

My First Sermon: Jim Gunn

Vineland Park Baptist Church
Hueytown, Alabama
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My first sermon was preached on August 24, 1969 at The Church of Our Christian Heritage, Vestavia, Alabama, that I titled: Sin, Shame, and Salvation.

A few weeks ago, on August 2, 2009, I gave my testimony to this church and said that I believe I was born again on September 28, 1968. Being an avid reader even before God arrested me, called me, granted me repentance, and birthed me into His kingdom I turned to the Bible and started reading it from cover to cover. That is no doubt the biggest factor in my conviction of sin and guilt. Of course, the Holy Spirit used the Word of God from beginning to end of the process of conviction, repentance, and confession of faith in Jesus Christ as the only sufficient Savior.

Move ahead by a few months from my conversion eleven months earlier in 1969 and I found myself being asked to teach and then eleven months later I was asked to fill the pulpit on a Sunday evening. Now I know that I was a novice then and should not have been put up to teach or preach, but without modesty it turned out okay.

What had transpired since my conversion was that the Assistant Pastor, Quincy Caldwell, had given me a copy of the Westminster Confession of Faith and he had been examining me on its contents. So in a short time I had received sound instruction in the Doctrines of Grace. Quincy also gave me Roman Catholicism by Lorraine Boettner and said that if I could understand the errors of Catholicism it would enforce the Doctrines of Grace.

Recently Brother Walter Swain said that he had listened to his first sermon and does not now agree with half of what he preached. Brother Walter says that he was in the Arminian camp that worships man's free will as the ultimate cause of a man's salvation.

In my case, and because I was introduced to sound doctrine at the start, I can say that I still agree with what I preached now over 40 years ago. That is not to say that I would not say a few things differently so that they would not be misunderstood.

Well, I found my notes from that first sermon and if you will indulge me I will preach it for the second time to you today. I will stay close to the original and only comment on what I would say differently today.

So here is My First Sermon:

The week before I was asked to preach to you I was asked to lead the singing. You can stop laughing now. “Somewhere in Hebrews it says to exercise your senses.”

Hebrews 5:12-14

¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. ¹⁴ But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

So we found out that leading the singing was not my gift so we will try something else tonight.

You all have heard about people having butterflies in their stomach when they get in front of an audience. Well my butterflies have got butterflies. First of all I must tell you that I am afraid; afraid, not of human failure, nor of being embarrassed, but afraid because of the great responsibility that God has placed upon anyone who assumes to exhort the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That sense of responsibility was best stated by the apostle Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians, “For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity, is laid upon me; yea woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel.” I Cor 9.16 This is the most serious and personally demanding thing that I have ever willingly, yes, even eagerly done.

But you see my chief concern is that though my heart says speak out - my soul is warned, “woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel.” We are not here to merely hold a meeting; we are here to worship God. Worship God and learn of his Christ. Learn of what Christ has done for you.

My foremost thought then is that through me, God will speak to your soul. That you will learn more about our precious Saviour, Jesus Christ. My concern is that I might in some way err in presenting God's word. That someone might be misled or confused. Pray that the message is clear.

My theme is a familiar one...

SIN, SHAME, and SALVATION

Those three S's may sound like a familiar tonic. God's word has always been the only tonic for sin-sick souls.

Now I wouldn't try to preach to you about something that I did not have a personal knowledge of so let's begin with SIN. There is not a sin known to man, save one, that I am not guilty of myself. I have not committed the unpardonable sin, blaspheming the Holy Ghost, because here I stand. But all other sins - yes. But I can't claim to be the worst sinner can I? Paul said he was the chief of sinners, so I must be the second worst sinner. I do know sin.

SHAME – I've known the shame of being convicted of sin against an holy God.

SALVATION - hallelujah I'm saved!

Look to God's Christ. What is his "good news", his gospel? Where is the gospel found in God's word? The gospel message is found in many places in the Bible, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

Ferrell [Ferrell Griswold was the pastor] preached a stirring gospel message from Leviticus 13 in the Old Testament. The truth of Christ is found on almost every page of the Bible.

My text is taken from Numbers 21:4-9.

Numbers 21:4-9

⁴ And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.

⁵ And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.

⁶ And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.

⁷ Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.

⁸ And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.

⁹ And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

I want to parallel the SIN, SHAME, and SALVATION of the Israelites with the people of today, of this city, and of this congregation.

The first part of my theme is about SIN.

A popular story today goes like this: “The preacher talked about sin again today. He did? What did he say about it? Well, he was mostly against it.” Now that may make a funny story but there are precious few preachers today that still talk about sin. Most are telling their congregations how good they are instead of convicting them of sin. Too many are presenting the Body of Christ, the True Church, as a social club or something that will help you in business. Now being a Christian is a lot more than belonging to a congregation, or just saying you are a Christian.

“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.” I John 3.18

A few Mondays ago I went to a so-called revival and the preacher told us that he was going to tell us why we ought to join the church. He said he would assume that we didn’t know anything about Christ. His climax was reached when he said that joining the church was the “sporting thing” to do, meaning I supposed that the church gives you more than you give it.

