

# Undeniable Members, Acts 2:36-41

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## Introduction

Good morning, my name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors here. We are continuing on today in our series about covenant membership, which we've subtitled, "A Place At the Table". A significant part of how we as a local church live out our membership is through two ordinances given to us by Jesus himself: the Lord's Supper, which we considered last week, and baptism, which is what we'll consider today.

So I invite you to turn in your Bibles with me to Acts 2:36-41. You can find that on page 910 if you're using one of the Bibles in the chairs. The title of today's sermon is "Undeniable Members," and the main idea is this: Baptism is the public declaration that you have a place at Jesus' table. I think the text will bring out two important applications for us, which do apply to the act of baptism itself, but also go far beyond it. They are:

- 1) Submit to Jesus inwardly - vv. 37-39
- 2) Submit to Jesus outwardly - vv. 40-41

With that said, if you are able, please stand with me to honor the reading of God's word. Again, today's passage is Acts 2:36-41. Church, hear the word of the Lord:

*<sup>36</sup> Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."*

*<sup>37</sup> 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?" <sup>38</sup> 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. <sup>39</sup> 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." <sup>40</sup> And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." <sup>41</sup> So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. Acts 2:36-41*

The Lord has spoken to us. [Congregation] Thanks be to God! You may be seated.

## Exposition

In the early 1940's, the American artist Norman Rockwell released a famous painting he called "Freedom From Want".



It portrayed an idyllic gathering around the family table for Thanksgiving, complete with a massive turkey, perfect table settings, and a crowd of young and old, all with delight written on their faces. This went on to become the stereotypical view of what a family's dinner table was (or should be).<sup>1</sup>

Over the decades, there have been many parodies of this painting to represent a more realistic view of how times have changed. The one that stood out to me most looks like this<sup>2</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> "Freedom From Want (painting)," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom\\_from\\_Want\\_\(painting\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_from_Want_(painting))

<sup>2</sup> Theresa Thompson, "Freedom From Want," <https://www.flickr.com/photos/theresasthompson/2235200801>



In it the turkey is replaced with a bucket of KFC, the water with a liter of Coke, and the extended family with a couple of dogs. But the thing I want to draw your attention to most is the posture of the children. It's definitely a more honest depiction to see them unamused by the gathering. But perhaps an even more honest depiction wouldn't include them at all. Why? Because even though they'd be eating food from the table, if it were left up to them they would likely be eating on the couch watching tv or in their room with their iPhone. Now that doesn't mean they're no longer family, it just makes it hard to *be* family.

The point I'm trying to make here isn't so much about what your family dinner table should be like. Instead it's this: *eating at the table involves commitment to the family.* You gotta want to be there for it to work.

If you remember the story from last week, Jesus had prepared the Passover feast one last time to celebrate with his disciples, to rest and enjoy the ones he loved. This was a compelling picture of the wider reason why Jesus came: to spread the table of God's salvation and invite all who would come. But the choice to keep or forsake one's place at Jesus' table, to submit to the family or to reject it, was already at play. And we know from the rest of the story that one of Jesus' disciples, Judas, literally and figuratively left his place at the table and betrayed his Master who had loved him.

And it gets worse. The Bible tells us that all of Jesus' disciples then fled when he was arrested<sup>3</sup>, that Peter denied he even knew Jesus<sup>4</sup>, that the leaders and people of Israel

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<sup>3</sup> Mark 14:50

falsely accused and condemned Jesus<sup>5</sup>, and that the Romans had him flogged and crucified<sup>6</sup>. Rejection, rejection, rejection. For a moment it not only seems like there's no one left at the table, but that there's no table of God's salvation at all—the Messiah is dead.<sup>7</sup>

But thanks be to God in three days Jesus rises from the dead and appears to his disciples.<sup>8</sup> Then he ascends to heaven<sup>9</sup>, and on a day called Pentecost he sends his promised Holy Spirit upon his disciples<sup>10</sup>. And at that time in Jerusalem there were thousands of devout Jews who wondered what in the world this commotion was as the disciples miraculously spoke in foreign languages.<sup>11</sup> Peter, the one who had forsaken Jesus' table just as much as Judas, has found his place there again, and he stands to speak to the crowd. And one of the very first things he speaks of, is a feast.

