

# Make It Personal

Acts 2:22-24 NIV

During a Bible study, an individual expressed a desire to become a Christian. The person leading the study asked some basic questions:

“Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God?”  
And the person said, “Yes.”

“Do you believe that you are a sinner?”  
At this question the individual paused and then replied “Well, I’m not really all that bad a person.”  
“Well then,” the instructor replied “you can’t be saved. Because Jesus only saves sinners.”

Wow. That was rude and rather personal, wasn’t it? The instructor could have been a little more gracious and sugar coated it a little bit. Or no? When so much is at risk, make it personal.

Christian or not, that’s how most people think. We sin... but we’re really not all that bad. We’re OK sinners. But we don’t really sin all that much. And if it came right down to it, if totally honest when asked, some would say that they could probably sneak on into heaven on their good deeds. I bet you could even find some who claim to be Christians who believe that.

We really don’t sin that much. We’re OK.

There is a theme that runs thru Acts that begins with Peter – you are guilty; it’s not going to be sugar coated. Take it personally.

**Acts 2:22-24: “People of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. <sup>23</sup> This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, <sup>[d]</sup> put him to death by nailing him to the cross. <sup>24</sup> But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.**

Remember; some of them may have been in the crowd when Pilate tried to release Jesus. Even those who were not in the crowd that day were aware of what happened. This was not something that could have been easily swept under a rug. Crucifixions were public.

They may not have actually put the nails into Jesus’ hands... but they may as well have. Because, with the help of wicked men, they had put Him to death. Those who had been in the crowd, who heard

Pilate say that he found nothing to charge against Jesus, had been whipped into a frenzy by the Chief Priests and Pharisees who had convinced them that Jesus needed to die.

The Jews had waited for centuries for this messenger from God. They had looked for this one who would be their leader; their priest and King who would establish a new kingdom. And when he came, they crucified him. Jesus was that person.

He had proved it by His miracles, signs and wonders. He had proved it by fulfilling the prophecies about Him from the Old Testament. And he proved it by rising from the dead.

And you killed him...this is a constant theme that Peter used in his preaching to his Jewish brothers.

**“YOU, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross”**

In Acts 4, Peter and John heal a crippled man at the temple... and, just like the noise on the day of Pentecost, the healing drew a crowd. They were arrested and held overnight for preaching the resurrection of Jesus. The Sadducees were behind this; they didn’t believe in resurrection of the dead.

The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. <sup>7</sup> They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

<sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! <sup>9</sup> If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, <sup>10</sup> then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. <sup>11</sup> Jesus is

"the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone."<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:5-12)

The rulers had a problem. The man that was healed was standing there. They could not deny what happened.

"Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. <sup>17</sup> But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name."(Acts 4:16-17)

When told not to preach Jesus anymore, Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! <sup>20</sup> As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."(Acts 4:19-20)

It didn't take long for the apostles to get into trouble again. In Acts 5, they were teaching in the Temple and healing the sick. The rulers became jealous and arrested them again.

"But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. <sup>20</sup> "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life." (Acts 5:19-20)

When the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel— finally figured out that they were not in jail, but back preaching to the people, they sent for them, and reminded them that:

"We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name... Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make US guilty of this man's blood."

Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings! <sup>30</sup> The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. <sup>31</sup> God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. <sup>32</sup> We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit,

whom God has given to those who obey him."(Acts 5:29-32)

The apostles' preaching wasn't sugar coated, was it? No allowances were given just because they were God's chosen people. Even the angel that freed them from jail told them to go preach about this 'new life.' New Life-not remodeled, not reformed, not a do-over, but New Life. That's important to remember.

**You** crucified the Christ; **you** murdered the Messiah; **you** are guilty before God.

Now why would Peter preach like that? Why make people feel guilty? Why make them feel bad about things they've done? Isn't life hard enough without hearing guilty, guilty, guilty in church?

Why not preach a "feel good" sermon that dwells on "the power of positive thinking": it seems to fill churches today.

Why not tell people "I'm OK, and You're OK... so it's OK!" Why not?

