

The Role of Words in Salvation

John O'Dell - Brown Trail church of Christ - Bedford, TX

Words are currency, a medium by which ideas and emotions are exchanged from one mind to another. Words can shape our perceptions, motivate our hearts, and inspire change in our lives. They possess the capacity to heal wounds or to inflict harm, to inspire hope or to spread despair (Pro. 18:21). Most importantly, words carry eternal significance (Matt. 12:36-37) and play a pivotal role in the salvation of souls.

The inspired penman Luke attested to this truth in the tenth chapter of the book of Acts. The chapter opens with an introduction to Cornelius the centurion, a devout Gentile who *"feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always"* (10:1-2). In answer to his many prayers, an angel of God appeared to Cornelius in a vision and instructed him to send men to Joppa to fetch Simon Peter (10:5), assuring the centurion that Peter would come and *"tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved"* (Acts 11:14). So, in obedience to the angel's instruction, Cornelius sent three men to Joppa to fetch Peter (Acts 10:7-9, 17-23), and upon hearing their summons, Peter agreed to go to Cornelius, being charged to do so by the Holy Spirit (10:19-20; 11:12).

Upon the apostle's arrival at Cornelius' home in Caesarea on the next day, the centurion declared, *"Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God"* (10:33). Take note of what it was that Cornelius desired to hear: words. Peter, then, commenced fulfilling the duty the Holy Spirit had placed upon him. He opened his mouth and spoke words affirming that God had anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power (10:38). Furthermore, he proclaimed that Jesus *"went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree; Him God raised up the third day, and shewed Him openly...To Him gave all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins"* (10:38-40, 43).

As Peter spoke these words, the Holy Spirit fell

upon those in the house of Cornelius, and they began to speak with tongues, magnifying God (10:44-46). This miraculous display upon a Gentile household confirmed to all who were there that non-Jews were to be accepted into the kingdom (Acts 11:15-17). Recognizing this new reality, Peter asked, *"Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord"* (Acts 10:47-48).

Though he is introduced to us in Acts 10 as a devout, God-fearing man, from the testimony of the angel who spoke to the centurion and from the Holy Spirit who spoke to Peter, it is evident that, prior to hearing the message of the Gospel and obeying the words given to him by the apostle Peter, Cornelius was lost in sin. The spiritual cleansing that Cornelius required could not occur until, in obedience to the Gospel, he was immersed in water for the remission of his sins (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:17; 1 Pet. 3:21; et al.). How, then, was Cornelius to come to know the facts of the Gospel and learn that he must be baptized in order to receive this salvation? Was this message revealed to him by means

"It is by the hearing of words that men are taught of God and drawn unto Christ (Jn. 6:44-45)."

of the angelic vision or by direct communication from the Holy Spirit? No! Per the angel, if Cornelius was to learn what was required of him for salvation, this would only occur by sending for Simon Peter and listening to the apostle's words. No other way was provided for Cornelius and all his house to be saved but by the hearing of the spoken word from the mouth of a man (Acts 11:14). This is precisely what the messengers of Cornelius said to Simon Peter, that the centurion was *"to hear words of thee"* (Acts 10:22), so Peter came to Caesarea and spoke the soul-saving words that Cornelius and his household needed to hear, by preaching Christ to them (10:34-43) and commanding them to be baptized in the name of the Lord (10:48).

It was Peter - not the angel, or even the Holy Spirit - who was to convey this soul-saving message to Cornelius, for God has determined that the treasure of the Gospel is to be carried within men, as *"earthen vessels"* (2 Cor. 4:7). Therefore, the angel that appeared to Cornelius was permitted to instruct him to send for Peter, but not to inform him of what he must

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do to be saved. But also, the Holy Spirit, though present in Cornelius's house, was not to be the One who would instruct him in the way of salvation, either. Instead, Peter recognized that the duty of proclaiming the words of salvation belonged to him, for Jesus had "commanded us [emphasis mine, JDO] to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead" (Acts 10:42). Thus, it was by the preaching of the apostle Peter that the Gentiles received the word of God (Acts 11:1).