In his whole sermon he never told us who Jesus Christ was. Why would you join any church unless you knew who the head of it is? Jesus Christ is the head of the church. He is the only Saviour. A man that doesn't know anything about sin doesn't know his need of a Saviour.

What is SIN?

I John 3.11 tells us, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth the law: for sin is, the transgression of the law." Are there some sins that are not as bad as others? Do you think that murder, stealing, or coveting is any worse than just a little gossip (tale bearing it's called in the Bible) or worse maybe than a little white lie (whatever that is)? All lies are black and filthy, all tale-bearing is condemned. Have you ever been caught and punished too severely?

Perhaps you were only looking at the transgression from your point of view. Think on Genesis 3.6 ... "she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat and gave also unto her husband with her and he did eat".... Now that's a good place to start. That's where we got our filthy, vile, stiffnecked, stubborn nature. Right there with just a little thing. But little in whose eyes? Little in MAN'S eyes. There is no such thing as a little sin against an infinite God! All sin is a great evil and demands infinite punishment. Look at where little sins lead to. Look at our text (vs. 5), "And the people spake against God, and against Moses," How dare they!

Murmuring is one of the most often mentioned sins in the Bible. Have you known anyone who is never satisfied with anything? Gripe, complain, fuss, and over nothing. They're too hot, too cold, too tired, too whatever is on their little minds at the moment. How often do you just thank God that you have enough to eat, clothes to wear, health? Don't worry about how good the food taste, how new the clothes are, or how healthy you are. There is always someone worse off than you.

The worst griper I know is a young girl. She comes from a well-to-do family, she's married and owns a modest home (her father gave them the money for the down-payment). But even in the army I never met her equal. She is a real champion in the field of complainers. One of the other girls was talking about how she liked her own sister. This poor girl (the griper) said that if she had a sister (she's an only child) she sure wouldn't like her. Now that's first class complaining. Griping about a sister that doesn't exist. No doubt she was right, she probably wouldn't like her.

Those Israelites back there in the land of Edom had about the same grounds for griping. They had been fed with angel's food, manna from heaven, and they called it light bread. Light bread is for children, not good enough for men--their thirst had been quenched with water from the rock that was Christ at the hand of Moses, and they griped about that too.

Think about some of the worst crimes that you ever heard of-- do nice people just all of a sudden commit murder? YES. Do good people commit adultery? YES. Christ said, "for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications thefts false witness, blasphemies: these are the things. Which defile a man:" Mt 15.19, 20

Out of the heart-- Christ said "That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Mt 5.28

One of you may leave the church today and be driving along just as fine as you please. Then some nut nearly runs you off the road. Then watch out. Curse him, blow your horn, shake your fist, and the worst of it is that for that moment you really hate that person. You've just committed murder. My point is that little things often lead to bigger things and even the "little" things are bad.

Why do we sin? Because we have to? NO!
We sin because we like it. We like to gossip and gripe.

When you consider what Adam did, or what the Israelites did, or what you do, you can begin to see the filth--the sin against God. My friend if those sins don't bother you, you are in danger of losing your soul in Hell.

Are there any that are free from sin?

You may have seen that Peanuts comic strip just the other day. It was supposed to be funny. Lucy, the little girl, was asked by Schroeder, the little boy who plays the toy piano, if she thought God loved her? Do you know her answer? "He just has to!" So many people think God just has to love them.

Do you know what God really thinks about the Lucy's of the world? Psalm 14.2 says, "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any that did understand and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

If God loves you it's not because he has to! We can't earn God's love.
We can't make God our debtor!

Paul said, "For all have sinned, and come short of the Glory of God;"
Romans 3.23

Now either these passages don't mean all men when they say all, or the Bible is lying. Either you are a sinner or there are some parts of the Bible that don't apply to you. I am a sinner, you are a sinner, and we have all sinned.

What does God do about sin? Look again to our text vs. 6, "And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people and much people of Israel died." God must punish sin. If God let one sin go unpunished, he would not be God.

Just as sure as God let those serpents bite the Israelites, he will punish your sin. Those serpents were fiery, red with rage. In their pride the Israelites lifted themselves up against God and Moses, and now God, humbled and mortified them by making these despicable snakes [scorpions] a plague to them. They died from their sin. You may die from yours. God had fed them and kept the serpents from hurting them. The serpents were there all the time but God was protecting them. They sinned, they murmured, and God punished them. Just like He always will be sure to punish sin.

Look further at vs. 7..."we have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord... And Moses prayed for the people..." Here Moses was a type of Christ.

He made intercession for his people. They prayed that God would take away the serpents. But God didn't choose to work that way. They had to repent of their sin and have faith.

This takes us to our second part of our theme -- SHAME.

There is one crucial event between sin and salvation and it is SHAME.

