

Introduction

We have been going through the book of Acts in order to think about the things that were fundamental to the early church.

We are drawing to the end of Trinity season. Next Sunday is the last Sunday in Trinity season, also called The Sunday Next Before Advent, or Christ the King Sunday. Pastor Phil will be finishing up our study of acts for time with the end of chapter 11 and part of chapter 12.

As we draw to the end, it is fitting that we should be reminded of the most basic thing that interests us, the gospel. Here we see Peter’s gracious offer of God’s good news. And we see it offered in a kind of radical inclusivity, a fulfillment of the song which the Saints sing to our God and King in heaven.

“Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”¹

This is the fifth of Peter’s sermons and the second shortest at 9 verses. While all of Peter’s sermons have differences, they all nevertheless have common parts or contents. All of Peter’s sermons have three similar portions:

- 1) a proposed solution,
- 2) to a problem, and,
- 3) the way to attain that solution.

For today— and since people like alliteration— I’m going to call these three things the gospel’s promise, the gospel’s person, and the gospel’s process.

The Gospel’s Promise

Meaning of Gospel

The word “gospel” comes from the combination of two old English words: the words for “good” and “talk” or “news”. This word comes from the Greek verb *euaggelizw* and the noun *euaggelion*, both of which mean a “good proclamation”, or (simply put) good news.

Interestingly, the gospel itself is described in a number of ways, such as the gospel:

¹ Revelation 5:9–10.

- of the kingdom,
- of Jesus Christ, the son of God,
- of God,
- of the grace of God,
- of the glory of Christ,
- of your salvation.

Gospel of Peace

Here in chapter 10, Luke says the good news is the good news of peace through Jesus Christ.

“I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.”²

Peter is preaching the word which God sent to Israel—and that word is peace. Now that is good news! But ... it’s good news with a catch.

There are a number of assumptions embedded in the promise of the gospel.

- There is a God
- there is life after death
- there are expectations regarding morality
- there will be a judgment
- there is a judge
- and there are consequences.

Because there are conditions to this promise of the gospel, that means that God does **not** accept everyone **without** regard for whether they fear him, or whether they do what is right. Not everyone is going to have peace with God.

What does it mean to fear God? What does it mean to do what is right? And what happens if one does not fear God? What happens if one does not do what is right?

Remember that Peter is preaching to a Roman. Nevertheless Cornelius, as a God-fearer, has a basic understanding of these things. He has been exposed to the law and the prophets—our Old Testament. That means he understands something of what the fear of God looks like. He has heard the stories about the Exodus, about the 40 years in the wilderness, and about the subsequent rebellion of God’s

² Acts 10:34–35.

people. He's is familiar with the 10 Commandments. He knows about the fearsomeness of God's wrath **and** the imperfection of humanity.

In short, the gospel's promise also creates a gospel problem. It seems that perhaps the good news might be bad news for some!

This is where the gospel's person comes in.

The Gospel's Person

God has sent a "word ... to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)".³

The gospel of promise is the gospel of peace, and that peace comes through Jesus Christ, the Lord of all. Note that the word "preaching" is actually a verbal form of the word gospel. In other words we could read verse 36 this way: "the word which he sent to the sons of Israel evangelizing peace through Jesus Christ".

The good news is that the peace which God offers to everyone, of every tribe, nation, and tongue is peace through Jesus.

Titles for Jesus

Note what Luke calls this word of peace.

- Jesus, which is his name, and has the meaning in Hebrew of Savior.
- Christ, which is his job description, as Messiah, the one sent to do God's will.

- Lord of all, which is his position of sovereignty.

Jesus, is the means of peace, because he is the sent Savior and because he is master over all things and all people.

Identity of Jesus

And to be sure that Cornelius and the others present understand clearly whom Peter means, he begins to describe him.

- All those things that happened in Judea, the fellow who did those things, that's the one I mean.
- The one who was born in Nazareth, that is the Jesus I'm talking about.
- The one who was baptized in the Jordan River, upon whom the Holy Spirit descended, and who ministered with power, he is the one I mean.

³ Acts 10:36.

- You may have heard about the fellow who went around doing good things and healing anyone who was oppressed by the devil, yes that one.
- He could do these things because God was with him. And we know that God was with him, because we saw the things that he did.
- He is the same one that was put to death on a tree, because – as the Scriptures say “accursed is anyone who hangs on a tree”.⁴ He took the curse of not being able to fear God and do what is right upon himself.
- We not only witnessed the things that he did, including his death (says Peter); we also bear witness to his resurrection on the third day. We can do that because he appeared to us as a resurrected physical being, not some ghost, figment of our imagination, or result of mass hysteria. In fact, he is so real that many of us had meals with him during the 40 days that he stayed with us after the resurrection.
- Oh, one more detail, he is the one who has been appointed by the father as the judge of the living and the dead.
- Cornelius, this Jesus is the one about whom the prophets of the Old Testament have spoken.

