

UBF 2018 ISBC MESSAGE - Samuel Palaka / Friday Evening

FORGIVENESS OF SINS TO ALL NATIONS

Luke 24:44-49

Key verse 24:47 “And repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

I thank God for this “Kingdom Conference.” I am trying to imagine how the kingdom of God on earth would look like. This “Kingdom Conference” is a small glimpse. Are you enjoying to the full? Powerful word of God; abundance of delicious food; God’s people from all over the world to meet; most of all abundant grace and love of King Jesus flowing all over. In the morning message we heard that Jesus is the King of mercy, who has authority to forgive sins and who calls people. This is World Mission Night. In tonight’s passage, we will learn about how Jesus’ forgiveness of sins is made available to all nations. While teaching the disciples, the Risen Jesus emphasizes two very important points: 1. The core of the Gospel and 2. Witnessing this Gospel to all nations. May the Holy Spirit open our spiritual eyes through the word of God. Amen.

Part-I The gospel of forgiveness (45-47a)

Look at verses 44 and 45. “He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.” The law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms refer to the Old Testament. The Risen Jesus explained to the disciples that the whole Old Testament is pointing to Jesus as the promised Messiah because in him all the promises of the Bible were fulfilled. In other words, the world salvation plan through Jesus Christ is God’s way and God’s wisdom. It reveals God’s faithfulness to his promises. We are living in a postmodern world which gives a relativistic view of everything. Many religious teachers have said, “All religions are like rivers flowing to the same sea.” In India there are 330 million gods. I am not joking. When we share Jesus with Hindu students, they say, “Ok not an issue. We have now 330 million gods +1--including Jesus.” In other parts of the world, technology becomes their savior. Some think

science is the solution to everything. But nothing can save us except to trust in God's way to save the world. Apostle Peter was shocked when Jesus was crucified on the cross. But when his spiritual eyes were opened by the Holy Spirit he could understand that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Bible. So he proclaimed "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Ac 4:12).

Why and how is Jesus the only Savior? Look at verse 46. "He told them, 'This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.'" People expect their Messiah to be somebody like superman, a power ranger, or a powerful man with several hands and heads and with so many weapons. Some of my Bible students ask me, "How can a man hanging on the cross be a savior?" It is because sin demands lifeblood as payment. Hebrews 9:22 says, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." Jesus, the sinless Son of God, willingly died for our sins on the cross once and for all (Heb 7:27; 10:14). Prophet Isaiah foretold this, when he said, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed" (Isa 53:5). Apostle Peter realized that this prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus when he wrote, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed'" (1Pe 2:24). Because of his wounds we could be healed from sin-sickness and have peace with God. Jesus became the perfect sacrifice to forgive our sins. On the cross, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Yes, Jesus was crucified to forgive all my sins of pride and lust. Jesus was crucified to forgive all your sins too. Jesus was crucified to take away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29). Jesus died and rose again. His resurrection is the evidence that Jesus is the Savior of the whole world. Through his resurrection Jesus brought freedom from death and gave us eternal life. This is the gospel. When you and I believe this, the kingdom of God comes into our heart.

Now who can receive Jesus' forgiveness? Look at verse 47. "...and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." The fundamental problem of human beings has been not acknowledging the creator God in their life, instead rebelling against Him and living according to their sinful nature. So repentance means turning back to God and

accepting his Kingship. When we repent and believe in Jesus, we can receive the forgiveness of all our sins. For example, two criminals were crucified along with Jesus. One criminal hurled insults at him while the other criminal repented and said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." How did Jesus reply to his request? He said, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." When he repented, Jesus forgave all his sins and brought the kingdom of God into his heart that very moment. I pray that the kingdom of God may come into our hearts this very night.

Look at verse 47 again. "...and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." The gospel is good news not just for a community, or a particular country but for all the nations of the world. Many people and many countries believe in many peculiar ways of forgiveness of their sins. For example, people in India believe that if they take a "holy dip" in River Ganges their sins can be forgiven. If it is true then people of all other countries should visit River Ganges and take a bath if you want your sins to be forgiven. However, it is far from the truth. Even not all Hindus are able to go to River Ganges to take bath. River Ganges is almost 2000 kilometers from my hometown. Poor people cannot afford to travel there. This would mean that only rich people's sins can be forgiven. But praise Jesus who opened a unique way by dying on the cross so that all who believe in him can enter the kingdom of God. This good news is not only for America, Europe, the CIS, and Oceania, it is also good news for Africa, Asia and the Middle East. This is also good news for my country India.

India divides its population into four major castes. According to Hindu creation theory, the Brahmins were born from the mouth of God; the Kshatriyas were born from the chest of God; the Vaishyas were born from the thighs of God and the Shudras were born from the feet of God. Apart from these four castes, there is another group which is called "the untouchables." The Hindu scripture has nothing to say about how they were born. Anyway according to this theory, I was born as an untouchable. We were despised. Our very touch could pollute people. Our only work was to serve all other upper caste people faithfully in this life so that in the next birth we might be privileged to be born in better castes. However, my father as a young man converted to Catholicism. He eagerly wanted one of his sons to become a priest because of social recognition. I was sent to a Catholic seminary.

