

WHAT WE BELIEVE—YOU CAN KNOW THAT YOU KNOW: Preaching the Gospel

By Bob Young

A related series can also be preached evangelistically to the church as a reminder of basic truths about God.

Let God be God: God in action. He is a God of being, but is beset revealed and seen as a God of verbs.

Creating, 1-2

Blessing, 1-2

Covenanting-promising, 1-4

Calling, 4

Re-creating, 4-5

Uniting, 6-7

You Can Know that You Know #1—GOD: God's Nature, God's Plan

We must begin with "the faithful God"

God's Plan: God Has a Creative Purpose for Us

Foundational Elements of the Gospel

The word "gospel" is thrown around quite loosely in our time. Listening to many sermons in churches today, internet, written, audio or AV, we could get the idea that any preaching/teaching that has even a passing reference to Jesus in it qualifies as gospel and qualifies a sermon as a gospel sermon. Some sermons seem to get by without any scripture at all, unless a passing reference to John 3:16. Sermons include news, movies, personal roads to happiness but little Bible, either openly or veiled. (Illustration from Terry Pace.)

Other times, it seems we get to pick and choose our emphasis, whatever appeals to us most in the Bible. Whatever is convenient or personally advantageous to the speaker or listener. Thus, preacher can fit comfortable into secular world, Christians do not have to fear cultural rejection, they can go forth into the world and be little noticed, little changed. Little of a Christian world-view in view here.

What happened to the biblical gospel? Needs to be restored. Is lost and needs to be found.

I know 1 Cor. 15, gospel defined by Paul.

But in this series we identify six elements to be included in a biblical balanced evangelistic message, foundations of faith, what we MUST know and understand: (1) creation, (2) rebellion, (3) God's loving grace, (4) human response, (5) eternal judgment and reward, and (6) God's eternal purpose for his people and the world. We will take these on one at a time. Presenting a complete gospel increases chances for real conversions and closer walks with God from the moment of spiritual birth.

CREATION

Gen. 1:1, begin with God. What does God want? Recognize Him, Respect Him.

This is the story of creation. Knowing the creation story and its dynamics is the foundation of any valid decision for Christ. Today theory of evolution has overshadowed the basic truth that human beings are God's supreme creation, that we were created by God. If God did not create us...we are no more than animals which means there is no right or wrong and we have no

accountability; there is not a God who speaks with moral authority from a moral perspective. If there is no heavenly plan for human beings...we are merely part of an ongoing evolutionary process. No wonder people don't feel any need to make a change in their lives!

Giving people the truth about human origin enables us to see the past, present, and future as a coordinated plan of God. This defines our role on earth, gives guidelines for relationships and provides foundations for scientific thought. Understanding life as created by God gives a new believer a comprehension of God's power and control of the universe.

The biblical account of creation tells us about God, about us, and about Jesus. It tells us that we were meant to have God's character and a moral view of life. We are destined by our creator to be noble and good because HE is!

Who is God?

Three significant characteristics: Holiness, Justice, Love/Mercy

Three significant activities: creating, sustaining, redeeming/saving

A brief word about the question we will expand next week: what about human beings?

Image of God, human beings.

Who is Jesus?

Jesus is God!

What is God's Plan for you?

Fellowship with him

Blessing by him

Likeness to him

You Can Know that You Know #2—HUMAN CREATION: Human Nature, Human Rebellion
Our study continues with “the unfaithful creation”
Our Rebellion: We Have Really Messed Up, but It's Not Beyond Repair

What does God want?

#1: Recognition, Respect

#2: Realization

[#3: Reconciliation]

[#4: Repentance]

The dictionary defines the word rebellion as: open resistance to authority...

“Human rebellion against God has wreaked havoc on the world, bringing disease and death into God’s good creation. Human efforts to overcome these things seem only to exacerbate the problems, indeed, sometimes to consume our very humanity. Yet God in His grace has stooped down into the very depths of fallen creation and human existence to retrieve that which was lost, to repair that which has been shattered, to restore that which evil has consumed.”

That means we have to talk about sin.

Sin is breaking the law, opposing authority.

That means someone has authority. We tried to establish that last week. God has authority-- because of who he is, because of what he has done.

1 John 3:4; John 8:34

A person who commits sin is a slave to sin.

