

What Should I Say?
(Talking About Jesus in Everyday Conversations)
“Part 4: Talk About How To Respond”
Acts 20:17-21

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on January 28, 2018 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Today we are completing a four part series that seeks to answer the question, “What is the gospel?” Gospel means good news. The Bible’s story claims to be good news. Our purpose in this series is two fold: first, if you are just looking into Christianity we want to clarify what it is all about so you can understand it. Second, we want to equip Christians to be crystal clear on what the good news is so that we can talk about it with others.
 - Most Christians feel intimidated to speak about Jesus. There is so much in the Bible that they aren’t sure what to say. What we have seen is that when you boil it all day is a message of good news. This good news can be summarized in four themes: God, sin, Jesus, and our response.
 - Many times you won’t get the chance to talk about all four. One of the most helpful things I have learned is to ask myself, **“How can I help this person take just one step closer to understanding the gospel?”** Sometimes that is just correcting false stereotypes. Sometimes it is not talking but loving them in hopes of a future conversation. Other times it is a conversation about who the God of the Bible is. And sometimes I get the chance to explain it all.
- Whatever the case, we always want to keep in mind what the core message of Christianity is. It’s fine to talk about other things in the Bible but if you want to learn how to play the piano you don’t spend endless time talking about what to sit on while you play. That’s fine but you want to quickly move to the essentials of music and how it is worked out on the white keys and black keys.
 - In the same way the Bible teaches us many things but at the core is this message of the gospel. This is what we want to bring people back to.
 - So let’s begin this message by quickly recapping what we have said so far.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

- In the first place, let’s ask the question, **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** what is the gospel? We have said it is a message about God, sin, and Jesus Christ. It begins with a message about God. The Bible’s story says that God is the Creator and loving Ruler of all things. He made you. He gives you life and breath and everything else.
 - Second, the gospel is a message about sin. We all agree that there is something seriously wrong with the world. We all agree that there is darkness within each of us. So what’s wrong with the world? The Bible’s answer to this can be summed up in the word “sin.” Sin is rebellion against God. It is turning your back on your Creator to live for yourself.

- But when we reject our Creator, life does not work the way it should. Even worse, the Bible says we deserve judgement for rebelling against our Creator. But the good news of the Bible is that, despite our rebellion, God has not just rejected us forever. Our loving and gracious Creator has done something to rescue us from condemnation, death, and hell.
- In the third place the Bible is a message about Jesus Christ. Jesus *is* the good news! God sent Jesus not to condemn us but to rescue us. Through his death on the cross he died in our place. He took upon himself the condemnation that is due to us. God raised him from the dead and he is now at the right hand of God and will one day return.
 - So Jesus is the good news because he is able to rescue us, he is able to save us, he is able to reconcile us to God, and he is able to bring us home to the Father's house. He has done all that is necessary to rescue us and this world from sin.
 - So when we are talking with people we must tell them about God, about sin, and about the good news of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ.

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

- But there is one more thing we must tell them. Today we will see that we must tell people how to respond to the good news.
 - So having answered the question, what is the gospel, let's turn now in the second place to ask, **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** how should we respond to the gospel?
- There are some facts in life that, once learned, require no response at all. My kids love reading the Guinness Book of Records.
 - There are all kinds of very interesting facts in there but they require no response at all. A man named Zheng Shusen has the longest eyebrow hair in the world, measured at 7.5 inches. That may be an interesting fact but it does not require a response from me.
- However, there are facts in life, that when learned, demand a response.
 - A response is demanded when someone yells, "Fire!" A response is demanded when you are driving and the light turns red. A response is demanded when he says, "Will you marry me?" A response is demanded when she says, "My water just broke."
 - Some facts in life demand a response. You cannot just ignore such facts.
- You know you understand the good news of Christianity correctly when you see that it demands a response. Conversely, you have not yet really understood Christianity at all if you think it is interesting but doesn't require a response.
 - So the question then is, how does God call us to respond to the good news of what he has done for us through Jesus Christ?
 - We must know this first for ourselves and then second so we know what to tell other people.
- To answer the question of how we should respond I want to break from my normal pattern of unpacking one passage of scripture. Today I want to look at a whole bunch of scriptures where Jesus and the apostles told people the good news and how to respond to it.

- So let begin in Acts chapter 20.

WHAT PAUL SAID TO THE EPHESIANS

- Paul has been the pastor of the church in Ephesus for three and half years. Here in Acts 20 he is saying goodbye to them. He gives a speech in which he summarizes his time with them. Let's read it and then watch as he summarizes in one sentence what he taught them.
 - **READ 18b-21** - *You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, ²¹ testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*
 - So for three years he has taught them about the good news and it has all been to one end, namely, that they would respond by repenting and by placing their faith in Jesus Christ.
- So what was the response Paul wanted from those in Ephesus? It was twofold: to repent and to believe. But we may rightly ask, ***“Is this unique to those at Ephesus or is it for everyone?”***

