

INTRODUCTION

This is the third episode in our series, "The Gospel According to TV." Today's message is entitled, "And Now a Word from our Sponsor." Television has been around for almost 70 years now, and shows have come and gone. But from the very beginning, an important part of television has been the commercials. Without the sponsors paying for the shows, there would be no television, and without the consumer buying the products, there would be no sponsors.

Of course, many of us think TV commercials are irritating. And with the advent of TiVo and DVRs, most of us just record programs and fast forward through the commercials. That's why sponsors are now spending billions on product placement in movies and television shows. It's also called "embedded advertising." For instance, do you know how much Coca-Cola pays "American Idol" to have their Coca-Cola cups in front of the judges? They pay \$56 million a season, but they know you won't fast forward through that!

I asked my Facebook friends about their favorite and least favorite television commercials. The favorites included the Coca-Cola song, "I'd like to teach the world to sing." And the commercial where Pittsburgh Steeler's Mean Joe Green tosses his jersey to a kid who gives him a Coke. Also the old lady saying "Where's the Beef?" in the Wendy's commercial was a favorite. One of the least favorites was the repetitive "Head On! Apply directly to the forehead. Head On! Apply directly to the forehead."

The goal of television sponsors is to try to get you to remember their products. One of the most effective ways to do this is to develop a catchy slogan and then repeat it so many times every consumer recognizes it. For instance, here are ten of the most famous advertising slogans. How many can you associate with the product?

1. It takes a licking and keeps on ticking (Timex)
2. Be all that you can be (U.S. Army)
3. Melts in your mouth, not in your hands (M&M's)
4. The Breakfast of Champions (Wheaties)
5. Good to the last drop (Maxwell House Coffee)
6. When it rains, it pours (Morton Salt)
7. Plop, plop, fizz, fizz, oh what a relief it is! (Alka-seltzer)
8. Don't leave home without it (American Express)
9. It's the real thing (Coca-Cola)
10. So easy a caveman can do it (Geico Insurance)

How many did you guess? If you guessed them all, then advertisers have accomplished their goal.

For you TV trivia buffs, do you know what the very first television commercial was? It was broadcast on July 1, 1941 on New York's WNTB. It was a ten-second spot during a baseball game between the Brooklyn Dodgers and the Philadelphia Phillies. The product was Bulova watches. The commercial was a picture of a clock superimposed on a map of the U.S. with a voice-over that said "America runs on Bulova time." It was only a 10-second spot, and do you

know how much Bulova paid for the commercial? \$4. Today, sponsors will pay about \$3 million for a 30-second spot broadcast during the Super Bowl.

As I was preparing for this series I got to wondering. Imagine you are watching the Super Bowl with some of your friends, and suddenly every television in the world blinks and a voice says, "We interrupt this game for a word from our Sponsor—the REAL Sponsor—the Living God." The producers in the studios are going crazy as they yell, "Where is this coming from?!" The technicians are frantically twisting knobs and clicking mouse devices and one yells, "It's not part of our satellite feed, someone has crashed our system!" The screens are filled with a bright light and a deep voice begins to speak that says, "This is your Creator speaking..." Okay, let's push pause for second. If God only had 30 seconds for a message to humanity what do you think God would say? Well, that all depends on your view of God. If you visualize God as an angry tyrant who is more of a Judge than a Father, you might imagine Him saying, "You rotten sinners had better straighten up and *fast* or I'm going to come down there and bust a few heads." Or at the other extreme, if you imagine God as a sentimental old grandfather who is too old and senile to really know or care about what is going on you might imagine Him sitting on a rocker saying, "Hey, kiddos, just live any way you want to; don't worry about sin, there really isn't anything that's right or wrong. Just be careful down there...I'm off for my nap." I think both of those ideas are wrong.

Wouldn't you just love for God to pre-empt your television show and deliver a personal message to you? Well, He's done something better. He's put it in print. We don't have to put words in His mouth because we have a book full of His words called the Bible.

