

Relevance of the Church

The 3 R's

Acts 2:22-40

One doesn't have to be a rocket scientist to recognize that the 21st Century church in the United States is in big trouble. Statistics regarding the relevance of the church in peoples' lives continue to drop like a cold brick. The image of the church portrayed by the media, and to be honest too often in real life, is an embarrassment to some of us who take quite seriously the roles and responsibilities to which we are committed. It's perhaps much the same feeling a skilled, well-conditioned Olympic athlete might have if compared to a sloppy, overweight, out of shape, WWF professional wrestler on Friday Night Smackdown viewed after the late night movie.

Sadly, in an attempt to fight the decline in the church, there is a sky-rocketing effort at inconceivable expense to outdo the magnetism of the secular world in competition for people of all ages. In many, if not most cases, the ever-changing attempts to woo the audience come at the expense of eternal Truth. An influential theologian, once respected for his conservative/biblical worldview, shocked many (but not enough) when he said that if we are going to keep our youth, we're going to have to change our theology (or what we once claimed to be truth).

We're not saying that we shouldn't seek every attempt to make the truth of God's Word relevant and magnetic (not simply *attractive*), but it should never be at the expense of teaching truth. Addressing both issues is seldom easy and always carries with it the risk of compromise.

The point for today is the reality that somehow the essence of the church has been lost, which may well account for its decline. Our challenge is to go back to the very core of what our faith and the church are about. It's here at this core that we find three pivotal, life-changing words that transcend cultures, generations, social environments, and educational backgrounds and become immediately relevant and most personal.

In the book of Acts, we see the relevance of these three words and the impact they had on every segment of the then known world. They are no less relevant today, and we have every resource (not simply marketing glitz, but the Spirit of God) to expect the church to have the same impact today. What would you suppose those three words might be?

Life Response

1. This week MEMORIZE and MEDITATE on Acts 2:39, "*For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off; as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.*"

In light of today's lesson, the breadth and depth of this passage are critically relevant to each person here today. Think about the implications in regard to . . .

- (a) . . . the one searching for Christ and the one who knows Christ personally.
- (b) . . . the generational impact.
- (c) . . . those we are estranged from who are "far off." See Eph. 2:13-16
- (d) . . . the whole concept of "changing our thinking/unconditional forgiveness."

2. In what areas would God have you change your thinking? This is relevant both for someone seeking truth and for someone who claims to know truth. See Col. 3:1-25; Eph 4:17-32; Rom. 12:1-21.
3. The relevance of **forgiveness** is central in every one of our lives. Where is the significance not only for you personally but for those you need to forgive or who need to forgive you?
4. Mediate on Acts 2:39 in the context of **repentance**; the whole concept of receiving God's unconditional **forgiveness** and the confidence we can have in the **resurrection** of Jesus. Imagine the relevance these three areas can have in your life, your family, your future.

So . . . ???

“The lack of knowledge (of the events in Acts 2) is often responsible for all the fads and fanciful interpretations we meet about us.” - Dr. A.C. Gaebelien

Luke 24:46-48; Acts 2:22-40

The first sermon that served as the catalyst to ignite the 1st Century church resulted in a cultural and spiritual transformation.

- - - 3 main themes defined its relevance
- - - These 3 words revealed their relevance with power and personal significance in the orator
- - - 3 words which centered at the heart of every encounter
- - - 3 life changing words indispensable for every culture
- - - 3 words that could easily transform every marriage, family, relationship

The 3 R's of Relevance

Repent	to change direction
Receive	to receive forgiveness
Resurrection	to confidently act

REPENT: . . . from self to Christ

Main theme of entire sermon (Luke 24:37/Acts 2:38)

Its meaning: to turn
to go a different direction
to change

Two fold A. A change of mind, heart, affection
 B. A change of association
 “Baptism”

Its relevance

- A. For those curious/searching
- B. For those who “know” Christ

RECEIVE: . . . His unconditional forgiveness from sin

The whole point of the Cross (Acts 2:22-24)

Its meaning: to no longer be condemned or powerless to sin.
The whole point of the Cross

SIN=to miss the mark of God's purpose /excellence/ plan for you
FORGIVENESS=to dismiss / release of all charges / to forget / to pass over all wrongs

The theme of every encounter in Acts
Acts 5:30-31; Acts 10:40-43; Acts 13:35-39; Acts 26:14-18

Its relevance

- A. For the curious / searcher
 - those who would desire to repent / discover truth
 - to no longer be judged / condemned
 - free from guilt
 - John 1:12 / 1 John 1:9

- B. For those who *claim* to know Christ
 - continual practice of unconditional forgiveness
 - continually do not take into account a wrong suffered
 - continually seek/ "pursue" peace with another

RESURRECTION: . . . of Jesus Christ, and "believers"

Confidence that we can, and should **repent** and **receive** His forgiveness

Its meaning: It's literal, no "spiritualism"

1 Cor. 15:14 "If Christ has not been raised then our preaching is vain, your faith is vain."

The whole foundation of faith, direction, forgiveness collapses if there is no resurrection

Its relevance

- A. Authenticity for the seeker/curious
 - * 2:22-24 the Person of Christ
 - * 2:25-31 the Prophecies of Christ
 - * 2:32 the Personal appearance of Christ
 - * 2:33-39 the Promised presence of Christ
- B. For the believer
 - Romans 6:3-5; 9
 - Removes all excuses to not experience His excellence in all areas of life.

So . . . ???

There's another R

Acts 2:37 "What shall we do" once we know Truth?
2:38-40 Repent – change my thinking, direction
Receive – His forgiveness

Based upon His resurrection