

Sermon – 12-19 – Acts 3 – Times of Refreshing – Manuscript

-Did you know the Gospel, which means “good news”, begins with really bad news? It begins, for all of us, with the harsh reality that we have each rejected God. And it was no half-hearted rejection. In Romans 3, Paul strings together a bunch of Old Testament quotes, mostly from the Psalms, to put it this way:

“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.

All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.’

‘Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.’

‘The venom of asps is under their lips.’

‘Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.’

‘Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.’

‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’”

That is the bad news that begins the Gospel. This bad news is the whole reason salvation is needed in the first place. You see, the reason the Gospel is good news, is because of how God responded to *that* bad news.

Bearing this in mind, it should be no surprise to us that the first Gospel messages ever preached, had a lot to say about the bad news, but also about how Jesus overcame it all. This is the beauty of the Gospel: it is the story of God repurposing our rebellion through Jesus to provide forgiveness for that rebellion, so that repentance might lead to blessing and the realization of our original and ultimate calling. This is what we will see in our passage this morning.

Our passage this morning will be Acts 3:11-26, if you want to open there. You may recall from last week that Pastor Grant took us through the first ten verses of chapter 3, in which Peter, accompanied by John, healed a lame beggar sitting beside one of the gates to the Temple. Hopefully, you also remember that Grant’s main point of application was that the preaching of the Gospel should occur in both deed and word. The miraculous healing was the Gospel deed, and this morning we look at the words that accompanied that picture.

To this point in Acts we have seen a number of important events take place. Jesus ascended to heaven after promising to send help for his disciples. Then that help came in the form of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This led to the birth of the church: a tightknit, dedicated, and growing Christian community. And this is where we find ourselves in the story.

An important key to the story of Acts to bear in mind is Jesus’ words that His disciples would be His witnesses “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”. This list of places paints the picture of the Gospel radiating out from Jerusalem in ever-increasing measure, until it covers the whole world. And this is exactly the path the story of Acts takes.

But there is more than geographic advancement implied in those words of Jesus, they also speak to the advancement of the Gospel to other people groups. Jerusalem and Judea were predominately Jewish regions. Samaria was well-known and despised by Jews as the home of those with mixed Jewish-Gentile blood, dating from the time of the Assyrians. And then, “the ends of the earth” presumably refers to predominately Gentile lands.

Both of these progressions, the geographic and the ethnic, are important to have in the back of our minds as we go through our passage today. First, because the story of Acts has centered on Jerusalem to this point, and actually it has centered on the symbolic heart of Jerusalem: the Temple. Second, it’s important to understand that the going out of the Gospel is still primarily focused on the nation of Israel, but there are hints that change is coming on that front.

With that, let’s begin looking at our passage. Peter and John have healed the lame man and entered the Temple with the man tagging along, causing great wonder and amazement in the crowds who recognize the healed man. Picking up in verse 11, Luke writes, “While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon’s. And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: ‘Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?’”

Our passage opens on a scene of great excitement. Luke has told us that this man had been a fixture at the gate of the Temple. So much so, that everyone inside recognized him as the beggar from the Beautiful Gate. It is, therefore, understandable that they would be astonished upon seeing this man not only standing, but walking, jumping, and praising God exuberantly.

And Luke tells us that he had affixed himself to Peter and John. Again, this is an understandable, even if it was, as Peter will say, misdirected adoration. But it is the man’s obvious gratitude toward the Apostles that ultimately leads the crowd to fixate on them as well, as the objects of their astonishment.

Peter, however, is not thrown off, but sees a perfect opportunity to witness to Jesus as the Savior. After all, he has just healed a well-known cripple, and so it would be very difficult for anyone to deny that a miracle had in fact taken place. And he had performed this miracle through the invocation of the name of Jesus. He, therefore, immediately sets about redirecting the attention and wonder of the people, first by undermining any idea that he and John had the power or piety to do such a thing in and of themselves. Then, in verse 13, he directs their attention toward Jesus, saying, “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him.”

So, Peter shifts the focus off him and John, and onto Jesus. And as soon as he mentions Jesus, he also brings up the elephant in the room. Jesus, whom the God of Israel had glorified...but whom the people listening to Peter had rejected and denied. You can almost feel the awkward silence that would have descended on the crowd at this point.

However, Peter’s blunt statement is not without a hint of hope. It’s fitting that I should be handling this passage in our Acts series, since the last time I preached I covered Isaiah 53, and Peter likely has that section of Isaiah in mind here. We see this in his reference to Jesus as God’s “servant”, which echoes Isaiah’s suffering servant whom he predicted would be rejected men, but by that rejection would redeem God’s people.

By way of reminder, here's how Isaiah put it: "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not...But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:3,5 *ESV*).

There are two massive, contrasting realities represented in both Peter's and Isaiah's statements: first, the heinous sin of man, and second, the shocking grace of God. Peter continues the comparison of the two in verses 14-16: "But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all."

