



Reviewing the Basics

(1) God's Message to the World

Luke 24:44-53

Text: verses 45-48

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This evening we will begin a new series of sermons that I am calling, "Reviewing the Basics." The title is self-explanatory. I will go over the very basics of the message of the Bible. This is something that we discussed as a session and decided that it would be a good thing to do. There are a number of reasons that we felt that a short series on the basics of the gospel would be helpful. Some of us have had a less than thorough training in the basics in our youth and so going over the basics will be good for those in that category. But even among those who have been well instructed in the message of the Bible, there is often a lack of precision and clarity about some very fundamental things. Many of us have a familiarity with the truths of God's word, but quite often there is a kind of vagueness when it comes to some key aspects of the gospel. And then there is the fact that it is always useful to review the basics. The basics are important. There is nothing more important than our relationship with God and there is a sense in which we never get beyond the basics. And it is important that we are as clear as possible about them. So we will consider questions like why we need to be saved, how God saves us, what did Jesus' death on the cross actually accomplish and various truths about what it means to be saved.

What we will do this evening is consider, "God's Message to the World." The point that I want to make in this sermon is the fact that the message of the Bible is not just a message for those who have been raised as Christians or some other subset of the human race. It is God's intention that every single human being hear what he has to say. God does not accept the idea of pluralism in the sense that there are a number of legitimate ways of living in the world and thinking about life.

Pluralism is necessary in this world in the sense that people should be allowed to practice their own religions in peace. But the God of the Bible claims to be the only real God and he claims that every single human being in the world belongs to him and is accountable to him. And it is from that perspective that the God of the Bible has a message for the whole world. If you are a human being, the God of the Bible has something to say to you. The message of the Bible is addressed to you.

We see this in the verses that I have chosen as the text to focus on in this sermon. Jesus Christ is speaking. And Jesus Christ said to his disciples “that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations....” Jesus has a message that is to go out to all nations. The message is to be proclaimed by Jesus’ disciples viewed here as the nucleus of the church of Jesus Christ. It is a message calling people to “repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” It is a message calling all the people of the world to turn from their sins and offering them forgiveness if they will do so. Of course in order for that message to make sense it must come with a lot of other truths that the Bible teaches. The message of “repentance for the forgiveness of sins” can only be understood in the light of the biblical answers to the great questions of life such as the existence of the God of the Bible and the nature of our relationship to the God of the Bible.

There is a very instructive example of what this looks like in practice in the book of Acts in a sermon preached by the apostle Paul to a number of philosophers in the city of Athens. Paul was a man called by Jesus to bring his message to as much of the world as he could manage in his lifetime. Paul was a missionary, a person specially called by Jesus to devote the rest of his life to bringing the message of Jesus to the Gentiles – the nations beyond the Jews. Paul’s sermon in Athens, a summary of which is preserved in Acts 17, is addressing people who did not know the context of the basic message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and so he begins at the beginning.

Paul had observed that the Athenians were very religious. He had noticed an altar to “the unknown god.” And this is some of what he had to say. “What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven

and earth ... gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.... [H]e made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth ... that they should seek God.... The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:22-31).

So for people with no knowledge of the Bible, Paul gives enough context so that the call to repentance can be understood. The call to repentance assumes that there is one God who created the world and everything and everyone in it. It assumes that all human beings are made by God and receive their life from God. It assumes that God made human beings in order to seek him – that is for a relationship with him. It assumes then that God made us, that he has authority over us and that he desires a relationship with us. It also assumes that human beings are not living as God requires them to live. The call to repentance assumes the reality of sin – which is living contrary to the will of God. And it also assumes that there is a day coming in which God is going to "judge the world in righteousness."

So when Jesus sends his disciples to proclaim, "repentance for the forgiveness of sins ... in his name to all nations," he intends for them to include in that proclamation at least the basic lines of biblical truth that make that message intelligible. And we get a peek of what that looks like in Paul's sermon to the Athenians. This has to do with the nature of reality as the Bible describes it. It has to do with the nature of our reality as the Bible describes it. Everything that exists apart from God has been created by God. It belongs to him. And that includes human beings. We are created by God. He has authority over us. He created us for a purpose. And we are therefore not free to live as we please. We are not independent of God. He cares how we live and if we are not dedicating our lives to please him, he calls us to repent – to turn from living as we please to living to please him.

This is part of the message that is to go out to all the world. From Jesus' instruction in our text, it is clear that he has instructed his followers to proclaim to all nations this message calling all people to repentance and

offering them the forgiveness of sins if they do so. It is a call to all people to turn from sin and turn to God by living lives of obedience to God. And that call implies a claim by God that he is the true and living God and that all people are accountable to him. And that claim is a vital part of the message because apart from it the call to repentance does not make sense. The obvious question to the call to repentance is, "Who says?" And the answer to that question gives the call to repentance its authority and meaning.

