

## **New Years Day Sermon 2024**

Go up north among the Aboriginal people and you can tell a man's whole life with one look.

The most obvious sign is the missing right front tooth.

The missing tooth tells you that this man has been taught the law, the stories, and the traditions, and has been circumcised - in other words he's been through men's business,

All that from a missing front tooth.

If there's a young woman with him it tells you she's been initiated – she's been through woman's business.

An initiated man will only be with an initiated woman.

**Women do not get circumcised – their man does that.**

Next you'll see scarring on his arms and legs – signs that he has been in grief – sorry business.

**Women don't have to be scared – their man does that.**

Sometimes you'll see – an initiated man with deep scarring on his legs – especially his thigh – this says he's been speared or beaten - punished for some traditional crime.

He lives with the scar but not the guilt – payback pays back for the crime – it's finished.

**Women don't have to be speared or beaten – their man does that.**

The missing tooth, the scars tell a story – it says "I belong".

Biblical circumcision is exactly the same.

Right back in the beginning –Genesis 17:

*"This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring: Every male shall be circumcised. [On the 8<sup>th</sup> day] you shall be circumcised and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.*

And it shall be a sign.

And every Jewish person to this day is circumcised to show they belong to Abraham's line – that they belong to God.

How faithful. Imagine during the holocaust – how tempting it would have been to not have you kids circumcised to save their life.

But it's a command – a sign.

---

Today, is the 8<sup>th</sup> day after Christmas – today Jesus was taken to the temple to be circumcised – to obey the law perfectly – for us.

Jesus obeyed every law of God so that he could be the perfect, perfect, lamb of God – to be sacrificed for our sins.

Just like the lambs had to be perfect for the sacrifice – so Jesus had to be perfect.

God only accepts perfect.

Are you perfect?

---

There's a problem for most Jewish people.

They believe obedience makes them Jewish – I'm circumcised I'm right.

I hear the same with Christians all the time – I'm baptised I'm right.

It's just not like that – is it?

Does a simple operation make you right with God?

You can be circumcised perfectly and obey the law perfectly - but cut off from God.

You can be baptised and obey the law perfectly – but cut off from God.

How is that?

You know there was a time in the Old Testament when the people were cruising along nicely obeying God to the letter, worshipping God to the letter, - but they had no heart.

God looked down and said, “your worship, your righteous acts, smell like filthy rags to me. I want your hearts.”

Paul says, “Obeying the law is one thing – but “circumcision of the heart is what's really required”.

A circumcised heart is one cut open – it's honest – it doesn't hide things from God.

---

Acts Chapter 2 – the day of Pentecost – Peter's first sermon – fairly basic but to the point:

*“Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs... This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*

*“Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that your father David died and was buried...But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah...God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.*

*“Fellow Israelites, be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”*

*<sup>37</sup> When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles,*

*“ what do we do?”*

*Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children ... for all whom the Lord our God will call.”*

These guys had a circumcision of the heart after hearing the Gospel: Jesus is the Messiah he died – and rose for you. You actually killed him but he died taking all your sins to the grave.

They were “cut to the heart”.

---

You know there is only one thing God requires – a true open heart – a circumcised heart.

The psalmists pray – “create in me a clean heart O lord”.

2024 – we will be walking in the name of Jesus.

To be truly circumcised, men and women, is to turn to Jesus with an open and honest heart.

We can have all the certificates in the world, certificate of circumcision, certificate of baptism, certificate of confirmation – they all smell like filthy rags unless we have open and honest hearts.

Remember the old, old, liturgy in the offertory:

*“The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit – a broken and contrite heart – O God you will not despise”.*

---

We celebrate today – because it marks the first of every law Jesus kept perfectly for us.

2024 all God wants from you is an open and honest heart – a circumcised heart.

You see Jesus can work with an open heart – open heart surgery.

He can't do anything with a closed heart.

*A Jewish man was about to have a heart operation.*

*The doctor asked him if he had ever had an operation before and how did it go*

*The Jewish man said I've only had one operation and it didn't go to well.*

*On my 8<sup>th</sup> day I was circumcised, and I couldn't walk for 18 months.*

Jesus wants your heart nothing else – let him cut it open.

---

“Give your heart to Jesus”.

It sounds such a cliché.

It's actually tough talk – it's where the rubber hits the road.

It means giving Jesus your sin, your lies, your hate, your greed, your racism.

It means opening your heart completely, and trusting he will still love you.

Listen to Paul: While we were yet sinners Jesus died for us – that's love.

Give your heart to Jesus – right now – right here 2024.

If you do this what was the promise made to us on the day of Pentecost? - “you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” – to help you and bless you.