

## **Different To Make A Difference**

Speak Boldly – Part 3

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### **SPEAK BOLDLY – PART 3** **Acts 2:14-41**

If you have a Bible and I hope you do. Let me invite you to open to Acts 2. We talked last week about how the agenda of the Bible is to make us look more like Jesus. That all of Scripture is aimed at recreating us into the image of Christ and that is the ultimate purpose of the Bible which means the ultimate purpose of the Bible is not to answer every question we may have in life or provide specific direction for every situation that we may face.

We finished up talking last week about the difference between good stuff and God stuff, God stuff being the Scripture that's intended to bring us in the image of Christ. Good stuff being good principles that really aren't maybe specifically addressed in Scripture. I want to clarify something. We talked about many different examples like managing your money or how to lead your family, how to raise your kids, how to raise your teenagers? How to walk through the grief process? I don't want to communicate that those things are unimportant, that those shouldn't be addressed when we look at the Word. Certainly these things are all important to all of us in this room.

What we are focusing on though is that the ultimate purpose is to bring us into the image of Christ. And when we focus on that purpose then we will begin to play that out in our lives in the different circumstances we come into.

### **The Character of Christ ...**

In a circle in the middle, I want you to write the character of Christ. At the core of our being, as believers who have placed our faith in Christ, Christ lives in us. It's almost like the incarnation in us John 1:14 says the Word became flesh. God became flesh and dwelt among us. And that continues through each of our lives. Christ is in us Col. 1:27. He lives in us, He dwells in us, His presence dwelling in us. So at the core of our being as believers is the character of Christ.

Now the second circle outside of that let's call the conscience. The conscience you can write some notes out by the side there. The way we think, the way we feel, the way we believe, what we believe. Now all of those things are obviously affected by the character of Christ in us. Right? When Christ comes in us, He changes the way we feel, He changes our desires, He changes what we believe. Everything now revolves around the character of Christ that is in us that affects our conscience.

Let's go to the third circle. That would be our conduct. That's the way we behave or act, the things we do. Now see how the progression goes here. The way we act, what we do the way we behave is completely based on what we think and feel and believe. We always live out our faith. We may say we believe something but if we are not living it out, we really probably don't believe it. Whatever is at the core of our values, and what we believe and

what we think or what we feel is going to affect the way we act. It's going to affect our conduct.

The last circle, let's call the church. Don't miss it here. We've talked already here at Brook Hills how God has designed it so that the character of Christ is reflected in the church. We want people in this community to look at the people called the Church at Brook Hills and see the mercy and grace, and patience and attitude of Christ. How do they see that? That comes out in our conduct. With the way we act. The everyday day in day out lives in this community. People see our concept, conduct, and that's how they perceive the church based on what we do.

So at the core is the character of Christ which affects the way we think and feel and believe our conscience which affects the way we act, which is our conduct and that affects how the church looks. How the character of Christ is reflected in the church.

Now in light of that picture right there. I want us to think about application, because what we talked about last week was many times we kind of twist Scripture to make it say what we want it to say, or take some things out of context of the Bible to try to communicate practical things, to try to come up with principles for how to manage our money, or principles for how to raise teenagers or children, those sorts of things. We start focusing on what we need to do. How to raise children; how to make money for the next ten weeks, okay? That will draw a crowd all right? How to manage your money, how to manage your kids, that might transfer over too.

All of these things are aimed at which circle? Conduct right? Things we do. So what we do is we come to church we want to put a lot of practical emphasis, practical application, we say preacher give me ten steps to do this or five principles to plan or to do this. If we focus all the time on the concept, conduct, and you come in the church week in and week out and you get a new list of things to do, steps to take. We walk out of here okay let's try to do them. What we miss out on is the fact that if we are following what Scripture says and we're looking at what Scripture tells us to do. We can't do it on our own. It's impossible for anyone of us in this room to live out the Christian life on our own. The beauty of the Christian life is Christ lives it in and through us.

