

Decide

The word decide has a curious origin. One we don't often think about.

Its two latin roots- one de- means to remove.

The other- cide- means to cut or kill.

So put together- decide means to remove something by cutting. Or cutting something off.

To decide- is to cut all the other options off. To kill your excuses and escape plan.

If you're a high school senior choosing where to go to college- and you've narrowed it down to UT-Knoxville, MTSU, and Memphis- you can't say "I like the English department at UT, I like the Pilot program at MTSU, and I want to play basketball at Memphis.- So I'm doing all three!"

You have to choose one. You have to cut off the other two. You have to decide. And when you decide- you are all in on that school. You go to English, Math, Science, and if you play on an athletic team...it's all gonna be for that school. Doesn't matter how much you like all your other options- you have to cut them off.

Baptism Sunday Slide

Today is a very special day in the life of our church. Because today I'm going to invite you...and all kinds of people, from all different walks of life to make a decision to follow Jesus and be baptized. There are some of you in this room right now- that you didn't walk in expecting to get wet today- but you are going to DECIDE to follow Jesus in obedience and faith- and be baptized- right outside on the sidewalk...right after I finish preaching. You are going to cut off all your escapes and excuses.

Some of you are thinking "I'm too old"- or "Its too late" or "It will be embarrassing"... and by the end of this message God is going to speak so clearly to you- that you will DECIDE to be baptized.

Somebody is going to go from cynical to believer today.

Somebody is going have THE turning point of their life happen in the next hour.

It is all going to come down you deciding.

And all of the rest of us are going to go crazy with applause when you come up from the water after making one of the best decisions of your entire life!

Title Slide: “Decide: Deny or Declare”- Luke 22:54-62 & Acts 2:22-41

Peter was Jesus’ biggest supporter. Nobody spoke up for Jesus as much- or put his foot in his mouth as frequently.

Peter looked committed- he had even decided to leave his family and follow Jesus as his teacher.

He swore he would save Jesus from anyone who tried to harm him. But Jesus wasn’t looking for salvation from Peter...instead Jesus was going to die and resurrect to save Peter. But Peter- and the rest of the disciples- even when Jesus told them his mission directly...they just didn’t get it. They weren’t looking for Jesus to die...they were looking for him to rule. And Peter underestimated his own loyalty.

In fact, Jesus told him on the night of the last supper- “Peter, before the rooster crows in the morning- you will deny me 3 times.”

When Jesus is arrested, Peter runs away- loses the tough guy act- and he has got to be ruminating over his giant failure.

But he secretly follows Jesus, maybe wondering if he’ll have a chance at redeeming himself- speaking up for Jesus- storming the castle to rescue Jesus.

Here’s what happens:

Luke 22:54-62

54 They seized [Jesus], led him away, and brought him into the high priest’s house. Meanwhile Peter was following at a distance. 55 They lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, and Peter sat among them. 56 When a servant saw him sitting in the light, and looked closely at him, she said, “This man was with him too.”

57 But he denied it: “Woman, I don’t know him.”

58 After a little while, someone else saw him and said, “You’re one of them too.”

“Man, I am not!” Peter said.

59 About an hour later, another kept insisting, “This man was certainly with him, since he’s also a Galilean.”

60 But Peter said, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. 61 Then the Lord turned and looked

at Peter. So Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” 62 And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Everything Jesus said about Peter’s denial...it happened- and He was devastated.

Picture now- this man. Likely a shell of himself. Deeply regretful with his decision to deny Jesus.

But then on Sunday- the Tomb is empty! The resurrected Jesus meets Peter on the shore- he tells him three times- that he is calling him back into ministry.

John 21:17-19

17 He asked him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me? ”

Peter was grieved that he asked him the third time, “Do you love me? ” He said, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”

“Feed my sheep,” Jesus said. 18 “Truly I tell you, when you were younger, you would tie your belt and walk wherever you wanted. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you and carry you where you don’t want to go.” 19 He said this to indicate by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. After saying this, he told him, “Follow me.”

In other words- “Peter- talk is cheap. You have talked a lot about how you love me. If you love me, trust me in your obedience- and that obedience will mean your death”

Now- we know that Peter now knows- if Jesus says something is going to happen- its going to happen. He learned that in his 3 times denial. And now Jesus is saying- if you follow me- you are going to die an excruciating death at the hands of those who hate you.

