

BaptistWay Bible Series for July 26: Experience God's good news

July 13, 2009

What's the best news you've ever received? That might depend on your desires in life. If you are married, maybe it was the words, "I do." If you're a dad, it could have been hearing, "I'm pregnant." More than one student has been thrilled by the phrase, "You passed." I have a friend who said he yearns to hear four words one day: "You won the lottery." It strikes me as funny. He doesn't even play it.

Good news often can be serious news, too. More than one family has issued a collective sigh of relief when a member has been told, "The operation was a success." Parents have held their breaths until hearing the voice on the other end of a phone line say, "She's going to be alright. She just has some cuts and bruises."

Christians have their own version of good news—that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and offered himself as a sacrifice so we might have eternal life. This good news is meant to be shared, because we know Romans 10:13 says, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." That's good news worth sharing with everyone, even if we hadn't been commanded by Jesus to spread it.

This lesson will introduce you (or re-introduce you if you are familiar with their stories) to four people who encountered the good news of Jesus Christ in different—and very dramatic—ways. While their encounters varied, the results were similar. They experienced a complete life change. Consider the results of their encounters:

- A wealthy tax collector instantly develops a heart for the poor.
- A zealous persecutor of Christians suddenly becomes the faith's greatest defender.
- A godly cloth merchant immediately accepts Christ as her Savior after hearing the good news from others.
- A jailer experiences an earth-shaking conversion because of the actions and good news message of his prisoners.

This is the first of six lessons that urge us to personally and actively participate in God's mission. This unit will guide us to:

- Experience God's good news
- Live in faithfulness to God
- Engage in God's mission together
- Tell the good news of redemption and reconciliation
- Minister to people's physical needs
- Participate in God's mission to everyone

But in this first lesson, we will discover that participating in God's mission grows naturally and directly out of a genuine experience of God's good news; we will recognize that participating in God's mission is the normal outcome of becoming a Christian; and analyze whether we have responded in that way ourselves.

Lost. Seeking. Saved. (Luke 19:1-10)

This passage is familiar to Christians, and is a popular children's Bible story. It details the stories of two men who were seeking

something—Zacchaeus, a wealthy (and assumed, unscrupulous) tax collector is lost and seeking salvation through Jesus. Jesus, the Son of God, was on a mission seeking the lost to offer salvation to them. Each accomplished his goal.

While the story is notable because Zacchaeus is short and has to climb a tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus, it's deep theological message about God's mission is even more so.

For starters, it shows that in a crowd of people, Jesus knew who was truly seeking him, and called him down from the tree for a confrontation.

Also notable is the immediate life change Zacchaeus experiences when he accepts Christ. Formerly a gatherer of money for self, he experiences a new, generous heart for the poor—becoming Christ-like.

And we also see deeply into God's saving mission through Christ. Note how Jesus tells Zacchaeus that salvation has come to Zacchaeus today, showing how Christ's good news is immediate and that it is his mission on earth—"For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

Questions to explore

- *When we are confronted by Jesus' good news, we are asked to believe in Jesus through faith. What do you think it was like to be confronted by Jesus in person?*
- The passage reveals Jesus mission on earth, to "seek out and save the lost." Are we as Christians living up to our name of being "Christ-like" by following this example?

From persecutor of the faithful to defender of the faith (Acts 9:1-9, 19-22)

Perhaps nowhere in the Bible has a life changed so greatly as shown in this account of Saul, who later would be renamed Paul. It also is one of the most

significant events in the early church, as it leads to the conversion of one of the faith's most prolific theologians and missionaries. Saul's encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road gave the man who persecuted Christians (called "the Way" early in history) a new mission as one of them. This experience caused him to so change his life that he "immediately" began to tell other Jews about Jesus, proclaiming him as the Son of God.

Among some of the notes on Saul's conversion and questions to explore:

- *It was dramatic. Blinded by a beam of light, Saul hears Jesus' voice asking him why he was persecuting him and commanding Saul to go into the city for further instructions. The event blinded Saul for three days. What do you think was going through his mind during those three days as he neither ate nor drank?*
- Saul gives his side of this event in Acts 22:5-11 and 26:12-19, using his testimony of his conversion experience both times in these passages to tell others about coming to faith in Jesus. If you are a Christian, how can you use your experience of coming to know and believe in Christ to lead others to faith in him?
- Verses 19-22 share that he immediately began sharing with others about Christ, despite opposition to those who knew him that he was just days before the man who "made havoc" (v. 21) among Christians. What in your past might prevent you from effectively telling others the good news about Jesus? How can you, like Saul, prove Jesus is the Messiah?

A simple message, a faithful response (Acts 16:13-15)

This story of how Lydia came to believe in Christ after hearing the good news may represent the most typical way the good news is spread—by word of mouth and by believing by faith in Jesus. Lydia already was a believer in God, and through an ordinary encounter with Luke (the author

of Acts) and Paul, the new convert to the Way formerly known as Saul, she comes to faith in Christ.

As opposed to the other three passages in this lesson, there is no personal invitation from Jesus, no beam of light, no earthquake. There is only a believer sharing the good news with her and the supernatural opening of her heart by Christ to allow her to believe by faith.

Questions to explore

- *What does it mean in verse 14 when Luke says “the Lord opened her heart?”*
- What do you think Paul said to her and the others there? What would you have said?

Believers’ actions tell the good news, too (Acts 16:25-34)

Later in chapter 16, after Paul tells Lydia about Jesus, Paul and the other missionaries heal a girl possessed by a demon that enables her to tell the future. Unfortunately, the men who were exploiting her condition for profit didn’t appreciate the healing (and profit loss) and had them thrown in jail. While there, the missionaries were praying and singing hymns when God caused a great earthquake to open the doors of their cells and made their chains fall off the prison walls. If they had desired, they could have walked out of the prison, claiming divine intervention.

But they didn’t. What some might call divine intervention to escape, the missionaries called divine intervention to save. The Roman jailer, charged with their care, rushed to the scene and found the doors open. Moving to commit suicide rather than face his authorities, he is stopped by Paul, who announces, “We are all here.” The jailer, whose life was forfeit, is physically relieved at their good conduct and asks the question that everyone seeking

God must ask, "What must I do to be saved?"

And the missionaries answer the only answer to the question: "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved," offering Jesus' salvation to the jailer and his household. Not only had they told the jailer the good news, their good conduct convinced him of the need to experience the faith they experience.

Questions to explore

- *What does becoming a Christian mean? Eternally? Now?*
- What do our actions say about us as Christians? Is there a noticeable difference between our actions and the rest of the world's?