The problem comes then when we all ways focus on the conduct. We come in week in and week out we get a list of things to do from the preacher. A list of tips from the preacher, then we go out during that week and we try to put those things into practice and it may last for a week or two. But, then we get frustrated because we can't do it and we come back for more. Ever felt like that?

What happens though when the character of Christ is fed in our hearts by His Word? And He begins to transform the way we think, the way we feel, and the way we believe and that begins to change the way we act and Christ begins to be reflected in His church. Do you see how that works, from the inside out? Let me give you an example.

College students, the overwhelming majority of college students who've grown up in church once they get to college drift away from their faith. You have this whole new horizon of different things they can do. Freedoms to do this or that, all kinds of new ways to act and behave. And they begin to drift away from their faith why? Because there is not a foundation there of how to think Christianly. How to believe and to value what Christ values, because the character of Christ hasn't been developed inside of us.

How about with youths and the struggles that teenagers have with purity, with holiness when in an age when they are bombarded with temptations left and right. What is the best way we can encourage teenagers to be pure and holy? By giving sermons on be pure, do this, do this, do this, do this, or, to pour the Word of God into their hearts so that the character of Christ is developed in them. So that they begin to love, and honor Christ, and begin to think like Christ and begin to realize that the Holy Spirit produces in them self-control and that begins to play out in the way they act.

How about adults? How about with men in our culture the epidemic we have with men who have not led their families in a way that honors God, men who have left their families on their own. How to you address that? By calling men together and telling them now do this, do this, do this, or by feeding men with the character of Christ and so they begin to love what Christ loves, they begin to desire what Christ desires, they begin to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. They begin to think how is that going to look like in my life? The Word, feeding the character of Christ.

We've got things backward if we are always hitting on conduct and we never feed our souls with the Word of God. We will live defeated Christian lives that way. However, when we feed our souls with the Word of God it will begin to change the way we look, the way we act, and the way the church looks in the community. We've got things backwards in our worship if we are not being transformed into the character of Christ day in and week out when we come together. That's why the Word must be central in our worship.

### **Five Reasons Why the Word of God Must Be Central in Our Worship Because of the Word's effect.**

Now, I want us to look, we've looked at the Word's magnitude, we've looked at the Word's authority, the Word's relevance, and the Word's purpose. One final characteristic of the Word, reason why the Word must be central in our worship and it's because of the Word's effect. Because of the Word's effect. I want you to look with me in Acts 2:36.

This is the end, kind of the climax, of Peter's sermon. He says, "Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this, God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ. When the people heard this, they were cut to their heart..."—look at their reactions—

*They were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' Peter replied, '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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.' With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:37-42).*

#### **The Word awakens conviction.**

I want you to see the effects of the Word, three different effects that come out of this. Number one, I want you to see the Word awakens conviction. The Word awakens conviction.

As soon as Peter finishes this sermon, verse 37 says, *"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart"* (Acts 2:37).

That's quite an interesting phrase that Luke would use here to describe what happened. They were cut to the heart. We've already talked about how way back in Exodus we saw 3,000 people who were struck down by the sword when the law came down. They had disobeyed against the law. They were cut to the heart here. We are reminded in Hebrews 4:12 says, *"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."* Ephesians 6:17 says the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit.

That's kind of the picture we've got here. This is not just man's word, not just another book. This is the sword through which God and His voice penetrates our hearts and our minds. This is not just a book there is something supernatural that goes on when the Word of God is proclaimed. And here it's awakening conviction.

I want you see something very interesting. The question they ask there in verse 37, they said, *"brothers what shall we do?"* This is the second question they ask. If you look back at verses 11 and 12, look what happened there. After this amazing scene, where all these people were speaking in different languages, tongues of fire were resting on them. It says, *"We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues,"* in the end of verse 11, and verse 12 says, *"Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean'"* (Acts 2:11-12). So two questions, *"what does this mean,"* in verse 12? Over here is verse 37, *"what shall we do"*.

