

## *Surrendered and Trusting*

Acts 2:37-47

4/11/2021

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For the next several weeks until the beginning of summer, we're doing a series titled "Qualities of a Disciple." We've spent the last season looking at "Renewal in the Wilderness" as it was leading us to Holy Week and Jesus going to the cross for our salvation and being raised on the third day victorious over sin and death. But now we enter what is called Easter season. As I want to remind all of us depending on your tradition, whether you grew up in a Roman Catholic tradition, or Anglican tradition, or Lutheran, or even many parts of reformed Presbyterian traditions, we would follow the church calendar. We don't follow it super closely here, but it is a part of what we do. And so the world thinks Christmas stops on December 25th, but it actually just begins. It's the same with Easter. Easter doesn't end on Easter Sunday. It's just beginning.

What we mark over the next several weeks is the ways in which Jesus in various ways reminds us as He appears to His disciples how He was preparing them for mission, what it looked like to actually give them authority and empower them to go and make disciples. And so we believe that we needed to ask the question, what are the qualities of a disciple? Pastor PD and I both had the opportunity and the honor of attending Covenant Theological Seminary where we both studied under Dr. Hans Bayer, a New Testament theologian and professor. He wrote a book wherein he unpacks these eight qualities of a disciple. And so we're going to be looking at these over the next several weeks.

We're beginning in Acts 2, but we're going to also go back to the gospel of Mark. And so we begin today, and I'm using the first two of the eight qualities and putting them together as they are given to us in this passage from Acts 2. It is simply surrendered and trusting. Surrender and trust. The qualities of a disciple. Have you surrendered? Are you surrendering? Are you trusting?

Let's turn together to God's word in Acts 2 beginning in verse 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?" 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. 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." And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

This morning as we turn to this passage to understand these first two qualities of a disciple, surrendered and trusting, I want us to see in these verses how both surrender and trust are unpacked for us in a narrative form of scripture. In other words, it's telling us the story of those who were coming and

believing. And it is watching this story unfold, the drama of what was happening in the early days of the apostles' teaching and the establishment of the church that actually what we see embedded in the drama, we receive the doctrine of what it means to be surrendered to the Lord, but also trusting in Him. We're going to look at that in two ways. First, the surrender of the heart in verses 37 through 41, and then also the trust of a changed life in verses 42 through 47.

First, the surrender of the heart in verses 37 through 41. If you have your pens, it's important for you to jot this down. There are three very clear things that are established for us that are related to the surrender of the heart in these verses. It's releasing control, it's restoration of the self, and it's rethinking the established order. It's releasing, restoration, and rethinking.

Let's look together then, specifically beginning at verse 37 where we see the call and the response of releasing control, which is what a surrendered heart does. When it says here the hearers of the word that Peter was preaching, the ministry and the word of Jesus Christ and the need for trust in Him and acknowledging that He is indeed the Lord, they respond by saying—and let me say as a caveat that the Holy Spirit is clearly at work because I don't believe that any particular sermon outside of the work of the Holy Spirit can actually bring about what's getting ready to happen. So as the word is preached, the Holy Spirit is at work. Thanks be to God. Which is why as I follow mentors who are both alive and passed away, as I ascend these steps, I say each week, "Come Holy Spirit. Come Holy Spirit," because I'm just a man who's been led by the Spirit to bring this word to you.

So I pray that just as the disciples taught, I preach to you in the power of the Spirit because what happens here is that as they hear the word, it says that "they were cut to the heart." Said another way, there is a splinter in their mind. Said another way, dissonance comes upon them. They recognize that the way they used to live was in alienation from acknowledging that Jesus is Lord, and now what they're hearing is that Jesus is Lord, that the Holy Spirit is calling them to faith. And so they are cut to the heart to the point where they then say, "What shall we do?"

What's happening there is there is the release of control. Practically speaking, what are they saying? What are they asking when they say, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And then Peter says, "Repent," which is the word which means a turning from. It's turning from one way to a new way. It's not just turning from doing stuff and stop doing the things you used to do. It's also picking up all new practices. But the surrender, the releasing of control is very specific, and you hear it when they are turning not to themselves, but they're turning to the apostles by asking, "What shall we do?"

What is happening in that moment? I believe what is happening in that moment is what C. S. Lewis said in these words, "When God talks of their losing themselves, he only means abandoning the clamor of self-will. Once they had done that, he really gives them back all their personality and boasts, that when they are wholly his, they will be more themselves than ever." You see a group of people who before were obstinate and alienated from Jesus as Lord, and they were squarely rooted to the reality that they were the Lord. They define themselves, and they get to choose among who they will follow. Now what they've heard is only Christ is the Lord, and only through Him do we actually find life.

