

**Easter! So What?
So, What Now?
Acts 2:37-47**

April 8, 2018

Dr. Steve Horn

Text Introduction: You probably thought Easter was over last Sunday. I have an announcement. As believers in Jesus and His death, burial, and resurrection, Easter is never really behind us. Easter is always before us.

Through the years you have grown accustomed to my question, “So What?” at the conclusion of my messages. I fell into this practice a few years ago as the result of making sure that every message ends on a note of action. As I routinely say, “We gather not so much for information, but for inspiration and transformation.” I pray we do that today. I want desperately for us to recognize the “So what” of Easter.

We have been studying questions that appear in the Easter narratives of the Gospels. Any of these questions help us get to the heart of the So What of Easter—the combined events of the cross and the Resurrection. For example, Pilate, the official of the Romans, asked Jesus, “What is truth?” Jesus asked this poignant and emotional question, “My God, My God, why have you abandoned Me?” These questions are powerful and meaningful.

Today, we consider a question that came from the first who heard the Apostles preach on the subject of the resurrection.

Text: ³⁷ When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: “Brothers, what should we do?”

³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, each 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, as many as the Lord our God will call.” ⁴⁰ With many other words he testified and strongly urged them, saying, “Be saved from this corrupt generation!” ⁴¹ So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to them.

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. ⁴⁵ They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Introduction: A good story always leaves us asking “What now?” Have you ever come to the end of a book or the end of a movie and said, “I wonder what happened next?” (I have done that sometimes

when the book is fictional. I forget that it is fiction, but I want to continue on knowing the lives of the characters that I have met in the story.)

Today, we ask, “So, what now?” And, obviously, this is not a story of fiction, but a story of fact. Jesus came in order to redeem us. He died for the forgiveness of our sin. He rose again showing victory over sin, Satan, and the grave. What now? Well, the Book of Acts tells us what happened next. The Book of Acts tells us the story of the beginning of the church.

Acts is the only history that we have in the New Testament. So, what did they do? What did those first disciples of Jesus do? What should we do? I want you to see at least these four realities today.

The resurrection calls for a decision.

The first thing to notice in this passage is that those who heard knew immediately that they must do something. They had to make a choice. This is not a new thing just because we are now in the New Testament. The Old Testament is filled with examples where God required a choice.

- Deuteronomy 30:19-20

I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, ²⁰love the LORD your God, obey him, and remain faithful to him. For he is your life, and he will prolong your days as you live in the land the LORD swore to give to your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

- Joshua 24:14-15

“Therefore, fear the LORD and worship him in sincerity and truth. Get rid of the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and worship the LORD. ¹⁵But if it doesn’t please you to worship the LORD, choose for yourselves today: Which will you worship—the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living? As for me and my family, we will worship the LORD.”

- 1 Kings 18:21

Then Elijah approached all the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him. But if Baal, follow him.” But the people didn’t answer him a word.

I have been enjoying on Satellite Radio the preaching of Billy Graham. One thing I have noticed, that I knew already, but I have paid special attention to it, is that Billy Graham closed all of his messages in essentially the same way. He called people to a decision. Not only did he call people to a decision, but he used almost the exact same words every time. He called people to believe, and then he explained what Biblical belief is. And then, he called people to repentance, and he explained what repentance is. Repentance is a change in your view about God, in your view about yourself, and in your view about sin. He called people by repentance to make a change.

He asked people what the people of our text asked, “What do I do now?” We believe. We repent. And we signify that inward change with a tangible, outward expression—baptism.

The resurrection calls believers to devotion.

I can't get over this word translated "devotion." Someone described it as "obstinate persistence." They were devoted . . .

- to God
- to the disciplines of the church

Next, we see what the church should do. Here are the priorities of the local church. We are going to be pressed all the time to do so many different things, but here is what we must be committed to doing.

They were continually devoting themselves to...

- Teaching—They wanted to learn all they could.
 - Fellowship—They recognized that authentic fellowship would sustain them, but also be contagious as they shared their message with others.
 - Worship—We see this in our text by their breaking bread together. In this context, "breaking bread" most likely refers to sharing the LORD's Supper together as a way of remembering. Worship is remembering what Christ has done for us.
 - Prayer—They were devoted to prayer because they believed that something unique happened when people prayed. When the early church had a problem, they didn't panic, picket, or pout. They prayed. Just one or two pages over in Acts 4, we see a remarkable example of this kind of praying.
- To one another

Some might consider this portion (vv. 44-46) of the text difficult to apply in a contemporary setting, but notice the timeless application. At the very least, our fellowship has these obligations:

- Relational
- Financial

Remember the word, "devoted." It might be hard to define, but it is not hard to know when someone is devoted.

The resurrection calls for dependence upon God.

Throughout the book of Acts, we see that the church had a commitment to praying. This wasn't just individuals praying, but the church coming together to pray. In fact, let me remind you that people are said to be praying 31 times in the Book of Acts. Of these 31 times ...

- 14 times an individual is said to be praying.
- 2 times two or more people in a small group are said to be praying.
- 15 times it is the church gathered in prayer.

They prayed about everything.

In chapter 1, the church is praying for the power of the Holy Spirit to fall on them. Later, they are praying for wisdom in naming a twelfth apostle to replace Judas.

In chapter 2, there is a summary statement about their continued devotion to prayer.

In chapter 4, they are praying for boldness in sharing the Gospel after the arrest of Peter and John.

In chapter 6, they are praying about the selection of deacons.

In chapter 12, the church is gathered in prayer for the release of Peter who is imprisoned for the preaching of the Gospel.

In chapter 13, the church is fasting and praying when God moves upon the church to send out missionaries. Before they send these missionaries, they gathered to pray.

In chapter 14, pastors were appointed to churches in prayer.

At every stage in establishment and development of the church, prayer is central. Indeed, they prayed about all things. They were totally dependent upon God. And, why wouldn't they be? They have just been eyewitnesses to God raising Jesus from the dead. But, why wouldn't we be totally dependent upon Him in all things.

I remind us today that the first church was powerful because they were a praying church. I am comforted by this. God empowered the Early Church not because they were perfect. In fact they were far from perfect. They got their feelings hurt. They disagreed with one another. They disagreed theologically. They disagreed methodologically. In fact, Paul and Barnabas got so upset with one another over John Mark that they went their separate ways.

They were not a perfect church, but they were a **Praying Church!**

The resurrection calls us to declare Jesus to others.

There is much to say here, but let's let Acts 4:12 stand on its own.

Here is what they believed: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved."

They had become convinced of this themselves. Because they had been convinced of this themselves, they were convicted that they must share with others—and not just those like them, but everyone—Jews and Gentiles, those in Jerusalem, but also in Judea, and in Samaria, and those in the uttermost parts of the earth. Being convinced and having conviction produces in us the courage to share the Gospel.

One of the world's greatest evangelists ever was a woman named Corrie Ten Boom. Her story is inspiring. Her autobiography, *The Hiding Place*, is a must reading for every Christian. Corrie and her family hid Jews in their family home in Holland after the German occupation. Eventually, they were arrested. Her family died in German Concentration Camps. Corrie survived after release which she learned later was due to a clerical error. Upon her release, she opened up a shelter for the homeless including many of her Dutch people who had collaborated with the Nazis. She spoke her testimony in over 60 countries. One of the first countries that she went to after the war was Germany.

Those who had sought to kill her needed the Gospel.

The resurrection calls us to so many things including to declare Jesus to all.

So What?

Believe.

Be Baptized.

Be devoted to the things of Christ and His Church.

Be bold in declaring Jesus to a world who has yet to believe.