A WALK THROUGH THE BOOK OF ACTS

- I want to show you that this two fold response of repentance and believing, or having faith in, Jesus is everywhere in the preaching of the apostles. As you read the through the book of Acts and see the apostles talking about the good news you will see that they are always calling for this response.
 - In Acts 2 the people believed Peter's message about Jesus at Pentecost. They were cut to the heart and ask the apostles, ***“What should we do?”*** Peter replied, **(SHOW SLIDE 4) “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins”** (Acts 2:38).
 - In Acts 3 Peter preaches to those amazed by the healing of the cripple and concludes like this, **(SHOW SLIDE 5) “Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out”** (Acts 3:19).
 - In Acts 10 Peter preaches to Cornelius and his household that **(SHOW SLIDE 6) “everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name”** (Acts 10:43) and when he reports that the Gentiles were turning to Christ the other apostles praise God saying, **(SHOW SLIDE 7) “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life”** (Acts 11:18).
 - In Acts 14 he talks to people who worship idols. He says, **(SHOW SLIDE 8) “we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God”** (Acts 14:17). To turn is to repent.
 - In Acts 16 the centurion comes trembling and asks Paula and Silas, ***“What must I do to be saved?”*** How did they tell him to respond? **(SHOW SLIDE 9) “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”** (Acts 16:31).

- In Acts 17 Paul is in Athens. He tells them the good news and calls them to respond. He says, **(SHOW SLIDE 10) “[God] commands all people everywhere to repent”** (Acts 17:30).
- In Acts 26 Paul summarizes his message to King Agrippa by saying, **(SHOW SLIDE 11) “I . . . declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God”** (Acts 26:20).
- How does Luke finish his gospel? **(SHOW SLIDE 12) “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem”** (Luke 24:46-47).
- So the apostles always called for this response of faith and repentance. Where did they learn it from? From Jesus himself.

JESUS CALLED FOR A RESPONSE

- Turn with me to the book of Mark chapter 1. What I want you to notice is the very first words of Jesus that Mark records. His first words summarize his message.
 - **READ 14-15a - Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God.** Once again we see that good news is the heart of the Bible’s message. Jesus’ message was all about the good news, or gospel, of God. And what is this good news that he proclaimed? Look at the first half of verse 15. **READ 15a - and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. . .”**
 - The kingdom of God is shorthand for all we have been talking about. A kingdom assumes a king. As our Creator, God is our Ruler, or King. The good news is that God’s reign and rule are invading this planet. The king comes to set up his good rule which will bring peace and joy to the whole earth. This also means that he comes to judge all those who rebel against his rule. So the question is, “what side are we on?” Are we citizens of this kingdom? Are we part of it? Or, are we on the wrong side? Those are the facts. And Jesus says those facts demand a response from us. How does Jesus call us to respond? Once again we see this twofold response.
 - **READ 15 – The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”**
- So the question we are asking today is, “how should we respond the good news of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ? What is it that we need to do and what we need to tell others to do?”
 - There are two things: **(SHOW SLIDE 13) Repent of our sins and place our faith in Jesus.**

WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

- Now that we have answered what the gospel is and how we are to respond, we need to ask two more questions: what is repentance and what is faith?

- Well they are really two sides of the same coin. You can't have one without the other.
- So in the third place let's ask, **(SHOW SLIDE 14)** what is repentance?
 - Repentance is a word that has largely fallen out of use in our culture. The only time you really hear it is when crazy people wearing sandwich board signs that say, "Repent! The end of the world is near."
 - Or when Christians think of repentance we think of it is simply being sorry for our sins. But according to the Bible it is very possible to be sorry but not to repent at all. So what is repentance?
- To help us grasp it, let's use a different word that we saw Paul use in the book of Acts. He called people to "turn." That is the same thing. In our modern world we have a word that perfectly captures this. It is a u-turn. Repentance is making a u-turn.
 - Last summer we were driving to California and our GPS told us to go down a road that would be a short cut. There were some signs in the ditch that said the road was closed but we decided to try it. About 5 kilometers down the road the pavement ended. The entire road was torn up. A 4x4 may have been able to do it but not a minivan. This fact demanded a response. So I pulled a u-turn and headed back in the right direction.
 - As we have seen in this series, the message of the Bible is that we have all turned away from God's way for us and have made our own roads. This is called sin and all of our own roads will end at the cliff of judgement. This is why God graciously commands us to repent. He calls each one of us to make a u-turn – to stop driving our own way and to turn back to him and his way.
- Paul describes the Thessalonians' conversion in exactly this way in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1:9 **(SHOW SLIDE 15)** "***you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.***" Do you see the turning away from and the turning to?
 - So to repent is to agree with God that it is wrong to walk in our own ways. It is to agree that our paths will end in death. And to then respond not just by saying sorry but by making a complete u-turn in your life and saying, "God, I want to turn away from my sin and to talk in your ways."
 - Isaiah 55:7 – "***Let the wicked man forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts, let him turn to the LORD and he will have mercy on him and to our God for he will freely pardon***"
- So what is repentance?
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 16)** Repentance is a u-turn *from* rebellion to God.

WHAT IS FAITH?

