find the same message in passages like: Acts 22:12-16; Romans 6:1-11; Galatians 3:23-27; Colossians 2:11-13; Titus 3:3-7; and 1 Peter 3:18-22.

Here's what 1 Peter 3:18-22 says: *God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, 21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:20-21, NIV '11).*

So that's why we baptize—it's our faith response to God's grace offered through Jesus Christ.

WHO DO WE BAPTIZE?

In the Book of Acts and throughout the New Testament we find what is called "believers baptism." Believers baptism means those who were baptized were old enough to understand their sin and respond to God's grace.

Some of you may come from a faith background that practiced infant baptism. If so, I'm not here today to tell you that if you were sprinkled as a baby or young child that it held no significance in your life. But I do want you to understand what the New Testament teaches about making that decision for yourself.

It may help to understand how infant baptism began. Infant baptism began as the result of two primary factors: (1) the doctrine of original sin and (2) the Old Testament practice of circumcision.

Original sin suggests that all human beings are tainted by sin at the moment of conception and are in need of immediate salvation. Those who practice infant baptism for this reason suggest infants are tainted with sin in the same way as adults and in need of the same forgiveness. The logical conclusion, then, is to baptize babies as soon as possible in order to secure their salvation before God.

The issue with this view is that even though the Bible affirms original sin in the sense that everyone inherits a sinful nature at birth, it also teaches that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross takes care of that inherited guilt and leaves us accountable for our personal sin alone (Romans 5:12-19; cf. Ezekiel 18:1-32).

We all must deal with a sin nature. But you are responsible before God for your own sin, not the sins of those who have come before you. Children, then, stand guilty before God only when they are old enough to understand the concept of their personal sin and recognize their need for forgiveness (Romans 4:15; 7:7-11). This is why we trust that in God's graciousness young children who pass from this life way too early are not separated from God because of their sinful nature, but with Him because of His grace. We sometimes call this "Original Grace."

Another reason some traditions practice infant baptism is because of Old Testament circumcision. In the Old Testament boys were circumcised on the eighth day of their life as *the sign* that they were part of God's family (in hindsight, you think you could have bought them a balloon or given them a certificate rather than a painful procedure).

Here's how this connects to infant baptism. Some assume that today children born to parents who believe in Jesus are automatically members of God's family. Sprinkling for them serves an outward sign of membership in the family of God the same way circumcision did in the Old Testament.

The problem is there are some key differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the Old Testament, circumcision was performed on male children only; in the New Testament, baptism is for all people. In the OT, circumcision meant you were part of the nation-state of Israel; in the NT baptism signifies that you're part of God's spiritual family, the church. In the OT, you entered God's people through your family's bloodline; in the NT, you enter God's people through faith in the blood of Jesus.

The New Testament gives little indication that the earliest Christians baptized anyone other than those old enough to understand the message of the Gospel, repent of his or her former way of life, and embrace God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

That's why we encourage those who have never made the decision to be baptized themselves to be baptized into Jesus Christ, even if you've previously been sprinkled. Look at it this way—being baptized now honors your faith tradition and your sprinkling. Someone made that decision because they wanted you to talk with Jesus. By making the decision to be baptized you're declaring that you are walking with Jesus as an adult. You're bringing that prayer into full fruition.

HOW DO WE BAPTIZE?

The word *baptizo*, "to baptize," means to dip, drown, or sink an object. In Classical Greek literature it was even used to describe the washing of a cooking pot or the sinking of a ship. The only water baptism known in the Bible was full body immersion.

The earliest reference to Christian baptism in any form other form comes from outside the Bible. An early Christian document called the *Didache*, written around ninety years after Jesus' death, teaches that if there is not enough water for full immersion water may be poured three times over a person's head. The

three pours were presumably done in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Three pours soon became three sprinkles. So sprinkling began as a concession for inadequate amounts of water and then over time it grew in popularity and eventually found its way into general use.

In summary:

1. *Why do we baptize...* because the New Testament describes it as part of our response to God's gift of salvation.
2. *Who do we baptize...* those old enough to understand their sinfulness and accept God's grace through Jesus Christ.
3. *How do we baptize...* through full body immersion, the way it was practiced in the New Testament.

Another common question is **When** should I be baptized? And the answer to this is easy. If you believe in Jesus but have not been baptized, the answer is now. The clear pattern in Acts is that a person be baptized as soon as they recognize their need for Jesus' grace.⁴ It's how you tell God and your friends I'm putting my trust in Jesus. But I don't want you to hear it just from me; I'd like you to hear it from a remarkable man in our church and community.

Adrian's story → Adrian has a powerful story, but truth be told we all have a story. Some decisions we've brought on ourselves; some we've inherited. But we need redeemed, restored, and renewed. If you haven't been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, why put it off any longer?

Response → Song (decision counselors up front to register you for baptism celebration, we have everything ready for right after the 10:45 service).

⁴ Acts 2:37-41; 8:12; 8:34-40; 9:17-19; 10:44-48; 16:14-15; 16:31-33; 18:8; 19:1-7; 22:14-16.

Resources

Bock, Darrell L., "Acts," *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

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Schnabel, Eckhard J., "Acts," *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

Witherington, Ben, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).