

Acts 2:22-41
The Church's Message
Acts: HTCWP

Introduction

Tim. Pastor. Sup. **Acts 2:22-41**. Before we get there, let me set us up and catch us up.

RAY ORTLUND:

If you've taken our membership class here at Citizens you've heard me talk about this formula for a healthy church, it's originally from Ray Ortlund, a retired pastor in Nashville, TN. And he says, rightly, that in order to thrive as a church, and as a Christian, you need two ingredients: **Gospel Theology** (right beliefs, right doctrine, right thinking about God) and **Gospel Culture** (right living, lives lived in relationship with and obedience to God).

- **Gospel Theology - Gospel Culture = Hypocrisy.**
- **Gospel Culture - Gospel Theology = Fragility.**
- **Gospel Theology + Gospel Culture = Power.**

In other words, to be a flourishing church and flourishing Christians - meaning powerful, healthy, stable, thriving - **we need to be united around the same beliefs AND those beliefs need to affect the way that we live together.**

And so over the next two weeks, as we tackle sort of this 2nd half of Acts 2, we're going to look at these two things. We're going to first talk about our core belief - This gospel of Jesus Christ that is central to all of life with God. And then next week we're going to talk about Gospel Culture. How should the gospel play out into our lives as a church family and as individual followers of Jesus.

GOSPEL

Today, we're looking at the foundation of all of our theology as a church - the **gospel**. When I say **gospel**, so we're all on the same page, here's what I mean:

The gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ, God's Son, came to earth, lived a perfect life, died on the cross, and rose again so that sinful humans, by grace through faith in Him, could live forever with God.

Or, as I've heard one pastor put it: The gospel means...

1. **God is good.**
2. **We are not.**
3. **Jesus saves.**
4. **Repent and trust in Him.**

Why This Matters

If you're not a Christian, or maybe you're newer to the Christian faith, I hope this is a helpful summary of the foundation of what being a follower of Jesus is all about. The foundation of our faith, our life, this gospel message that is central to everything.

If you are a Christian, hopefully nothing I say is new, but I'm inviting you to remember, to cherish, and to reestablish some gospel footing in your own life.

There can be this temptation or tendency in the Christian life to think we "move past" the gospel. That the gospel was what we believed when we first became a Christian, but then we move on to the "deeper things" of the Christian faith.

New Year's Resolutions. For many of us, we are tempted to approach the gospel like a New Years resolution. You know what I'm talking about? Something we declare once, say is true about our lives, say we're going to reorient our lives around, and then *occasionally we might glance back at it once or twice but for the most part we forget about it after a few days unless someone brings it up again.*

Race Horse blocks. For others of us, the gospel is more like the starting blocks of a race. My Father in Law is a veterinarian on race horses. And so I've gotten to watch quite a few, and seconds before the race starts they load all of the horses and jockeys into the starting gate and it signifies to the horses that it's go time. Time to start running.

Some of us, we don't forget about the gospel, it's just not important to our lives now. It was the starting gate. It was back there, we went through it, it helped start our race but now we're off on our own trying to do this Christian life thing by our own power and grit.

But the gospel is not simply a forgotten New Years resolution, or a starting gate to the race of the Christian life. What I hope you see tonight is that **the gospel is central to all of life with Christ.** And so we're going to consider it together tonight.

Acts 2. 5 Things together:

- 1. The Plan of the Gospel**
- 2. The Proof of the Gospel**
- 3. The Point of the Gospel**
- 4. The Response to the Gospel**
- 5. The Promise of the Gospel**

And it's my hope that as we see this we would be reminded and refreshed in this, **the absolute foundation of our faith - the gospel, the good news, of Jesus Christ.**

1. The Plan of the Gospel

By way of reminder, here's where we are at in the story:

- "Be my witnesses", wait for HS
- HS has come
- Crowd has gathered, all hearing these folks preach in their own languages
- Peter gets up, and is mid-sermon.

22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: 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, as you yourselves

know—[Jesus, this guy you saw do all of those miracles] **23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.**

Alright, let's pause and unpack what Peter's saying here:

1) First, Peter makes it abundantly clear - the cross was not a mistake.

He says: **delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.**

The cross was not Jesus being powerless or weak or unable to stop the will of men. The cross was not God making it up as He went along.