Cornelius and his household would never have known salvation apart from the conveyance of saving truth through words. And note that this crucial role played by words in the salvation of souls is not unique to the conversion of Cornelius and his household. For example, in Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, to what did Peter encourage the multitude to give heed? To his words (Acts 2:22). What was it that pricked the hearts of the people on that day? Words (2:37). What did Peter employ to encourage his listeners to save themselves "from this untoward generation?" Words (2:40). And what did the 3,000 souls that were saved on that day gladly receive that led them to be baptized for the remission of sins? Words (Acts 2:41). As in the

first century, even so today, the soul-saving message of the Gospel must be conveyed by means of words. Christianity is a taught religion. It is by the hearing of words that men are taught of God and drawn unto Christ (John 6:44-45). It is by the preaching of words that men hear the Gospel, believe it, and then call on the name of the Lord (Rom. 10:13-15; c.f. Acts 22:16). It is by the preaching of words that men learn to purify their souls through obeying the truth (1 Pet. 1:22-25).

Words are tools of immense power. God, in His infinite wisdom, chose to preserve His will and self-revelation through words. By His inspired Word (2 Tim. 3:16; Eph. 3:3-5), through the proclaimed word (Mark 16:15; 2 Tim. 4:2), mankind can "know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Cor. 2:6ff) and be made "perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:28). By His Word, the Father desires to shape our perceptions, motivate our hearts, and inspire change in the lives of all, to make us complete, "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:17), conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). Let us, then, fill our hearts and minds with the truth of His Word, allow it to have free course in our own lives, and then make our words a mouthpiece for the truth, to aid lost souls in finding the Savior.

Grace Teaches Us

Farrell Nicholson - Agnos church of Christ - Agnos, AR

At the time of this writing, my father is in the end stage of life. He has been an elder who is gentle and wise among the flock over which he shared oversight (1 Pet. 5:1-3). He was a beloved vocational-agricultural teacher of hundreds of students for 32 years, a devoted husband of 54 years. As a father, he has been supportive and (usually) tender, often sacrificing his own personal wishes for the happiness and amiable functioning of our family. In an impromptu speech last Thanksgiving, he cited Proverbs 17:6, "*Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers,*" when expressing gratitude to God for his four grandchildren. Surely, "Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them" (Ps. 127:5). Such a role as shepherd of both spiritual and familial flocks would seem to lend itself to his remaining here to continue the valuable work that an inquisitive and wisdom-craving heart can perform in the kingdom of our Lord.

So why not extend this shepherd's life? Why not, as in the case of Hezekiah, grant unto him a lengthened stay here (2 Kg. 20:1-6)? As prayers were

made without ceasing of the church unto God for Peter (Acts 12:5), so have they been made unto God for James Luther Nicholson. Other scriptures such as James 5:15-16: "*And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up...the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*" Foy E. Wallace, Jr., in his A Review of the New Versions, at Romans 11:26, states that "...the verb 'shall' expresses a conditional futurity, while the verb 'will' is unconditional determination - a thing that will be done." If "shall" denotes a conditional outcome, conditional upon what? The prayers for the author's father were effectual; they were fervent; they were offered in faith. If I am to "harmonize the scriptures" as a predecessor of Dad's in the Pilot Church of Christ, Otho Griffith, used to say...our prayers of faith were conditional upon the will of God. John here is instructive: "*And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us*" (1 Jn. 5:14). And, in violation of the charge this and other MSOP graduates were given, to "Never quote me from your notes!" Keith A. Mosher,

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Sr. stated that 1 John 5:14 refers to the circumstantial will of God. As per 1 Timothy 2:4, it certainly is God's will that my father be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. It may not be according to God's circumstantial will that a critically ill man on a ventilator, needing dialysis 3 times a week for 12 years, continue to persist on this side of the veil (Heb. 6:19, 10:20). We shall see.