What you see when "they were cut to the heart," what enters in is they were like, wow, what have I been doing? Who have I been following?" And what Peter and the apostles present to them is an invitation to release control of the clamor of self-will and to surrender that control to the Lord.

But there's not just the releasing of self-control. There's the restoration of self. What does he say? "Repent and be baptized." Of course, he's talking about not that you have to repent and immediately be baptized, but generally in these early days, the conversion moment of being cut to the heart and the releasing of control was quickly followed by being baptized in the water in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit into that name. So when we say we're baptized in the name, yes, it's a phrase, but it means something so much more. It means they are brought into a name and all that that name represents, all that Jesus taught, and all that He is. And in verses 38 and 39, he says, "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." I believe what is being talked about there, though the words are not being used, is that they are becoming new people. They've now been adopted into a new father. They're receiving a new name. They have new rights, new privileges, new ways of thinking, new ways of understanding themselves.

In fact, what is happening is the restoration of themselves. They're beginning to see what their purpose is. Pastor Tim Keller said this years ago, that "If you take a watch to bang on a nail, or you want to use a toaster as an anchor, you can try it. But that's not what their purpose was for." Each one of us has a purpose, and that purpose is to find who we are in the one who has created us, to find who we are in the one who came to die and be raised to life for our salvation. And in doing so, restoration of who we really were meant to be in the image of God comes into reality.

Dr. Bayer in his book says these words,

"The work of God in and through Christ to pursue us in love restores us to wholeness and personhood. Salvation means, among many things, restoration of the image of God. While all human beings still live in some respects as image bearers of God despite this alienation, the ugly effects of the fall, it discolors every aspect of human existence. The restoration through Christ liberates us to live individually and corporately as true image bearers of God."

This means that we are people who are again becoming whole emotionally, intellectually, and physically. By God's grace, we glorify God in all we do. To be a disciple of Christ is not to have our personhood diminished, but our true personhood come to light and restored. We were built for a purpose and for a person and God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

They were cut to the heart. They confessed their sins, acknowledging how they once lived. And now they turn to walk and surrender themselves to the Lord as the Lord of life and the one to whom they surrender all that they are. And in so doing, as we've already read this morning, they have to bear their own cross. When it says in Luke, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple," means that to surrender this control, to release our control, and to be restored means we fundamentally haven't taken up the cross. To bear the cross means I allow my self-will and my self-definitions—we go further in and further up into our beings. Who are we, and why are we here? That fundamentally now finds answer in Christ alone. Without it, discipleship cannot truly take root.

It's not just about intellectual furniture of doctrine. It is that, but it's so much more than that. It's being remade, a new Lord, a new self.

But it isn't just the restoration of self as they repent and are baptized into the name. There's also the rethinking, the rethinking of the established order. Notice what he says in verses 40 and 41. "And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation.'" Now, he's not referring to a particular people, a person, or even a people group.

This is in the same vein of what Paul means when he's writing to the Corinthian church in the second letter that we have in verses 4 and following. He says, "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience when your obedience is complete." What Paul is talking about there and what Peter is referring to as "this crooked generation" isn't to a particular person or people group. It's to this. It's to the stronghold or the established order of the time and place where the Lord has put you. So it's what the New Testament calls "the world," meaning this. A culture has a specific set of beliefs, behaviors, and values that are unique to it, that we as a people group who live in this particular part of the world that has a specific set of beliefs, behaviors, and values which are not given to us so that we might adopt them, but rather we just assume that they are true. And we are shaped by them in ways that are frighteningly

personal. And we assume their validity, and we begin to live by it. And I'll get to an example in a moment. So when Peter is saying to flee or "Save yourselves from this crooked generation," he's saying flee from any set of beliefs, behaviors, or values that are contradictory to the lordship of Christ, that set themselves up against God. Flee from them, which means we need to rethink, as a part of surrendering, the place and time in which we live.

Here is an example. I take this example from pastor and writer Mark Sayers in his book *Disappearing Church*. He lists several qualities of present belief systems within the western world. I'm only going to deal with the first. Here, I'm merely paraphrasing. You define you. The premium value of western culture is individual freedom, self-identification, self-direction, and if anything seeks to come against that, that thing and that belief system must be destroyed and torn down or completely deconstructed. You do you.