I think it's really interesting to note that when we saw these amazing things happen in the beginning of Acts 2 people speaking in different languages, tongues of fire resting on people's heads it caused curiosity, what is this about? But when the Word was proclaimed, when Peter preached they didn't say what does this mean? They said what shall we do? It wasn't just curiosity, it was conviction. They realized something needed to change.

I want you to notice, you can do a lot of things to amaze people and to wow them. And there is a lot of tendency temptation today to do church to amaze and to wow and to entertain, and that will get you so far, it will get people curious maybe. But, it's proclamation of the Word by the power of the Spirit that brings conviction. And that's completely different. The Holy Spirit alone can convict, can speak to our hearts. Apart from the Holy Spirit my words falls on deaf ears this morning. However, because of the Holy Spirit and His Word, the Word awakens conviction in our hearts.

Now for each of these effects I want us to look at two components, or two parts of them and then ask a question that I think we really need to ask in light of contemporary worship trends. Two components here of conviction, first of all we'll put them together then begin to explain them. First of all, we realize the gravity of our need. This is what conviction is, we realize the gravity of our need. And second, we realize the greatness of His provision. We realize the gravity of our need and second, we realize the greatness of His provision. That's what we mean by this word *"conviction"*. I want you to see how this unfolded here in Acts 2.

We've read different parts of Peter's sermon, basically he told them that they had crucified Jesus the Son of God, God Himself in the flesh. In the very end the climax of the sermon, *"God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2:36). And so basically he tells them you crucified the Son of God. And he says, *"You have a need. You stand under the judgment of God. You have crucified Him."*

And I want you to catch the need when he comes down in verse 38 and says, "*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for*"—what? "*For the forgiveness of your sins*" (Acts 2:38). That's the need. That's the ultimate need that is driving the response in this passage. That's the ultimate need that they were convicted of. They had sinned against God and they stood under the judgment of God for it. And they needed to be forgiven of their sins.

Now that sounds pretty basic. We've got a temptation to miss this today. When we share the gospel we often talk about how we have a need for success, or a need for happiness, or a need for fulfillment, or a need for adventure, a need for an abundant life. We talk about the gospel is the answer. Jesus is the answer to all of those different needs. He is the answer to our need for success, our need for satisfaction, our need for happiness, our need for fulfillment. And certainly He is all of those things. But if that's all we focus on, then we bypass that which is the greatest need that all of us in this room have. And it's not a need for success, it's not a need for fulfillment, it's not a need for satisfaction, it's not a need for loneliness. Those are all symptoms. The root need in every single one of our lives, is for forgiveness. The cosmic problem of the universe, for every single one of us is that we sit under the judgment and wrath of a holy God because of our sin. And unless something is done to be put right with Him, then we will be separated from Him forever. That's the core need.

"Oh wait a second, don't talk about the wrath of God, talk about the love of God." Ladies and gentlemen we will never get to a full understanding of the love of God until we have a full understanding of the wrath of God against our sin. We don't talk about this in 21st century American church. We don't talk about the wrath of God. We talk about the love of God in the process we create a mush god. Who somewhere along the way we're convinced is obligated to save us. And He owes salvation to us. And ladies and gentlemen it is not biblical.

It's not until we understand that we stand under the judgment of a holy God that we realize how infinitely precious it is that He forgives us of our sins, and He sent His son to take that wrath upon Himself, instead of taking it out on us. That's the beauty of the Gospel. If we do not communicate the wrath of God, we will never be able to communicate the love of God.

And see how that's set up in this thing? We realize the gravity of our need and that's when we realize the greatness of His provision. Don't miss the good news in this passage. Peter is telling these guys, that even if you are a murderer of the very Son of God, God Himself stands ready to forgive you and not just to forgive you, but to pour His Spirit in you. To pour the presence of the Christ that you murdered. He's going to pour His presence in your life by His grace and His mercy. Is that not good news? That's incredible news.