Now in terms of this passage, it is clear that Jesus claims the authority to send this message to all the nations of the world. He says that "repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed **in his name** to all nations." Jesus claims the authority to tell everyone in the world what to do. He claims the authority to call every single person in the world to repent of their sins. That is quite a claim! Who does Jesus think he is? He seems to think quite highly of himself and of his authority. He clearly thinks that he has the right to send a message to every single person in the world and call them to stop living the way they are living and start living in obedience to him.

C.S. Lewis had an interesting thought about Jesus' claim to this kind of authority. Lewis was addressing people who denied that Jesus is God, but who wanted to say that he was a good man and who was a good example for people to follow. Lewis responded to this way of thinking but insisting that it was not an option to consider Jesus to be a good man and at the same time deny that he was God. He said that either Jesus is who he says who he is, or he is nuts. A mere human being who claims to be God is not a good man. He is crazy. We can look at what Jesus says here in our text in that light. Jesus here is sending his followers with a message in his name to call everyone in the world to repent. Jesus here is claiming authority over every single human being on the earth. Jesus is claiming the authority to tell all people what to do with their lives. There are only two ways that we can respond to this. Either we must think he is crazy and ignore his call to repentance or we take him seriously and acknowledge that he has the authority that he claims to have. If we do choose to ignore him we are implying by our actions that he is crazy to claim such authority.

The biblical presentation of Jesus is that he is God and thus has the right to tell us how to live our lives. Jesus himself had a tremendous sense of his own authority. Think of the way that he spoke in the Sermon on the Mount. A number of times in that sermon he says, “You have heard that it was said to those of old ... But I say to you” And then he would give his interpretation of one of the Old Testament laws. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew tells us “And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.” Jesus seemed to think that he had the authority to give definitive interpretations of the law of God. Jesus had an incredible sense of his own authority. At the end of Matthew’s gospel, Matthew records him saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Jesus is claiming an authority that is greater than any human authority. Imagine a mere human being claiming, “all authority in heaven and on earth....” If that is true, it is very significant. If it is not true it is madness.

The disciples believed Jesus and the church has continued to believe Jesus’ claims for himself. In the rest of the New Testament we have development and clarification of Jesus’ status. Listen to what Paul writes about Jesus in Colossians 1:15-16, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him.” This is why Jesus can send a message to all the world in his own name calling all people everywhere to repent. He is our creator. “All things were created through him and for him.” He has the right to tell us how to live our lives because we are created through him and for him. We exist for him. He has the right to tell us what to do.

I will mention one more example of Jesus’ status. Philippians 2:6 says that Jesus, “though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.” Philippians 2:7-8 say that Jesus humbled himself to become a man and was obedient to “death on a cross.” And then verses 9-11 say, “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and

under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

So when Jesus says that “repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations...,” that carries some weight. This message comes with the authority of Jesus whom the Bible claims is equal with God by whom we exist and for whom we exist.

This is the most basic truth of all when it comes to the message of the Bible. The message that is to go out into all the world calling for repentance gets its seriousness and urgency from the greatness and the weightiness of the one in whose name it is proclaimed. There is no more basic and fundamental truth that we can know than the greatness and glory and authority of God. The biblical revelation of who God is the truth of all truths. It is the most important and significant fact of our existence. It is the meaning of life. And it gives incalculable weight to the message that Jesus has sent to every man, woman and child that “repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations.”

One of the greatest problems in the church and in each of our lives is a failure to live with the reality of who God really is. Our thoughts of God are far too small. Because of that we shove him to the periphery of our lives. The basic truth that we need to constantly be relearning is that everything is about God and that God is overwhelming in his greatness and glory. Our wellbeing in life is tied to our knowledge of the glory of God. And the great and fearfully serious sin that condemns us all is not to give God his due in our thoughts and in our actions and in our words. The call to repentance is first and foremost a call to give God the rightful place in our lives and God’s rightful place in our lives is first place in our lives. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Or Romans 11:36, “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

So the message calling all the world to repentance for the forgiveness of sins gets its weightiness from the one in whose name it is proclaimed. And that means that there is no greater message for us to here and

obey than Jesus' summons to all of us to repent for the forgiveness of sins.