What's interesting is that does not then lead us to more Christlikeness. Rather, it leaves us more shaped by the world in which we live and the culture, its behaviors, its beliefs, and its values. So the question is how are you and how are we rethinking the beliefs, values, and behaviors of the western world in which we live and this premium value of "you get to do you"? Because what that is saying is then the Lord is not the Lord who defines who we are; I get to define who I am. And any point at which the scriptures come to say something about who I am and how I ought to live that feels out of accord with how I feel or view myself, then I call the word into question, or I seek to reinterpret it or translate it in such a way so that I can feel better about myself.

But the rethinking of the established order must require the other way around and to flip back around to where I came. To release control, the restoration of self in Jesus Christ, and to rethink the established order requires that we begin with the word and what it says about who we are and why we've been made, who Christ is and what He has come to do, and how we ought to live. And we use that word to what? To rethink the established order. It's a process. It's not a onetime thing. It's a continual lifelong hard work in the mirror and in community asking the question, where am I becoming more like the world? And where am I becoming more like Christ? Because as someone once wrote, "You have to serve somebody." Who are you serving? Whom are you surrendering to? What set of beliefs are you surrendering to?

But it's not just the surrender of the heart that Peter refers to here as one of the qualities of a disciple. It is also the trust of a changed life. The trust of a changed life, verses 42 to 47. I'm going to read this again, 42 to 47, and I want you to hold three words in your mind. Okay? First, belonging. Second, believing. Third, becoming. Because the trust of a changed life involves all three, and all three are here in these few verses. Belonging, believing, and becoming.

Hear the word again, 42 to 47.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. [ESV]

Do you hear? The trust in the Lord of a changed life means we're not left to ourselves. Yes, we all individually are invited to believe in who Jesus is, how He lived, what He came to do, and what He has accomplished in the cross and resurrection to bring about salvation. Every one of us and everyone in the world is invited individually to believe this. But for those who believe, they are not left as individuals. They are brought into a body, belonging.

But I want to be clear. And I want you to hear this, church. You can belong even before you believe. What I want you to see about discipleship in this passage is that not everyone who were disciples and everyone who was there believed first. Some were just along for the ride. They belonged, they watched, and they were discipled into the kingdom, which means the kingdom of God is messy, and each one of us is on a different part of that journey. But belonging sometimes precedes belief. Sometimes belief precedes belonging. In other words, it's not meant to be sequential, but we're meant to keep it complex, and as such it involves all three. But it first gets to this idea of belonging.

Notice what it says. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship." They devoted themselves to one another, which means that surrendering means you're adopted to become a child of the living God, but you're also adopted into a family. And boy, oh boy, right? That's interesting. Right, church? Right? Sometimes we love each other, and sometimes we don't like each other. We hurt each other. We disagree. We argue. We debate. But we're still in the family.

And here's the rethinking of the established order that's working against our belonging. You've heard me say it several times, and I want you to keep this in your minds. Each one of you in this room is a part of and represents an economic unit. And by economic, I don't mean dollars and cents. I mean relationship, practices, habits, schedule, and all of that stuff. And as western society members, we each represent an economic unit. And the established order says, "You do you." And so we all come together as a church as individual economic units that very rarely acknowledge the fact that we need each other.

If you literally did not see the person that you're sitting next to after today, do you know that western society has taught us that we actually don't need them to flourish? Why are we even here? It's because we are called to belong, which means we have to overturn the established order. Even though we don't feel like we need each other, even though we look good and are educated and well paid enough, we don't need necessarily the physical stuff from each other, and so that leads us to believe that we don't need each other relationally. And that's why we play bumper cars, and we're just comparing economic units.

But we're actually called into a deep rich community, a fabric of community that without the gospel, many of us would never be in the same room together. We wouldn't be friends. We wouldn't choose to, right? We have different political beliefs. We have different habits. We like different music styles. We like different kinds of preaching. We like different kinds of theology. But why are we here? Because somewhere we at least understand intuitively that the Lord has called us into a community that only exists because the gospel has worked and that we're called to belong. And we fumble, we rumble, and we get it wrong, and we make mistakes. But we are called to belong. In fact, the word is to be devoted.

Belonging is a key part of a changed life that is trusting the Lord, that I'm not my own. I've been bought with a price, but I've also been adopted into a family. And I believe that is one of the largest challenges facing the church in the western world. Do we really need each other? Can't we just get what we need in books, sermons online, podcasts, and livestreams? And we can just keep our money and maybe give it to some place that we really want? We don't really have to do this because this is kind of inconvenient.

But belonging is inconvenient. It's uncomfortable. We step on each other's toes. But the trust of a changed life recognizes that we need to lean in and to belong.