The cross, the gospel, the death and suffering of Jesus, and then his subsequent resurrection - was always God's plan. His **definite** plan. His **appointed** plan and will. The cross was always God's plan A. It wasn't his plan B. God didn't freak out when sin entered the world in Genesis 3 like "oh no, what do I do." **The cross was always God's plan.**

We see this all the way back in the Garden, **Genesis 3:15**. God is cursing the serpent for tempting Adam and Eve and He says, **"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."**

Even in the midst of the curse of sin, God promises a redeemer. Jesus on the cross was God's plan.

2) But then the question becomes: why was a cross needed? Why did Jesus have to die? Why was a plan needed in the first place?

Think about Peter's statement at the end of verse 23 - **you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.**

Now remember who he is talking to here. A giant crowd of at least 3,000 people, probably much much more. Many of whom were not from this area, were not in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' death. There's no possible way that all 3,000+ people in this crowd had a direct hand in the crucifixion and murder of Jesus. But part of what's shocking in this sermon is that Peter charges the whole crowd as being guilty. There is a sense in which they are all responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus.

But Biblically, that is actually true of all of us. We weren't there 2,000 some years ago at the trial of Jesus. We didn't betray Him for 30 pieces of silver like Judas. We didn't shout with the crowd "we want barabbas." **But the reason the cross was necessary, the reason there needed to be a plan, was because of our sin before God.**

Our sin, our rebellion, our disobedience against God is so grievous to Him that He cannot just let it slide. People have this wrong idea of God - well if God is love, if He's full of mercy and grace, if this whole sin thing is true, why doesn't He just forgive us, let it go, NBD?

But you have to understand that God is love, but God is also just. And a just God cannot let sin go unpunished. There is real wrong and must be real consequences for that wrong. **Something or someone must pay for the sins and wrongs of humanity.**

Because God is just, a sacrifice must be made for sin.

But because God is gracious, He provides that sacrifice by giving up His own Son, Jesus.

Jesus had to die according to the plan and foreknowledge of God because of your sin, because of my sin. So you might be tempted to wrongly think - "I'm a good person. I don't really do anything that bad. I'm generally pretty kind. I try to help people and do what's right." But the Biblical reality is that you are just as guilty and responsible for the death of Jesus as the Jewish crowd who handed Him over and the Roman centurions who drove in the nails.

But the good news (and tension) for us in the gospel is that it was our sin that drove Jesus to the cross, and yet it was God's plan that out of that suffering and death would come life and forgiveness.

This was God's plan in the gospel - the salvation of the world through the suffering of His Son.

I love the way the Hymn "How Deep the Father's Love for Us" puts it. In the 2nd verse we sing:

**Behold the Man upon a cross
My guilt upon His shoulders
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers
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**

God would not leave us in our sin, he would not leave us to figure it out on His own.

Colossians 2:13-14 hits right to the heart of this:

13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

This was the plan of the Gospel - **the salvation of the world through the suffering of God's Son.**

2. The Proof of the Gospel

24 God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

Peter tells the crowd - you guys killed Jesus, He was the Son of God. This was God's plan from the beginning, but you are responsible for your wicked actions. But here's the good news. Jesus didn't stay dead. God raised Him up. He was in the grave for 3 days, but **only** 3 days. He rose from the grave and in doing so He **loosed the pangs of death**.

I love that phrase. Christ defeated death and in doing so He undid the bind that death had on the world. What a year to understand this beautiful reality. **2020 was a year marked by death.** On a global scale, on a national scale, but I also know that many of us have lost loved ones this year as well. This phrase is good news for us - Christ has loosed the pangs of death. The sting, the bitterness, the hurt of death is still real - we still mourn. **But we know we don't mourn forever or as those without hope.** Why? Because death isn't the end of the story...the grave could not hold Christ!

25 For David says concerning him, “I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; 26 therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. 27 For you will not abandon my soul to Hades [aka - the grave], or let your Holy One see corruption. 28 You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

Psalm 16. Beautiful Psalm if you read it as talking about David. His heart is glad from the Lord. God didn't abandon him to the grave. But look at what Peter says.

29 “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, 31 he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.

Peter is pulling a little bit of a switcheroo/blindside here. He's talking about the resurrection of Jesus, and then he starts quoting David. David is **THE MAN** in Jewish culture. He was considered, by many, to be the first true king of Israel. It's His line and lineage through which the Messiah was going to come. He wrote big portions of the Jewish Scriptures.