Now this message is often construed as bad news. For those who do not understand it, it is an unwelcome message calling us away from living as we please to living as we don't please. One of the highest values of our world is the freedom to live as we please and the call to turn from that to live as God requires us to live is seen as a call to a miserable, joyless and boring existence. But even the little summary of the message as we have it in this text, makes it clear that it is a positive message. The little summary of the message as we have it in this text makes it clear that Jesus' motivation behind the message to benefit those who comply with it.

The message is that we are to repent for the forgiveness of sins. Those who turn from their sins receive forgiveness for their sins. That is quite a life-changing gift. The assumption behind the offer of forgiveness to those who repent is that we are guilty because of our sins. The assumption is that apart from the forgiveness offered, we are guilty of sin. Those three little words, "guilty of sin" convey a fearful and most serious condition to be in. We know what it means to be guilty of a serious crime. That is a serious thing. We know too that there are punishments attached to being guilty of a serious crime. Being guilty is not a good thing. Even with respect to our relationship to the law of the land, being guilty is not a welcome situation to be in.

But being guilty of sin before God is a much more serious situation to be in. The seriousness of our guilt has to do with the seriousness of the crime. And there is no more serious crime than sinning against God. Failure to live for God is rebellion against our creator. Insisting on living for ourselves rather than living for God is to live in violation of the very purpose of our existence. It is the creature spitting in the face of the creator. It is the very essence of wickedness and evil. And the penalty for sin is death. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death...." And death in the Bible is much more serious than physical death. The penalty of death for those who fail to repent is eternal endure-ment of the wrath of God. That is not where you want to end up.

Hebrews 10:27 speaks of “a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.” And then verse 31, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” That is the alternative to the forgiveness of sins that is promised in Jesus’ message to the world for those who repent.

Forgiveness of sins is an incredible offer. It means being not guilty before God. It means being in a right relationship with God. It means living in God’s favor. It means being living in hope instead of dread. It means the joy of being set free from the burden of our guilt in this life and looking forward to all that God has in store for his people in the next. It is impossible to over emphasize the wellbeing contained in this offer of forgiveness.

As creatures made by God and for God, the very essence of wellbeing is to be in a good relationship with God. This is how we were designed to flourish. The ultimate good life is life in a good relationship with God. The ultimate bad life is life apart from God. And the message that Jesus sent out to all the nations is that through repentance everyone can receive the forgiveness of sins. Now you might wonder why Jesus does not mention faith here. The fact is that the Bible summarizes the response to the offer of salvation by mentioning either faith or repentance. They are two sides of one coin. Repentance and faith can be distinguished but not separated. True faith includes repentance. And true repentance includes faith. For now we will just focus on Jesus’ formulation in this text. The whole world is called to repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

That is good news. The message from Jesus to the whole world is good news. We are all sinners. We are all deserving of eternal death. And Jesus here sent his disciples to proclaim this message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all nations. This is the very best possible news.

And we as the church are both the recipients and the bearers of this message. It is by this message that we live. And a huge part of our calling as the church of Jesus Christ is to bring this message to the world. We will look at it in more detail in the weeks to come. But for now I just wanted to remind us that it is with this message that the God of the Bible addresses the whole world.

Table Meditation

Jesus gave us the Lord's Supper because he wanted us to remember his death in this symbolic way. It did it for a number of reasons, but one of them is to underscore the centrality of his death on the cross for our life and salvation. That centrality is emphasized in our text as well.

The setting is the risen Lord Jesus appearing to his disciples. And one of the things we see in his words to his disciples is the close relationship between the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and Jesus' death and resurrection. The exact nature of the relationship is not spelled out, but it is implied. Jesus says, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem." What is implied here and spelled out in the rest of the Bible is that the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins is based upon Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection.

And that is what we remember at the Lord's Supper. It is on the basis of Jesus death and resurrection that our sins are forgiven. Jesus gave himself to the death of the cross so that there could be a message of good news for all the world. But in the Lord's Supper the message is addressed to those who have repented for the forgiveness of sins. The message comes to us as individuals and as individuals related to one another through our common relationship to Christ. In the Lord's Supper the message is addressed to each of us individually – "This is my body which is for you." And of the cup, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

The message goes out to all the world. But for those who receive the message there is this personal address – This is for you. And one of the purposes of that is to strengthen our faith. If we see even a little of how serious our sins are, the good news seems too good to be true. "How is it possible," we sometimes think, "for God to forgive me? My sins are so great, so provocative. My repentance is so incomplete." It is not surprising that we sometimes wonder whether we disqualify ourselves

by our particular array of sins. And that is one of the reasons why Jesus as instituted this supper so that he could reassure us by saying – this is for you. As certainly as you see me give you the bread and the wine that is how certainly I give myself for you for the forgiveness of your sins.