Now you may not see anything in his sermon about a feast, but if you're familiar with the book of Joel, you start to understand. Joel is a prophet who confronts God's Old Testament people with his coming judgment against their sins. And he describes that judgment in terms of a famine. God wants to feast with his people, but their sins have separated them from him.<sup>12</sup> But then Joel begins to announce a coming day in which his people will repent and God will pour out on them a great salvation. And he describes that salvation in terms of a feast, saying things like this: "The threshing floors shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil...You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you."<sup>13</sup> It's from this exact context that Peter then preaches,

*this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:*

*17      " 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams;*

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 22:54-62

<sup>5</sup> Luke 22:66-71; 23:18-23

<sup>6</sup> Luke 23:24-33

<sup>7</sup> Luke 23:50-56

<sup>8</sup> Luke 24:1-49

<sup>9</sup> Luke 24:50-53

<sup>10</sup> Acts 2:1-4

<sup>11</sup> Acts 2:5-13

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 59:2

<sup>13</sup> Joel 2:24, 26

<sup>18</sup> even on my male servants and female servants  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.  
<sup>19</sup> And I will show wonders in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;  
<sup>20</sup> the sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,  
before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.  
<sup>21</sup> And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of  
the Lord shall be saved.’ Acts 2:16-21

So when Peter stands and quotes from Joel, he is saying to the crowd that the table of God’s salvation is here, and at the head of that table is Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup> In fact, he goes on to bear witness to this truth based on the Scriptures and his own two eyes.<sup>15</sup> And then, by the power of the Spirit, he drops a bomb to confront the crowd with what this all means for them. If Jesus is the Son of God who has died and rose and sent his Spirit as a conquering King, then

*<sup>36</sup> Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Acts 2:36*

‘God just came down in the flesh to save you, and you killed him!’ Now for many of these Jews, only weeks ago they had shouted along with the religious leaders to “Crucify him!”<sup>16</sup> They had literally participated in the killing of Jesus. But if we have a correct understanding of why Jesus died, then the killing of Jesus confronts all of us. If “all have sinned”<sup>17</sup> and if Jesus “died for our sins”<sup>18</sup> “according to the plan and foreknowledge of God,”<sup>19</sup> then we all killed him. You may not have been there in the crowd, but if you had been, you would’ve been shouting, “Crucify him!” too, or standing by passively. This wasn’t a *Jewish* heart condition, but a *human* heart condition.

And so Peter’s words, with the help of the Holy Spirit, confront us too. ‘God just came down in the flesh to save you, and you killed him!’ God spread a table of salvation and

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<sup>14</sup> Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus: Discovering Grace, Community, and Mission Around the Table* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 108-111, 114-115

<sup>15</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), Loc 4454, 4065

<sup>16</sup> Luke 23:21

<sup>17</sup> Romans 3:23

<sup>18</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3

<sup>19</sup> Acts 2:23

you turned that table upside down. If, by God's grace, you have begun to agree and own that reality, then what do you do? That's what the rest of this sermon is about.

### 1) Submit to Jesus Inwardly - vv. 37-39

This brings us to our first point of application this morning: submit to Christ inwardly. Finally, after all this rejection, we read in v. 37,

***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***

If you've ever shared about Jesus with someone and confronted that person with their sin, then you know—people aren't easily *cut to the heart*. Just think about the list of people we talked about earlier who rejected Jesus! Being "cut to the heart" means being brokenhearted and under deep conviction.<sup>20</sup> It's like the reality of your guilt before God is coming at you like a knife, and you don't dodge it in denial, or attack back in anger, but you let it strike you square in the heart. And the human heart is so hard that this is a total miracle; impossible apart from the Holy Spirit.

But when the Spirit does conduct this sacred surgery, there is a common reaction. We see it here in the text as the Jews ask, "Brothers, what shall we do?" It's the thought that follows a moment of "What have I done?!"—"Now what do I do?" In other words, "What do I need in order to fix this?"<sup>21</sup> It's not that these guys have killed the prince and now have to face the wrath of the king, it's that they killed the King and the King came back to life. They're dead meat and they know it!<sup>22</sup>

But here's the most amazing news in the world (v. 38):

***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. Acts 2:38***

'Here's what you need,' Peter says: (two things) the forgiveness of your sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Let's give a moment to both.

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<sup>20</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1980), 85

<sup>21</sup> John Piper, "Repentance, Forgiveness, and the Gift of the Spirit," <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/repentance-forgiveness-and-the-gift-of-the-spirit>

<sup>22</sup> Schnabel, Loc 4484-4503



First, the forgiveness of your sins is not the downplaying of your sins. It's not God saying, 'Oh, your disobedience isn't so bad, I'll just let it go.' 'Oh, you killed my Son, but you didn't really know what you were doing, I understand.' That sounds like what we say to each other when we're late for a meeting! No, what we're talking about for these Jews and us is courtroom scene, pronounced guilty, sentenced to death. That's why the word "forgive" here means "to release from a legal obligation".<sup>23</sup> What we need isn't for God to downplay our sins, but to forgive them (to release us from them) because Jesus paid the price for them when he died in our place.

