

**Acts 2: 38-41; “Being Added to the Church”, Sermon # 11 in the series –
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
August 21st, 2011, In the Morning Worship Service.**

The words, “Then those who gladly received his word” are a good description of how the gift of eternal life comes to a person. When these 3000 people heard Peter preach, they responded to the things which were spoken to them by repenting of their sins and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. They had asked Peter and the rest of the brethren, “What should we do?” They had been “cut to the heart” by what he had told them concerning their sins, and they needed to know what they should do immediately; right then and there. Peter told them; Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The first thing for you to do, if you would be saved is to “gladly receive the truth”. In Jesus Christ there is hope. Stop thinking that you are somehow good enough as you are, to be in God’s favor and to inherit eternal life. Be glad to know that your eternal salvation and eternal life are not based upon your good works or your good intentions of keeping God’s commandments perfectly. When you know yourself to be a sinner, then you should “gladly receive the truth” that God has provided a way for you to have remission of your sins. To remit your sins, God sent Jesus Christ to pay your sin debt on the cross. So, if you have been convinced of this truth, you then repent of thinking that you are a basically good person who just needs a little help to do the right thing. You need to be saved. You must repent or you will perish eternally. And you must grasp this truth; that in order to repent you must believe in the word of faith which is preached to you. Receiving the Word of God and exercising sincere faith in the Lord Jesus Christ enables a person to see, by the power of the Holy Spirit, that they can repent; that they can turn from their selfish, sinful, and sometimes perverse way of life. By believing in the Word of the gospel, you can, by Christ’s power and grace, consciously change the direction of your life. You can stop fighting the truth of what God would have you to do; and become a follower of the Christ who has saved you. That is pleasing to God. Each person here must ask themselves if this is something that they have come to?

Have you “gladly received the word” that your sins will be forgiven if you trust in Christ? Have you gladly come to the place where you have repented of your sins? Have you seen the futility of living for the pleasures and pursuits of this vain world, and have you received the word of exhortation, “Be saved from this perverse generation”? Oh, how good and how great a thing it is to be saved from your sins; to be saved from what is vile and perverse in your own heart, as well as being delivered from that feeling that you have to continue to associate with what is vile and perverse in this society; the culture of the angry and the selfish and the unclean people in which we live. No, my brethren, we have been set free from that

bondage of sin and death through the blessed work of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been brought out of darkness and ignorance and into the light. And now, because God is leading us, we are coming to see the importance of acts of obedience to His Word. There are 6 of them set before us in this passage. We will only have time to look at the first two this morning. The other 4 we will open up next week, and the week following, Lord willing. These acts of obedience; if you will pursue them; will show forth your sincere intention to follow Christ and to be His faithful servant. You and I, when we meet Christ will want to hear the words, "Well done thou good and faithful servant."

First of all – The first act of obedience that shows your sincere intention to follow Christ and be His faithful servant is for you to be baptized. (verse 41)

Baptism is expected of all those who have believed in Jesus Christ. Christ Himself expects you to be baptized. Although there is no outright command for the believer to be baptized, the Church is given the command by Christ to baptize believers. In Mark Chapter 16, verse 15, after Jesus was raised from the dead; on His final appearance to them before He ascended to heaven, He said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." And Matthew 28: 18 and following. Go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." You can see how important your being baptized is, to our Lord Jesus Christ. He connects it, there in Matthew 16 with the saving grace of faith as something to be done for Him. He expects it of you if you would be His follower. He expects you to show forth what He has done for you, and your love for Him for what He has done." A person wants to be baptized so that they can publicly identify themselves with Christ, before all men, but especially before the local church that you worship with. Baptism is a church ordinance. And we can see from our text that there was not a great deal of time that elapsed between the time when the 3000 believed, and the time that they were baptized. They were, it appears, baptized that same day that they believed. If anyone thinks that this would be impossible, that 3000 people could be baptized in one day; there were many pools of water in Jerusalem in those days and if the 70 men who were commissioned by Jesus during the days of His earthly ministry, each baptized about 40 people that day they could have certainly accomplished it. There actually may have been more helping that day than that. You can see here, that the Apostles did not believe that each one who had believed, had to be examined for days, months, or years in relation to their obeying this ordinance, but rather; if they had believed, they were to see their being baptized as an act of obedience to Christ Himself. When they received Peter's word with gladness; I believe that they were further instructed as a group, or as small groups, what the