One of His personal messages is found in Isaiah 43 that takes exactly 30 seconds to read. So, now a Word from our Sponsor:

Isaiah 43:1-4. "This is what the Lord says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life.'"

Have you noticed there seem to be more and more commercial interruptions on television? You're not imagining this. In the 1960s a 30-minute show had 4 minutes of commercials. Today a 30-minute show typically has 9 minutes of commercials—more than double from the sixties. And have you noticed the volume of commercials is much louder than regular programming? Well in these last days, God is bombarding us with His Word and He's saying it LOUD and clear. Let's examine the four messages in this Word from our Sponsor:

(1) God says, "I made you!"

In the Message paraphrase we read, "But now, God's Message, the God who made you in the first place...the One who got you started." (Isaiah 43:1 *The Message*) As long as people have breath, they will continue to debate the origins of the universe and mankind. One side says, "The Universe came into existence through a natural phenomenon like a Big Bang, and we are simply carbon-based life forms who evolved from single cell protozoa." The other camp says there is an intelligent Divine Being who designed and created the universe and us." Dr. Charley Gordon is a neurosurgeon and a member of our church. He has a website called "Designed on Purpose." (www.designedonpurpose.com/) Just as you can identify certain paintings by the style of the artist, Dr. Gordon has found the signature of God in every part of creation, from outer space to microscopic organisms. He's going to be publishing a book about his findings and I've asked him to share his presentation with us here on Sunday morning in a few months. I agree with Dr. Gordon's research that God designed and created everything in our universe.

What does God have to say about this? He simply says, "I made you." If you believe God made you then, you can believe He has a purpose for your life. However, if you're simply a biological accident, what is your purpose for living?

Because God is our Maker, that means when something goes wrong with our lives, we should consult the Maker. When an appliance breaks down at my house, I usually don't try to repair it, because I will make it worse! Instead, I call the company that made it and they send a technician to fix it. When our lives become broken down, we can't fix them ourselves. We should call on God, our Maker, and allow Him to fix our lives.

(2) God says, "I bought you!"

He says it this way, "Don't be afraid, I've redeemed you. I've called your name. You're mine." (Isaiah 43:2 *The Message*) The word "redeemed" means to "buy back." In most commercials, the sponsor is trying to get you to buy something. But our Sponsor is saying, "I've already done the buying. I bought you!" The word "redeem" was used in association with the sale of slaves.

The best way to illustrate the idea of redemption is from the life of Hosea and Gomer. Hosea was one of the Minor Prophets in the Old Testament, and Gomer was his wife (not the guy on Andy Griffith who said, "Shazam!"). Hosea married Gomer and they had children, but Gomer wasn't feeling fulfilled, so she abandoned her husband and children. She ran to seek happiness in the arms of other men. Gomer's life spiraled downward until she was forced to sell herself into slavery. And while she was being unfaithful, Hosea never stopped loving her. One day as Gomer was auctioned off as a slave to another man who would use and abuse her, she heard a familiar voice start bidding for her. She looked up and saw it was her husband, Hosea. The bidding rose, "Ten shekels!" Hosea said, "Eleven!" Another man said, "Twelve." It continued until Hosea had bid all the silver he had, "Fifteen shekels...plus, I'll pay ten bushels of barley." "Sold!" So Hosea bought his wife back; he redeemed her.

I can only imagine the fear that must have filled Gomer's mind. Was he going to say to her, "Now, I paid good money for you, so I'm going to treat you like the slave that you are. I'm going to teach you a lesson you'll never forget for leaving me and the children." But instead, Hosea

showed her love. He said, "Gomer, I love you. I bought you back so I can spend the rest of my life with you as my wife."

That's what God has done for us. We each owed a sin debt so high that we could never repay it. So Jesus went to the cross and paid the highest price possible to redeem us from sin. He paid the gold of His blood, and the silver of His tears. The Bible says, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed...but with the precious blood of Christ." (1 Peter 1:18-19)

(3) God says, "I will be with you!"

