



SHARING GOD'S STORY

WEEK 5

“For God so loved the world that He gave His One and Only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). God paid the price and provided the forgiveness of sins by His loving grace. However, this is not an automatic and open-door entrance into heaven. Our response is needed to show we’ve accepted and received such a gift. We accept such a gift by admitting we have sinned, believe that Jesus is God’s Son who died on the cross for our sins, and confess our trust in Him for salvation. We must accept His gift by faith. Many reject His gift and they will not receive everlasting life with God. But for those who do believe, their lives are changed. They are sealed with the Holy Spirit. They are producing good works. Nothing can separate them from God’s love.

DON'T WORRY, JUST SAY IT

OUR RESPONSE

DAY 1 / RECAP

His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. By these He has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desires... Therefore, I will always remind you about these things, even though you know them and are established in the truth you have. I consider it right, as long as I am in this bodily tent, to wake you up with a reminder, knowing that I will soon lay aside my tent, as our Lord Jesus Christ has also shown me. And I will also make every effort that you may be able to recall these things at any time after my departure. (2 Peter 1:3-4, 12-15)

This week we finally arrive at *how* we can come to experience the new, eternal life Jesus Christ made possible. Let's begin with a recap of what we have learned about the Gospel so far while keeping in mind that our desire is to be competent in living out God's heart to see people return to Him in faith.

We began this journey with God's Perfection & Plan. As Creator, God's plan was for His creation to live in perfect relationship with Him for eternity. This is rooted in God's nature of love. What a great thing it is to realize that we, each one of us, are precious to God and always will be. But we also learned that God is holy. He is perfectly righteous, meaning everything that dwells in His presence must be perfectly righteous and holy as well.

This is where our sinfulness creates a problem for God's plan. He loves us and wants us to spend eternity with Him but that just isn't "possible" because all of us are sinners; and therefore, we are disqualified from living in the presence of His Holiness. Sinfulness takes on many forms (some truly vile and evil). Yet, at its core it is about we, the creation, acting independently of the Creator, doing as we please and thus failing to treat God as holy. In short, we just prefer to do things our way, not His.

Nonetheless, in God's Remedy, we learned that God's love found a way to satisfy His need for righteousness by having "Him who knew no sin" (God's only begotten Son) to die for sin so that we might become righteous in Him. *He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* (2 Corinthians 5:21). God did all this so people could live in an eternal relationship with Him. He wants us to have that eternal life. He wants us to invite other to accept that eternal life. That is why He commissioned us to Just Say It. The Good News is for you. The Good News is for you to share. Is it yours? Are you sharing it?

For reflection:

- Recall when you responded to God's Remedy and knew for certain you were going to spend eternity with Him in Heaven?
- Whom are you praying for who needs to respond to God's gift of forgiveness and eternal life?

DON'T WORRY, JUST SAY IT

OUR RESPONSE

DAY 2 / REPENT

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah!” When they heard this, they came under deep conviction and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: “Brothers, what must we do?” “Repent,” Peter said to them, “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.” (Acts 2:36-38)

This passage lays out for us the very first time the Gospel of Jesus Christ was shared publicly by the Apostles. On Pentecost Peter stood before a crowd that sought an explanation for what they had just witnessed. He proclaimed to them that Jesus was the Messiah. When he had finished, they were moved to ask, “what must we do?” Peter’s answer launches us on our journey of understanding how we are to respond with God’s Remedy of forgiveness and new life in Jesus Christ.

Peter told them they needed to repent. Our first step in responding to God’s remedy for our sinfulness is to repent. There seems to be a quite a bit of confusion about what repentance really is. Many think repentance is the same thing as feeling conviction or guilt for sin. Undoubtedly conviction/guilt are closely associated with repentance because they are a work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8) and it is also the Holy Spirit who leads us to repent. But even though they are closely linked and are both an outcome of the work of the Holy Spirit, it is important for us to understand they are not one and the same thing. Indeed, our whole response to God’s Remedy is built on not letting them be one and the same thing.