So.....sin is not something you inherit, it is something you do.

It is not possible to sin without breaking the law.

Jesus took our sin, but that does not make him a sinner.

What the Bible says....

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:6

God commanded man not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But Adam and Eve in the garden were tempted. Eve sinned first, heard, believed, obeyed a lie. But note that Adam did not inherit Eve’s sin, not guilty by association, but guilty because he did what he was commanded not to do.

Ezek. 18:4, 20-24

Each person is responsible for his/her own sin. God does not hold you responsible for your father’s sins. Sin is not passed on from one generation to the next. The results of sin are not passed on; the consequences of sin may endure.

God does not hold you responsible for your children’s sins.

But this is important, we are not born “lost” because of the sins of humankind before us.

How then does sin come into our lives: James 1:12-15; 4:17

God does not tempt us to do wrong.

But when we refuse to do what we know is right, we commit _____

Each person is tempted by their own desires, which conceive and give birth to sin, which results in death. This is individual responsibility.

1 Pet. 5:6-9, Satan is seeking to devour us.

Gal. 5:19-21, works of the flesh oppose the Spirit of God within us, the authority of God within us, and those who practice such things do not and cannot inherit the kingdom of God?

2 Thess. 2:8-12, people perish because they do not love the truth. We all have a choice, but some choose to despise truth and love untruth.

1 Tim. 2:1-4, God does not want people to be lost, God desires that all be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

Romans 1:18-32

Rom. 1:24-32 THE RESULTS OF MAN'S REBELLION

This text deals with God's divine wrath against sin. The results of man's rebellion against God are told in clear language.

Note three terms in our text: "God also gave them up", v. 24; "God gave them up", v. 26; and "God gave them over", v.28. These phrases say there is a limit to the patience and longsuffering of God. When man makes his choice to abandon God, God will also choose to abandon man.

We are surrounded by millions who have been abandoned to the lifestyle they have chosen over God. These are capable of any sin imaginable. There are people we know who are living a life that exists under the shadow resulting from their abandonment of God and His abandonment of them.

I. vv. 24-25 THE SUBSTANCE OF MAN'S SINFUL REBELLION

v. 24 Based In Sinful Choices - Man chooses sin over God because sin is bound up in his own heart, Matt. 15:15:19-20; James 1:14. The natural man will always choose sin over the will of God, the word of God and the purposes of God. Man is a sinner and nothing can remedy that short of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ!

(Note that the more a man seeks to honor himself by exalting his will over that of God, the more dishonorable he becomes. When he chooses sin over a relationship with the living God, his sinful nature grows more corrupt still. Eph. 4:22, "corrupt" - Present, passive, participle. Literally, "corrupting"! The whole character representing the former self is not only corrupt, but growing more and more corrupt. Every trait of the old man's behavior is putrid, crumbling, or inflated like rotting waste or corpses. It stinks and is ripe for being disposed of and forgotten forever! That is the truth about natural man!)

v. 25 Based In Sinful Changes - Since man refuses to live by God's law, v. 18, he invents his own law! The result is that man also invents his own gods, the chief god usually being "Self." God calls this behavior the exchange of a truth for a lie! Man trades that which is living, helpful and vital for that which is dead, harmful and vain!

(Why does man do this? Because he possesses an overwhelming desire to worship. However, he needs a god that will condone his sinful behavior! Therefore, he lives for self and his invented gods.)

II. vv. 26-27 THE SYMBOL OF MAN'S SINFUL REBELLION

(Because man has chosen his sin over God, man is given over, v. 26, to vile affections. The depths to which man can sink are represented here. These next two verses describe absolute bottom of the pit of iniquity. The basic idea here is that this is where societies always end up when they choose their ways over God's ways. It has been the case in every major society throughout history, and we are seeing the same trend in America tonight.)

v. 26-27a Man's Attractions Are Sickening - In these verses, the Apostle describes the sin of homosexuality. Yes, I said sin! He pictures the depths of depravity. Why this sin and not any of the thousands of others? I think the answer lies in the fact that homosexuals are typically given to more promiscuous behavior than heterosexuals. One statistic has found that many homosexual males have as many as 300 different sexual partners a year. The sad thing for us is that the homosexual community in America is estimated to be about 1% of the population. However, they are given special privileges and are promoting their lifestyle in the open, demanding that people like you and me endorse them, accept them and affirm them in what they are doing! Even those at the highest echelons of our government are extending special

favors to homosexuals and promoting the homosexual agenda. Yet, I still find the thought of same sex relationships revolting, abominable and utterly sinful and depraved. God does too!