Peter makes the sin of the people abundantly clear. They denied God in the flesh, in favor of a murderer. They killed the One who gave them life. God, on the other hand, raised that same One from the dead. Jesus was rejected by man, but glorified by God. And Peter and John witnessed it all firsthand, both the rejection and the glorification. And now, Jesus' name is effective to take a man who had never walked in his life, and enable him to walk and leap for joy.

Peter has done something really subtle in these verses. He begins by reminding the crowd of the night when Jesus stood before them on trial, but then he flips the scene on its head, putting the crowd on trial with Jesus preparing to judge them. He does this by laying out evidence that clearly shows it was Jesus who was innocent, and therefore, the crowd who was in the wrong on that momentous night.

Jesus stands vindicated by God. He was raised from the dead, and lives again. And this is proven by the fact that His name is effective to heal. And the crowd cannot deny it, because they knew the man who was healed, they knew him well. So, if Jesus was innocent and they rejected Him, calling for His death, they stand guilty of murdering God's servant, who is the Holy, Righteous, Author of Life; they are guilty of murdering God incarnate. Which means the only question left to answer is what will the judge do to them? What will their punishment be? Peter provides the answer in the latter half of his sermon, beginning with verses 17-18: "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled."

You might imagine these verses as a preliminary statement before the verdict is passed. Much as a judge might offer his opinion on a case, citing information he believes to be important, before reading the decision of the jury, Peter gives some important context to the crowd's involvement in Jesus' death, once again drawing on the theme of Isaiah 53.

He acknowledges that ignorance played a part in what happened. He says that the people, and even their leaders, simply misunderstood who Jesus was. Not only that, but he identifies with them. Peter refers to the crowd as his "brothers" at this point. Which draws attention to the fact that it was not just the crowd that denied Jesus, but His closest friends did as well, Peter foremost among them.

After acknowledging the role of the people's ignorance, Peter declares that God had planned to use the evil that came of that ignorance for His own purposes. At this point, I wonder if Peter does not have the story of Joseph in mind. The story of Joseph, of course, parallels Jesus' story quite closely. Like

Jesus, Joseph was betrayed by his brothers, but God ultimately used that betrayal and all the evil that came of it for His own good purposes, to save life, in fact. And like Joseph's brothers, those in Peter's audience now find themselves standing before the person they betrayed, now raised to a position of ultimate power, and able to recompense them as He sees fit.

So, how will He repay them for their sin against Him? We find out in verses 19-21: "Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago."

Peter, speaking for Jesus, offers them a chance to repent, and by so doing, enter into God's blessing. The need for repentance is a foregone conclusion at this point, based on the case Peter has laid out against the crowd. But the blessings that come as a result of that repentance are not so expected. Peter basically tells them that if they just plead guilty, the curse they are under will be lifted, the refreshment of God will come, and they will be drawn into God's ultimate plans for creation. This is a far better deal than anyone guilty of murdering God's Son could hope for; it is a testament to God's unimaginable grace.

First, if they repent, their sins will be "blotted out" or "wiped away". This phrase refers to someone wiping the slate clean. But it also carries with the idea of permanence; their sins will be blotted out for good. Second, if they repent, they will begin to experience the blessings of the new creation Kingdom Jesus established on earth. They've already seen what this kind of refreshment can look like: a lame man leaping for joy. In other words, repentance leads them into the experience of Jesus making all things new. And third, if they repent, they are promised to be on the right side of things when Jesus returns and completes that process of making all things new by removing all evil.

Both Isaiah's and Revelation's accounts of the new heavens and new earth draw a stark contrast between those who are a part of God's people, and those who are against Him. They make it clear that when Christ returns, He will return *for* some, and *against* others. This third blessing that Peter mentions is the chance to be on the right side of that conflict; a conflict that ends with Christ's enemies destroyed, and His people established in paradise. The simple fact is that Jesus is committed to renewing all things, which means evil has an expiration date, as do those who stubbornly cling to their evil ways and do not repent. Therefore, repentance is the path to ever-increasing blessing, and rejection of Jesus is the path to ultimate destruction.

And this point has been made from the time of Moses on, as Peter shows in verses 22-25: "Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.'" And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'"

Here Peter reminds this group of Israelites about the promises of God from their past, and the noble calling placed upon them as children of Abraham. He begins by reminding them that Moses predicted a prophet like him would come. And Israel's response to this prophet would carry significant

consequences. Anyone who does not listen would be cut off from God's people. This again speaks to the repentance that is necessary, and warns of what will happen to any who refuse to repent.

Then Peter mentions the other prophets, and points out that every prophet from Samuel on continued to look forward to and proclaim the future coming of *the* prophet. This is important, because the prophets would have been the natural place to look for the one Moses predicted, and yet they all continued to predict one still to come. That is until Jesus, who claimed to be the Christ sent from God. With Jesus, the claims, that there was still another prophet who would come, stop.

And finally, Peter reminds his Jewish brethren that they were called to be a vehicle for God's blessing to the nations. In this we have the implication that God's blessing is not going to stop with Israel, and, in fact, was never meant to. It is meant to go to all nations, just as Jesus' witnesses are meant to go to the end of the earth.