Imagine Peter saying to us this morning, you all, all of us sit under the judgment of God because of our sin. And we have infinitely offended a holy god, but He stands ready this morning to forgive all who would call on Him, and all who would trust in the love and grace that He freely provides. That's good news!

Now we miss that. Do you see how we miss the greatness of His provision if we don't realize the gravity of our need? See the joy that comes in seeing a holistic picture of God. That's what conviction does.

Now, it's at this point that I want to ask a question. The question is, which seeker are we going to be sensitive to at The Church at Brook Hills? Here is what I mean by that. Let me give you a little background. In light of a desire to communicate more about the love and

grace of God, maybe to the exclusion many times of His other attributes, we come to worship in the contemporary trend particularly among mega churches is to do "seeker sensitive" worship, and by that is meant, we're going to cater our worship to those who are seeking Christ maybe unbelievers who have not placed their faith in Christ. We're going to cater our worship and our time in the Word to seekers. And what that's resulted in, is a pretty strong delusion of the Word in worship.

One church that I went to during the time when we were displaced from New Orleans, we were homeless, we would visit a couple of different churches there. There was this one particular service where it was very, very contemporary and very seeker sensitive outwardly. They had said that is what they did. I remember the favorite quote Heather and I had from the preacher was, he had been talking for a while probably 15 or 20 minutes and he said, "Now, let me show you a verse real quick and then I'll get back to what I was saying." That's the trend or maybe to use the Word but to twist it to hit some of the issues that are most prevalent to seekers. Well, I want you to think about a couple of things with this idea of should Brook Hills, should we have seeker sensitive worship?

First of all, let me say I am all about leading as many people to Christ as possible. In fact, that's what drives me to say the things that I am about to say. First of all, the Bible says, Romans 3, there is no one who seeks God, not even one. So when you take the Scripture for what its teaching there. If we were to say that we are seeker sensitive and there is no one who seeks God, and you put the two together, and we are actually sensitive to absolutely no one in our worship if we are seeker sensitive.

But maybe a step deeper, and much more important. What happens when we realize that worship first and fore most was designed to please the "divine seeker"? What do you mean by that? Well, John 4 says the Father is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Luke 19:10 says Jesus came to seek and to save those who were lost. 2 Peter 3:9 says that God desires that all would come to repentance, that none would perish. So we've got a God that we are worshipping in this room this morning who is longing to see people come to know His grace and His salvation. Who has a zeal for people to come to know His grace and salvation that is greater than all of our zeal in this room combined. I believe the Bible is teaching us in worship if we will exalt His character and exalt His voice, that we can trust Him to do the seeking after people. If we exalt what He wants us to exalt then He knows a lot better than we do how to reach people in 21<sup>st</sup> century culture. So let's take Him at His Word, let's exalt His greatness, expose His voice and let Him do the seeking, and then, guess what? He'll get the glory for what happens and not the seeker sensitive worship service.

I want to show you this in Scripture, let me show you this. I want you to turn to the right and look in 1st Corinthians 14, this is such a great passage this is in the middle of some of the disputes that were going on with the church in Corinth about prophesy and tongues. Keep in mind prophesy, we've talked about it, prophesy is proclamation of the Word, take the Word of God, speak the Word of God. I want you to look with me at verse 22 in first Corinthians 14. First Corinthians 14:22. Get a hold of this picture right here, what Paul is saying. He says,

*"Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers. So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind" (1 Cor. 14:22-23)?*

Isn't that good? They are going to think you are crazy, if all they hear you're doing is talking in tongues. So here is what he says, *"But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you'"* (1 Cor. 14:24-25). Now isn't that a good picture? When people, doubtless there are some in this room this morning, who have not placed your faith in Christ, when people have not placed their faith in Christ come into our worship and they hear the Word of God being proclaimed and they see the greatness of God being exalted, they will fall on their faces and say God is among you, God is doing things here. They will see their need and realize the greatness of His provisions when we worship to please the "divine seeker" over everybody else. This happens when the Spirit works through the Word, the Word awakens convictions.