(Note: Paul tells us in v. 26 that "even their women" were involved in this insidious lifestyle. The emphasis here is that women are usually the last bastion of morality in any society. Men are more given to sin, especially sexual sin, than are women. However, Paul is describing a people who are totally given up to a sinful standard of life.)

(We need to be much in prayer for those who are in the forefront opposing the onslaught. As days go by, the battle cry will be for "tolerance".

(What is really sad is that certain mainline denominations are seriously considering accepting, ordaining and marrying homosexuals. That some groups are all for declassifying homosexuality as a sin! Even the fact that it would be debated at all is almost beyond my comprehension!)

v. 27b Man's Addiction Is Settled - This choice of lifestyles, and it is a choice, brings its own judgment! When God gives a man up to his choice of lifestyles, that man will find that his attraction to and addiction to his sin will become stronger by the day. These are literally overcome by their vile affections. What used to bring a twinge of shame when committed, now does not faze them at all, opening the door for them to sink to ever deeper levels of sinful depravity. That is the "recompense of sin". Being abandoned by God enslaves a man to His sin fully!

III. V. 28-32 THE SCOPE OF MAN'S SINFUL REBELLION

v. 28a Seen In His Decision - At this point, man's rejection of God is complete. As they give themselves more fully to their sins, the less room they have in their minds for God. Eventually, He is rooted totally out of the picture by the vile affections that have these people trapped! Even the gods of his own invention become less and less necessary. The person who has come this far in his rebellion comes to think of himself as his own god.

v. 28b-31 Seen In His Depravity - We are told that God gives them over to a "reprobate " mind. That refers to something that has been put to the test, failed the test and has been rejected. The word was used to refer to the refining of metals. The idea is that men did not want God in their lives, so He gives them over to the power of a totally depraved mind. At this point, they are absolutely capable of any sin imaginable! The Apostle gives us a list of 23 sins. These are not meant to be an exhaustive list of possible sins, but it is a mere representation of the sins of which man is capable of committing. Most are self explanatory, but a word needs to be said about a few anyway.

1. Unrighteousness, Fornication and Wickedness - These categories of sin encompass all those listed below and every other form of sin imaginable! They are all represented in these words.
2. Covetousness: Appetite for the things of other.
3. Maliciousness: ill-will and vengeance.
4. Envy: It is the spirit that wants not only the things that another person has, but begrudges the fact that the person has them. It is the spirit that wants not only the things to be taken away from the person, but wants him to suffer through the loss of them.
5. Murder: Obvious!
6. Debate: A spirit given to fighting!
7. Deceit: Pure old lying.
8. Malignity: A spirit do filled with evil, envy and hatred that it loves nothing better than the destruction of another human being!
9. Whisperers: A gossip who seeks to harm another's reputation.
10. Backbiters: While the one above is done in secret, this one is done openly. It is the same spirit.
11. Haters of God: This is a person who hates the standards and restrictions imposed by God. His goal is to be the god of his own life.
12. Despitiful: A life of defiance that dares God or other men to get in its way. This kind of person is determined to have his own way at all costs.
13. Proud: Self-exaltation.
14. Boasters: This is a braggart, one who brags about what he has or what he has done, even if it isn't true.

15. Inventors of Evil Things: This is a person who is tired of sin as usual and seeks new forms of pleasure and excitement.
16. Disobedient to Parents: Obvious! Watch a rebellious child! He/she is open to all kinds of sinful activity!
17. Without Understanding: This is a person who refuses to learn by experience. They have rejected the truth and have closed their eyes and minds to it!
18. Covenant Breakers: Untrustworthy! Refers to people who will not keep their word! You simply cannot depend on them!
19. Without Natural Affection: abnormal affection and love, heartless, without human emotion or love, a lack of feeling for others, abuse of normal affection and love. Others become little more than pawns for a man's own use and benefit, pleasure and purposes, excitement and stimulation. Abnormal affection, sex and perversion prevail.
20. Implacable: A person who is unwilling to make peace or come to an agreement.
21. Unmerciful: It is an absence of consideration or feelings for others. What matters is one's own pleasure and rights, not the pleasure and rights of others.
(This describes the world in which we live!)