As the psalmist of old, my *"feet were almost gone; My steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the arrogant, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death; But their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; Neither are they plagued like other men"* (Ps. 73:2-5, ASV). I began to ask, "Why me, Lord?" (or more specifically, "Why him, Lord?") Why would as humble, studious, and compassionate an elder as could be located be poked, prodded, drained of blood and refilled, unable to communicate except through blinks, nods, and indecipherable whispers, laid up in a hospital bed for 5 months on a ventilator while wicked, cruel, callous reprobates walk and talk freely, in relatively good health, for well nigh unto the century mark? It doesn't seem to make sense - *"Until I went into the sanctuary of God, And considered their latter end... Nevertheless I am continually with thee: Thou hast holden my right hand. Thou wilt guide me with thy counsel, And afterward receive me to glory"* (Ps. 73:17, 23-24).

The reader is directed to an article reprinted in the February 1997 issue of FCGN entitled, "Why Me, Lord?" by a gospel preacher, Billy Joe Gooden, who just so happened to hunt whitetail deer on the same farm (my maternal grandfather's farm) as my father. In the article, a man diagnosed with ALS ("Lou Gehrig's Disease") asks, not why he isn't allowed mobility and longer to live, but rather why has he been allowed to enjoy the blessings of being in the outdoors, of having a faithful wife, a beautiful daughter, darling

grandchildren, of having had a good job for many years, and of hundreds of brethren praying for him as he battles the disease that finally overtook him. The late brother Gooden concludes that the real question is, "Why me, Lord? Why have you blessed me so?" With this valiant soldier of the cross's gracious question in mind, we turn to the title of this article. Paul tells Titus, *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world..."* (Titus 2:11-12). Furthermore, after Paul had (in faith, effectually, etc.) asked 3 times that the Lord remove the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan from him (2 Cor. 12:7-8), the Lord answered him, *"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness"* (verse 9). His grace, or "unmerited favor", was sufficient for Paul. The Lord's grace should be sufficient for my father and, by extension, for me. So the grace of God teaches me that I should be grateful that my father was there to bring me up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4), that he was there to encourage me to become a gospel preacher in 1998, and that not long thereafter I was able in turn to coax my reluctant father by means of logic ("It's a Catch-22...if you're able to serve as an elder, should you not desire it?") into serving as an elder.

Grace teaches us to ask (Matt. 7:7-8; Jam. 4:2). Grace teaches us to wait (Rom. 8:25; Jam. 1:3-4). Grace teaches us to say, *"Lo, I come...to do thy will, O God"* (Heb. 10:9), in effect acknowledging that *"...the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether"* (Ps. 19:9). The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit (Phile. 25) and with the saints (Rev. 22:21, ASV).

James Luther Nicholson, father of the author, passed from this life on Monday, June 26, 2023.

There is no one thing alone that saves man from sin. Salvation does not come through "faith alone." Salvation does not come through "grace alone." Salvation is "by grace, through faith" (Eph. 2:8-9).

If someone tells you that you are saved by any one thing "alone," you can be certain that they are not telling you the truth!

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Pilot (Mammoth Spring, AR)	\$700.00
Mammoth Spring	\$600.00
Crossroads (Gepp, AR)	\$300.00
Dellhalf (Myrtle, MO)	\$300.00
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The Churches of Christ

- Bible only (2 Pet. 1:3)
- Name of Christ (Rom. 16:16)
- Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
- Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18)
- Purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28)
- Married to Christ (Rom. 7:4)
- Established in the 1st century (Acts 2:47)
- Jesus the Head of the One Body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23)
- Added to the church by God (Acts 2:41, 47)

Salvation

- Saved by grace, though faith (Eph. 2:8-9)
- Not by faith alone (Jas. 2:14-26)
- Not by grace alone (Matt. 7:21)
- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
- Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
- Hear, belief, baptism (Acts 18:8)
- Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)
- Baptism does save us (1 Pet. 3:21)

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