This, in turn, means that the Jewish people of the time were operating in a unique window of time that would eventually close, and we see Peter allude to this again in verse 26: "God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

This final verse operates as a summary of Peter's sermon. The whole sermon is meant to show the crowd that they are at a decision point. Jesus has been vindicated, and they have been proven guilty. They now must decide if they will repent, turning from their wickedness, so that they may experience the blessing of Christ, and take up their call to be vehicles of that blessing to the nations, or if they will reject Christ once again and forfeit that blessing and call.

But the clock is ticking, in some sense. The Gospel had come to Israel first, which was a tremendous privilege. But to say it came to them first, implies it would eventually move on to be offered to someone else second, as indeed God's words to Abraham centuries before also indicated.

Remember, the setting of this sermon and what I told you about the movement of the story of Acts. The Gospel was to start in Jerusalem, but would gradually make its way to the end of the earth. So too, it was to start with God's covenant people Israel, but would gradually go out to others. Also, it is likely significant that Peter is preaching in Solomon's portico, which was a section of the Temple located in the court of the Gentiles; where Gentiles were allowed to worship. All this point to Israel having a choice to enter into the times of refreshing that were and are at hand, and be a part of taking that refreshment to the nations, or to have those blessings pass them over.

As we continue in the story of Acts, we will see that Israel's response was a mixed bag. Some repented and entered into the times of refreshment. Others, continued to reject Jesus and the blessings of repentance. What about us? Perhaps, this sermon, preached to a group of Israelites, doesn't seem to have direct application for us. But I would argue that it does.

It might be easy to think that we would never have been a part of the crowd that called for Jesus' crucifixion, and so we bear no guilt for that particular act of wickedness. But I would say, if your sins and mine are forgiven *because of what Jesus did* on the cross, then our sins were part of what *led him* to the cross. The first two verses of the great spiritual *Were You There*, ask the questions "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" and "Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?" The implicit answer to those questions is, yes, we were there, or at least our sins were. It is this reality that caused writer of this song to say, "Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble." If you have not trembled at

the realization that you had a part in Jesus' murder, then I would suggest you have come to understand your sin in its most devastating facet.

And so, the same decision that faced Peter's audience faces us still: will we repent and enter into Christ's blessing? And repentance is not a one-time act, it is the ongoing cycle of sanctification. While there is the moment of justification, at which point all our sin, past, present, and future, was forgiven, growing in holiness is a lifelong process of repentance. But it is not repentance that leads to guilt and burden, but repentance that leads to the removal of guilt and blessing of new and greater life. The Christian life is a cycle of death and resurrection. Dying to sin and self that we may be resurrected to new and eternal life.

And part of that new life is engaging the call God has put on our lives as His new creations. When mankind was first created, God placed His image upon us and told us to fill the earth with that image; we failed in this calling until the time of Christ. In Christ, this calling has been redeemed, and freshly enabled by His Spirit. We are once again called to spread the image of God throughout the earth, but now that image has a perfect representative: Jesus Christ of Nazareth. And so, our calling is inextricably linked to Him; it is all about Him.

Jesus, who is the exact image of the invisible God. Jesus, who was rejected by man, but glorified by God in resurrection and power. Jesus, who offers us forgiveness instead of condemnation, blessing instead of a curse, new life instead of destruction. Jesus, who calls us to make disciples of all nations, expanding His Kingdom, that all families of the earth might be blessed.

So, let me add on to Grant's main idea from last week, and say, let us live in joyful repentance, knowing it leads to ever-deepening refreshment in Jesus Christ, as we await the restoration of all things, preaching the Gospel everywhere we go, and doing good to everyone we encounter, that Christ may be seen by all. "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever" (Romans 11:36 *ESV*).

"TIMES OF REFRESHING"

Acts 3:11-26

Main Idea: Repentance is the path to forgiveness, the blessings of new life in Christ, and the realization of our calling as image-bearers and Christ-followers.

Introduction – Bad News and Good News

Acts 3:11-12 – Peter’s Golden Opportunity

Acts 3:13 – The Elephant in the Room

Acts 3:14-16 – The Crowd on Trial

Acts 3:17-18 – Ignorance and the Plan of God

Acts 3:19-21 – Repentance: The Pathway to Refreshing

Acts 3:22-25 – God’s Promises and Israel’s Calling

Acts 3:26 – Israel’s Moment of Decision

Application – Repentance and the Christian Life

Life Groups

Sermon Discussion Questions

“Times of Refreshing”

Acts 3:11-26

Main Idea: Repentance is the path to forgiveness, the blessings of new life in Christ, and the realization of our calling as image-bearers and Christ-followers.

1) What do you think the role of repentance is in the Christian life? Consider 1 John 1:9.

2) What do God’s various callings in Gen. 1:26-28, Gen. 12:2-3, and Matt. 28:19-20 tell us about the heart and plans of God?

3) How might we more fully reflect God’s heart, and engage with His plans, as seen in the above passages?

Questions? Pastor Michael Tourtellotte at michael@ebcsalem.com