Here's the problem. There is no way people can be saved if they do not know they are lost. Sometimes we Christians talk about God's love, forgiveness, and benevolence. We tend to bypass the less popular discussions of sin, our criminal situation, our rebellion against God. This is the source of no little difficulty in the western world, for it suggests what many people already believe—there is no absolute right and wrong, only different views of reality, different values, different situations.

The only way we can combat the problems that are everywhere around us is to discuss THE problem opening and candidly. Right/wrong has to be explained by God's standards, with the creation story we discussed last week in the background. If we do not start with God, we end up without God. We end up without morals, without love, without any of the things that have to do with God. And we end up without truth, in a world operating by relativism and situational ethics.

Now this is the problem, and we must not shun it. We must not be afraid to call a spade a spade. We must identify sin. We must talk about those things in our world that deny the very existence of God.

Some preachers try to keep people from feeling condemnation from their preaching. Maybe I am among that group too often. But, if someone is lost, that person needs to feel lost and condemned, so that he/she will turn to the Savior. God gave Moses the law, not so the Israelites would be saved, but so they would recognize their lost condition and turn to God. Remember the words of Paul: Rom. 7:7-8. For people to know guilt and to experience the corresponding godly sorrow that leads them to repentance, they must understand their own spiritual rebellion. They must understand the goodness of God (Rom. 2:4); they must understand the nature of sin in the life of every person.

Now, this is not to suggest we should be self-righteous or condemning in the way we talk to people. We are obviously not the standard of holiness. To suggest that we are the pattern and that we have it all together would be pharisaical. We should preach the gospel with tears in our eyes. Story of two different personal workers: one told me I was lost and seemed glad of

it, the other told me I was lost with tears in his eyes. We will not talk to nor change many until we have tears in our eyes over the lost. This the true measure of how much we love. We must be able to admit our own rebellion, our own imperfections, and our own sins. We have been lawbreakers and failures. This is genuine humility—we are not perfect.

Now one way to think of this is that we are not preaching a list of do's and don'ts. Rather, we are lifting up God and his character, his nature, his love as the standard, and he is perfectly holy. The holiness of God is the standard by which all will be judged. To preach God as the standard, to see God, and to see us for who we are, valuable but rebellious, allows the Holy Spirit to do his work in convicting of sin, righteousness, and judgment. (John 16:8-11).

Now the truth of the matter is that the exhortations of 2 Timothy 3 and those of 2 Timothy 4 could have been written in our time. (3:1-5; 4:1-5).

Unless we are willing to share this part of the gospel, it will fall on deaf ears. Too often we are careful to keep the integrity of God's word, but we emphasize only a certain part of that word, and we end up with a one-sided, people-pleasing message. The average church member is shocked to even consider that we should discuss sin in specific terms.

Such is an indication of the worldly influence in the church. Our message of the gospel must include a clear description of sin in uncompromising terms. This is imperative, if we are to see real, lasting change and transformation as people are converted to Christ. A listener doesn't know how good the good news is if he hasn't come face to face with the bad news.

Next week, we'll talk about the good news (gospel), but first we have to see the bad news.

The bad news is really bad.

The bad news is personal.

The bad news is pervasive, but that is no humanly devised justification or salve.

You Can Know that You Know #3—GOD’S GRACE: The initiative of grace
The God who acts/speaks/reveals is the one who “acts in faith” (acts faithfully)
This is the epitome of grace, generous initiative; cost and value
God’s Love: God Takes the First Graceful Step
We must understand God’s ‘good faith’ commitment and fidelity
Why Did God Pay Such a High Price?
Our Value
The cost is consistent with the perceived value

Introduction

Two weeks—thinking about basics, gospel foundations, message of Bible.
Artificial—usually in sermon or Bible study don’t have luxury of dealing with one item at a time, we want to say everything that needs to be said, but sometimes we Christians need to come face to face with the details.
What must people see—come face to face with God, his existence, his nature, his plan, his purpose. This is much of the OT. This is easily overlooked. We assume God. We assume the basics—to our detriment.