And finally- Jesus offers another invitation- the same one he offered Peter when they first met. FOLLOW ME.

The next scene we get of Peter is in the sequel to the book of Luke- the book of Acts.

And that book opens with the Holy Spirit descending like fire on the apostles heads- and Peter- of all people- Peter- stands up and preaches a sermon boldly- in front of thousands of people... people who are denying Jesus’ resurrection. The one who denied Jesus...now is deciding to declare him as LORD in front of the same people that before he had run away from. ...and this is what it sounds like.

Acts 2:22-24

22 “Listen to these words: This Jesus of Nazareth was a man attested to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did among you through him, just

as you yourselves know. 23 Though he was delivered up according to God's determined plan and foreknowledge, you used lawless people to nail him to a cross and kill him. 24 God raised him up, ending the pains of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by death.

Acts 2:36-41

36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

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.

Peter drew a line in the sand with regard to Jesus- and he let them decide where they wanted to stand. and 3000 people decided.

They were cut to the heart...and their lives were forever changed...right there.. on the spot...and they were immediately baptized to declare Jesus as their Lord.

As Luke keeps documenting the work of the Holy Spirit in the apostles in the book of Acts- you're gonna keep seeing the same pattern.

In Acts 8, Philip preaches about Jesus death and resurrection to a crowd of people..

Acts 8:12

But when they believed Philip, as he proclaimed the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized

Then the Holy Spirit takes him out to a rural road where he sees an Ethiopian government official riding in his chariot reading a scroll from the prophet Isaiah- So Philip explains that Isaiah is talking about the Messiah and Savior...and that man is the Crucified and resurrected Jesus.

So the Ethiopian man is convinced and look what he says.

Acts 8:36

36 As they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, “Look, there’s water. What would keep me from being baptized?” 38 So he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.

Acts 9- Saul meets the resurrected Jesus on the Road to Damascus...after he was busy arresting and killing Christians. He changes his mind about Jesus- and decides to follow him....and watch what happens.

Acts 9:18-20

At once something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. And after taking some food, he regained his strength... Immediately he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues: “He is the Son of God.”

He changed his mind about Jesus- He was baptized BEFORE he had lunch...then he went out declaring that Jesus is the son of God.

Acts 16:14-15

A God-fearing woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, was listening. The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying. 15 After she and her household were baptized,

Acts 18:8

Crispus the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, along with his whole household. Many of the Corinthians, when they heard, believed and were baptized.

Are you are seeing the pattern?

Belief in Jesus—> followed by baptism.

I can't find a single baptism in the book of Acts that isn't immediate, on the spot, unplanned, and spontaneous- something none of the people thought would happen when they woke up that morning. There were no classes, no waiting period, no sending out invitations to family...because it wasn't really ceremony or a ritual- it was a public DECLARATION!

And every single time in the NT, Baptism FOLLOWS belief.

So now- lets go back to Peter's sermon in Acts 2- because I want to show you what happens there...cuz its still how God operates today.

And then I'm going to offer you the opportunity to do what those 3000 people at Pentecost did- and what all those others in Acts did- decide to declare- and be baptized on the spot.

Back to title slide

3 groups I'm talking to today.

1) You are going to make a first time decision to follow Jesus today.

You may have known about Jesus...maybe even respected him in some way. But today- you are actually going to change your mind about him.

Some of you its your first time back in church in years...or maybe at all. And you are going to meet Jesus.

Some of you maybe even have been opposed to Xianity- and God has you hear today- just like he encountered Paul on the road to damascus- the scales will fall from your eyes today.

And you are going to believe and be baptized.

2) Those who have made a decision to follow Jesus in the past, but never been baptized.

Some of you didn't understand you are supposed to.

Some of you have known you need to do it as a step of obedience...but you have just not done it for a thousand small excuses.

And today- you are going stop making excuses and start obeying Jesus.

3) Some of you have been baptized in the past...maybe as a child or even a baby..but you are not really sure if you were following Jesus back then. Or like Peter- you were talking a big game, but really denying him with your life.

Baptism is the beginning of a life of following Jesus. Not a ritual or a rite of passage. Its not a decision a parent can really make for you.

