

Sep 19, 2010



Oaks Early Risers Bible Class

The Oaks Baptist Church
Grand Prairie, Texas

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ESSENTIAL TRUTH Knowing Christ Personally

Date	Lesson	Text
08/01	Introduction	
08/08	Who is God	Exod 3:1-15
08/15	God Wants to Talk	Isa 6:1-10
08/22	Oaks120th Anniversary-No Class	
08/29	What God Expects	Mk 12:28-34
09/05	Bible is Important	Matt 4:1-11
09/12	Who is Jesus	Matt 16:13-20
09/19	Can I be Forgiven	John 3:1-17
09/26	Death	John 11:17-44
10/03	Lone Ranger	Acts 2:42-47
10/10	Keep it Real	Luke 11:37-54
10/17	Temptation	Gen 3:1-8
10/24	Meaningful Life	Luke 9:23-27
10/31	Holy Spirit	Acts 2:1-13
11/07	Grace	Eph 2:1-10
11/14	Summary and Review	

Food for Thought

We make a big deal of our physical birthday, but our spiritual birth is much more important.

What role does God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ play in that birth?

Session 6: How Can I Be Forgiven? John 3:1-17

About Today's Lesson

NEED FOR FORGIVENESS

At one time or another most of us feel the need for forgiveness. Sometimes we feel the need for forgiveness from another human being, and sometimes we feel the need for forgiveness from God. Philip Yancey points out a story about this in a work of Ernest Hemingway. In this story a Spanish father decided to reconcile with his son who had run away to Madrid. The father took out an ad in a Madrid paper which ran, "PACO MEET ME AT HOTEL MONTANA NOON TUESDAY ALL IS FORGIVEN PAPA." Since Paco is a common name in Spain, when the father went to the square in front of this hotel, he found 800 young men named Paco waiting for their fathers! What a hunger for forgiveness there is in the world! If our heavenly Father placed such an ad, how many would be there waiting in the square? God has placed such an ad, it's called the Bible. In that Bible, God declares to us that all we have done wrong can be forgiven.

GOD'S PLAN

It's important, however, for us to know what God's plan is for bringing that forgiveness to us. Our sins cannot simply be ignored. That would be like ignoring a cancer, trying to pretend it does not exist. Those sins must first be atoned for, just as a cancer must be treated. That is why God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty for our sin. By accepting what God has done for us in Christ, we gain the forgiveness for which we hunger. That forgiveness brings new life to our spirit, and we are "born again." Our spirit, made dead by the destructiveness of sin, comes to life and will never die again. That is what this session is about. We will be exploring forgiveness and the relationship of forgiveness to what God did in Jesus Christ.

Life Change Lesson

If you're not yet a Christian. Admit that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness

What we can do: Jesus often spoke strongly against people who acted like they were morally perfect or did not *need* God's forgiveness. He commended a contrite tax collector over a religious leader (Luke 18:9-14), and He told the religious leaders of His day that even prostitutes and tax collectors were entering the kingdom of God ahead of them because they had no heartfelt remorse for their sins (Matt. 21:31).

Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as the one who saves you from your sin

What we can do: In addition to the Scripture we have been studying today, John 3:16-17, another important passage that relates to this is Romans 10:9. If you have already made this confession of faith, proceed to next action item.

An important practice for Christians is to learn to confess your specific sins daily and ask for God's forgiveness

What we can do: This is taught in 1 John 1:9. Naming specific sins shows God that we are aware those actions were wrong and also raises our awareness to keep us from repeating them. It is often helpful to confess our sins to a trusted friend, spiritual mentor, or religious leader (James 5:16). Confessing to a *trusted* person can help us be more accountable and can give us a support person in seeking to overcome our weakness. (Confessing indiscriminately to strangers or to untrustworthy people, on the other hand, can lead to needless pain if people abuse the confidence given.)