After five years of training, I was kicked out. Do you know why? A dog which was assigned to my care unfortunately died. So the priest said, "If you cannot take care of a dog how can you take care of people?" After I was rejected, I rebelled against God. I wanted to hurt God as much as possible by indulging in sinful activities. I did everything: drinking, smoking, indulging in sexually immoral life. I became a slave to sin. My studies suffered a lot. I wanted to change my life but did not know how. However, God did not leave me. By his grace and mercy, I could enter JNU, which is the top university in India. It was a miracle. I deeply realized that there must be some purpose of God in my life. At that time a missionary invited me to study the Bible. The word of God became so alive to me. Through one of the Bible conferences Jesus spoke to me "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin" (Jn 8:11). I deeply repented of my sins and personally experienced the forgiveness of all my sins. God called me to be a shepherd through 1 Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen people a royal priesthood...." I was an "untouchable" who was despised by society. I was rejected by the religious leaders. But God invited me to his kingdom by his unconditional love shown on the cross. God changed my identity to a royal priest and made me a shepherd for India. Praise God.

Part-II You are witnesses to all nations (47b-49)

When you have some good news, what do you do? Don't you share with others? You make sure that you share with everyone. Forgiveness of sins through Jesus' death and resurrection is the good news of all times. What does Jesus expect from those who have this kingdom news? See verse 47 once again. "Repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Through this verse we can feel God's broken heart to let all the nations know this good news. God wants all people to be saved (1Ti 2:4). In fact there is a great celebration in heaven when one sinner comes back to God. Why should his disciples preach the gospel? Look at verse 48. "You are witnesses of these things." The disciples should preach the gospel because they are the witnesses. As witnesses, Jesus eagerly wants his disciples to be his partners in world mission.

How can the disciples be his powerful witnesses? Look at verse 49. "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." Jesus promises that they will be clothed with the

power of the Holy Spirit. This verse is the same as Acts 1:8 which reads, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The Holy Spirit will empower the disciples to be his powerful witnesses of repentance and forgiveness to all the nations of the world.

Indeed the disciples were the witnesses of repentance and forgiveness of their sins. In today's main message we saw how the kingdom of God came upon Matthew, the tax collector. He grew to be such a wonderful witness that he wrote the book of Matthew so that he can continue to be a witness of Jesus to all generations.

Who are Jesus' witnesses in our generation? Jesus says to us, "You are witnesses of these things." We are witnesses of Jesus' forgiving love. We are all being transformed into a kingdom people. But there are many people who are not in the kingdom. Jesus eagerly wants us to be his partners to witness to them. How can we do it? God will give us the gift of the Holy Spirit and enable us. When we share God's broken heart we really want to be his faithful witnesses in our generation.

God opened a way for me to get a professor job in Delhi University. Through Joshua 17:18 God called my family to serve Hindu ministry. It reads, "...but the forested hill country as well. Clear it, and its farthest limits will be yours; though the Canaanites have iron chariots and though they are strong you can drive them out." Hindu students were like a forested land. Sharing the gospel with the Hindu students was really challenging in a Hindu dominated land. But the Holy Spirit empowered my family and gave us the courage to invite students from all the castes and witness Jesus to them.

One such case was shd. Yash. He belonged to an orthodox Hindu family. His father belonged to a Hindu fundamentalist group (RSS). When his father came to know that his son had become a follower of Jesus, he visited my house and threatened me saying, "If you invite him to church you will face the consequences." We were really afraid. His father called his relatives and some prominent Hindu leaders and publically beat him up for his faith and warned him never to go again. For almost one year he could not come. His family arranged his marriage with a Hindu girl and wanted him to marry. Just one day before his marriage he ran away from his house. Humanly speaking it looks crazy, but God used it for his purpose. He began to stay in

a rented house. After a couple of months, God moved his mother's heart to call him back. But Bro. Yash told them that only if they would allow him to go to church he would return. They agreed to allow him to go to church. Praise the Lord. This event only made him stronger and more rooted in the word of God. He is now growing as a wonderful shepherd and witnessing the gospel to many of his friends.

We have another young shepherd named sh. Chandu. As a young boy he was a gangster candidate. He always got involved in fighting and other wrongdoing. Even when he came to Bible study, a few times I had to go to the police station to bail him out. His heart was full of anger and hatred. This kind of life only showed his deeper inner spiritual problem of his broken relation with the creator God. Through continuous one to one Bible study, the Risen Jesus opened his spiritual eyes and then he deeply repented of his sins and believed in Jesus. Today he is growing as a wonderful shepherd for DU north ministry. Though he is from a Hindu family he has started a Bible fellowship at his home and is witnessing the good news to his family members and neighbours. He has led two of his sisters to faith. Like him, each of our brothers and sisters has a story to tell about their faith in India.

Most of the churches in India are caste-based churches. But we thank God for sending students from all the castes to come to our church and believe in the same God and Jesus as their Savior. By the power of the Holy Spirit we are growing as a witnessing church. We have a vision to grow our church as a model church in India. I have talked based on my experiences mainly from India. But after my message, we are going to hear about God's work in many other parts of the world. I am sure you are eagerly looking forward to it.

We learned that forgiveness of sins which comes through Jesus' death and resurrection is the core of the gospel. Most despised people are also invited to become kingdom people. God eagerly wants us to be his partners in the gospel by witnessing to all the nations until God's kingdom comes.