meaning of Baptism is. It was their public identification with the Lord Jesus Christ; their public confession of their faith in Him, and in His finished work. It was their confession that by faith they had died to sin and were now alive to righteousness, and now they should live to God's glory. They had, after all, received the truth of the Word concerning their need of Christ and their need to repent, and they had that truth confirmed in their hearts by the Holy Spirit.

The Apostles also, no doubt, instructed them about the truth related to the Spirit's having baptized them into the spiritual body of Christ, His Church, after they first believed. And they no doubt, spoke to them of the importance of their joining the local church there in Jerusalem. This is exactly what they did according to verse 41. They did not wander off, after they believed, thinking that they would always be independent of a local church. They joined the church in Jerusalem even if they had come from afar; as it is recorded that some of them did; from Phrygia and Pamphilia, Egypt, Rome, and Asia, and many other places. They stayed long enough in Jerusalem to receive instructions from the Apostles on what God expected of them now that they had believed; that they were to be integrally involved with other Christians. There were no local churches in these various places that they had come from, and they could not expect to be able to have functioning local churches for some time to come. But the Apostles were beginning to move toward the establishment of local churches, from this first day on. I do not think that we should have any problem believing that the Apostles were overseeing this work of the Lord, in these many places, and no doubt had their ways of sending instructions through letters and representatives, to those who had come from afar who had believed; for those who had to return to their native lands. Even though they went back to their native lands, they still belonged to the church in Jerusalem until local churches in their area could come into existence.

But 3000 were baptized that day, and 3,000 were added to the church there in Jerusalem. These were not infants who were baptized; they were adults and young people who could understand and receive and act upon the Word spoken to them. The application to us here today ought to be evident. If you have believed in the gospel; if you have believed in Jesus Christ; taking Him for your Savior, you have also taken Him to be your Lord. Will you not then take this first step of obedience to Him, by submitting your testimony and requesting to be baptized? How important and significant a step this is, is more clearly seen in foreign countries where those who have believed in Christ, and have been baptized, are persecuted for their faith. They have publicly taken their stand for Christ. In baptism they have enlisted themselves under His banner. They will identify with the people of God, even if it might cost them their life. How gladly, then; you who live in a free country, ought to be able to be willing to be baptized and to join the church, seeing this ordinance and these steps of obedience do not usually involve suffering for you on that level. Your public declaration of faith in Jesus Christ is

very important to Him, and it is important to you, to show forth your union with Him in His death for you; and His resurrection, which gives to you the power to live a godly life in connection with a local church of his people.

The 2nd act of obedience which shows your sincere intention to follow Christ and be His faithful servant is to join the local church which has faithfully preached to you the gospel.

“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.” The question that you may have thought about; but have not yet found the answer to, is this. Why is it important that a believer in Christ join a local church? The answer to that question is; that you, as a believer, will have an very incomplete obedience to what God has clearly commanded you to do, as a disciple of your Lord Jesus Christ; if you do not join a good Bible-believing church. And this incomplete obedience will jeopardize not only your reward in the Day when Christ returns, but it may also mean many sorrows and disappointments will come to you as you try to live your Christian life; by your trying to hold on to your living independently from the will of God. There are some people who believe that they can be a true Christian and never go to church, or join a church, but the Bible does not give permission for such a view. It speaks, rather, of their unwillingness to do what God would have them to do, and they have become authorities unto themselves. It is not the Bible that is governing their decision, but rather their wanting to be independent of all church authority. Listen to Hebrews Chapter 10, and verse 23. “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.” “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” This “not forsaking” assumes that the persons addressed had already joined the church. “Not forsaking” means that there was for some, an irregular pattern of attendance; of their not consistently attending, that led to this spiritual fall of not coming much at all to church; if ever. This, in my mind, causes me to wonder if the person who leaves off coming to church; or will not join a church; is because they do not think it really necessary to being saved. It causes me to wonder if they ever really knew the Lord in the first place. On the final day when Christ returns, He will say to many, “Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” A person is practicing lawlessness when they do not come to church and when they refuse to join a good Bible-believing church. Where else does a person learn to keep God’s law unless they come to church and hear it preached? How can you remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy, and have no thought of Christ’s Church? No , one of the real ways that the Christian Sabbath is kept is by coming to the worship services of the church.