### **The Word leads to conversion.**

Second effect of the Word, the Word leads to conversion. I want you to come back with me to Acts 2:37. I want us to see another area where we are tempted to be dangerously unbiblical. I want you to look at verse 37, *"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' Peter replied"* (Acts 2:37-38)— ask Jesus into your heart. Peter replied invite Christ into your life. Peter replied everyone bow your head close your eyes and pray a prayer to accept Jesus. These phrases that you will find all across American Christianity are found nowhere in Scripture. And there is a great temptation today to dilute the gospel into phrases like this that in the end, in up missing out on the whole point of the gospel. And I am concerned that we have created a mindset where all you have to do is pray a prayer, sign on a dotted line, or walk down an isle to experience salvation, and that is grossly unbiblical. And the result is, it leads people to assume that they are saved when they've never heard the gospel and responded to it biblically. This is extremely important.

What is conversion? What does it mean to come to the point of salvation? "Peter replied"— one word drives this whole conversion experience here in Acts 2. What's the word? "Repent." Now, keep in mind this is the same message that John the Baptist preached, Luke 3, the same message that Jesus preached. Peter, his first Christian sermon, "I don't know what else to say, I will use what Jesus used." *"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins"* (Acts 2:38). What does that word mean?

Literally, "A changing of direction" in the original language of the New Testament. Literally, "A turning from one way to another way," and as we see the gospel preached here in Acts 2 as well as other places. This is a word that is extremely important. Now, some of you are thinking, "Well I thought it was faith that saves you? 'It is by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not from yourselves it is a gift of God so that no one can boast.'" Exactly, it is faith, faith alone that saves you.

But, it is a biblical understanding of faith that we've got to keep in mind here and that biblical understanding of faith involves repentance. Let me show it to you in the book of Acts here. We've got it here in Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized," that was the invitation. I want you to look at the very next chapter, chapter 3:19, you might underline some of these verses. I want to show you the times when the Bible stresses repentance in the book of Acts. Chapter 3:19, *"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord"* (Acts 3:19).

I want you to look over in chapter 8. Look in chapter 8, look at verse 22. This is a really interesting passage, Simon the sorcerer, is a guy who had made a public profession of faith

so to speak, but had missed out on what true conversion was all about. Look at what Peter says to him in Acts 8:22. Pick up in verse 21 just to give you a picture, *"You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart"* (Acts 8:21-22).

Now look over at Acts 17. Look at Acts 17:30. This is Paul speaking in Athens giving an overview of the gospel. This is the core of the gospel that he brings out. Verse 30 says, *"In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to"* (Acts 17:30)—what? Repent. So there is a few instances where we see, just "repent". Faith is not mentioned specifically that word in those different passages.

Now, let me show you an instance where faith or belief in Christ is the only thing mentioned as apart from repentance. Look at Acts 16, one chapter before verse 31. This is the jailer Paul is talking to. It says, *"They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household'"* (Acts 16:31). So you're saved by believing in the Lord Jesus.

Now I want you to look at an instance where we see both of them mentioned. Look at Acts 20:21. We've seen repentance, we've seen faith, now let's see them both together. Acts 20:21, says, *"I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."* They're both there. One more time, Acts 26, go close to the end of the book. Acts 26, look at verse 20. Paul is talking about his mission to preach the gospel. Listen to what he says. He says, *"To those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds"* (Acts 26:20). Hold on to that phrase, we'll get back to that a little bit later.

Now obviously we're seeing all through out the book of Acts, when it comes to people coming to that point where they placed their faith in Christ, where they are converted, where they have their salvation experience it's obviously involving repentance and faith or repentance as apart of faith. So I want us to see two components of repentance that I think we see all through out the book of Acts as well as other places in Scripture.

