

Added!

Genesis 30:17–24, Acts 2:41–47

Kevin, I have known you for a long time. I first met you when I came to your home, beginning back in 2007, as a hospice “spiritual care volunteer,” to meet with your father, Wayne, who was in hospice care. As I came week by week to talk with him, I began to tell him about Jesus. You would sit on the couch and listen, and I wondered how you were receiving it. Did you think the gospel was just something to comfort old people as they faced death? Or did you realize that it applied to you too?

Later, after your father’s funeral, when your mom began attending our church, you visited from time to time. Then over the years I would come to your home for Bible studies with you and your mother. You listened politely at first. But as time went on you said that you agreed. Then more recently you began to say that you wanted to confess Christ yourself. A few weeks ago you met with the session and gave your testimony and affirmed the membership vows. Now the time has come to affirm your vows before the congregation with God in heaven as a witness.

Kevin:

1. Do you believe the Bible to be the Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation to be the true doctrine of salvation?

2. Do you believe in one living and true God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, equal in power and glory—and that the Lord Jesus Christ is God the Son, come in the flesh?

3. Do you repent of your sin and trust for salvation not in yourself but in Jesus Christ alone?

4. Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your sovereign Lord and promise that you will serve him, forsake the world, put to death your sinful deeds and desires, and lead a godly life?

5. Do you promise to participate faithfully in this church’s worship and service, to submit in the Lord to its government, and to heed its discipline, even in case you should be found delinquent in doctrine or life?

Kevin Lee Carey, you have now publicly confessed Christ as your Lord and Savior. On the basis of your testimony I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, “Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.” Today we know that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God at the public profession of Christ by Kevin Carey. The angelic choir is up in heaven cheering right now!

The Bible teaches that all of us are sinners, disqualified from heaven. All of us—every single person in the whole world, every person in this congregation—needs the righteousness of the perfect Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, God in human

flesh, to attain heaven. Every member of this church is charged to acknowledge Jesus Christ as our sovereign Lord both with the congregation and in our everyday life. Kevin, you cannot do this on your own, but God promises his Holy Spirit to help you. May his grace, mercy and peace be with you always. Amen.

The title of the message this morning is “Added!”

Years ago, when I was in elementary school, the local bank provided little cardboard folders for all the students. These held, as I remember, something like 40 quarter-dollars. There was a little slot for each one. The idea was that gradually filling up the folder with quarters would teach the students the importance of saving money. I remember the joy at sliding a quarter behind a flap until it snapped into place. With the top edge of the quarter still visible it was easy to verify the exact number of quarters in the folder. If a student added just one quarter every week, at the end of the year he or she would have \$10—actually a valuable amount in those pre-inflationary days. This sum was to be deposited in the bank, establishing a new account in the student’s name, and giving him or her a sense of ownership in the economy.

I don’t know how many of my classmates learned the habit of saving, but it made an impression on me. The idea was to ingrain in young people the idea of increasing wealth through the building of capital, not by going into debt—a valuable life-lesson.

What does this have to do with our text in Acts? If you were listening carefully, you heard the word “added” in our reading this morning. Just as I added a new quarter every week to my little bank folder, so we read that about three thousand newly-baptized persons were *added* to the number of the disciples. Later we read that “the Lord *added* to the church daily those who were being saved.”

The word *added* is an accounting term. An accountant going over the books is very careful to differentiate between sums added and sums subtracted. If you went to the bank and told the teller to *add* the money you were depositing to an account, and the teller instead *subtracted* it from your account, you would not be happy! As a matter of fact, if the teller did that knowingly and deliberately, it would be embezzlement—theft.

We also saw the word *add* in our Old Testament text this morning. We saw two sisters, Leah and Rachel, who desperately wanted children. In both cases “God listened to them”—he heard their prayers—and they bore sons. Conception and procreation are gifts from God. “Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.” Children are the heritage—the gift—of the Lord of heaven, and they are to be raised in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Parents are to bring their little ones to Jesus.

But notice particularly what our Old Testament text says about Rachel: “God listened to her and opened her womb. And she conceived and bore a son, and said, ‘God has taken away my reproach.’ So she called his name Joseph, and said, ‘The Lord shall *add* to me another son.’” This is a play on words in the Hebrew: Rachel called her firstborn son יוֹסֵף (*yōsēf*, Joseph), for the Lord would הוֹסֵף (*yōsēf*, that is, *add* to her) another son. In Hebrew the name Joseph sounds exactly like the word for *may he add*. Rachel took the birth of her son, Joseph, to be a promise that God would add to her, who had been childless for so long, another son. This later came to pass upon the birth of her second son, Benjamin. Years later, after Joseph had been sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt, Joseph, now governor over all the land of Egypt, told his brothers that they would see his face no more until they brought their brother Benjamin with them.

