

Trivia fact: *25% of "Acts" is actually speeches and sermons delivered by Peter, Stephen, and Paul.*

Peter's First Sermon, cuts to the heart of the Matter. Acts 2: 14-38

Adapted from: "Is The Gospel For The Devout?" by Glenn Durham @ SErmonCentral.Com

"Luis Palau tells of a woman in Peru whose life was radically transformed by the Gospel. Rosario was a terrorist, a brute of a woman, an expert in martial arts who had killed 12 policemen. When Palau conducted a crusade in Lima, she learned of it, and incensed by the message of Christianity, made her way to the stadium to kill the preacher. When she arrived, however, she heard his warning on hell, as today's scripture says, she "was cut to the heart." Convicted her of her sins, she embraced Christ as her Savior. Years later, Palau met Rosario for the first time. By then she had assisted in the planting of 5 churches, was an active witness for Jesus, and had founded an orphanage that housed over 1000 children." (Green, Illustrations for Biblical Preaching.)

What a great story. It has everything we want in a Christian conversion. It has a bad guy (or in this case, a bad gal), a faithful pastor preaching the Gospel, and a poor sinner cut to the heart then healed by divine grace. Plus her life has "*fruit*" which lends credence to the sincerity of her faith. It is a perfect "*power of the Gospel*" illustration. And this morning, in churches all over America, stories like Rosario's will be told in hopes of seeing one terrible sinner saved.

Maybe you are terrible. Maybe you are involved in serious sin from which you need deliverance. Please know that this is truth – God's grace is greater than all your sin. I pray that you, like Rosario, might fall under conviction and turn to Jesus for forgiveness and change.

Yet there are not many Rosarios here today, are there? (Have any of you murdered a policeman?) In fact, there will be few Rosarios in any churches this morning. Pastors will preach for their conversion, but they will not likely attend. Instead, however, some of us may leave feeling pretty good about ourselves: "*After all, I am not wicked; I do not need to be cut to the heart; I'm a good religious person in church on Sunday!*"

Might it be though, that some of the hardest hearts are not in the wicked?

But in us good religious people?

We who do not "need" God like Rosario?

Notice that our text describes, not terrible sinners, but good religious people who were "*cut to the heart,*" and then healed by Peter's first sermon. **The truth is that we good**

religious people also need that same "hurting" and "healing;" we also need to hear and heed the Gospel message as preached by Peter that first Pentecost Sunday.

So, today, let's think together about four characteristics of Peter's Gospel message that should cut to the heart of even us "good religious people."

1. Even Good religious people need to hear the Gospel

You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say Acts 2:22

1. Even Good religious people need to hear Gospel Preaching (Acts 2.5,37)

Peter was not ministering in a jail, nor in a Roman coliseum. He is not preaching to pagans, not to the Rosarios of the world, but to good religious people.

Yes, God's grace does convert some "terrible" people. The message of "freedom from slavery to sin" went to Milan in AD 400 and transformed the life of **Augustine**, formerly a promiscuous, rebellious collegiate playboy, into one of the greatest pastors of his day. And it still converts murderers on death row today just as it changed the hearts of Roman soldiers who were killing Christians when the Bible was written. The Gospel offers grace sufficient for all the depths of human depravity. Yet those are not the people whom Peter is addressing. He is "preaching to the choir." He is teaching about Jesus to men and women who are already seeking God. And when he was finished, "they were cut to the heart. (2:37)" We might say "they were deeply convicted" of their need for mercy.

Whether we know it or not, we good religious people are also in need of hearing and heeding the Gospel. In my 48 years of being a Christian, in the eleven churches in ten states in which I have either worshipped or served, I have seen only one church problem that was caused by someone from outside that church. Every other church problem has come from good religious church members.

Jesus faced the same resistance. When he ate with the irreligious or with those devalued and dismissed as, "sinners," the good religious people said: "*Why does he go to parties with pagans?*" To which Jesus replied

'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For **I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.**' Matthew 9:13

Jesus was rebuking these good religious people for refusing to acknowledge their own sinfulness and neediness. If you think Rosario needs grace more than you do, then you do not know the first thing about the Gospel. The Gospel has the same message for all us good religious people as for the Rosarios: "You are more wicked than you would have ever dared imagine."

So Peter preached the Gospel to these good religious people and they were "**cut to the heart.**" Will you hear that same message today? We all need to hear and heed the Gospel.

2. Even Good religious people need to acknowledge their role in Jesus life, death, and resurrection.

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*Jesus of Nazareth, [proven] to you by God,
according to the definite plan of God,*

...you crucified and killed.