What must we see—God, he has revealed himself. Cannot see God unless he reveals himself—natural revelation, supernatural revelation.

See God in nature, but only that he exists. Not see his nature (perhaps his grandeur), not see his plan, his purpose.

Only see God completely in supernatural revelation, he reveals himself, he shows himself. That is how we know him, know about him.

This is the value of the Bible. It cannot be assumed.

Ask question: What does God want? Not know answer until we study/know/read the Bible?

#1: God wants Recognition, Respect

There is a God in heaven. He is there, he is real, he is the only explanation of this world. He is there, and he is not silent. Who is God, what is he like?

He sent Jesus so that we might recognize him, so that we might know something of what he is like.

Jesus came, in nature of God, divine, but taking human nature (John 1:1,14)

He came in humility, servanthood, sacrifice (Phil. 2:5-11).

He came experienced our life, thus capable of succoring, strengthening, appearing before God on our behalf, Heb. 2,4.

When we see Jesus, fix our on God through Jesus, we see another problem more clearly.

#2: God wants Realization—that we realize the nature of reality.

This demands that we come face to face with a second matter: Who are we? What is the human nature, condition, dilemma? What is the human incapacity? Lots of sermons begin and end here—the human problem, and the essence of that is sin. We will not define it as such unless we begin with God! We will end up only with human frailty, weakness, human imperfection, lots of descriptions—illnesses, not our fault.

The nature of the human condition is that it is torqued, it is twisted, that is the impact of sin, and it is our human experience.

Further, when we see God, and when we see the human experience, we see relationship broken, we see the impossibility of life, the impossibility of the creative plan without recreation.

We have tried to say all of that, to bring that to understanding. I appreciate your patience—we have done this in a plodding way, little by little, trying to understand the entire message of Scripture.

#3: Then we are ready to know that God desires Reconciliation, a way to return to him, and will involve the interaction of humans with God, response in repentance and change (as we will discuss in more detail next week).

God desire that the broken relationship be restored, but it is impossible.

What is it impossible? Because of God's purity/holiness, separation from sin, not in individual daily actions and decisions as we experience as humans, but by his very nature. God is holy, but he is also just, and he is merciful. It is this three-fold understanding of God's nature that shows the dilemma of restoration.

Yet, restoration is the essence of religion, being bound back to God—recognizing the great rift that has occurred, seeing the God who is seeking us despite the fact that we are not looking for him. He comes seeking us, calling us, recreating us in his image, a process little by little. That is good news.

You know that I like to preach specific texts, but that is hard to do with the theme we are exploring, because the Bible is filled with God, filled with the problems of human experience, filled with the grace of God, filled with the generous initiative that God has taken on our behalf, from creation, to sustaining, to providing a way back when we wandered away.

How does one preach the grace of God? How does one communicate how vital, how important, how rescuing is the action of God in our lives. How personal this is—not just for the world, but for me, for you, for us. For those we love, those we care for.

Rom. 5:8.

To a person drowning in sin, John 3:16-17 makes sense and is good news. To the hopeless, this is hope. To the guilty, this is release and relief.

When we really begin to deal with the hurting and hopeless and homeless in our society, we do not have to spend a whole lot of time diagnosing the problem of humankind—that is sin, that was our subject last week.

Alice Foote. Eva. Annie. Larry Hayduk.

E. L. Thompson, extended family.

“Was lost, but now am found.”

When we know this, we are more than ready to hear about the love of God in Christ. When we set the two in contrast: the intense mess we have made and the intense love by which God will

remedy the mess, we are relieved. We are comforted; we realize the immensity of the grace of God (Eph. 2:4ff). Forgiveness of sins washes over us like a flood. The goodness of God overwhelms us (Rom. 2:4).

When we are convicted by what the Bible says about sin, we are ready to hang on every word about God's promised forgiveness. The news about what God did in sending his Son, the price Jesus paid on the cross, has deep and real meaning. This is the best part of the message—what we are talking about today is really good news if we are aware of our need.

But that is hard—because we grew up with it, now it is old hat, we no longer know we need it, or we have given up on its ability to really change our lives, but because this matter of following Jesus did not come out the way we thought it would. We underestimated the power of Satan, and the power of our culture, and its influence on our families and lives. So we forget, we walk at a distance.