But notice the word “add”: “The Lord shall *add* to me another son.” In the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was made about 200 years before Christ, the word is precisely the same as the word used twice in our New Testament text. On the day of Pentecost, after the apostle Peter preached, there were a lot of people who believed. That day three thousand newly-baptized persons were *added* to the number of the disciples. Later we read that “the Lord *added* to the church daily those who were being saved.” So this word *add* is an important word in our text.

Remember, the word *add* is an accounting term. The Greek word translated *add* literally means *place toward*. A wise person exercising discipline can *place* a sum of money in a special envelope or bank account every paycheck, to go *toward* the purchase of a big-ticket item. Paying cash instead of taking on debt can save hundreds or even thousands of dollars on the purchase price. It does take discipline—what my dad used to call “postponed pleasure”—but in the long run it is worth it.

All of us should learn the spiritual discipline of tithing 10% of our income—giving it to God as an expression of gratitude for his provision and blessings; saving another 10% as wise stewards, then living off the rest: 80%. God doesn’t want his people living from paycheck to paycheck—or worse, dependent on “payday loans” with their exorbitant interest, just barely scraping by. If we learn to *save* for the future, cutting present expenses and living on 80% of our income while tithing and adding regularly to our nest-egg and old-age funds, then we will do so much better in the long run. God promises to supply all our needs.

But for the moment, focus on the word *add*. Believers were “added” to the visible church—the church in Jerusalem, under the oversight of the apostles and elders. Implied in this is a confession of faith and taking of vows.

Add is only three letters long in English, but it is an important word. Think of how it is used the the New Testament. In addition to the two uses in our text today

consider these: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be *added* unto you” (Matt. 6:33). If we make the kingdom of God our highest priority, God will add to us material blessings as well. “And believers were the more *added* to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14). “... and much people was *added* unto the Lord” (Acts 11:24). As the message of Christ went out, God regenerated lost souls and gave them faith to believe; these new believers were then added to the church. In each case it shows that a thing (the necessities of life, Matt. 6:33) or people were joined to something else so as to increase the size, number, or amount.

So God is the God who *adds*, whether it’s children (in the case of Rachel), or new converts added to the church, or material blessings (in the case of Christians who make God’s kingdom their priority). It was God, through my parents, who provided the quarters long ago for me to fill up the little cardboard banking folder.

It is God who adds; his adding is his blessing. The God who created the world and all things in it at the beginning adds blessing upon blessing for his believing people. In Malachi he says, “‘Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.’” Yes, this is the way God blesses. He keeps adding and adding and adding, blessing upon blessing. He is a good God. “Praise God, from whom all blessings flow”!

But particularly for today, it is God who adds to his church. We saw this this very morning as we witnessed an adult baptism. Kevin Lee Cary, whose heart was changed by the sovereign working of God, was added to the church. The church increased in size as a result. The church is now stronger; it has gained influence and strength. As Kevin’s witness is added to that of the rest of the body, it will make more of an impact in this world. This is all part of God’s perfect plan.

In Scripture, those who confess Christ as Savior and Lord are baptized and added to the church. We see this in our text this morning where those who gladly received Peter’s preaching were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were *added* to them. Three thousand! That’s a considerable number. That’s a lot of people who confessed Christ, that’s a lot of confessions of faith for the church elders to hear. That’s a lot of baptisms. That’s a lot more baptisms than any one man could perform in one day. That’s a *lot* of growth for a church—to go from 120 members to 3,120 members in one day. That’s 2,500% growth! If we had an investment that grew by 2,500% in one day, we’d be fantastically rich! Jeff Bezos’s wealth is said to have grown by over 40% during the pandemic scare, when people started to have most of their purchases delivered by Amazon instead of getting in their car and going to local stores. But 2,500% far eclipses Jeff Bezos’s measly 40%! That’s tremendous growth by any measure. God added and added and added.

The apostles provided teaching and spiritual leadership, but they couldn't do it alone. That is why the church eventually had to ordain deacons, to help with the work.

One commentator observed that the conversion of such a large number on the day of Pentecost was a greater work than the feeding of five thousand with a few loaves and fishes. Jesus had said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and *greater works than these* he will do, because I go to My Father." Now, on the day of Pentecost, this prophecy began to be fulfilled. This could only be fulfilled by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit changing men's hearts. Think of how difficult this was.