- Let's flip the coin over and ask the second question: **(SHOW SLIDE 17)** what is faith? Well if repentance is misunderstood in society, faith is completely misunderstood. Let me say four things that faith is *not*.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 18)** First, faith is *not* believing something despite evidence to the contrary. I regularly hear people say, "***I'm a person of science, not a person of***

- faith.**” By this they mean they follow the evidence whereas people of faith believe things despite evidence to the contrary.
- But the biblical concept of faith is belief in light of the evidence. Faith is not opposed to science or evidence. It is based on evidence.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 19)** Second, faith is *not* an absence of thought. Again, people speak of having faith as something that naïve people have who don’t use their minds. But biblical faith uses the mind. It examines the evidence.
 - Hebrews 11 talks about faith as **“the conviction of things not seen.”** Conviction is something that comes from thinking about the evidence.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 20)** Third, faith is *not* a mysterious thing that some people have and some do not.
 - People will say, **“I just don’t have your faith”** as if faith were a mysterious religious substance that some of us have and some of us don’t have.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 21)** Fourth, faith is *not* a religious concept at all.
- To help us grasp what the Bible means by “faith,” simply replace the word **“faith”** with the word **“reliance.”** Or replace **“faith”** with the word **“trust.”**
- If I ask you, **“have you got reliance”** what would you say? You would answer, **“reliance in what?”** If I ask, **“Do you trust?”** you will say, **“trust in what?”** Or, **“trust in who?”** You cannot speak of reliance or trust without referring to an object or person that goes with it.
 - It only makes sense if I say, **“Do you trust that the chair or pew you are sitting on right now will hold you?”** Now you can answer the question. So you see faith is not a religious concept at all. Faith is simply trusting. Faith is relying. Right now you are all expressing faith in the sense that you are trusting in, or relying on, the chair or pew to hold you.
- When Christianity says you must have faith it is not speaking about some weird substance that you try to get. It is not talking about a leap in the dark when there is no evidence. When Christianity says you must trust or rely the question is, **“Trust in what? Or, “trust in who?” “Rely on what?” Or, “rely on who?”**
- The answer is to trust in Jesus: to rely on him to rescue you from condemnation, from judgement, to trust that he can forgive you, to trust that he has the ability to save you from death and to bring you back to God.
- So the good news demands a response. It declares that we have all sinned and will face judgement one day. But it also says God has graciously provided a way out – to be rescued from death and judgment. That way is through Jesus Christ.
- Through his death and resurrection he has the power to rescue us. So this demands a response. We can either keep going our own way and perish, or we can make a u-turn and trust in Jesus to rescue us. The Bible is such good news because it declares that whoever repents and believes is rescued and given life.
- So you see the message of Christianity is not, **“Clean up your life and God will accept you.”** The good news is, **“You are not clean but Jesus can cleanse you.”**
- The good news is not, **“Do better and God will probably accept you.”** The good news is, **“You have sinned but, through what Jesus has done, God pardons and accepts those who respond to this good news.”**

- The good news is not, **“Obey God and he will love you.”** The good news is, **“Receive Jesus and God will make you his child and love you forever.”**

WHY IS THIS SO IMPORTANT?

- So as we are talking about the good news with people we must tell them how to respond to the good news of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. We must call people to faith and repentance.
 - You know you understand the good news of Christianity correctly when you see that it demands a response. Conversely, you have not yet really understood Christianity at all if you think it is interesting but doesn't require a response.
 - There are only two possible responses.
- The first way to respond after hearing the message of the gospel is to refuse repentance and faith and say, **“I choose to live my way. I refuse to believe in this God. I reject him as my ruler. I will live my life my own way.”**
 - The result of this response is plain in scriptures. All people who reject God will be condemned by God and will face death and judgement.
 - John 3:36 - **“Whoever rejects the Son will not see life for God's wrath remains on him”**
- The second way to respond after hearing the message of the gospel is to say, **“Oh what good news! I cannot believe that God has made a way for me to be forgiven and restored to him. I now turn away from ruling my own life. I am placing all my hope for the forgiveness of my sin in Jesus for I believe he is the Saviour.”**
 - The result of this response is also plain in the scriptures. To the person who repents and believes
 - John 6:47: **“He who believes has everlasting life.”**
 - Romans 8:1: **“There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”**
 - Romans 10:13: **“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”**
- Let me ask you first, have you done this? Do you trust in Jesus? Have you turned toward God?
 - It does not matter what you have done, there is no sin so great that Jesus death cannot cover it. It does not matter how old or how young you are, today is the day for you to get right with God.
- Do not put this off another day. Who knows but that this very night God will demand your very life from you? Are you ready to meet him? Will you meet him as a guilty criminal or as one who has been forgiven? Will you meet him as a rebel against him and his cause or will you meet him as a child who has been adopted into his family through Jesus?
 - And then as you go about your life, pray for opportunities to talk to people about this good news. And when those opportunities arise talk about these four key themes. Tell people about God, tell people about sin, tell people about Jesus, and then tell people to respond through faith and repentance.