Then let’s think about Hebrews 13, verse 7 in terms of why we should join a church. It says, “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of

God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.” No pastor or leader can rule over another believer in Christ without that believer having, before that time, formally given their permission for them to do so. If you fall into sin, and you attend the church, but you have not given your formal permission to the elders of that church to rule over you; how would they then ever be able to enact church discipline on you; the sinning member? They would have no authority to do so. You have never stated that you are one of them. But if you join the church, they have the rule over you, for your good, and for your spiritual welfare. You see; to hold fast your confession of Christ means that you will work your way forward toward church membership. It proves the sincerity of your faith in Christ, and your willingness to be held accountable if you go astray. Truly, God’s plan is good, and it is proved by everyone who gives themselves up to Christ, first of all, and then to the church. The Apostle Paul says of the believers in the churches of Macedonia, in 2 Corinthians 8: 5 – “And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.” Let me ask you this morning; have you given yourself up to the Lord? Then you will also want to give yourself to the people of the Lord in a good Bible-believing church. Christ has saved you, not to live to yourself, but to God. God’s plan, when you believe in Christ is to have you join a local expression of the Universal body of believers that He has spiritually placed you in, when you first believed. I know that it is possible that some people may actually go to a Bible-believing church, may even join that church and attend there all their lives, and yet not really know the Lord. But at least they are in the place where God would have them to be. And they are in the best place to be saved, if they truly are not saved. Going regularly to a local church is God’s plan for every believer. It is important to you, and important to God, that you as a believer join a local church and continue on steadfastly with it, to show that you are an obedient servant of Christ.

I want to point out to you, here, the close connection between your being baptized, with your joining a local church. The two went hand in hand on that Day of Pentecost. Those who believed were baptized and they were added. I am hoping that you will see this morning; that when you are truly saved **from** your sins and delivered from following after perversity in all of its forms, you are saved **to** something as well. You are saved from your sins and you are brought into the Church. And not only are you brought in to the brotherhood of the Universal Church, made up of all believers in all ages and places in heaven and earth; which is something God does; making a believer a part of Christ’s Church. God then expects you to take steps to join with a local church; a visible local expression of the “One Body” of Christ that you were spiritually brought into, when you first believed. It is in the context of your voluntarily becoming a member of a local church, that your being a righteous person, and becoming a more righteous person will be worked out. Those who “gladly received Peter’s word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.” It was a joy for them to

join the church. They were added to the 120 members of the local church there in Jerusalem. This was a conscious decision to join on the part of those who had believed, but it was also the expectation of the Apostles that they would do so. It was the Lord who added daily to the church, spiritually, it says in verse 47, "those who were being saved." But their being added also involved the Apostle's instruction that this was God's purpose and the right thing for them to do. And it involved the conscious decision on the part of those who had believed to voluntarily and formally commit to the church there in Jerusalem. The church which has taught you the gospel and the Word of God deserves your entrance into it, and your service in relation to it. God deserves your tithes and offerings, your time and your service, to be given to that church. There are people who need your help and the exercise of your gift in that church. You need to be taught the Bible and learn the way of the Lord. It is not the Lord's plan that you learn it all on your own. This is what Christ died for; so that you could be joined with His Church, and that serving Him in that context would take place. His Universal Church is built spiritually by the additions which God gives. And His gracious work in saving people is then further confirmed in their desire to become a member of a local church; a local expression of the Universal body. This is what Christ has called all believers to. It is to identify with Christ in the waters of baptism, first, and then it is to identify with the people of God, secondly, by joining the church where the Word of God is being faithfully preached. This is the duty and the responsibility of all those who have believed.