The Bible teaches that because of our forefather Adam's fall, all people by nature are spiritually dead. "As in Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). Here were people who were spiritually dead who were brought to life by the power of the gospel. God promises that his word, that goes forth from his mouth and the mouths of his preachers, will not return to him void—empty, fruitless—but will accomplish its purpose; it shall prosper in the thing for which he sends it (Isa. 55:11).

When the natural man hears the gospel, he closes his ears to it. He doesn't want to hear it. He doesn't want to be reminded of his sin. He doesn't want to hear of a the holiness of God. He doesn't want to hear that sinners cannot enter heaven. He doesn't want to hear that unless he measures up to the perfection of God himself, he will spend eternity in the lake of fire.

The Jews and converts to Judaism on the day of Pentecost didn't want to be reminded that their rejection of Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God and the Israel's Messiah was a grievous sin in the sight of the God of heaven. Peter's proclamation of the resurrection of the Christ from the dead after being in the tomb for three days and nights was proof that of God's approval, that his ascension into heaven where he sits at the right hand of the father was proof that God would ultimately make his enemies his footstool. They were particularly offended at Peter's declaration, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Here was the indictment against them: the Jesus who was rejected by the Jews, whom they had crucified and slain, is the Lord of glory, the Lord, the Messiah. Their rejection of him would seal their eternal doom. Was there any hope for them? Instinctively they cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter answered, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Here in a nutshell was the gospel, the promise of God unto salvation. Here was the lifeline, if they would reach out and take hold of it. Here, in just a few words, is man's only hope. There is forgiveness with the Lord. He is the God who forgives iniquities through the death of his Son. Peter's sermon was effectual through the power of Christ's Holy Spirit

blessing the word. Our text tells us that on that day “those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added.” What were they added to? Why, to the church, the Jerusalem church, the visible church. As one commentator put it, “Those who are joined to Christ, ought to join themselves to the disciples of Christ, and be united with them: when we take God for our God, we must take his people for our people.” His words are reminiscent of Ruth’s to her mother-in-law, Naomi: “Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.” This is what the Christian says who professes his faith in Christ before God and his people. He is saying, as Kevin said this morning, “I acknowledge Jesus Christ as my sovereign Lord. I promise that I will serve him, forsake the world, put to death my sinful desires, and lead a godly life. I promise to participate faithfully in this church’s worship and service, to submit in the Lord to its government, and to heed its discipline.” Kevin was saying in essence, “God’s people will be my people, and their God, my God. This is my choice.” Kevin received Christian baptism and was received into the Christian church. He was *added* to the church.

And though Kevin was received by the session and baptized by the pastor, he was really added and incorporated into the church by the sovereign work of God’s Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit of God can regenerate a spiritually-dead sinner. Only the Spirit of God can add to the church those whom he sovereignly saves. This was what was happening in Acts 2:47: “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

Jesus promised, “*I* will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” This is the word of him whose very name is “the truth,” who says, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”

The mainstream media relish foretelling the demise of the church. Back in the 60s and 70s there was a highly-publicized resurgence of Nietzsche’s “God is dead” theology: the Enlightenment had killed the God of the Bible. The Easter, 1966, issue of *Time* shocked the public with the provocative question—in huge red type against a black background—“Is God Dead?” Almost every year since, a major newsmagazine will run a story questioning whether the Jesus of the Bible even existed.

This past week I read an article asserting that the people who run the State have control of the money supply, the economy, the education system, and the media. They’re replacing traditional religion, as well, with what amounts to a new secular religion. Christianity is on its way out. It’s already dead in Europe and is hanging on in the US only among the lower classes. The elite no longer believe in traditional religion. This itself is an elitist, secular-humanist perspective, but it is at

odds with the teaching of Jesus Christ: “I *will* build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

The church is important to Christ. Paul wrote, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” Christ loves the church and gave himself for it. He has an eternal purpose for the church: at his coming he will present it to himself as his glorious bride. Christ and his people will sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb and enjoy life-giving fellowship for all eternity.

What God requires of Kevin he requires of all of us. He wants us to acknowledge Christ as our sovereign Lord, to serve him, to forsake the world, to put to death our sinful desires, to lead a godly life, to participate faithfully in the church’s worship and service, to submit in the Lord to its government, and to heed its discipline. Most of all, to love him with our whole heart, mind and strength, to the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, forever and ever.

Is this your heart? Is this your passion? Remember his promise, “him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” Amen.