So Peter is setting up this whole quote from Psalm 16 about how God wouldn't let his Holy One see corruption, or abandon them to Hades (meaning God won't let him die or stay dead), all of this stuff. And the crowd is probably nodding - “yep, yep, King David, uhuh, uhuh.” And then he wraps it up in verse 29 and he basically says - “By the way, this isn't about David, because David is dead and we know that because you can go visit his tomb, it's just south of the pool of Siloam. David is writing this prophetically about Jesus. David saw it, you didn't. This Jesus guy is the Messiah. He is the one who God wasn't going to abandon to Hades or leave dead but raise Him from the grave.” (So...got 'em)

Here's Peter's point → You want proof Jesus is the Messiah? You want proof Jesus is God's Son who died for the sins of the world? You can go to David's grave, dig it up and find his body. You go to Jesus' tomb - it's empty. We saw Him. You want proof of the gospel? You want proof Jesus is who we are saying He is? **The proof of the gospel is that the tomb of Jesus is empty!**

The tomb is empty and I have 120 people here, who by the way are all speaking in different languages because of the Holy Spirit, who saw Him with their eyes. We are witnesses to this.

Throughout the book of Acts, the resurrection of Jesus is kind of a hinge point for the early church. So much of the church's willingness to suffer, to take the gospel to the nations no matter the cost, is rooted in the fact that Jesus rose from the grave and they saw Him with their own eyes.

The apostle Paul picks up on this in 1 Corinthians 15 when he says:

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

The proof of the gospel is the empty tomb of Jesus. He has accomplished what He set out to accomplish. Death is defeated. Sins are forgiven.

3. The Point of the Gospel

33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, 35 until I make your enemies your footstool.”” 36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

At the crux of Peter’s message, at the heart of the gospel is not a thesis, or idea, or point of view - the crux, **the point of the gospel is the person and work of Jesus, who is both Lord and Christ.**

Jesus, God’s Son, is who the entire gospel hinges on. This Jesus, who Peter, again quoting David’s prophecy about the Messiah, says has been raised up, and is seated at the right hand of God. This is a place of power and authority. **All of His enemies, God will make into a footstool for Christ.**

Do you see the power of this scene? Jesus, who 50 some days earlier was hanging on a cross in total humility as a willing suffering servant for the sins of the world, is now exalted, and lifted up, and conquering and ruling and reigning. Jesus went low to come to earth as a baby, born in a manger. Jesus went even lower to the humility of the cross. But now, Jesus is not low anymore. He’s exalted. God puts His enemies as a footrest.

This is King Jesus.

This is grave-overthrowing Jesus.

This is “death can not hold Him back” Jesus.

This is all things were created through Him and for Him Jesus.

This is the name that rules above every name Jesus.

This is every knee is gonna bow Jesus.

This is preeminent and first above all Jesus.

He is the point of the gospel. It’s all about Him.

The gospel is not simply a set of beliefs. The gospel is not simply some facts you affirm. The gospel is not a worldview option to consider. The gospel is not just something that makes you feel warm and bubbly inside or makes you smile when you’re sad. **The gospel is the good news that there is a king and He is in charge and He’s come to save and reign forever. The gospel is about Jesus! It’s all about Him.**

He’s the point! All of this is about Him! It’s all about King Jesus! (Talked about this last week, a primary role of the HS is to make much of Jesus!)

4. The Response to the Gospel

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?”

They were **cut to the heart**. **They were pierced down deep with Holy Spirit conviction.** Desperate - what do we do Peter? (Gar article - Conviction vs Shame)

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.”

Peter gives a very straightforward, clear and simple - this is how you respond to the gospel. And these are invitations for us this morning as well.

1. Repent and believe.

Peter tells them first to repent. Repentance is a Christian term for change, for turning around. It means you were headed in this direction, running after these things, pursuing and chasing these things for life, hope, meaning, purpose, salvation. And the Spirit convicts you, you're cut to the heart, and instead you turn around and go this way. That's repentance. That's the response we are called to have to the gospel.

Maybe you've never trusted in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.

Maybe you've never embraced the gospel as true.

Maybe you've never repented/turned from your sin and towards God.

Maybe you've been going through the Christian motions, doing the churchy religious south thing, and you've never actually believed and trusted in Jesus to forgive you.

Here's the invitation for you tonight - **Repent and believe.**

Romans 10:9 tells us - **If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**

Look at the cross! The cross of Christ tells you that you are both worse than you could ever imagine, but also more loved than you could ever dream.

- The cross of Christ is proof - **you're not a good person!** Jesus had to die! To think - "I'm a good person, I don't need forgiveness" is to look at the suffering of Christ and say "That's great, but I don't need it."
- The cross of Christ is also proof - **you can't save yourself!** You can't earn God's approval, you can't earn right standing with Him. To think you can work your way to a relationship with God is to look at the fact that He sent His only Son, Jesus, to die a horrific death on a cross, and goes - "NOT ENOUGH. I can do better, I gotta do more. Thanks for Jesus, but didn't quite cut it!"

