**The Gospel**

Acts 2:21-41

***What is the Gospel?***

This is **the most important question** anyone can ask. What is the good news by which someone can be saved? In verse 37 of this passage the people ask Peter, “What shall we do?” It’s a similar question to the jailer in Philippi who asks Paul, ***“What must I do to be saved?”***

“Then he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, ***what must I do to be saved?***’And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.’” Acts 16:30-31

The way you answer that question **FOR YOURSELF** will determine your eternal destiny. The way you answer that question **FOR OTHERS** could influence their eternal experience.

Many people today **ASSUME** they understand the gospel. They say things like, “I’m good with God… me and Jesus - we are buddies… I feel at peace. God will accept me. If there is a heaven, I’m pretty sure I’ll get in. I’ve been pretty good and a reasonable God would be ok with the effort I’ve put in.”

When I talk with people about spiritual things like this the question I come back to is: ***How do you KNOW?***

Whatever you believe about God - HOW DO YOU KNOW it’s true? Is it based on a FEELING? Is it based on the writing and **teaching of a HUMAN**?

* ***Mormons*** are wagering their eternity on Joseph Smith - a 19th century fortune teller.
* ***Muslims*** are wagering their souls on Mohammed - an 8th century warlord.
* ***Jehovah’s witnesses*** are betting their destiny on Charles Taze Russell who claimed Jesus would come in 1914 but then Russell died in 1916 (insisting that Jesus HAD come but invisibly).
* ***Universalists*** - who believe everyone will go to heaven - are wagering their eternity on a handful of 19th century germans like Friedrich Schleirmacher.
* ***Atheists*** are betting themselves on philosophers like Nietszche or more modern writers like Richard Dawkins.

It’s important to know **in WHOM** you are trusting. Because in the end, everyone puts their faith in SOME **ONE**. Are you trusting in your parents? Are you trusting in yourself? Are you trusting in some famous philosopher or teacher?

Ultimately it comes down to a single question. Every single person on earth - their eternal happiness or misery is determined by **one single question**: ***“Are you trusting in JESUS or not?”*** It’s a true/false, pass/fail one question test.

So let me pose that question to you today. ***“Are YOU trusting in Jesus today?”*** Are all of your chips right there on Jesus or have you hedged your bets a little over on yourself, someTHING or someONE other than Jesus? I like the illustration of **a chair**. Are you resting ALL OF YOUR WEIGHT on Jesus, as you are on that chair? Or are you trusting partially in Jesus and yourself or Jesus and the church or Jesus and good works?

What we will see today are **the five core truths of the Gospel** and the **three necessary responses** to the Gospel. Peter’s sermon here in Acts two is the first of many times in Acts that one of the apostles proclaims the Good News. There are more details here than in the other recorded sermons, with two Old Testament quotes and a thorough explanation. On Paul’s journeys Luke often summarizes it as, “He preached THE WORD there,” or “They shared the gospel with them.” And Luke can be more sparing later in the book because he was so detailed and explicit here in Acts 2.

So what are the five essential truths of the Gospel? First:

**Five Core Truths of the Gospel:**

1. Jesus Came

“Men of Israel, hear these words: **Jesus of Nazareth**, **a man** attested to you by God…” Acts 2:22

Three times after this verse Peter says, ***“THIS JESUS,”*** making it very clear that he is talking about a specific man. Jesus’ name was relatively common among Jews of that time. His mom called him “Yeshua,” like our Joshua, since there is no “J” in Hebrew or Aramaic. To distinguish him from every other “Josh” in the area, he was Jesus of Nazareth - the son of Mary and Joseph.

The Gospel begins with the wonderful and mind-blowing truth that ***our God CAME to us***. After sending one prophet after another, and after appearing numerous times to different people in different ways through the Old Testament, finally God sent His Son to be born of a woman. The incarnation is the first essential Gospel truth. Without believing in the real man, Jesus of Nazareth, we cannot believe in Jesus the Christ who died for our sins.

**A real human person had to die**. An eternal, immortal, almighty Spirit could not die. So the Son of God took on flesh - He became fully human in Mary’s womb. He was born like every other baby. He grew up like every other child. He learned how to walk, how to talk, how to write. The love of God took Jesus all the way to the cross - but it started with Him coming all the way to Bethlehem. Jesus came.

