**SERIES TITLE:** **Being Gospel-Ready (2 of 4)**

**TITLE: Commissioned to communicate** (Equipping Message)

**TEXT**: Acts 3:11-26

**OBJECTIVE**: To reflect on Peter’s example as a gospel preacher, considering what the content of the gospel is, so we could then consider how to share it (in our messages) in the following weeks/months/years. (I.e. to establish a foundation to build upon).

[For pastor/preachers: We note again that this message and series are purposed as one part of a larger picture, and are not sufficient by themselves as an equipping. While this series is about being Gospel-ready, we recommend that teaching is also needed on conversational skills, team-work, prayer, and the work of the Holy Spirit in evangelism.]

**Introduction:** Have you ever had a time when you were stuck for words? I remember a time when... I felt embarrassed / disappointed. We all experience this.

**Last week:** We looked at how Jesus felt and responded when he saw people are they really are - being moved with compassion. In response Jesus (1) preached the good news and healed every disease and sickness, (2) commissioned us to pray for more workers for the harvest-field, (3) in Matthew 10:1f commissioned his followers to ‘go’.

There is no time more important to know what to say than when someone is asking about why we believe in Jesus / what Christian faith is all about!

**Acts 3:11-26**

**1. The occasion**

Crippled beggar healed. Healing ‘saved up’ for / delayed until that time. An opportunity was created that we still hear about today. People were surprised. Peter called out ‘Why does this surprise you?’ He recognised and took the opportunity! [How often do we?]

**2. What was Peters message outline?** *(Observations – explained afterwards)*

A. An explanation of Christ’s coming, Divinity, death and resurrection.

* A messages has a content. The gospel message has a specific content.

B. Evidence to support the claim, including...

* The miracle they had just witnessed
* Christ resurrection (which was their personal testimony – like we have ours)
* Biblical prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. See v18 and 22-25 (this related well as the audience was predominantly Jewish).

C. He established their guilt before God (sin), and called them to repentance

* They had sinned in rejecting and killing Jesus – v14-15.
* While done in ignorance (v17) the implication is that this didn’t excuse their sin. - V19 – *‘Repent...and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out...’*

D. Concludes with affirming words to encourage them to respond

* This included warnings that rejecting Christ would bring consequences (v23)
* As well as affirmation (v25-26) – in this case, that they were God’s chosen nation - to help them view the message favourably.

**3. What could we learn from Peter’s example?**

A. Peter’s sermons were well reasoned (noting Acts 2 is also)

It is important to explain why we believe the faith to be true, both in terms of explanations that satisfied reasoned questions, as well as experiences that confirm our belief to be real in daily life (testimony, answered prayer, why we believe in God or the Bible, prophecies fulfilled, miracles we’ve seen/experienced, etc.)

B. Peter’s sermons were unapologetically passionate (inc Acts 2)

He didn’t mince words. He believed and cared enough to be straight (v23, Ac 2.40).

C. There was a specific content (more clearly reflected here, but in Acts 2 also).

God’s love. Sin that separates (often an assumption when speaking with Jews). The consequence of judgement. Salvation as being made possible through Jesus. The need for faith, and a choice to turn from living our way to God’s way (recognizing Lordship).

**What is the Gospel? (to state it more clearly)**

**i. Creation** - God created the world for us humans - who he placed in charge of this creation, and everything was perfect

**ii. Fall** - We used the free will God gave us to choose to live separately to God’s good ways, bringing sin and suffering into the world

**iii. Redemption through Jesus** - God came, in Jesus, and through His death and resurrection at the cross made our forgiveness and restoration to relationship with God possible

**iv. Restoration** - God’s plan for us is to work with Him to bring restoration to all areas of life on this planet - a task that will only be completed when Jesus finally returns.

**Amongst this we could**

* Give evidences to support the message - like we see Peter doing in Acts 2 and 3
* Invite people to make a response to what God has done for them.

[SEE 5MIN VIDEO ‘What is the gospel?’ at <http://www.alltogether.co.nz/equipping-videos/>]

**Summarise again (getting members to repeat the 4 words - to aid memory):**

Creation - Fall - Redemption - Restoration

**Encouragement** (illustration):

* Even if we share unclearly, God can still use our efforts (illustrate with personal examples).
* The Holy Spirit can make up for weaknesses and inadequacies. It is important that we try to do something!

**Challenge**: Why not learn to share this message clearly, so we can at least communicate this message clearly when the rare opportunity comes *all by itself?\*\** 1 Peter 3:15b. Would you be open to that?

**In closing:** We will show you a simple way to share this message next week. There is some great content in your small group discussion.

* Has anyone here not heard this message?
* Would you like to consider faith in Christ today?