Two components, number one, in repentance, this whole turning, we turn from sin. We turn from sin. When you enter into a relationship with Christ you do not continue to pursue sin, you turn from sin. And when you turn from sin you turn to something else, you turn from sin to Christ. Now think about those two different levels right there. Turning from sin, this idea of repenting of sin, doing an about face. Heather and I lived in New Orleans for five years. You can't take a left turn anywhere in New Orleans. All you can do is U turns. Everywhere you've got to go, if you want to take a left, you' do a left turn then come back a take a right. That's what repentance is. It's U turns. It's just like New Orleans. And there is need for repentance in New Orleans. So, you turn, you do a U turn, you go the other way. You turn from sin to Christ.

Now, think about this repentance thing. Think about three key words that we see all through out Scripture, in our minds, our hearts, and our wills. In our minds, we change our mind about sin. We change our mind about God, about Christ. There is a mental change that goes on in repentance. But, obviously we know that's not enough just to change our minds. Just to have mental belief, right? Even the demons believe God and shudder. If demons can do this, then it's not what we need for salvation. We need to go at least a little step further.



What about our hearts? Second Corinthians 7:10, talks about having a godly sorrow over our sin. That's the result of repentance that we feel sorry for our sins. And then there is a change of will. Luke 3:7 and 8 when you look back at when John the Baptist was preaching repentance he talked about how producing fruit and the way you live in keeping with the repentance that has taken place in your life, in your heart, mind, heart and will. It's a total change of mind, total change of heart, a total change of will that's going on in conversion. That's turning from sin and then turning to Christ.

Two key words here, when Peter preached this sermon verse 36, *"God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2:36). Second word there, "Christ", is the Messiah, the promised Messiah, the Savior, the One who would save us from our sin. So you confess Christ as your Savior. Same thing in Romans 10:9 and 10, *"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead"—*He died on the cross to save you and He is risen from the dead—*"you will be saved"* (Rom. 10:9).

So you confess Him as your Savior and also as your Lord. God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ. That word right there is so huge, I wish we had time this morning to dive into it. But we would be here another version of this sermon next week. The word "Lord" is used over 100 times in the book of Acts, many times used to refer to God the Father. But the majority of times used to refer to Jesus. Basically it means, the word means, "God who rules," or, "God who reigns." So it's saying that Jesus is God, God in the flesh. That He wasn't just a man, but it's also saying that He is sovereign. He rules and reigns over everything including our lives.

So when we are converted, when we come to a point where we enter into faith, true biblical faith in Christ. What it is, is a change of heart, mind, will about our sin, and it's a turning to Christ as the One who saves us from that sin and the One who is Lord over everything in our lives. That's biblical picture of saving faith.

Now, I am not saying at this point that when you experience conversion everything is now perfect. Yes, we stand justified before God, we stand clean before God but at the same time we still struggle with sin. So I would not want for people to doubt their salvation today, just because they have sin in their lives still that they struggle with. But I do want to say this, once we begin this thing call salvation at that point, it's a process that continues. A continual turning from sin and a continual turning to Christ. Where we realize more and more every day that He is the Lord over our life, that He has saved us, and continues to save us from sin and give us victory over sin. We continue to feel sorrow over our sin. We continue to have our minds changed and our wills changed and our lives look different. Here's where we've missed out on it, we've created salvation to be at this point in time, we've ignored the rest of Scripture in what talks about salvation also being something that continues after that. We've got a bunch of people who have prayed a prayer and walked an isle, but their lives look just like everybody else in the world. And the purity of the church has been sacrificed on an altar of easy believism that we have created when it comes to salvation.

The question that I want to ask this morning is, "Have you been converted?" I am concerned that in our effort to reach as many people as possible we've diluted the gospel. We've convinced people to believe in a salvation that is less than biblical and deceived people into thinking that they are saved when they are not. "How do I know if I am converted?" Look at your life, is there evidence of a continual turning from sin and an continual turning to Christ? Is there sorrow over sin? Is there changes in your life that come

in on a day in day out basis as you submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and surrender to Him in your life? Is there evidence of that?