But God raised him up. Acts 2:22-24

From many pulpits and podiums this morning, many preachers will simply be giving a brief self-help seminar. People will leave feeling some vague sense of goodness because God is on their side. But such is not the Gospel. Biblical preaching is about Jesus — his life, his death, his resurrection – and then how that reality changes your life. In his sermon, Peter listed out four aspects of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, that even us good religious people need to come to terms with

Jesus' Life was Proof that he was from God

Unlike me, Jesus lived a perfect life. He was both God and man, united in one person, born of a virgin, living here on earth. And in order to prove his divinity, he performed miracles: healing the sick, raising the dead, multiplying the fish and changing water into wine. These "signs" point us to Jesus as the promised savior sent to us by God.

This is critical, because in order to justify ourselves before a sinless God, we need a spotless substitute for our sins. On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the priest must offer up two animals: first one for his own sin and then another for the sins of the people. This was repeated yearly, for no sinless sacrifice existed. But Jesus offered

himself, his perfect life, once for all of us so that sin might be forever destroyed. We need to hear preaching which points us to Jesus as God's provision for us.

Jesus' Sacrifice was Ordained (Acts 2.23a)

Do you realize that we were built and born to live forever? Yes, we were created for eternal delight in fellowship and friendship with God. **Jesus was born to die.** In the unsearchable mystery of the Triune counsels of God, it was determined before the foundation of the world to make a people who would be redeemed by the death of the Son of God. *"For God so loved, He gave His son to save a wretch like good religious me!"*

Yes, the truth about Jesus cuts to my heart: **"My sin is so great that my only hope for salvation is if someone dies in my place."** Such a message is repulsive to high thoughts of ourselves! It cuts deep into our self-esteem and leaves us looking for help. But the great physician not only exposes the disease, he also heals! You have been shown in Jesus that the Father loves you more than you could ever hope – he gave his son! It was God's plan from the beginning to provide this perfect sacrifice.

Jesus' Death was My Doing (Acts 2.23b)

Why do you think those good people were "cut to the heart" by the Gospel message while so few of us are today?

The answer is that **they were convinced of their personal responsibility in Messiah's death.** For thousands of years the Jews had longed for a Messiah to save them. Yet when he arrives, they hate him, they mock him, they torture and kill him. Of course, those listening to Peter did not actually drive the nails, did they? So, in what sense, then, did they crucify Jesus?

Perhaps there were some listeners in that crowd who truly shared some guilt for Jesus' murder. But the primary force behind Jesus' death is that God appointed him to die for all sinners. So, **by sinning, both they and now I – and also you – have nailed him to that cross! Christ's death is my doing, your doing, because the Father made him our representative.**

Some may say, "I do not want such responsibility." Okay, there is an alternative – pay for your own sins. Live your own life and die your own death. But can you afford the cost? Either Jesus pays for your crimes or you pay. Those are the only two alternatives given to us.

Thankfully Gospel preaching does not end with the cross.

Jesus' Resurrection is My Hope (Acts 2.24)

In spite of some church's misguided devotion to crucifixes in which Jesus remains on the cross, the Bible reminds us that he is alive! Both the cross and the tomb are empty! Death could have no power over him, for Jesus is Lord of death and of hell and of Satan. And when Jesus rose, all of us for whom he died, rose with him. The sacrifice made; the atonement accepted; the price paid. The Father's wrath is appeased and the Son's obedience rewarded with a redeemed people; now he has countless brothers and sisters.

Praise God, there is hope – Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! We need to hear preaching which tells us the good news of Jesus' life, death, and especially, his resurrection!

3. So, even Good religious people need to accept the Gospel's Promises (Acts 2.38-40)

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This promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him Acts 2:39

The word "Gospel" means, "Good News." It is news because it accurately describes events which actually happened: Jesus lived and died and was raised up by God. But the Gospel is more than simply "news"; it is also good news. The "good" comes from the promises.

Specifically two promises are made in Peter's sermon. First is the promise of "**forgiveness**," — the assurance that all our past sins are wiped away, paid for by Christ. When God looks, he sees me wrapped in the person of his Son.

Farmers say one way to get a cow – having lost its own – to accept another orphaned calf, is to lay the skin of the dead calf over the orphan; when the mother smells her former calf she accepts the orphan as her own.

God can't be so easily fooled, yet he chooses to view us this same way – seeing us as sinless because he sees us wrapped within his son.