\*\* Note again, as in the introductory note to preachers for this series, that the gospel message us usually shared in the context of a conversation. This series focus’ on the gospel communication part of this equation. Other sermon-series on conversational skills are available.

**- SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION -**

**SERIES: Being Gospel-Ready**

**Commissioned to communicate**

**Week two.**

**Leaders note:**

At the beginning of this session the goal is to get members even more open in sharing. Many lack personal confidence as witnesses. When discussion is open and honest we are better able to hear what God would want to say to us each. So getting members to open up is your first goal.

Note also that the practical exercise (B3. In the discussion) is important if lessons taught are to be applied. Please guard your time in the discussion so adequate time is remains for this.

A handout is included below for the members, if not given out already.

**INTRODUCTION (10 minutes)**

**Comment:** Today we’re going to talk about the Sunday message we just heard. We’re going to talk about how well we know how to communicate the gospel in a clear way.

**Two questions to start us off:**

1. On Sunday our preacher shared of a time when he was stuck for words. Do any of you have a funny incident where you got caught out because you didn’t know what to say?

2. Can someone read 1 Peter 3:15-16?

- How many of us could share a clear gospel message now, were a relative or friend to ask what you believe?

**Demonstration**: Would anyone be willing to actually demonstrate now what you might say in just 2- minutes? (If they do, encourage them heaps!)

**DISCUSSION**

**(A) Authenticity and personal conviction (20 minutes)**

**Comment:** Communication is most powerful when it comes from the heart. Authenticty is key. So let’s start by discussing why we are Christians:

 1. Why are you a Christian?

 2. What has convinced you that this belief is true?

 3. What difference has God actually made in your life?

4. Why would you want to recommend Christianity to your friends?

**(B) The Gospel (20 minutes)**

**1. Revise gospel content (3 minutes)**

Revise together what the gospel content is, as summarised in the weekends message

* (Creation - Fall - Redemption through Jesus - Restoration. In addition it is wise to include some personal evidence and to invite a response).
* Have members say these four points out loud together, to aid memorisation.

**2. Demonstration of gospel sharing (7 minutes)**

Have someone demonstrate how they might share the gospel using this framework in response to the question *‘So, what do you believe as a Christian?’*

**3. Practice (10 – 15 minutes)**

Break into pairs, and take turns at sharing - in response to the ‘seeker’ asking the Christian what they believe and/or why.

Note: If someone really doesn’t want to take a turn, don’t force them.

Note: Because many Christians struggle to communicate the Christian message clearly - and without jargon, practice is important. ‘Practice time’ isn’t something to skip.

**APPLICATION (5-10 minutes)**

1. Is anyone willing to make the commitment that, if an opportunity arises this week to share what they believe, or why, that they will choose to take it?

2. Are you willing to join in a prayer that God will create such opportunities with our friends and family?

**Pray**

(1) …for those you love, such as were listed in small group last week

(2) …for each other, that God would help you be disciplined to do what it takes to *actually be ready* to give an answer for your faith at any time

HANDOUT

**What is the Gospel?**

**A possible thought outline for the gospel is as follows:**

* Creation - Fall Redemption - Restoration

**When communicating, it is wise to**

* ...include evidences - like Peter does when preaching in Acts 2 and 3 (personal testimony, fulfilled prophecy, miracles, ‘apologetic’ reasons for believing in God etc.)
* ...and then to Invite a response.

**(i) CREATION**

In the beginning God created everything, and it was good!

Scripture:

*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth…”* (Genesis 1:1 )

Illustrations:

* God’s work in your life
* Things that amaze you, that also convince you that God must exist
	+ The miracle of life
	+ DNA
	+ Miniature machines inside cells
	+ The fine tuning of the universe
	+ The existence of morality, rationality/freewill, beauty, love, etc, etc.

**(ii) FALL**

We have used the free will God gave us to go our own way - choosing wrong instead of right, bringing sin and suffering into the world. Because God is righteousness (perfect), we are separated from Him - both now and beyond this life.

Scriptures:

The Bible says, *“…for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (*Romans 3:23). *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (*1 John 1:8).

*“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin” (*Romans 3:20). Our best efforts cannot attain the needed standard - which is perfection

In Hebrews 9:27 it says, *“…man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”*

Illustration of sin vs perfection: Imagine you were thirsty and were about to drink a glass of cool, clear water. Then I reach over and put a small bit of sewage into your glass. Would you drink it? Of course not! And, would you be upset? Of course! While the sewage may be a small thing, such an impurity is a big deal to us. In the same way our sin may not seem a big thing to us, but it is a to a *perfect* God. He is holy, and cannot let anything imperfect into heaven.