Consider Acts 26:20 *“Instead, I preached to those in Damascus first, and to those in Jerusalem and in all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works worthy of repentance.”* Repentance is more than a feeling. It is a deliberate, intentional change of heart that evidences itself in what we do. Paul describes it as turning to God. It literally is a spiritual about-face. We stop moving/drifted away from God and turn toward God. Guilt and conviction can and often do play a role in leading to the decision to repent, but since they are just feelings and not actions, they are not repentance. And when we “feel” guilt/conviction and don’t actually “act” to turn back to God in faith, we are not responding to His remedy for our lostness.

Responding to God’s Remedy for our lostness involves repentance...the act of turning away from our sin and turning to God through Jesus. It is an essential step in experiencing new life in Christ. We need to join Peter and the Apostles in calling people back to God through repentance.

For Reflection

- How would you describe repentance in your own words? What did repentance mean to you as you turned to Christ?
- Are there ways in your on-going journey with Christ that you are “satisfied” with just the feeling of conviction rather than going on to the hard work of repentance...real change in what you do?

DON'T WORRY, JUST SAY IT

OUR RESPONSE

DAY 3 / FAITH

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us, made us alive with the Messiah even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! ... For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift— not from works, so that no one can boast.”
(Ephesians 2:4-9)

The incredible mercy and grace of God is applied to our lives resulting in salvation and eternal life *through* faith. God’s solution to our lostness is the mercy and grace available to us though the life and death of Jesus Christ. This becomes active in our lives only by our faith response to God’s gift of salvation. Faith is the indispensable ingredient to experiencing God’s gift of salvation. Biblically, just accepting God’s free gift of salvation does not count as a “work” or some form of “merit”. It is an undeserved, unearned gift from start to finish.

There are a couple things about this faith we need to understand. 1) Faith has a “content” component. We believe (have faith) that certain things are true. Paul hinted at this in 1 Cor. 15:3-5 *“For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.”* There is a substance to our faith. Primarily this lies in believing that Jesus is both fully God and fully man, lived a sinless life, then died on the Cross as a substitutionary atonement for humanity’s sinfulness, rose on the 3rd day to make new life possible for us, and ascended back into Heaven because He is truly God’s Son. Faith isn’t just believing anything, but specifically believing that God has redeemed the world through His only Son, Jesus Christ.

2) Faith has a trust component. Living by faith is more than just *believing* a set of facts. We believe that King Henry VIII had lots of wives, but that doesn’t really mean anything in terms of how we live. The saving faith of the Bible, like repentance, has an action component. We not only believe Jesus is God’s Son who died for us, but we also lean on him, entering in a life-long pursuit of following Jesus.

A quick illustration. Hopefully a helpful one even if a bit quirky. You could “believe” that someone is the person you should marry and spend your life with. They have everything on your “list”, so to speak. But that belief should also demonstrate itself by actually marrying that person and doing life with them. It has the “content” element and also the “trust” or relational element. Faith is the same. We believe certain things to be true about ourselves, Jesus, God and salvation. We also trust or commit to follow Jesus. We don’t follow Jesus so we can be saved, but we follow Jesus because we have been saved.

For Reflection

- Does your “faith” clearly indicate both elements of belief and trust?
- How would you explain/illustrate this truth?

DON'T WORRY, JUST SAY IT

OUR RESPONSE

DAY 4 / CALL + CONFESS

“The message is near you, in your mouth and in your heart. This is the message of faith that we proclaim: If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation. Now the Scripture says, Everyone who believes on Him will not be put to shame, for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, since the same Lord of all is rich to all who call on Him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Romans 10:8b-13)

Love the last line of this passage: *“everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”* It is a great word of assurance and hope. But it does introduce us to a couple of new concepts in how we respond to God’s Remedy for our spiritual need: call and confess.