The Israelites were ashamed (some of them), you must repent of your sin against God. Don't just be sorry you got caught doing something, that's worldly sorrow that the Bible speaks about. "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." II Cor 7.10

Your sin is against God.

Not very long ago I was one of those smart alecks who bragged and said, “Anything you do is all right as long as you don’t interfere with or hurt someone else.” What I did was just nobody’s business except mine. After all I wasn’t hurting anyone.

Oh yes I was -- I was killing me - I was going to Hell as fast as I could. My logic, if you dare call it logic, was faulty. You see I didn’t know that I was sinning against God. That’s no excuse. I was still responsible. But I didn’t know God. I had been to church some and heard about Jesus. But I never really listened. Under conviction, I began to care about my soul! My soul became important to me. I didn’t want to go to Hell. But I still sinned. I couldn’t hide from God. Even my secret sins were known. I couldn’t stop sinning. What an awful fix. You may be having the same problem. There has never been a natural man that did not sin. God always punishes sin.

What can you do? What did the Israelites do? God told Moses to make a brass serpent and put it up on a pole and if anyone that got bit would look up at the fiery serpent of brass and believe, they would live. The brass serpent didn’t save those people; there was no magic in the brass. There is only one thing that can save you. We don’t need the brazen serpent. Gods grace saved the people, his word; all they had to do was believe God’s command.

There is the gospel. Our Saviour told us, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so the Son of Man must be lifted that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:14, 15

Do you see the resemblance? Look up -- Look up at that spectacle. Do you see the brazen serpent? Will it save you? Do you see my Christ hanging on the cross?

He came to “save his people from their sins.” Mt 1.21 That’s God’s message to you. Sinner, Christ died for you. Your sin-debt has been paid. Do you think Moses could have thought up that cure? It was God himself that devised the antidote against the stinging death of the fiery serpent; it was God in the counsel of his own will that contrived Christ as our salvation.

{Here is a place that I would say it differently. We cannot say without qualification that “Christ died for you.” We may say Christ died for sinners and Christ died for people just like you, but do not imply that Christ died for the human race.}

It may seem a very unlikely cure.
Even foolishness to them that perish. I Cor 1.18

God himself perfect in Christ, free from sin; yet made in the likeness of sinful flesh, to be wounded, to be bruised for your sin. Yes Christ died for you; shed his precious blood for ungodly sinners.

So we have Sin, Shame, and Salvation; always in that order.
Can't you see it?

This is how it works. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."
Eph 2.8-9

Through faith! How do you get faith? Faith in what? Pray for knowledge of Jesus Christ. Listen to what God, speaking through Paul says, "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:" Ro 3.22

If you want faith you must, have knowledge. You – can't believe something that you don't know. "... for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he can keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." 2Tim 1.12

In Romans chapter 10 at verse 13 "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? How shall they hear without a preacher?"

If you want to believe in Christ you can. In your own way, without any reservation, tell God you are a sinner. He already knows it, but you tell him. Ask him to teach you about Christ. Say, Please God, I want to be saved. Your Bible tells me that to be saved I must have faith in Jesus Christ. Will you teach me about Jesus, Amen. You know a prayer like that prayed from your heart, the heart of a repenting sinner, would do it for you. God has never refused anyone yet,

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Jesus said, "All that, the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." John 6.37

Now if just praying that prayer was enough to save you that would be works wouldn't it? You must obey God when you ask him to teach you about Jesus.

To learn about Jesus you must strive to live like he did. You must turn from your sin and live for Christ. Now you just can't do that can you? No, but God can. "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible."

Mt 19.26

Do you want to stop drinking? You can't. But God can do it for you. Stop smoking? Stop cursing; anything that's sin for you, God can give you the power to overcome. You can even learn to love your enemies. You will have disappointments, you will slip, you will fail, but you will grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and keep that which I have committed... pray without ceasing. Not just some token prayer some vain repetition; be in constant communion with God.

Well, I've gotten pretty far away from those Israelites and all those snakes, but we've not strayed from the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel was with the Israelites and its right here with us. Look up at Jesus and believe.

"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." Is 45.22

When I was first converted, just beginning to learn about Jesus, I was so afraid that I was going to be ridiculed or laughed at. I actually didn't want to be seen reading the Bible, even in my own home. Now there's a dilemma, wanting to learn about Jesus but self-conscious about reading my Bible.

Then one night I read, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth: to the Jew first and then to the Greek." Ro 1.16

That took care of that. I simply can't read the Bible enough. You can't know too much about Jesus. Let Him absorb your thoughts. Trust Christ.

In closing I simply ask you, do you know Christ? If you're not sure who Jesus is, then right now is the accepted time to ask God. Through the power of the Holy Spirit you can know Christ as your Saviour and know the power of God unto SALVATION

Are you sick of SIN and its hold on you? Are you truly ASHAMED of your sin? Then flee to Christ. Look to Christ alone for your SALVATION.

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And that is a forty year-old sermon that has a message that is never out of date; Sin, Shame, and Salvation.