Illustration of the justice of judgement: Imagine a judge was ruling on a murder case. The accused admits that he did the murder, but then says sorry. He promises to never do it again, and asks to be let off. How would you react if the judge let him off? Would he be a *good* judge? In the same way God must see that our wrongs are punished.

**(iii) REDEMPTION**

It is at this point that we come to good news for them. Most religions basically agree with the ideas represented above - that spiritual things are real, right and wrong exist as real things also, and we are also somehow ‘infected’ by a desire to do wrong/be selfish, while we should be doing good/right.

However, the Christian faith brings something unique to the table here - not based in all the things we have to do to get to God. Instead God loves us enough to make a way for us to be ‘saved’ from the consequences of our wrong-doing (it’s about what God did - not what we have to do).

In short, because God is just He must punish our sin, but because God loves us He has provided a way out. The gospel is a message of love. The way God saves us is by providing forgiveness for our sins through Jesus - whose life, death and resurrection were to take the punishment due to us, in our place - so we could be forgiven if we turned to His ways and asked..

Scripture: Romans 6:23 says, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Why did God have to *give* this to us as a gift? It is because we could not gain it for ourselves. Our righteous works could not ‘earn’ it for us, and so He provided it for us, because of His love!

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16)*.* Jesus’ death on the cross was to take the punishment for our sin, in our place - and it was all because of love.

*“That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (*Romans 10:9). Faith in Jesus is the ‘key’ by which we receve the gift of forgiveness.

*“Peter replied ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins’”* (Acts 2:38). The decision to follow Jesus involves repenting (turning from our ways to God’s ways) and also ‘confessing’ to (telling) others - as happens when we choose to be baptised (see previous verse), thus letting our choice be known to those around us.

It is also clear from the Bible that Jesus is the *only* Saviour - the only one through whom we can be forgiven, and receive a restored eternal relationship with God (eternal life). *“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (*John 14:6).

Illustration: Imagine you are in a fire, and have passed out, and someone saves you. Imaging you are drowning and someone saves you. This is the image of what God has done for us.

We don’t always realise see the seriousness or consequences of our sin – but God sees them, and has done what is needed to make it possible for us to be saved.

**(iv) RESTORATION**

Having turned to God’s ways again, God then restores us to the purpose He has for us both in this life (making the world better) and beyond (in heaven).

Scriptures:

Genesis 1:28-31. God made humans last. Everything else in this creation was made as a gift and home for us. Then God very clearly gave us ‘dominion’ / rulership over the earth, giving us the responsibility of looking after it.

Matthew 6:10 “*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”*

Even in the Lord’s prayer we see stated God’s desire that we work to make earth perfect again, as heaven is perfect.

Throughout the Bible God’s desire for justice on earth, equality, care for the poor, honesty and integrity - and much more, are abundantly clear. God’s people are to use their gifts, abilities, experiences, opportunities and resources to make earth a better place - until God eventually comes and completes the job.

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**A comment on how do might best explain this message in our culture?**

If we say *‘Come to Jesus and you will have* ***eternal life****’,* some people might ‘pray the prayer’ to get to heaven - without understanding the commitment that is required (repentance). IN contrast if we say ‘*‘Come to Jesus and you will be able to being an actual* ***relationship*** *with God Himself’ -* people know that relationships require commitment. So, people understand the need for repentance (turning / changing) better. It is easy then to explain that this restored relationship brings a restoration to our purpose on this earth, as that we get to be with God beyond this life too - because we are God’s friends (eternal life).

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**HOW TO RECEIVE CHRIST SUMMARISED [FOR EASE OF MEMORY]**

 A – Admit you are a sinner. Ask for forgiveness.

 B – Believe in Jesus as your Saviour (the only one who can save you)

 C – Commit to follow Jesus as your Lord (your boss, teacher, leader)

**PRAYER OF COMMITMENT**: A.B.C. [FOR EASE OF MEMORY]

Dear Lord Jesus, I admit I am a sinner *[Admit]* and ask for Your forgiveness *[Ask]*. I believe that You died for my sins *[Believe]* - thank you! I give the remainder of my life to you *[Commit]*. Help me to learn more about what you are like, and to serve you well with my life. Amen.

**FOUR HABITS OF CHRISTIANS [NEXT STEPS FOR NEW BELIEVERS]**

**1. Read the Bible:** We read the Bible to understand what God is like and how He wants us to live.

**2. Pray to God:** We talk to God in prayer as our friend and master.

**3. Find Christian friends:** We attend a Church (spend time with a Christian group) to learn about God from others and to have Christian friends so we can encourage each other to love and serve God well with our lives.

**4.** **Share and serve:** We then show and share of God’s love through how we live, and what we say - because this is what Christian life truly looks like!