Instead, I invite you - repent (turn from your sin) and believe.

2. Get baptized.

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.”

Point of clarity here - what Peter is not saying is that baptism saves you. If baptism saved you, that would be a works-based salvation. But the Bible is clear - salvation is by grace through faith. **Rather baptism is the outward symbol of what happens when you repent and put your faith in Jesus.** It is a physical symbol of an inward reality of a changed heart and life. You go down into the water - symbolizing you are dead to your sin - and you come back up showing that you are raised to new life in Christ.

Some of us have never gone public with our faith through baptism, and that for you is your next step. If you've trusted in Jesus for your salvation, but haven't in front of a church body publicly declared Jesus as Lord through baptism, that's your next step of obedience.

3. Go back to the gospel.

For some of us in the room, we have gone too long thinking the gospel is a new years resolution or the starting gate of a race called life. It was that thing we believed when we started this whole Jesus thing, but now we've moved on.

But you don't move past the gospel in the Christian life. That's not how it works. This is not just our foundation, but it's central to everything - in our church, in the Christian life - all of it.

I find Tim Keller to be so helpful here when he says,

"We never 'get beyond the gospel' in our Christian life to something more 'advanced.' The gospel is not the first 'step' in a 'stairway' of truths, rather, it is more like the 'hub' in a 'wheel' of truth. The gospel is not just the A-B-C's but the A-Z of Christianity. The gospel is not just the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we make progress in the kingdom...All of us, to some degree live around the truth of the gospel but do not 'get' it. So the key to continual and deeper spiritual renewal and revival is the continual re-discovery of the gospel."

**If during this sermon you thought - ok this great, but let's move on. I know this already. Let's get to the deeper stuff or to the application. YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND CHRISTIAN MATURITY.

If you think you are too spiritually mature or too advanced in your faith for the gospel, you think "I need some of the deep stuff not this Christianity 101", then friend you don't understand the gospel at all.

Christian maturity, depth, growth, is not using the gospel as a diving board to jump into other things. It's viewing the gospel rightly as the pool itself in which we learn to swim deeper and apply more fully and love more and more.

You don't mature past the gospel, you mature through the Gospel.

You can spend your entire life trying to grasp the gospel message - the depth of your sin, the beauty of God's grace, the implications and outworkings of the cross, and not even scratch the surface of what this means for life and godliness. We have to be a people and a church that continually go back to and apply and remind ourselves and each other of the gospel over and over and over again.

- How does the cross apply here?
- How does the gospel speak to this lie?
- How does the good news of Jesus heal me, transform me, mature me, sanctify me into the image of Christ?

These are the questions we want you asking in your CG as folks are sharing their sin, their pain, their lives.

These are the questions we seek to speak to every time we open God's Word in the Gathering.

These are the questions we must not move past, but continue to ask over and over and over again. For this is how the Spirit matures us and grows us by the grace of God.

This is where we'll end...

5. **The Promise of the Gospel**

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. 39 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."

The promise of the gospel is that God still saves people. That the way of salvation here in Jerusalem 2000+ years ago is still God's way of salvation today. It has not changed. People are saved through repenting of their sins, placing their faith in Jesus, and receiving the Holy Spirit. This has always been the way - for thousands of years and millions of people. The promise is that it has continued and it will continue. God is still saving people today!

That's why we can overflow the front of this sanctuary with 125,000 packing peanuts representing 125,000 people within 5 miles of this building who don't know Jesus and go - **"That's overwhelming. But God still saves people and He is still building His Church and His Kingdom, so we can step out in faith and get to work being witnesses."**

40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Verses 40 and 41 are a reversal of the tower of babel. This story in Genesis 11 where mankind is trying to build this tower to the heavens to build a name for themselves in pride. God comes down and confuses their languages and scatters them across the earth. And now here is Peter, preaching the gospel, and this incredible diverse crowd of Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Judeans, Cappadocians, etc. etc. all hear him in their own native tongue.

People from all over the known world hear this gospel in their own language, and believe.

Notice - they don't hear it in the same language, they hear it in their own language. God is doing what He said He would do - bringing together a people for Himself from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

Showing once again - Acts 1:8 will be accomplished - the Gospel will get to the nations!

Do not fear church. Do not shake. Do not worry - **God will finish what He has started! His kingdom is still on the move.**

Communion. Pray.