***Isn’t that what love does?*** It comes. When you are in trouble. When you are in pain. You want someone to COME. You want them to sit with you - to be with you - to listen to you - to care for you. You show up. Brothers and sisters, we worship the God who showed up. Jesus came. Hallelujah, this is Good News! Second:

**Five Core Truths of the Gospel:**

1. Jesus Lived

“Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with ***mighty works and wonders*** and signs that God did through him in your midst.” Acts 2:22

***Jesus proved His power and authority over and over again.*** He demonstrated His love for all people as he touched lepers, restored outcasts and even spent time with tax collectors and sinners no other Jew would associate with. Jesus even cross well established lines to interact with Samaritan half-Jews and Gentile non-Jews - something no other Rabbi in his day would have done.

Everyone who saw Jesus was struck by Him. Some hated him. Some loved Him. **Everyone remembered Him.** Hundreds, probably thousands of people were healed by Jesus. Of the 3,000 gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, you wonder how many of them had been healed by Jesus themselves or knew someone personally who had been.

Peter is addressing Jews who were devoted enough to their faith to come to Jerusalem for their annual passover celebration. These were committed people of faith. And he says to them about Jesus “You yourselves know” these things. Jesus was a proven miracle worker. John’s gospel records seven **SIGNS Jesus did** - verifiable miracles that were witnessed by hundreds, even thousands of people - such as the feeding of the 5,000 and later the 4,000.

***How much more proof could anyone ask for?*** What other miracles would the true Messiah do? Jesus lived a life of impeccable righteousness and love. He taught about the kingdom of God with unparalleled authority. And He did acts of power that no one before or after could copy - He healed people no one could heal, like a man born blind and a man crippled from birth. He even raised dead people back to life on several occasions, including Lazarus who had been dead a full four days - well beyond the time of thinking, “He might just walk this one off.” Jesus came. Jesus lived. Third:

**Five Core Truths of the Gospel:**

1. Jesus Died

“This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, ***you crucified and killed***.” Acts 2:23

Jesus - the Rabbi they heard teach, the miracle worker, the carpenter’s son - this Jesus “YOU crucified.” Peter names **the Jews in Jerusalem as the ones responsible** for Jesus’ death. Not the Romans who hammered in the nails. The Jews who demanded that this innocent man be crucified - not only executed but publicly humiliated and tortured beyond recognition.

We all need to hear this word. ***Who was responsible for the death of Jesus?*** You were. I was. We didn’t swing the hammer, but Jesus died because of you and me. In a very real spiritual sense, WE crucified Jesus. If Peter were preaching in Tampa today, he could look at each of us and say, “This Jesus YOU crucified and killed.”

We did a dramatic stage play at our church in Chicago featuring the thief on the cross. For several scenes we needed crowd noise so we grabbed 30 or so people from the church and recorded audio of the sounds the director wanted. Some of it was just crowd noise, random yelling, cheering. But some of it felt very personal - like we were the ones in the crowd shouting, “Come down, if you are the Son of God! Save yourself! You’re no King!”

And, of course, we had to record the defiant cry of the crowd - ***“Crucify him! Crucify!”***

It’s one thing to hear the shout on a movie or even to hear someone else shout it. But when you hear your own voice calling for the crucifixion of Jesus it triggers something.

The truth is, we were there. You and I - all of us. We were there in Pilate’s court. We demanded that Jesus die. We shouted for it.

Who was responsible for Jesus’ death? We were - you were, I was, **we all were**. “It was MY sin that held him there, until it was accomplished. His dying breath has brought me life. I know that it is finished.”

Here is the heart of the Gospel - “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Jesus died in my place. He died in your place. We are the ones who deserved to die - not Jesus. He is the only innocent person who ever lived. But in His infinite mercy and grace Jesus paid a debt He did not owe. ***He died for us!*** This is wonderfully good news, but thankfully it doesn’t end with the death of Jesus. Number 4:

**Five Core Truths of the Gospel:**

1. Jesus Rose

“***God raised him up***, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.” Acts 2:24

If Jesus just came and lived and died, we would not worship Him, we would not trust in Him, we would not follow Him. He would have been just another teacher, another prophet who made lots of claims but couldn’t back them up. If Jesus did not rise from the dead then he actually wasn’t a great teacher at all - He was a fraud and a liar because He said, on several occasions, that He would rise from the dead!