CALL. This week we have frequently noted the role that conviction, guilt, and repentance play in accepting God’s free gift of salvation/eternal life. The Holy Spirit leads us with those to ask God to forgive us and to enter our hearts by faith. This is a specific, deliberate, and personal act to acknowledge our sinfulness to God, ask for His forgiveness through Jesus Christ, and commit to follow Christ by faith. Once the Holy Spirit has brought our spiritual need/condition to our attention, we must respond by calling on the only Being who can do anything about it.

CONFESS. Jesus linked the mouth with the heart in Luke 6:45 and other places. We speak out of who we are on the inside. This indicates that responding to God’s Remedy is something “comprehensive” in our lives. It is something that engages both who we are and what we do. It affects our heart and our actions. It is internal and external. Confession indicates that in both word and deed you have become a Christ-follower. He is now your Lord. Matthew 10:32 - *Therefore, everyone who will acknowledge Me before men, I will also acknowledge him before My Father in heaven.* We don’t confess or acknowledge Christ before men in order to be saved, but since the experience of faith/salvation is a total life experience, it will reveal itself in both what we say and do. This helps to explain why the Bible anticipates being baptized by immersion as one of the first outward confessions of our post-conversion life.

Let’s summarize while at the same time recognizing that simplifying can at times be theologically dangerous. When you connect “call” and “confess” together in responding to the Gospel, it means we must speak out for forgiveness and for a relationship with God through Christ. And we must be earnest. It can’t be mere words. They must be sincere, genuine. They must be something internal and external. You don’t have to understand all that it means to follow Christ, but it does mean that you are committing to follow Christ, learning as you go.

For Reflection

- What are the evidences in your life that Jesus is your Lord?
- Have you confessed your faith in Christ through baptism? If not, why not?

DON'T WORRY, JUST SAY IT

OUR RESPONSE

DAY 5 / REACH + TEACH

“He commanded us to preach to the people and to solemnly testify that He is the One appointed by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about Him that through His name everyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins.” While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speaking in other languages and declaring the greatness of God. Then Peter responded, “Can anyone withhold water and prevent these people from being baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for a few days.” (Acts 10:42-48)

This passage records an incredible event for us. For the first time in the history of the Gospel, Gentiles, those who were considered “pagans”, experienced the salvation that is in Jesus Christ. This leads us to understand that there is no one within our orbit who is beyond the reach of the Gospel. Yet, the passage is interesting in how they came to faith in Christ. You will notice that their conversion occurred while Peter was still speaking. They didn’t even wait for Peter to invite them to do so.

This highlights the difficulty of trying to standardize what happens in the spiritual transaction that leads to salvation. It can happen in many ways. But as folks who are eager to be in-sync with God’s heartbeat by seeing people come to Him by faith, it will be helpful for us to have some picture of what it looks like. Generally, we can expect the following:

- The Gospel is presented: God’s Plan, Our Problem, God’s Remedy, and Our Response. Salvation is completely and only built on what God has done. His truth is essential.
- An opportunity or invitation to act on what they have come to know is provided. It could be as simple as asking them if they are led to place their faith in Christ.
- A “Calling on the Lord” takes place. Usually this is in the form of a prayer. In this call, or prayer, the individual: 1) acknowledges or confesses their sinfulness to God, 2) asks God to forgive them because of what Jesus did on the Cross, 3) specifically asks Jesus to enter their lives as they place their faith in Him, and 4) commits to following Christ the best they know how.

As we have the privilege to be there when that spiritual transaction takes place in a person’s life, our task shouldn’t end there. You will notice that Peter stayed for a few days. We should seek to be agents of grace in the new believer’s life by helping them to launch well. We should make sure they have a Bible. If not, you can always get one from the church. We should help them into a church if it isn’t realistic for them to attend our own. We should pray for them. In fact, we should pray with them. Nothing fancy, just be sincere. Ask God to do for them what you would love to have someone ask God to do for you. Stay connected. Seek to be a spiritual mentor in their lives. If that isn’t possible try to connect them with someone who can. Rejoice. God will be rejoicing too!

DON'T WORRY, JUST SAY IT