Its the beginning of a life surrendered to Jesus. An outward sign of what Jesus has done in your heart.

Maybe all your friends were doing it.

Or you just wanted to make your parents happy.

Bottom line- if your first baptism was not after you placed your trust in Jesus and marked the beginning of a life of surrender to him as LORD- then today you are going to be baptized to declare that.

Ok- now back to Acts 2 and Peters sermon. when he finishes...listen to what the people said that heard this message about Jesus.

Acts 2:37

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? "

There were two things these people realized that pierced them to the heart. Or cut them and Made them come to a point of decision.

1) They realized they were wrong about Jesus.

Peter is addressing mainly a crowd of Jewish people- and at this time among the Jews there were a few theories as to who Jesus was.

Prophet- calling people back to a kind of pure religion
Political Messiah- finally overthrow the oppressive Roman government

But Jesus would not let himself be categorized like that. He kept saying and doing things that blew up their perception of him.

He forgave people sins- something Jews saw as blasphemous
He let people worship him- even said if they didn't the rocks and trees would cry out in praise.
He claimed he was replacing the temple- the dwelling place of God among the Jews.
He demanded Lordship among his followers- even calling them to devote their lives to him over their own families.

And so people started saying- "Cut it out! You are sounding like you think you're God!"
And Jesus was like "You said it! Not me!"

He told people plainly that he was on a rescue mission to save them from their sin- and that the only way to heaven was through him.

And even the people that liked him and were most loyal to him- were like "Calm it down, buddy. You gotta chill with the "Divine Lord" stuff.

But he wouldn't. So they crucified him.

Acts 2:36

So Peter in his sermon says- this Jesus that you crucified- God has made him LORD and MESSIAH

“Lord” means “God”- not generically. But the personal God of the Jews- the creator of the universe. Not another Prophet of God...God himself.

“Messiah”- means the one who fulfills all the OT promises of salvation.

He is not one way to be saved among many- but he is the only way to the Father. The only name under heaven that can be called on to remove the guilt we have on us from our sin against God...and forgive us so that when you die- you will be raised to eternal life.

Peter makes it clear. All of your opinions about Jesus that don't make him Lord and savior- are wrong.

And the resurrection proves that.

When a guy gets out of the grave- you kind of need to go back and think through everything he told you he was- because he was likely right the whole time.

Likewise, a lot of us have a category for Jesus.

Great and wise teacher.

Model of social justice and kindness.

Foundation of western system of morality

One of many ways to know God

Get out of hell free card

Good luck charm

Someone to turn to in jam

Someone who helps improve your life and establish a good family as long as you obey most of his rules and don't get too fanatical about it.

Jesus will absolutely not allow you to put him in any of those categories.

You must decide that HE is BOTH LORD and MESSIAH- or he is neither.

He is either LORD OF ALL...or isn't LORD AT ALL.

“So what you're left with is either Christ was who he said he was – God incarnate, the Messiah – or a complete nutcase. I mean, we're talking nutcase on the level of Charles Manson...I'm not joking here. And, the idea that the entire course of civilization for over half of the globe could have its fate changed and turned upside-down by a nutcase, for me that's a little far fetched...”- Bono

Back to 1)

You need to be honest. Either accept Jesus for who he says he is...and declare him with your life as Lord and Messiah...or you are denying him with your life. But don't

treat him like a salad bar where you pick and choose what to take and what to leave behind.

If you look honestly at your life- at the way you live- does your life declare that Jesus is Lord and Messiah- or does it deny that?

2) They realized their sin put Jesus on the cross.

At least twice in Peter's sermon- he tells the crowd that they were responsible for Jesus' death.

And when he does that- he's not really speaking to them merely as Jews. And a lot of them weren't even at the cross. These people have come from some far away countries.

When he says that- he's talking to the whole human race. People from every nation. All who speak different languages.

In fact- he even says "this is for those who are far off- and your children". He expands his audience to all people in all places at all times.

AND- Peter is thinking about himself in this. He counts himself among that number.

Remember when he was Cut to the Heart when Jesus met eyes with him after his 3rd denial? Yeah- Peter is not standing on moral high ground with this crowd- He is saying- WE ALL KILLED JESUS.

See you are pierced to the heart when you understand that you killed Jesus with your sin. When you realize you have denied Jesus with your life...and you meet eyes with him on the cross.