"Are you saying that my works brings salvation?" Absolutely not, please don't hear me saying that. But remember that phrase from Acts 26:20? Let me read it to you again. What did Paul say? He said, *"They should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds"* (Acts 26:20). That doesn't mean that you work to get to heaven. That's not what Scripture is teaching at all. That is a false gospel. However, Scripture is teaching that you are saved by faith alone, yes, but not by faith that is alone. Does that make sense? Your faith shows itself day in and day out and students, adults, anybody in this room, if there is not evidence of your faith, on a day in day out basis, if there is not a continual turning from sin, turning to Christ, then we need to look seriously at what it means to be saved.

Jesus said, *"Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers'"* (Matt. 7:22-23)! There will be many who will be shocked on that day to find that they were deceived into thinking that they were apart of the Kingdom when they never were. This is all important. More important than anything else in life and I pray that we take a serious look, everyone of us, at our hearts, the pastor not excluded.

It really leads to the question. If this is the gospel, are we going to preach a gospel of cheap grace or of costly grace? What do you mean by that? Well, let me use the words of a guy name Dietrich Bonhoffer, this guy from Germany. Wrote a book call The Cost of Discipleship. Incredible book and he said this, "Cheap grace, if the preaching of forgiveness without required repentance it is grace without discipleship, and grace without the cross. True grace cost a man his life. And it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. The only man"—listen to this—"the only man who has the right to say that he is justified by grace alone is the man who has left all to follow Christ."

What do you mean? If it's grace, we can't earn it? Exactly. And that's the beauty of it, because you are so captivated by grace that when you hear Jesus say, "Any one who will come after me he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." You lay your nets down like those guys did and you follow. That's costly grace. It's grace because we get to follow Jesus. It's costly because it cost us everything. It is our lives. Maybe more importantly have we embraced in each of our lives cheap grace or costly grace?

### **The Word results in continuation.**

The Word leads to conversion. Awakens conviction, it leads to conversion and finally the Word results in continuation. When you get back to Acts 2, it says, *"With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day"* (Acts 2:40-41).

Really the only public thing we know happened there in Acts 2 to cause them to say that, "Yeah this is going to be real in my life," was their baptism. It doesn't say they walked down the isle or sign a card, or anything like that, not that those things are bad. But baptism is huge. It was the way that they identified with Christ and with His church.

You know one of my favorite evangelist from the past a guy named George Whitfield. Would stand and preach to 20,000 people without a microphone, I don't know how he did it. It's just amazing how God used this guy to lead many people to Christ. People would come up

to him and ask him after they had a meeting they'd say, "How many people were saved in the meeting tonight or this week?" His response? He would say, "I don't know we will see in about six months." You don't hear that from a lot of evangelists today, you hear, "Well we had this number or that number." Whitfield wasn't saying over the next six months they were going to earn their salvation. What he was saying was we're going to see who's repentant by their lives. Do our lives reflect that in a continuation in a seeking after Christ?

Two components here. We are lead by the Spirit. It says the very next verse 3,000 come to faith it says, "they devoted themselves." The word literally means, "continued steadfastly". They gave themselves to the apostles teaching. The other things that we've talked about. They gave themselves to the Word, because they were led by the Spirit. When you repent, believe in what Christ has done—this is what you see going on here in Acts 2—Peter promised, "You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

So it's not just a thing that they get this time in the Spirit and another day, and another day. No they had the Spirit that would dwell in them and that's the good news. For any of us once we have truly converted. Once we have placed biblical faith in Christ the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us. He is the deposit that guarantees our inheritance. In other words the Spirit is evidence and the Spirit works in our lives that repentance is real. That Christ is real to us. He lives inside of us. He doesn't go and come He lives inside of us all of us who placed our faith in Christ truly.

So were led by the Spirit and second, we long for the Word. When the Spirit's in us and the Spirit wants to feed the character of Christ in us then we have an innate longing, and innate hunger for the Word inside of us. We want the Word. The more we feed on the Spirit the more we feed on the Word the more we want it. There becomes this craving in us this thirst that can't be quenched with anything else once we've got the Word and the Spirit. It kind of like, once you eat a big fat juicy steak. The processed hamburger from McDonald's just doesn't do it anymore does it? Once you get the Word once you feast on it, and you try to worship without it, it takes awful. And you say I want the Word my Spirit longs for the Word.