(Adapted from Essential Truth: Knowing Christ Personally)

NOTES AND CROSS-REFERENCES

Today's Lesson

Most of us have learned that when someone gives us a compliment, different things may motivate it. The motivation can be straightforward: The person has learned that affirming others for doing something right or well is a good way to help them feel good about themselves and encourage them to "keep up the good work." We often run into other motivations as well: (1) the person is setting you up for a request or is getting ready to complain about something; (2) the person is trying to get you on his or her side in a dispute; (3) the person is in bad need of affirmation and wants you to return the compliment; or (4) the person is in need of the skill he or she is complimenting in you. So, when Nicodemus came up to Jesus and complimented Him, we might well ask, what was his motivation? What, if anything, was he looking for?

Jesus sensed that Nicodemus was looking for spiritual renewal for himself (the fourth option above). He didn't even wait for "the other shoe to drop," but immediately responded to the issue that was on Nicodemus' mind: To be part of God's kingdom, one has to be born again. Being born again is necessary because in our first birth, our physical birth, we are born to sin and death. We inherit the tendency to sin from Adam and this leads not only to eventual physical death but to spiritual death as well. Sin kills our spirit by separating us from God. In order for our spirit to truly live, it must be "born again."

Being born again, then, means accepting what John 3:16-17 says as true, having a change of mind regarding sinful actions (Rom. 10:9-13), and living accordingly. The clear implication is that if God had not sent Jesus, we would all perish. The reason we would perish is that we are all sinners (Rom. 3:23) and our sin results in death, in our perishing spiritually as well as physically (Rom. 6:25). This is not an arbitrary decision by God because He wants to get back at us for sinning, but a natural, spiritual law. Just because God does not want us to perish in our sin doesn't mean it won't happen. We have a choice in the matter, and we might choose to hang on to our sin until it drags us to our death. What God wants us to do in reaction to His giving of Himself in Jesus Christ is to *believe* what God has done in Christ. "Belief" here means more than simply assenting to an idea. It includes trusting God. When we feel what we have done wrong in our lives is too horrible to ever be forgiven, we need to *trust* God's promise that *whoever* believes in Jesus Christ will be saved. Peter denied Christ three times (Matt. 26:69-75), but he was forgiven and saved because he trusted fully in God's promise. Paul persecuted Christians (Acts 7:59-8:3), but he was forgiven and saved because he trusted fully in God's promise. Others who claimed this promise of forgiveness and salvation included prostitutes (Luke 7:36-50); women who had lived lives of promiscuity (John 4:1-42); and criminals (Luke 23:52-43).

Belief also includes *submission*. To truly believe in Christ as Savior is to submit to Him as Lord. A person who truly believes Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior of the world is going to invest in Him. And a person who truly believes in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is going to "campaign" for Him in how they speak and act. That is what submission is about, and it's an integral part of belief. So when Nicodemus asks, "How can a man be born when he is old?" (v. 4), the answer is, "By the forgiveness of God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ!" That offer is not just to religious leaders like Nicodemus, but to all of us, regardless of our past behavior or religious background.

Preparation for the Next Session (09/26/10)

	READINGS	REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS
Monday	John 11:17-22	Could you have had the faith of Martha? Have you had a time in your life when you had to rely completely on God?
Tuesday	John 11:23-27	Were Jesus and Martha speaking of the same resurrection? How big was her faith? How big is yours?
Wednesday	John 11:28-32	Was Mary looking for the resurrection of Lazarus? Did she have faith in Jesus? Do you?
Thursday	John 11:33-35	Did Jesus weep over Lazarus' death or their lack of faith?
Friday	John 11:36-37	In their recognition of Jesus' compassion, did His followers show that they understood His position and power?
Saturday	John 11:38-40	Why was it so important for John to record the decay of Lazarus and the lack of understanding of the friends of Lazarus? How does this fact challenge you?
Sunday	John 11:41-44	Has there ever been a time you doubted that God could answer your prayer? Why?

(Adapted from Essential Truth: Knowing Christ Personally)