Your refusal to submit to God's authority.

Your rebellion against your parents.

Your sexual sin.

Your hate of people that aren't like you.

Your shame in confessing him in front of your friends.

Your pursuit of money and possessions and the praise of people over praising him with your life

Your lying and bending of the truth to protect yourself

Your ungratefulness and cynicism that puts others down

Your selfishness as mother or father or husband or wife

Your gossip and tearing others down behind their backs

The Scripture says for all of those things you're guilty of- you have sinned against a perfect holy God that loves you...and you have condemned yourself to death.

And yet- because he loves you- God himself in Jesus Christ took the death you were condemned to die on himself. He took the punishment for your sin- so you could be forgiven and have life eternal. By his stripes- you are healed.

And when you are pierced to the heart- all of that sin becomes to you less about breaking God's rules...and you weep bitterly because you know you have broken God's heart.

So how do you respond when you realize your sin is on Jesus? That Jesus resurrected and has forgiven you- and like he did with Peter...and all these folks at Pentecost- is once again coming to you saying "FOLLOW ME"

Salvation occurs when you personally are convicted of your sins and you personally receive his forgiveness and say yes to his Lordship.

Your parents can't do it for you.
Conviction of sin and forgiveness and salvation are things
between you and God only.

YOU have to decide to STOP DENYING him...and instead DECLARE HIM PUBLICLY.

Acts 2:41

So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to them.

The people were baptized immediately. Why?

Baptism is a symbol that Jesus gave to the church to represent what he has done for us. You go down under the water...like Jesus died and was buried...and you come up out of the water- new, different, soaking wet. In fact- you look transformed- because a person looks different wet than they do dry. your hair changes- we can see your eyelashes better.

But just like any symbol- it doesn't have any power without the reality it represents.

EX- Wedding ring.

If I have it on- it shows people I'm married to Keva.

If you have it on- you don't become married to Keva.

What does it symbolize?

SALVATION & SURRENDER: Baptism declares "Jesus is my Savior and Lord!"

Lordship- He is the Lord of my life. He calls the shots. I'm dying to control. That part of me is buried in baptism.

Savior- His death is my death. And his righteousness is now my righteousness. He identified with my sin on the cross by taking it from me. Now I identify with his perfect life...in baptism. I now carry his name!

IDENTIFICATION: Baptism declares “I’m with Jesus and He’s with me”

The Bible calls salvation a gift. It is something you receive- and then you are baptized to declare it.

So in a moment- I’m going to ask you to decide.

And already the excuse that you need to kill and cut off are coming up.

First- I want you to know that Baptism is not a cellphone contract that you renew every couple of years.

If you were baptized after you truly repented and trusted Jesus for salvation.

The question is did your life show true and actual repentance- or did you just give lip service to it?

Maybe your saying “I don’t think I’m ready”

Let me be clear: When step out today to be baptized- what’s going to happen is that you’re going to chat with a counselor who will help determine if you’re ready. Stepping out doesn’t mean you have all your questions answered ... but it means you’re ready to have the conversation ... and there are people ready to help you make that determination.

But would you say Jesus is your Lord and Savior and you’ve repented of your sin? Then you’re ready. The Ethiopian eunuch said, “I wanna get saved.” He gets saved. Then he says, “There’s water, let’s get baptized.” Boom. That’s it.

I don’t need baptism to love Jesus and follow him.

Again, baptism isn’t a condition of salvation; but it is evidence of it. I don’t need to wear a ring to be married. To say you love Jesus but not follow his command of baptism is either to live in unbelief or disobedience.

- Today’s the day ... come be baptized.

I was baptized as a kid. // I don’t want to shame my parents.

- It’s not shaming your parents, it’s ratifying their decision of faith. When they baptized you as a kid it was them saying, “I hope this child grows up to follow Christ.” Today you’re just ratifying what they desired so many years ago!
- Today’s the day ... come be baptized.

I don't have any clothes.

- We have clothes for you. Shirts, shorts the whole bit. Today's the day ... come be baptized.

I rode with people.

- They'll wait for you. Actually, let me let you in on a little secret: This is why they brought you ... they were hoping for this!
- Today's the day ... come be baptized.

3 groups-

What will you decide? Deny...or Declare?