Well, there are several reasons. First, because it's not true: the Jews, God's chosen people were not OK, I'm not OK, and you are not OK.

Second, there is too much at stake to sugar coat the message of this New Life—the human soul is in the balance.

Third, if I'm OK and You're OK... explain the cross...if I'm OK and you are OK, then Jesus didn't have to die: this

makes God a sadistic murderer of his own son.

Scripture says that Jesus came to die for our sins. But if there's another way to be acceptable to God without Jesus dying for us... why would He have to die to begin with?

There are experts out there that say that Jesus didn't really intend to die; that he intended to set up an earthly kingdom, but, everything went too far and got out of hand.

You can hear from these authorities several times a year on TV: channels like PBS, The History Channel, and the Discovery Channel.

And these experts write books and hold highly publicized conferences to discuss why the Jesus of the Bible wasn't who He said He was.

In the 1990's, a doctoral candidate at a well known Theological Seminary, questioned the idea of a "Father God" who would willfully kill his own child. He asked this question: "How can we continue to believe a loving parent would do this when human parents who do this are sent to prison."

Sounds logical, doesn't it?

Where did thinking like this originate? Eve, did God really say...I'm going to remind you every chance I get that we have an enemy that wants to destroy every ounce

of God's creditability. The Bible says that our enemy is a liar and the father of lies. And he roams the earth seeking whom he may devour.

The father of lies was in the Garden with Eve, in the form of a serpent, laying the foundation for the lie of lies; you will be like God...and I bet he was listening when the Lord told Joshua: **"Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."** (Joshua 1:8)

He may have whispered something like this in Joshua's ear: Joshua, did the Lord really say always? Surely he didn't mean always. You have Canaanites to kill. You don't have time to be a Bible thumper. Be your own man. 75% is a passing grade. Day and night; he really didn't mean day and night. When are you going to sleep?

A man named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish ruling council, came to Jesus one night. I'm sure he had many questions. Jesus made sure that he asked the right one, because Jesus answered the question before Nicodemus asked. "...**no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again. (Or born from above. John 3:3)**

Here is a teacher of Israel, a son of Abraham, a member of the ruling council, who may have thought that he was part of the in crowd, hearing this miracle worker tell him that he needed to be born again, or

born from above, to see the kingdom of God.

I don't know how far he walked that night to speak to Jesus, but can you imagine the walk home...all the possible tricks and scenario's Satan could use on his mind concerning this 'New Life' to destroy Jesus' creditability? The following is a possible scenario:

Nicodemus, how dare that carpenter from Nazareth speak to a man like you the way that he did. Does he really think that you are that naive to believe that you can be born once you are old? How foolish. Why would you need to be born again? You know who you are. You're a ruler of Israel, the chosen people; born from above...indeed. You're OK. Why would you need a New Life? And what could a hick carpenter from Nazareth know about the Bible that you don't?

That may have been a rough night for Nicodemus. But, I admire the fact that he wanted a one on one with Jesus; first hand information. And I notice that Jesus didn't blast him like he did some of the other rulers of Israel.

But, as good a man that Nicodemus may have been, he wasn't OK; he wasn't good enough to slip into heaven on his own. Even this teacher of Israel needed born from above, even though he was one of Abraham's sons.

Nicodemus would learn, along with the rest of the ruling council, and all of us, that

it was his sin, their sin, our sin, that nailed Jesus on the cross. And there is only one cure for that...you must be born again-from above.

You see, it's not really enough for us believe Jesus is the Son of God. It's not enough for us to believe He died on the cross. It's not enough for us to believe He was buried and rose from the grave on the 3rd day. All good and important information...but;

Unless it gets personal that's all window dressing. Unless I believe that it was my sin and Jesus did it for me... it's just cold theology. But once it becomes personal... our lives can change forever. So you know what's coming next.

The question this morning is this: is it personal to you? Do you realize it was your sin that put Jesus on the Cross of Calvary? Do you really know that it was for YOU that Jesus died? Have you come to the point where you ask "...what shall I do?" If so, then you know what you need to do for New Life if you haven't already done so..."Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins."

Thank you, God, that Jesus saves sinners.