To conclude this message I would like to have you turn over to Acts Chapter 19, verse 1 to see an example of loyalty to God and to his servant Paul who was trying to labor in the building of Christ's Church. He was laboring, but he needed those whom he was preaching with the commit to him and to the work themselves. This is how it came about. "And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus." "And finding some disciples he said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?'" "So they said to him, 'We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy spirit.'" "And he said to them, 'Into what then were you baptized?'" "So they said, 'Into John's baptism.'" "Then Paul said, 'John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.'" "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." This was a righteous response to the Word spoken to them by the Apostle. It led to their sincere act of obedience; being baptized. They had already been baptized with John's baptism; the baptism showing their repentance from their own dead works and the ritual works of religion to save them. But Paul was able to tell them of their need to believe on Jesus, and to baptized in His name. He was able to preach to them about Jesus and tell them that the Holy Spirit would be in their heart and life when they believed in Christ. So the text goes on to say in verse 6, "And when Paul had laid

hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.” When they believed in the Lord Jesus, they received the Holy Spirit; the evidence of which was their speaking in tongues. That is not the evidence today. Today the evidence is joining the church and learning the way of the Lord through placing yourself under the preaching of the Word; to come to church consistently learn and keep and become a doer of the Word. You may have been baptized as an infant being held in the arms of your parents. But that baptism will not give you salvation or the Holy Spirit. That baptism bears some resemblance to John’s baptism. Except that it is other people making the commitment for you, and not yourself. It is other people declaring on your behalf that they will raise you in the right way, and lead you to the point where, when you are old enough, you can believe in Christ for yourself. But your coming to faith in Christ is not a family affair. You must come yourself, and no one else can do it for you. But once you have believed, then you should be baptized; immersed in the water in Jesus name. And then you should proceed on towards joining the church . Listen to what happened here in Acts 19: 7. “Now the men were about twelve in all.” “And He went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.” “But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.” “And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.”

Now I want you to notice the loyalty of these disciples to Paul. Theirs was a true loyalty to the Apostle; an ecclesiastical church loyalty; to submit to him and to his teaching as an Apostle. When Paul preached in the synagogue, there were some who hardened themselves and did not believe. Because of this Paul had to leave off preaching there and he withdrew the disciples. And they followed him. They could have questioned this. They could have made up their own mind and decided not to go to church; which was then being held in the temporary building of the “school of Tyrannus”. But they did not. They were loyal to Paul and they were loyal to him because they wanted to be loyal to Christ. Their highest loyalty was to Christ, and being loyal to him, they were being loyal to the One who had given Paul to them to be their teacher. This loyalty to the Apostle is what is still needed today in the churches of Christ, and in our church here, in thinking about the relationship which exists between pastor and people. Loyalty to Christ today, in the context in which we are speaking, of joining the church, means that you will, by God’s grace, be loyal to the one who is preaching and teaching the Word of God to you if he is faithfully explaining it, and applying it, and living it out. Sometimes those who are listening to the Word harden themselves under the preaching of the Word of God; and they will then begin to speak against the pastor and attempt to discredit the ministry of the pastor. What should you do if you see this happening? I think that to be faithful to God and to the Lord’s work, that you

should resolve that you will be loyal to your pastor and continue to follow his teaching and his lead, unless you see that he has fallen into sin in some way. A true disciple sees the importance of having a pastor-teacher lead the church, through his faithfully teaching them the Word of God, in all situations; especially the most difficult. Continue steadfast in this my brethren. Never leave a Bible-believing church where the pastor is faithfully teaching and preaching God's Word, for a church which is entertainment-oriented, or program oriented in a man-centered way. It will only weaken you spiritually and weaken the cause of Christ in general. Rather, pray for the Word which is being preached to you, to come with power to your soul. And pray for the Lord to refresh, strengthen and revive every member of the church, so that His cause and kingdom will go forward, and His glory be seen. God is glorified when people are loyal to His Word and loyal to those who preach it faithfully. May the Lord increase the membership of His church here in this place.