People have asked me, how do I get a deeper hunger for the Word? Here's the key, this is extra you are not even going to have to pay for this this morning. If you want a deeper hunger for the Word, read the Word. This is good huh? Because the more you read it, the more you study it, the more you memorize it, the more you meditate on it, the more your spirit longs for more.

I remember the first time I went over to Heather's house to eat dinner. My family grew up never ate seafood. Dad hated seafood so we all hated seafood, got over to Heather's house, first meal, seafood. Got this shrimp put in front of me. I don't like shrimp at that point. But I looked around at Heather's family, Heather, got to be kind, so I ate the shrimp. "Hmm this is good shrimp. Wow that was great." Then I learned that was their pattern on all their family vacation, seafood, shrimp, all the time.

So I continued to eat more. "Hmm this is good," and somewhere along the way I convinced them I like it so they'd offer it again and again. Today, I love shrimp because I feasted on it. Do you see how that works? The same thing with the Word. It results in a continuation. The question we need to ask, "Do our lives reflect a continual evidence of a changed heart?" That goes back to the fundamental question that I asked you just a second ago regarding conversion. Do our lives reflect a continual evidence of a changed heart? If your life in this room does not reflect evidence of a continual change of heart then I pray this morning that you would dive seriously into whether or not the Spirit of Christ is in you.

## The Bottom Line ...

The bottom line is this. Our effectiveness as a church is completely dependent on our faith on this of God's Word. We at the church at Brook Hills will not be judged or accountable to the Lord for ultimately how good the music was or how great our building looks? But we will be held accountable for how faithful we were to God's Word.

If I could change that phrase around even a little bit. Our eternity as an individual is completely dependent on our faithfulness to God's Word. Our eternity as an individual is completely dependent on our faithfulness to God's Word. Not that we have to do things in order to get to heaven. But, that as a result the grace and the faith that has completely changed us we will long to be faithful to His Word. And that's why Jesus said the only ones... In that passage in Matthew 7:21-23, "Many will say to me those things." He said, "Only those who do the will of my father who is in heaven will inherit the kingdom of God."

Will you bow your heads with me? As best as I know how this morning, I want to urge you and plead with you much like Peter did in Acts 2. Have you been converted? Are you in a process of continually turning from sin and turning to Christ because of the root of Christ has taken hold in you? If not, it's not about praying a prayer or signing something. But, now I want to urge you right now to confess your faith in Christ and say, "God change my mind about my sin, change my heart about my sin and change my life. I see that you died on the cross and rose from the grave for my sin and I confess that you are the Lord of my life." That is biblical salvation, and it's free to all today who will just embrace.

I want to urge you not to be deceived or in a monotonous motion of religious activity that bypasses the point so that one day you stand stunned before God in heaven because you never truly placed your faith in Him. I want us to enter into a time of repentance. I know that whether it is people who need to repent and be converted for the first time or whether it is people in this room, men or women brothers and sisters that have been holding on to sin. I want to invite you into a time of repentance today. I want to invite you to turn from your sin.

Struggles that are represented - whatever they may be, I want to invite you to turn from them and let them go. Or maybe to go to somebody else during this time and say that, "I need to repent of some things I have done against you, some areas where I need to be forgiven." To have a time where we repent confess our sins to each other.

You do whatever that means you need to do whether that is going to somebody else, whether it's filling this area at the front here and just saying we need you to change our heart, and change our mind and change our lives and bring us under your Lordship, or whether it's going to somebody in this room. I invite your response. I want to invite you to stand around this room and sing about the presence of Christ. You continue to respond as God leads you in a time of repentance. Let's glimpse His greatness, in the process we'll see our need and you continue to respond as God leads you.

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