The second need we have is the gift of the Holy Spirit; we need God himself to come and dwell with us. We don't just need God to forgive us for turning his table upside down—'You're forgiven, but stay away from my table'—no, we need him to welcome us back at his table and remind us we belong there. What's the point of forgiveness if there's no relationship? The main point of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit is to be restored to relationship with God, not to be able to speak in tongues or feel spiritually intoxicated. He comes so that old affection for sin turns into new affection for God. So that old fear, guilt, and shame turns into the confidence, innocence, and approval of life with God.

Ok, so that's what is needed—but how do we get it? For that, we go back to v. 38:

***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. Acts 2:38***

'Here's how you get it,' Peter says: (again, two things) repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Let's also give a moment to both of these:

First, repentance is not just feeling sorry for your sin. These Jews have already done that when they were described as being "cut to the heart". Instead, "repent" means to change your mindset and turn the direction of your life. Jesus himself describes it as turning "from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God".<sup>24</sup> It's something that you do as much as it depends on you, while also recognizing that you're actually incapable of it on your own. This is why the Bible both commands you to repent and describes it as a gift from God.<sup>25</sup> For the Jews in the crowd, "repent" meant to turn from

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<sup>23</sup> Schnabel, Loc 4592

<sup>24</sup> Acts 26:18; Piper, "Repentance, Forgiveness, and the Gift of the Holy Spirit"

<sup>25</sup> Marshall, 85-86; Acts 5:31, 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25

rejecting Jesus as an imposter to submitting to him as Lord and Messiah.<sup>26</sup> The same is true for us. We submit to Jesus inwardly.

And a second part of this inward submission is the commitment to be baptized, which means to be immersed. Now we might think of baptism as purely external, something that only happens in a pool of water. But Paul describes it as being immersed into Jesus by faith. He writes,

*<sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. Romans 6:3-5*

What this means is that as you are repenting of your sins and putting your faith in Jesus, you are being united to Jesus, through the forgiveness of your sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. And to be united to One who is far greater than you, is to be in submission to him. So baptism begins as work in the heart.<sup>27</sup> This is a large part of why we practice believer's baptism instead of infant baptism.

So there it is: repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus is what leads to forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is Peter's good news to the Jews. And luckily for us, he continues, this

*promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." Acts 2:39*

Let the nations be glad! This good news is for us too. For all who would hear God's call, and submit to Jesus inwardly.

## **2) Submit to Jesus Outwardly - vv. 40-41**

And yet, there is no true inward submission without outward submission. This brings us to our second point of application this morning: submit outwardly to Jesus. Read with me in v. 40:

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<sup>26</sup> Schnabel, Loc 4503-4521

<sup>27</sup> Marshal, 85-87



*<sup>40</sup> And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” Acts 2:40*

What Peter does as he continued to preach was describe the action the Jews needed to take in order to have a place at Jesus’ table of salvation. ‘Do this and you’ll be saved. Don’t do this and you’ll remain condemned<sup>28</sup> among this crooked generation.’ “Crooked generation” isn’t just preacher-talk, but it’s a term used in the Old Testament to describe the people of Israel who had refused to submit to God and his leaders in the wilderness, even after God had achieved for them a great salvation from slavery in Egypt. Deuteronomy 32:5:

*<sup>5</sup> They have dealt corruptly with [God]; they are no longer his children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation. Deuteronomy 32:5*

In the New Testament this term is then used to describe the people who refuse to submit to Jesus, even after he had achieved for them a great salvation from slavery to sin. Philippians 2:14-15 (where after calling us to Jesus’ own submission to death on a cross, Paul writes,)

*<sup>14</sup> Do all things without grumbling or disputing [in other words, submissively], <sup>15</sup> that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, Philippians 2:14-15<sup>29</sup>*

So this is the action that Peter says needs to be taken immediately: submit to Jesus. Not just inwardly, but outwardly. How do we know this? Because, v. 41,

*those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. Acts 2:41*

The evidence that a person had received (had repented and believed) the good news preached by Peter that day, was that he or she was baptized. That meant in the presence of one of the apostles who assisted with the act, in one of the large pools near the Temple Mount, in front of a mixed crowd of believers and unbelievers, a person was immersed in water in the name of Jesus Christ<sup>30</sup> (which if you have a proper doctrine of

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<sup>28</sup> John 3:18

<sup>29</sup> Marshall, 87

<sup>30</sup> Schnabel, Loc 4665

the Trinity, is no different than baptizing, as commanded by Jesus, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit<sup>31</sup>).