As wonderful as that is, however, there is more: **the gift of the Holy Spirit**. You can think of it this way: **forgiveness is a promise which deals with my past failures;**

the presence and power of the Holy Spirit points forward to my future victories. No longer must you be a slave to sin! No longer will it have dominion! No longer must you continue in behavior which destroys both you and your loved ones! You have the Spirit of Holiness.

Forgiven and indwelt by the Holy Spirit! *“Together these constitute the freedom for which all people are searching — both freedom from guilt, defilement, judgment, and self-centeredness, and freedom to be the persons God made and meant us to be.”* (John Stott).

These twin promises of forgiveness and a changed life, through grace and the presence of the Holy Spirit, are tremendous! Have you, good religious person, received this gift by believing that it is also for you?

4. Even Good religious people need to respond to the Gospel

***Repent, and be baptized every one of you
in the name of Jesus Christ
so that your sins may be forgiven;
and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.***
Acts 2:38

4. Even Good religious people need to respond to the Gospel (Acts 2.37, 38, 41)

But, notice your response must include three parts..

Your Response Must Include Guilt

Upon hearing the news Peter’s listeners were “cut to the heart.” They felt guilt; they knew they were wrong. They killed the Messiah and offended the Holy God. No longer was it the “bad gals out there,” who were the problem — it is the bad guy right here who needs saving. Guilt is a good response to Gospel preaching. We should feel convicted; we are sinful! In fact, here is one of the great failures of preaching today – Rosario can be cut to the heart, but the good religious people are not so easily cut.

After the sermon one lady said “Preacher you really stepped on my toes today.”
“I’m truly sorry” the pastor replied, “I was aiming for your heart.”

Yes the Gospel message is aimed right at your heart. But guilt alone is not a sufficient response: Your Response must also include Repentance

The word “repent” means, primarily, a change in your way of thinking, a 180 degree turn from your previous response to God. For these Jews, it meant no longer thinking of Jesus as a criminal; now he would be worshipped as their Messiah, their savior. Their thinking about the person and work of Jesus Christ was radically changed by the Gospel. The same must happen to us. Here are some ways that might happen.

- No longer will I think of Jesus as simply an interesting teacher; now I will accept him as Lord of my conscience and master of my thinking. My attitudes on money, marriage, singleness, church government, evangelism, the law — everything, will become conformed to his standards. As Our Bible teaches:

Since he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct. 1 Peter 1.15

- No longer will I think of Jesus as giving me grace to sin; from now on he my Savior whose grace and Spirit which alone helps me live a holy life.
- No longer does Jesus say that my behavior is a matter of private interpretation; he is now the Interpreter of all things.
- No longer is Jesus impotent to protect you from suffering; he is the sovereign Lord who so controls the world that that you might know the joy of sharing in his sufferings.

On and on the list can go. Will you, good religious person, change your false thinking about Jesus?

- Recognize that you also need to hear and heed the Gospel?
- That you are also responsible for Christ’s death?
- Accept both the cutting and the healing that the Gospel’s promises offer you?
- And that even though good and religious, you still need to repent and ask for Christ to be your savior?

Finally your Response Must Include Baptism

Those who believed in Jesus made a public profession of their faith, were baptized, and joined the church. It is popular in America to think that religion is a matter best kept as a private experience. But Biblical faith cannot be private, because it is a change of mind

and heart about Jesus which changes of every aspect of your life. Private religion is a faith without Jesus! If you have not yet done so, If you have just been a good religious person all your life, will you join with those who just like you were cut to the heart and commit to Christ's church?

One day the pastor called on a 96-year-old man who had just lost his wife of many years. The old man said, "There's nothing I want more than to be with my wife again."

The pastor said, "Now why do you say that? You don't profess to be a Christian. How do you know where she is? And can you be sure you'd be happy there?"

The old man thought a few moments and said, "You're right. In fact, when it comes right down to it, the thought of leaving this life terrifies me." Then he blurted out: "I'm sick of living, but I'm afraid of dying."

So let's cut to the heart of this matter
(yes, this is where the phrase probably came from).

Maybe some of you are sick of living like Rosario. You wonder, "Is there forgiveness sufficient for my terrible life, for my awful sins?" Jesus' resurrection proves that the Father has accepted his death as your perfect sacrifice. Will you accept his gift and his life in your place?

Perhaps others of you are sick of living a life of pretended righteousness. You long to admit your need, to confess your weariness, to quit acting what you are not. The death of Christ proves that there are none righteous, no not one. Accept the cutting of the great physician and find his healing grace.

And for all of you who may still be afraid of dying, remember this: the grave is empty. Christ is risen! And so will you if you hear and heed the Gospel

Let's pray about this.