



“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...” Matthew 28:20

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The Role of Words in Salvation

John O’Dell

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 (Proverbs 18:21). Most importantly, words carry eternal significance (Matthew 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 alway”* (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 (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:17; 1 Peter 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 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 Corinthians 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 do to be saved. But also, the Holy Spirit, though present in Cornelius’ 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 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 (Romans 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 Peter 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 Timothy 3:16; Ephesians 3:3-5), through the proclaimed word (Mark 16:15; 2 Timothy 4:2), mankind can “*know the things that are freely given to us of God*” (1 Corinthians 2:6ff) and be made “*perfect in Christ Jesus*” (Colossians 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 Timothy 3:17), conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 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.

Not For Sale: I was traveling in rural Oklahoma when I ran out of gas. I went to a nearby farmhouse to call a service station, but the farmer insisted on taking me to town, bringing me back, and even staying with me until the car was running again. I offered him \$20.00, but he shook his head. When I insisted, he replied, “Look, Mister, I feel very good about helping you. If I took your money, you’d be buying that feeling back from me...and it’s not for sale.”

Observations and Concerns

August 9, 2023

- Welcome Visitors!** A special Greeting to our special Guests.
- Praise in Psalm:** “I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me” (Psalm 13:6).
- Declaration of Appreciation:** Within any congregation, there are those who quietly do things without others knowing. For them, we are truly grateful.
- Summer Series** — This evening’s speaker is **Doyle Jackson**. His topic is “*If Ye Suffer for Righteousness’ Sake, Happy Are Ye*” (1 Peter 3:14).
- Our **monthly potluck luncheon** will be next Sunday, August 13th, after morning services. All are encouraged to stay.
- Please check the **sign up sheets** in the hallway. There are several opportunities to serve, including teaching, preaching, and building cleaning.
- Remember in Prayer:**
- ▶ **Jim Allison** has a spot on his lung. His doctors are hoping to schedule a biopsy soon.
 - ▶ **Dan Dennis** is scheduled to have his port removed August 18th at St. John’s Medical Center.
 - ▶ **AJ Huckleby**, husband of Stephanie Huckleby, fell and injured his leg and head. We are thankful he is doing better.
 - ▶ **Betty Jackson**, sister-in-law of Doyle and Dicie and daughter-in-law of Walter, fell recently. She is out of rehab and staying with her son.
 - ▶ **Mark Odell**, cousin of Nelda Hudson, recently suffered a fall that resulted in facial injuries and two broken shoulders. He is recovering at a rehab center.
 - ▶ **Fred Phillips** is in a hospital in Fairfax with kidney issues, a broken hip, and other problems.

Schedule of Services	Assignments		
	Wednesday, Aug. 9	Sunday, Aug. 13 AM	Sunday, Aug. 13 PM
Sundays			
Bible Classes. 9:30 AM	Chris Nelson	Chuck Northrop	Paul Praschnik
Worship 10:30 AM	Doyle Jackson	Bill Dilks	Ross Swearingen
Worship 5:00 PM	Chuck Northrop	Russ Earl	Bill Dilks
Wednesdays			
Bible Classes. 7:00 PM		Paul Praschnik	Chris Nelson
Website: oologahcofc.org		Doyle Jackson	
	Doyle Jackson	Michael Purdham	Chuck Northrop
	H. Praschnik / R. Earl	Chris Nelson	Russ Earl