But they not only sought to belong. It says that they also believed. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." Let me simply summarize it this way. To say that they were committed to the apostles' teaching meant they were committed to the word.

And I want to remind you as I remind myself. We must keep categories for two things in the scriptures, and for sermons, and for Sunday school, and Bible study, and all of this stuff. It's two categories, which are very important. They travel together. To be devoted to the word of God means this.

I'm going to be comforted, but I'm also going to be confronted. If all you're getting from the word is that you are comforted and not confronted, then I don't believe you're reading the word deep enough. If all you are is confronted, then my question would be do you know the grace of Christ? You see, the scriptures have a category where Jesus says, "Come unto me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." But it also has a category for the Lord disciplining those whom He loves and disciplining His people when they fail to submit to Him, not out of punishment but out of love to bring us back to Himself.

Comfort and confrontation. The word brings both. And to devote ourselves to the word means then we lean into the world by allowing the word to reshape our minds and our hearts and our desires, but we then use that word for then understanding how we live in the world. It means to be comforted and confronted.

Finally, I close with this. The trust of a changed life does not just involve belonging and believing. It is also about becoming. When he says the following,

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. [ESV]

Thanks be to God that the trust of a changed life doesn't just involve belonging and belief. It also involves becoming, which means it's a process of being restored. And in the process of being restored, it doesn't mean we have the absence of private property. Of course not. They all had private property. But do you know what they did? They considered the needs of their neighbor greater than the value of their private property. And to the degree that they needed to relinquish their private property for the love of their neighbor, they were willing to do because they trusted that the Lord who gave the property to begin with will continue to provide for them.

This is the work of the deaconate. This is the work of caring for each other, of making meals for those who have just given birth. It's also going and listening and praying and caring for somebody who's struggling, who is hurting, who is longing for community. It looks like a whole host of practices and values. And it's the story of what it means to become the people of God for the glory of His name, and by becoming, we begin to flourish in what it means to be Christlike because what we're doing is we are following the way of Jesus into discipleship by surrendering to Him, trusting Him, and being a part of the body, that He has a plan that He means to make us something demonstrably different in the image of God because He's brought you here in this community. And in Him and in this place, we are becoming that which God desires through the lives of other people in the body of Christ. The Lord added.

So you see the cycle that as they were becoming, as they were giving and sharing, worshiping, and rejoicing together, that was the testimony and witness to the world. Again, I want to say to you, very rarely—it happens. Rarely have I seen someone outright reject the testimony of Christ and of the gospel because of doctrine. Oftentimes, they reject it because they don't see the drama of love in the people of God becoming who He's called us to be. And we get it wrong. But this is the opportunity to again trust ourselves to the Lord, that He means to do something in us and through us in this place for His glory and the witness to the world and to the strongholds of the world.

And so I ask you, in becoming, are you finding greater favor, deeper joy, and purpose in who Christ is and being part of His people even though it's messy? And it is. And so I ask you, do you know Christ more? Are you more Christlike having trusted Him in being part of the body of Christ? Or if you're not a part of this body, or if you're wondering whether you want to be here anymore, here's the question. It's not whether we're going to give ourselves to another group of people. It's a question of who. And is that group of people making us more like Christ, or is it making us more self-sufficient and self-dependent? My hope and my prayer is that we're becoming more Christlike slowly, but by God's grace through His

Spirit, that through trusting Him we are belonging, we are believing, and we are becoming. And it's ongoing.

These are the first two qualities of a disciple. Let us again go to the Lord and ask, Lord, where am I on this? "See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting," as David says, that I might be able to surrender and trust. Do this, O Lord, in me. Do this in us for the glory of your name. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We pray and ask you, Father, that as the gospel broke out in the early church, we see the qualities of what it means to be a disciple. We confess to you, Lord, that we're constantly tempted to go back to self-dependence. We want to surrender to our own desires, our own plans, and not to you. Lord, have mercy. But by your Spirit, renew in us the surrender to the Lord, and to surrender to you as our heavenly Father, and as Christ as our redeemer, and the Spirit as the empowerment, empowering presence of God that we might walk more faithfully with you. But then, Lord, as we trust you and live out this faith in this community, Lord, we cannot do it aside from your Spirit. So do this in us, we ask, for the glory of Christ's name in the world, that those who see the church wherever she is found would see a people who by God's Spirit are becoming more Christlike one day after another, who are seeking to love one another imperfectly. But in Christ we are becoming more like you. Help us, O Lord. Do this, we ask. In Jesus's name. Amen.