The solution is in the story of Jesus. This is his life on earth, his love for people, his teaching, preaching and healing, how he delivered folks mentally, physically and spiritually. This is life remade and reborn. This is the essence of the gospel—what he did through his death and resurrection.

These facts assure us of two things: Jesus is more powerful than death and the forces of the devil, and Christ is alive. This is the demonstration of God's power and love. This is demonstrated through signs and wonders.

Recognizing the goodness of God helps people to the next step: God desires response, repentance. The goodness of God leads people to repentance.

We have heard the gospel, we have personally been redeemed, not perfected, but sanctified. We are struggling pilgrims, we are daily challenged. But in Jesus Christ is the possibility of a new life because of what God has done for us. This is a part of the message that must not be shortened. We can talk all day about the benefits of the new life in Christ, what God has done for us, how we are changed, how our lives are different, our families, our acquaintances, our experiences. We rejoice in what it is like to walk and talk with Jesus every day. There is an euphoria in intimacy with God, and that is far more than temporal blessing or momentary happiness.

I offer to you today intimacy with God. Incredible—given who God is, given who we are, that there can be reconciliation and grace extended when we are undeserving. But that is the gospel, that is the purpose of the DBR of Jesus Christ, so that we out of our spiritual death can find life through the newness of baptism, imitating him, and in resurrection to the new life. There is no new life biblically without this dependence on the death of Jesus, identifying with his death, participating in his death, acknowledging God, self, and separation so there can be restored relationships, not only with God, but also with one another.

You Can Know What You Know #4—FREE MORAL AGENCY, HUMAN CHOICE: Human Response

God wishes a faithful (“faith”) response and continued fidelity

Our Response: Now the Ball's in Our Court

What does God want? Response to Him

- #1: Recognition, Respect
- #2: Realization of the human reality
- #3: Reconciliation, restoration of relationship, redemption
- #4: Response, Repentance

When Christ returns to this earth, he will not come as a gentle lamb representing a God who can be defined totally and acceptably by the single characteristic of love. Rather he will come full of the fury and wrath of God Almighty against sin. It is essential that we have in view both aspects of the returning Christ: yes, a loving Savior, but also the God of justice who judges and makes war against all those who oppose him, even against those who merely refuse to take sides. He that is not with me is against me.

The fact is that this teaching about the character of Christ has almost disappeared in contemporary teaching and preaching. We have a tepid view of what it means to be a Christian. We rarely speak of the army of God; we are certainly not desirous of being militant or aggressive, we would hardly want to wage an offensive offensive, we are pretty content being community—church dinners, camping, conferences.

In view of the human mess, the only solution to which is Jesus Christ and him crucified, one must ask where is the preaching about the ruling King with his measuring line of justice, his plumb line of righteousness. Who talks about the Jesus with a sharp sword coming from his mount, striking down the nations, ruling with an iron scepter, leading his righteous army in battle? No wonder the average contemporary church has become so passive, so pleasing, and so innocuous. No wonder new churchgoers and most Christians are so passive. The Christ they hear about passively loves everyone and everything, regardless.

My purpose in this series is to call the church, this body of Christ, and my fellow preachers to a rigorous reexamination of the story of the Christ: to get into the Old Testament and learn about the God of heaven, to get into the gospel and watch Jesus. Watch his actions, hear his words afresh. Let me tell you what you will see—you will see the kindness (come to me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden) and the sternness (woe to you...) of God. You will see the nature of God in Christ, consistently revealed. Let's get the balance right. This is essential!

God wants human beings to recognize and respect him. That doesn't happen when the average Christian in our society hardly thinks about God, cares little for the people of God, cares even less for the people of the world whom God loves, and is hardly distinguishable in daily living from the surrounding world. What does it mean to recognize God, to respect (worship) God? What does it mean to ascribe to him honor and glory and praise and adoration?

God wants human beings to recognize their dilemma, the sin dilemma, the criminal nature of the human experience, the nature of reality. Lifting up God's nature to full view—especially as that nature is visible in Jesus—sets a different standard, and one we cannot meet ever by our own efforts or our own merit.