In order to be as clear as possible about our church's understanding and application of this ordinance, I want to quote from The Baptist Faith and Message, a doctrinal statement that we adhere to:

*Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.*<sup>32</sup>

So even though baptism begins as a work in the heart, it moves into an outward work of submission to Jesus. It's meant to be the *undeniable* evidence that you have truly repented and believed, and thus have received forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the title of today's sermon, "Undeniable Members".

So baptism, as we established in today's main idea, is the public declaration that you have a place at Jesus' family table. That's why we teach that baptism should take place before membership is possible, and before you come to the communion table. From the day of Pentecost on, the clear progression is that believers publicly submit to Jesus through baptism, and *then* they come to the communion table undeniably united to the family of God. We'll see this even next week as we continue to follow this story in Acts 2.

## **Conclusion**

As a pastor in a church that places great value on being spiritual family to one another, and seeks to be intentional about that through covenant membership, I am often having conversations with people who are considering joining Antioch, and have questions. So in conclusion today, I basically want to share how I answer those questions.

I readily admit that covenant membership is not a third ordinance alongside baptism and communion. It is not required for salvation. Look for where it is explicitly (word-for-word)

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<sup>31</sup> Matthew 28:19

<sup>32</sup> Southern Baptist Convention, "The Baptist Faith and Message," <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>

commanded in the Bible, and you won't find it. But you also won't explicitly, word-for-word find things in the Bible like:

- God is triune (the doctrine is clearly there in the full counsel of Scripture, but not those exact words)
- Penal, substitutionary atonement
- join a Family Group
- participate in a Sunday Gathering
- sing with the accompaniment of a guitar and cello
- care about the South End of Louisville, Kentucky
- refer to your missionaries as Distributed Members
- have five pastors (with at least two named Jason)

But you know what you *will* find in there? The verse I most commonly point to as the basis for covenant membership at Antioch Church. It says this:

***17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. Hebrews 13:17***

Because the leaders of Antioch, going back to its Constitution and Bylaws, its pastors, and the members who approved them, because they have determined that covenant membership is a significant part of how we obey Jesus together (not the *perfect* way or the *only* way, but the way we do it at this local church), then what this all comes down to is a matter of *submission*.

And really, that's the connection to today's sermon and passage. Baptism is not required for salvation, but it is a declaration to everyone that you belong to Jesus and his family. To refuse it, is to not submit. Likewise, membership is not required for salvation, but it is a declaration to everyone that you belong to Jesus and his family. To refuse it, is to not submit. Or in other words, it's wanting to eat from the family table, but sit on the couch or in the bedroom instead. It doesn't mean you're no longer family, it just makes it hard to *be* family.

Are we as pastors and members really that concerned about people signing a document once a year? No. But we are concerned about people having tender and submissive hearts to God and one another. Why? Well,

*as the Holy Spirit says,*

*“Today, if you hear his voice,  
8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,  
on the day of testing in the wilderness,  
9 where your fathers put me to the test  
and saw my works for forty years.  
10 Therefore I was provoked with that [crooked] generation,  
and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart;  
they have not known my ways.’ Hebrews 3:7-10*

Now this hits home with all of us, no matter where we are today:

- If you're here and you've never claimed your place at the table of Jesus' salvation, then today, hear his voice: repent and believe.
- If you're here and you've done that but you haven't declared it in baptism, then today, hear his voice: be baptized in the name of Jesus.
- If you're here and you've done that but you haven't made a clear commitment to a local church family, then today, hear his voice: obey your leaders and submit to them in local church you can trust.
- If you're here and you've done all that already, then today, hear his voice: whatever he has spoken to you this morning, do not harden your heart.

*6 “Seek the Lord while he may be found;  
call upon him while he is near;  
7 let the wicked forsake his way,  
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. Isaiah 55:6-7*

May we all submit to him, for he wants us at his family table. We want you at his family table. On the night that he was betrayed, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it, he broke it and said to his disciples, “This is my body, which is broken for you; eat this in remembrance of me.” He also took a cup of wine, and after blessing it, gave it to his disciples and said, “This cup is the new covenant marked by the shedding of my blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you announce the Lord's death until he returns.”<sup>33</sup> **Today we are announcing that Jesus Christ submitted himself and died so that we might submit ourselves and live.**

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<sup>33</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:23-27

Our tradition here at Antioch is to come forward and break off a piece of bread and dip it in the juice. There will be stations here in the front; gluten-free bread will be available to your right. If you're a baptized believer, come and remember who you are and whose you are. If you're a believer but not yet baptized, before coming to the table, we would love to help you first come and declare your faith publicly through baptism. If you're not a Christian, this sacred symbol is not for you, but rather than taking communion, we encourage you to take Christ. He has made himself available to you this very moment. There will be pastors in the back to talk and pray with you about any need you have. Let's pray.

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