***But Jesus did rise from the dead.*** On the third day He walked out of the tomb, not like a limping zombie covered in graveclothes, but in a glorified body and a fresh new robe.

Peter spends a lot of time on this point, so we will too.

***Why was it NOT POSSIBLE*** for Jesus to be held by death? We know “the wages of sin is death.” Everyone who dies in sin BELONGS to sin - they will receive their pay-check in full. But Jesus received OUR paycheck, not His. So after paying for our sin on the cross, the grave could not hold Him because He had no sin of His own.

**The resurrection was the proof** not only of the truth of what Jesus taught but of His perfect righteousness. The only person who could walk out of death’s domain is a truly, completely righteous person. Everyone else belongs with death and has no means of escape. But Jesus could not be held by death because death had no grounds on which to hold Him - nothing to charge against Him. The collected sin of mankind was enough to kill the divine Son of God. But it was not enough to hold Him.

**Five Core Truths of the Gospel:**

1. Jesus Rose

“For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption.” Acts 2:27; Ps. 16:10

Here is how Peter explains the resurrection - from Psalm 16. 1,000 years before Jesus was born, **King David focused His hope** on the Lord who was with Him: “because he is at my right hand I will not be shaken!” David said, “This is my joy, this is where my heart rejoices - in the Lord who is with me!” And remarkably, inspired by the Holy Spirit, David foresaw and predicted the resurrection!

“You will not abandon my soul to Hades.” The Old Testament does not give many clues about the afterlife. This is one of the few places where God gave hints. But think of the significance of this coming from the mouth of DAVID.

God promised David **a kingdom that would last forever** - one of his descendants who would reign on the throne in Israel FOREVER. David was a Messiah in the sense of being anointed as the King. Messiah simply means “anointed one.”

So here when David says, “You will not let… your Holy One see corruption,” David is mainly thinking about HIMSELF - but also about his coming offspring who would be THE Messiah. David was **A Holy One**, A Anointed One - but He knew that **THE holy One**, THE anointed One was coming! And that was the focus of David’s hope, his joy, his confidence and his trust.

Peter goes on in Acts 2 to contrast Jesus and David.

**Five Core Truths of the Gospel:**

1. Jesus Rose

“The patriarch David… died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.” Acts 2:29

**David died** and his body stayed there in the tomb. So while the general promise of resurrection applies to David, as it does to all believers, this prophecy from Psalm 16 was not about David.

**Five Core Truths of the Gospel:**

1. Jesus Rose

“Knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw… the resurrection of the Christ.” Acts 2:30-31

What a gift that David was enabled ***to see 1,000 years into the future*** - to the exaltation of the Messianic King. It was a natural implication of the promise. How could David’s descendant reign FOREVER without living forever? The Messiah could not be abandoned to hades, could not see corruption and decay in the grave. So Peter concludes:

**Five Core Truths of the Gospel:**

1. Jesus is Lord

“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

Here is the center of our confession: **Jesus Christ is Lord**. Jesus means Savior. Messiah means Christ or Anointed One. Lord means God, the covenant keeping Creator and King of Israel. Jesus is the Savior, the Anointed King, the God of Israel, the Lord of all things!

**Five Core Truths of the Gospel:**

1. Jesus is Lord - our sovereign God and suffering Savior

“God has made him both **Lord and Christ**, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Acts 2:36

When Peter says, “God has made him,” the apostle is not saying that Jesus WASN’T Lord and Christ before the resurrection and then became those things. Rather, Peter is saying, ***“God has PROVED HIM TO BE both Lord and Christ,”*** through the resurrection. God has MADE IT CLEAR that Jesus is both Lord and Christ - and the final proof of that was His resurrection. But Peter adds one more key Scripture to hammer home this point one more time.