God so much desires reconciliation and the restoration of broken relationships that he paid the ultimate price, made the ultimate sacrifice in sending his Son to the cross. His love is demonstrated in Christ; the heart of God is in the heart of Christ, emptying himself, sacrificing himself, the God who serves, stoops down, shows himself. We must see that side of God as well—yes, his love, his grace, his generosity, his mercy (hesed), loving kindness. Without seeing that part of God, we cannot reach the next step, for it is the mercy of God that leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

There are multiple aspects to our response—we cannot cover all of them in one lesson, we can only begin. This lesson will end: to be continued...

→God desires a response of recognition/worship/respect. I believe in God, not only that he exists, but who he is, what he is about, what he is capable of doing, his power, what is his plan and purpose, his intent, what makes God God.

→God desires a response in recognition of the Lordship of Jesus.

→God calls us to turn, change, transformation: the Bible calls it repentance.

God calls us to “pay a price”. It cannot be true that there is a version of Christianity that requires nothing. There is no non-participating plan. There is no costless, cheap discipleship. We must stop separating the truth of salvation from the Lordship—because there is no salvation without complete submission to Christ's lordship. Rom. 10:8-10. Jesus is Lord and Christ.

We say the words so easily that they have all but lost their meaning. Because of the prevailing false versions of Christianity everywhere about us, this may be the most vital part of this series of messages, because it is the most difficult. If we cannot see this, we cannot make a deep, lasting decision to be a Christ-follower. We follow at a distance, we are discouraged at the first problem, we are not all the way in, and so we are uncomfortable, because we know we are not all the way in, and thus we suspect that we are at least partially out.

Submission to the Lordship of Jesus (#1) cannot be separated from salvation in Christ (#2). The Bible does not separate them, neither can we. And....we have to get them in the right order.

Those to whom Paul was writing in the first century understood Lordship. If an individual gave himself to a “lord”, he gave up everything. He surrendered every aspect of his life. Rights, possessions, even names were given up for the Lord. They made the decision (and sacrifice, at least in our terms) willingly because of what they understood they would get in return: membership in a new household with benefits, protection, security, honor. Debts paid, clean slate, old enemies vanquished, old problems gone. That is what we get when we follow Christ. This is a message of self-denial, not for the purpose of denying self, or self-deprivation, but for the purpose of laying down our lives for our Lord, and trusting him to take care of everything.

We must surrender all to Jesus—this is the first decision, it is based on the goodness of God. There will not likely be biblical repentance until we get to this step. We have overlooked it; ignored it, not seen it. All must belong to Jesus—our future, relationships, will, and resources. More will be required, but the “more” is not a problem, because we have made a “once for all” decision. When people come to Jesus with this spirit, they come broken, needing and expecting a complete transformation.

Now you may be thinking that this kind of preaching will drive people away, but the opposite is true in my judgment. The harder the challenge, the larger the response. People are looking for something to live for, something worth dying for.

And that something is clear in God’s work and purpose, rescuing us from our self-made difficulties, providing evidence of his redeeming love and great desire to restore relationships, and calling us to respond—in worship, in submission.

You Can Know that You Know #5--The Rest of the Story -1

God's faithful future; God desires our continued fidelity; God rewards our faithful response

The Rest of the Story: What a Future!

God's Eternity is Our Destiny

Today we near the end of the gospel story—eternal judgment and reward. We have made a long journey in a short time.

We began with God—all that he is. We must recognize God who is worthy of and wants respect (worship).

We saw humanity—beginning in the Garden and incapable of getting better.

We saw God graciously reach down to penetrate the human experience and resolve the human dilemma.

We surveyed the human response God desires.

Until a person, even a Christian, has a good understanding of heaven and hell, the perspective on Christianity remains incomplete. Life is properly defined by understanding God's eternal purpose, and his eternal purpose concerns our eternal destiny. The gospel that Jesus died, buried, and rose encompasses something beyond the experiences of this life.

When people are ignorant of eternity, two problems arise. First, without an understanding of heaven and God's goodness, there is no hope. Second, without an understanding of hell and God's wrath and fury, there is no fear. As we claimed last week, a balanced and biblical view of God requires that we preach and keep in view both aspects of God's character.