These are the things that are true about the gospel’s person.

This one is the gospel’s person. He is not merely one who talks about the good news. He is the good news itself. The “word” to which Luke is referring is a living word, a human messenger who is also the message itself!

The whole message is himself!

The Gospel’s Process

We have the gospel’s promise of peace. We have the person who gives us that peace, Jesus Christ, the Lord of all. So how do we make the promise apply to us?

“Through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins. While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.”⁵

Let’s briefly take the phrase “through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins”.

Understanding the Phrase

⁴ Deuteronomy 21:23; see also Galatians 3:13, 1 Peter 2:24, among others.

⁵ Acts 10:43–44.

Name

Think about the power of a name. If I am talking with someone in a noisy room, a person may have heard nothing I have said, but if they hear me mention their name, all of the sudden they lock in on what I'm saying. Our names aren't just sounds that we pin to an object; they are ourselves, in a sense.

That's why we understand such ideas as someone "calling us a name", or "slandering our name". If we are trying to help a friend, we might send them to someone and tell them, "when you talk to that person, use my name".

The name of the "Lord Jesus Christ" is semantically packed with meaning, as I pointed out earlier. Not only that, having forgiveness of sins through his name also signifies identification with him, much like the last example.

Belief/Faith

To believe and have faith use the same words in both languages of Scripture and signify the same thing.

Faith is a two-sided coin made up of:

- 1) truths,
- 2) on which we depend.

Regarding the truth:

- Paul speaks of the "word of faith which we are preaching" (Romans 10:8)
- "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17)
- "appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints." (Jude 1:3)
- "To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ:" (2 Peter 1:1)

What Luke talks about regarding the gospel's person is what must be believed about Christ.

Regarding resolute dependence:

- "But resist [the devil], firm in your faith." (1 Peter 5:9)
- The great "faith chapter" of Hebrews 11.

Forgiveness of Sins

I mentioned certain assumptions already.

- There is a God
- there is life after death

- there are expectations regarding morality
- there will be a judgment
- there is a judge
- and there are consequences.

The basic truth is that peace with God is not automatic or natural. It's contrary to our natures, having fallen from God in Adam. It's our natural disposition to resist God, turn away from Him, doubt Him, disobey Him. We, like Adam, are not naturally drawn to him, but try to “clothe” ourselves with our own perceptions of what is good, right, and beautiful. And, again like Adam, we are naturally moved to hide from Him when he calls our names.

But Jesus says, “You can have peace with God. Know who I am. Depend wholly on what I say. Follow after me. And when you meet with the Father, well, just use my name.”

The Process

Why do I call this a process? Because it never ends.

“Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.”⁶

What we know must be put into practice. What we practice increases our knowledge. And so it goes.

Let not your knowledge become the end in itself, because without application it's actually ignorance and of the most dangerous sort, “knowledge that puffs up”!

Conclusion

Putting it all together

⁶ 2 Peter 1:5–11.

Notice how points 1 and 3 loop around on each other: peace with God, by faith in the name of Christ, getting forgiveness of sins, by which we get peace with God.

Peter’s evangelizing at its most simple and fundamental level is simply saying that. Our inability to obtain the gospel’s promise is reversed by following the gospel process of increasingly believing in the gospel’s person.

Can it be that simple? Everything in us wants to say, “no, it can’t be that simple”. And yet it is.

It may be thought:

- Don’t need forgiveness, or,
- Or can’t obtain it, for whatever reason, or,
- Don’t see forgiveness as the key to life.

We’re all in the same boat.

As I was preparing this sermon, I began by thinking that this would be a great way to teach about evangelism. And then it struck me that the biggest problem with evangelism might not be that we don’t know how—but rather that we don’t believe it ourselves.

“Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.”⁷

If evangelism is the proclamation of good news, how good is that news to us?

*And on that day when my strength
is failing
The end draws near and my time has
come
Still my soul will sing Your praise
unending
10,000 Years and then forever more.*

*Bless the Lord
Oh my soul, oh my soul
Worship His holy name
Sing like never before
Oh my soul
I’ll worship Your holy name*

⁷ Hebrews 3:12–14.