**Five Core Truths of the Gospel:**

1. Jesus is Lord - our sovereign God and suffering Savior

“The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’” Acts 2:34-35; Ps. 110:1

This is **God the Father talking to God the Son**: THE LORD talking to David’s Lord, the coming Messiah. Jesus is the One who took His seat at the Father’s right hand. And the Day is coming soon when all of His enemies will become His footstool.

So these are the five core truths of the Gospel.

**The Five Core Truths of the Gospel:**

1. Jesus Came
2. Jesus Lived
3. Jesus Died
4. Jesus Rose
5. Jesus is Lord

Two years ago we did a **sermon series on the Gospel** highlighting these five truths and five more important Gospel truths. You can find all of that on the website. But these are the central, essential elements of the Good News. Our God CAME to us. He did not leave us alone. Jesus LIVED a life of perfect righteousness, proving His authority over disease, demons and even death. Jesus DIED on the cross as the full and final payment for your sin and mine. Jesus ROSE from the dead, proving He was the Son of God and that His payment was accepted by the Father. And all of this confirms the truth that Jesus Christ is LORD!

Now let’s look at the three necessary responses to this Good News.

**Three Necessary Responses to the Gospel:**

1. **Repent** - admit and turn from your sin

“‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ.’” Acts 2:38

As Peter preached a strong sense of **conviction fell on the crowd** gathered there. As they heard the Word of God proclaimed, the holiness of God gripped them and “they were cut to the heart.” This is what happens in times of revival - an awareness of the holiness of God settles on people. They realize how awesome and holy God is, and begin to see how sinful they are.

Just as John the Baptist called for repentance, just as Jesus called for repentance, so Peter continued this call. This is ***the first step to a changed life*** - you have to admit and turn from your sin.

It’s not enough to just admit your sin - that is **confession**. Repentances acknowledges sin and promises to STOP doing it. If you eat a cookie after dinner and say, “I shouldn’t have eaten that cookie,” - that’s a confession. If you go on and eat another cookie you’ll know you did not make it to REPENTANCE. Repentance puts the Oreos back in the pantry for the kids.

An old pastor has wisely said, ***“God makes no promise to forgive a sin that we will not forsake.”*** The Gospel does not give us a license to keep sinning. It gives us the freedom to STOP sinning - to put all the sin cookies away!

There was an old **way to catch monkeys** in the jungle. You place a jar with a narrow neck in a clearing, with a banana inside. The monkey sees the banana and wants it, so he jumps over to get it. He reaches his hand inside the jar and grabs onto the prize. But the banana won’t come out of the opening with his little hand clutching it. So the monkey is stuck.

And even when he sees the hunter approaching, the silly monkey won’t let go of the banana and escape. He will stay there, holding that fruit that ensures his capture. It’s an effective monkey trap.

And that’s what sin is. We see the fruit and we want it. Money, power, possessions, applause, comfort… ***whatever your shiny banana is***. And we reach in to grab it. We see that judgment is coming and if we hold onto that sin, we cannot possibly escape judgment. But like the silly monkey, people won’t let go of their sin in order to be saved. They hold onto their sin until it’s too late.

The first step to salvation is REPENTANCE: admitting and letting go of our sin; turning away from it and starting to move in a new direction. Second.

**Three Necessary Responses to the Gospel:**

1. **Believe** - personally trust in Jesus to save you

“Repent and be baptized… in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” Acts 2:38

**Baptism** is the public and visible expression of private, personal faith. Being dunked under water represents the death of your old life - being buried with Jesus. Coming up from the water represents rising to new life in Christ. It’s a new birth, a new beginning. Baptism doesn’t save you, it is a symbol and sign of your salvation. It’s like a ***wedding ring***. The ring doesn’t make you married, but it is a sign that you are married.

A Christian who has not been baptized is like a married person who doesn’t wear a ring. It should feel off; not right. A married person wears a ring as a sign of their covenant relationship. A Christian person gets baptized as a sign of their relationship with Jesus.

It isn’t baptism that saves, it is the ***NAME OF JESUS*** that saves. When you come under the protection of His name your sins are forgiven. They are removed from your account and transferred to Jesus’ account. To be forgiven is to be released from a debt. Feel the force of this truth. At the moment you called on Jesus in faith, He paid your debt in full. All of it. All at once. Forever. Paid.