The average Christian has little understanding of heaven and hell. We have developed in the church a very temporal view of Christianity. We think of Christianity primarily in the here and now. As a result we are weak and easily influenced by the circumstances of life. Our commitment and fervor comes and goes based on what happens in life—personally, family, church, business, etc.—at any given time. Those Christians who do have an understanding of eternity have gotten it more from the movies or television than from the Bible.

The biblical teaching about eternity is not mystical or vague. There are real places (not necessarily physically real, for they transcend the physical reality we know in our experience on this earth). They are described in the Bible with some detail. During Jesus' life on this earth, his relationship with the Father was so close that heaven was perhaps for him as real as earth. Jesus' kingdom teaching refers both to the present world (kingdom near you, kingdom on earth) and the future world (kingdom of heaven). Jesus told parables to help people understand the kingdom world he described.

Many people who strive to be followers of Jesus do not understand this key kingdom concept: what we do here on earth with regard to the kingdom affects our heaven kingdom experience. If we understand this, we live differently. If we define the benefits of Christianity only in temporal terms—fellowship, hope in this life, blessings...etc., we do an injustice to the teachings of Jesus, and we do not really have much to offer unbelievers who may find their own unique ways to deal with these aspects and problems in life.

Temporal mindedness leaves us complacent and apathetic, more concerned with sporting events and vacations than our God-given mission in life. Temporal mindedness establishes wrong priorities and takes us away from the things of God for the least little thing—at least in

the long-term eternal view. Jesus and the apostles constantly focused on eternal destiny, the fact of accountability. As a result, they were sober-minded and willing to lay down their lives to reach a lost world. To them suffering was not unusual, but was to be expected. Suffering is a small matter in comparison to the eternal reward (Rom. 8:17ff).

This eternal perspective still exists in some places in our world. And in those places, the church is growing. The Christians in these areas look much like the church in the book of Acts—devoted, prayerful, filled with power, preaching the Word boldly.

Lazarus and the rich man: Luke 16:22-26.

We have mythologized hell and punishment. We have laughed at it; it is innocuous and not so bad. It is fantasy in the minds of many. Such is not the Bible account: 2 Thess. 1:7-10, separation eternally from presence of God.

It is alarming to see people on the road to this destruction. They suffer here, and will suffer eternally.

Three great facts about heaven:

Eternal blessings and relief, Rev. 21:4, no tears, death, mourning, crying, pain

Eternal reward: Rev. 22:12

Eternal presence: John 14:1-6

We have an awesome future in Christ. If we do not preach hell, equally we do not preach heaven. When heaven is preached, it is often preached temporally. Heaven is eternal presence with God. He is there, and we are with him. We are eternal beings—this is the ultimate restoration of the intent of Eden. This is what makes sense of the world and of life. 2 Cor. 4:17-18.

We must come face to face with the fact that there is little passion in the modern church for evangelism, and one reason for this is that we do not have an eternal perspective. We do not paint the horrible portraits of preaching past, and we do not read carefully about the God who acted so that none would perish.

There is an unseen, eternal world. 2 Cor. 5:11. We want to persuade people to surrender their lives to Jesus. We want to help people enter a new life in Christ. We want to help God's people remain faithful.

So there you have it—the rest of the story, Part I. God's greatness, our humanness, God's initiative, our response, because eternity is in the balance.

God's greatness made possible the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

Our human incapacity made necessary the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus

God's gracious initiative makes clear the sacrificial love behind the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

Our response imitates the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

Eternity tells us why the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus matters.

You Can Know that You Know #6—What Am I Doing in a Church?

God's faithful family

The Rest of the Story—Part 2: What a Fellowship!

God establishes a faithful community

The church is God's plan for insuring our destiny.

The church clearly sees God, humanity, grace that balances cost and value, and human responsibility.

In these truths, the church finds its identity, purpose, vision, and mission; and therein it ultimately finds its destiny.

Church, a place of faith

Be-lieve, be a believer, live as a believer

Church, a place of fellowship, discipleship

Become a follower of Jesus, followers/disciples are made (Mt 28)

Baptism, learning, lifestyle

Church, a place of focus

Become involved, mission, tasks

Church, a family and fellowship

Be-long

Church, a place of friendships

Be friendly, connect, be inviting, seek others

Church, a place of festivity

Be worshipful

Church, a place for fidelity

Be faithful

Church, a people with a future

Be hopeful