He says, "When you're in over your head, I'll be there with you. When you're in rough waters, you will not go down. When you're between a rock and a hard place, it won't be a dead end— Because I am God, your personal God." (Isaiah 43:3 *The Message*)

One of my favorite music videos is Reba McEntire singing the song, "I'll be." The video traces the life of a mother who kisses her daughter's knee when she skins it. Then she's there to comfort her teenager when she breaks up with her boyfriend. She's there when her daughter goes off to college, and then in the last scene the roles have reversed and the daughter is taking care of the mother as she's dying. The lyrics say: "When darkness falls upon your heart and soul; I'll be the light that shines for you; When you forget how beautiful you are; I'll be there to remind you; When you can't find your way; I'll find my way to you; When trouble comes around; I will come to you; I'll be your shoulder; when you need someone to lean on; be your shelter; when you need someone to see you though; I'll be there to carry you; I'll be there; I'll be the rock that will be strong for you; the one that will hold on to you; when you feel that rain falling down; when there's nobody else around, I'll be."

Reba can't be everywhere at once, but God can! We all wish we had someone to be with us when life gets tough. That's exactly what God promises. Notice that God *didn't* say, "I'll keep you out of the rough waters." or, "I'll keep you out of the fire." No, He promised that He will be with us *when* we pass through the tough times. If you read the entire 43rd chapter of Isaiah you'll see that God says ten times, "Don't be afraid!" You are going to face some scary situations in life, but God says "Don't be afraid because I'll be with you." The final experience all of us will face is death and the Psalmist says, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me." (Psalm 23:4)

(4) God says, "I love you!"

In *The Message* paraphrase we read, "I paid a huge price for you...that's how much you mean to me! That's how much I love you! I'd sell off the whole world to get you back, trade the creation just for you." (Isaiah 43:4 *The Message*)

How can you know that God loves you? He said it—clearly! He says plainly, "I'm crazy about you! You are precious and honored in my sight!" But more than just saying it, He showed it. Romans 5:8 says that "God demonstrated His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

We read in the NIV that He says He will give men in exchange for us. What is that all about? Well, I know of one man God gave in exchange for me: His Son, Jesus. The Bible says "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21) God loves you so much that if you had been the only sinner on earth who needed a Savior, then Jesus still would have come and died for you!

John Bisagno tells the story of a TV executive whose teenage son ran away from home and traveled to a large city. He learned that his boy had gotten involved in drugs, so he called a preacher there and asked him if he could try to find his son. The pastor finally found the young man and after working with him for several weeks, he shared the plan of salvation and the young man prayed to receive Christ. The pastor told him to pick up the extension line while he called his father to report that he had found his son. When the father answered the preacher told him he had found his son and that he had accepted Christ. He father said, "I don't care about that. I want to know how long his hair is, if he's had a bath, and if he's ready to apologize to his mother." The young man ran out of the study and his father never heard from him again. His love for his son was *conditional*. "If you meet these requirements, then I'll love you." But God's love is totally *unconditional*. He loves us in spite of our sins.

CONCLUSION

So if God pre-empted television programming and delivered a 30-second commercial, here's what our Sponsor would say: "I made you; I bought you; I will be with you; and I love you." How can you refuse an offer like that?

There's a Latin phrase, *caveat emptor*, which means "let the buyer beware." That's good advice because have you ever noticed all the subtle caveats appearing in television commercials? They are almost added as an afterthought, and some of them are pretty silly when you think about it. Here's one: "See dealer for details." You usually see that with car commercials where they say something like, "A brand new car for \$5,000, plus you'll get \$4,500 cash for your clunker. See dealer for details." Hmm. Guess what those details are? You don't qualify because you have to be born between July 16 and July 18 and you must have a Polish father and a Brazilian mom who both play the piano or something.

Since drug companies are now advertising their products, you often hear: "Tell your doctor what medications you're taking." Hold it. I thought my doctor was supposed to be telling ME what medications to take—not the other way around!