**Marriage is a beautiful picture of salvation**. Let’s say a very rich man marries a woman with $100,000 in debt. He isn’t going to pay off that debt UNTIL they are married. She might just be playing him for his money - and he won’t have that. But as soon as they are married, the first thing he will do is pay off her debt. When they got married, her debts became his debts and his assets became her assets. Now they share everything as a couple.

Think about that with Jesus. You brought in ***a million dollars in debt***. Some of us brought in 2-3 million. Some more. At the moment that you said “Yes” to Jesus, you entered an eternal covenant relationship with Him - you became His Bride - you got married to Jesus. At that very instant, the first thing Jesus did was pay off your debt. He took your sin into His account and applied His righteousness to your account. Not only were all of your sins paid for, but instantly your bank account of righteousness was full and overflowing.

Spiritually speaking you went **from rags to riches** - from being in terrible, inescapable debt to being a zillionaire with limitless resources! Baptism is like the marriage ceremony. Again, it isn’t baptism that saves. Go back to v. 21 that started this sermon.

**Three Necessary Responses to the Gospel:**

1. **Believe** - personally trust in Jesus to save you

“Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Acts 2:21

We are saved by **FAITH ALONE**. Just call on Jesus. That’s it. Turn from your sin - let go of that deadly monkey trap. Trust in Jesus. Take hold of His outstretched hand. Let Him pay your debt. Let Him fill you with His love, His grace, His peace, His power, His goodness. Let Him fill you with HIM - invite Him in!

One more necessary response.

**Three Necessary Responses to the Gospel:**

1. **Confess** - verbally state that Jesus is Lord

“Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Acts 2:21

It’s not enough to think it or even to believe it very sincerely in your heart. ***You have to SAY IT.*** You have to go public. This isn’t a WORK that you do, it is the completion of faith.

Would it be true that you LOVE someone if you never say it? No. You have to say it. When you say, “I love you,” to your husband, your wife, your kids, a friend - **it COMPLETES** the reality of love, doesn’t it? You might think, “Of course I love my wife. Of course I love my kids. I feed them. I pay for things. They know I love them.”

And all of that is certainly true. But the WORDS provide the completion. Without words, something is missing. Once you say, ***“I love you,”*** it resolves the moment. There is a feeling of rest, security and joy in the truth of saying what both people know to be true.

C.S. Lewis made this point about worship. ***Expressing your pleasure in something COMPLETES the enjoyment.***

* When you see a spectacular sunset you want to share it with someone, to point it out.
* When your favorite team wins a big game, you want a friend with you so you can celebrate together.
* When you propose and the girl says “Yes,” you call your Mom to share the news.

When you share something - when you talk about it - ***the joy is completed in the act of being shared.*** That’s why we gather to **worship**. Our worship would not be complete without coming together to lift our voices together.

The same is true with saving faith. Once you say it out loud, the joy and reality of the moment is completed. Paul makes this clear in Romans 10.

**Three Necessary Responses to the Gospel:**

1. **Confess** - verbally state that Jesus is Lord

“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.” Romans 10:9

Here Paul puts the verbal confession FIRST and the necessity of authentic faith SECOND. But the two go hand in hand. True faith speaks. The verbal confession confirms and completes the reality of faith. Paul goes on in the next verse to explain.

**Three Necessary Responses to the Gospel:**

1. **Confess** - verbally state that Jesus is Lord

“For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” Romans 10:10

So there you have it. 5 core truths of the Gospel. 3 necessary responses. We will hear the Gospel proclaimed over and over in Acts and these elements will appear repeatedly, as they do all over the New Testament.

This is the **Good News** we profess and believe. Pastor Rico Tice of London says, “If you hear this message and it doesn’t sound like the best news you have ever heard you can be absolutely certain that you have not yet understood it.”

This truly is ***the BEST NEWS ever shared***. It’s better than the end of a war. Better than the discovery of penicillin. Better than the announcement of a baby coming. Better than any graduation or achievement.

This is the Gospel - the life-changing good news that peace with God is possible in Christ. You can be forgiven and set free from the penalty and power of sin. Just turn from your sin, trust in Jesus and commit to Him in personal faith!

Let’s pray.