Here's another one: "Quantities are limited." Wow, thanks for telling me. I really thought you had an unlimited supply of George Foreman grills. Come on now, *every* product quantity is limited! The only thing in this world that is truly unlimited is God's love.

How about this phrase: "Use only as directed." I guess they had to add that because there really are some folks out there who just might *eat* Preparation H or something!

And then there's the one every dad loves to hear in a toy commercial: "Some assembly

required.” Right. Guys, when you read that, you know you’re going to spend at least 14 hours reading the 90-page assembly manual written by someone for whom English is not their first language. It contains such easy instructions as: “Insert Tab A into Slot B while gently turning flange C counterclockwise until bolt D4 is clicks into underside of frame.”

Here’s one more: “Limited time offer.” That is one of the most effective marketing phrases ever invented. Sponsors want you to think you must buy NOW, because this offer may not be available for very long. Sometimes that may be true, and other times it may not be. I remember the funny guy here in Tyler who used to advertise the “Going out of Business Sale” for some furniture store and if I recall they were going out of business for about seven years!

But when it comes to God’s offer, it really is a limited time offer. God isn’t offering you a product, He’s offering you a personal relationship. But it is a limited time offer, because you may not be able to accept it tomorrow. The Bible says, “Seek the Lord WHILE he may be found; call on him WHILE he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.” (Isaiah 55:6-7)

Will you accept His offer today? In order to do so you must be willing to forsake your sinful past. That certainly doesn’t mean you have to be perfect, because if that was the case, *none* of us would qualify. It’s like this: God is offering you the gold of His grace, and our hands are full of the garbage of this world. We must be willing to release our garbage in order to accept the gold of his grace. But this is a limited time offer. Why? One day you are going to die, and after you die, the offer of salvation is no longer on the table. You may think, “I’m young and healthy, I’ve got lots of time.” But there’s another event that could change this offer: Jesus is going to return without warning, and when He does, the offer changes, so the only certain time you have to accept God’s offer of the free gift of eternal life is right now.

The goal of a television commercial is to get you to respond by buying a product. You’ve heard the Word from our Sponsor, so how will you respond? He’s offering you the free gift of eternal life. Will you seek Him and receive this gift, or will you push the mute button, change channels, or simply walk out of the room?

OUTLINE

If God broadcast a commercial, what would He say?

(1) "I made you!"

"But now, God's Message, the God who made you in the first place...the One who got you started" *Isaiah 43:1 The Message*

(2) "I bought you!"

"Don't be afraid, I've redeemed you. I've called your name. You're mine." *Isaiah 43:2 The Message*

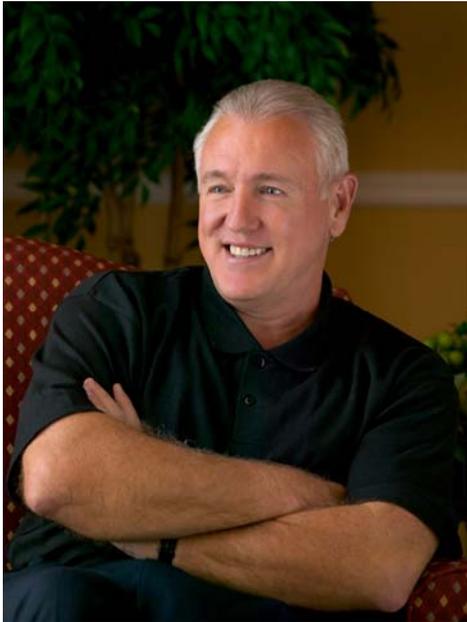
(3) "I will be with you!"

"When you're in over your head, I'll be there with you. When you're in rough waters, you will not go down. When you're between a rock and a hard place, it won't be a dead end—Because I am God, your personal God." *Isaiah 43:3 The Message*

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"I paid a huge price for you...that's how much you mean to me! That's how much I love you! I'd sell off the whole world to get you back, trade the creation just for you." *Isaiah 43:4 The Message*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes