

The Church Alive – Getting It Right About Jesus Acts 3:11-4:4

11 While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement. 12 But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, "Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. 14 But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. 16 And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.

Some of you may be familiar with an apologetic or defensive argument for the deity of Christ (that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and in fact God in the flesh; the God –man); first outlined by C.S. Lewis in his book, "Mere Christianity," that has come to be known as the Lunatic, Liar or Lord argument. Or as some have called it, the Mad, Bad or God argument. It goes something like this:

Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. Therefore we have only one of three options concerning who Jesus is: 1. He was exactly who He said He was, that is the Son of God and Lord; 2. He was an evil immoral liar who just lied to trick people for He knew that what He was saying about Himself was not true. 3. Or He was a stark raving lunatic who was completely out of His mind and did not even realize what He was saying.

Many people (even many non-Christians) consider Jesus to be a moral man and perhaps even the greatest moral teacher. And it would not be in character for the greatest moral teacher to lie knowingly, purposefully and continually. Lying, as a characteristic of one's life, is not consistent with being known as moral. Therefore, Jesus could not be a liar and yet claim to be God who does not lie.

Additionally, it would be inconsistent to claim that this great moral man who taught humility, love, compassion, and caring for others was actually some crazed, sick-in the head, ego-maniac who did not really know what He was saying or doing. So clearly, Jesus was not a lunatic either. Therefore we are left with just one possible option, Jesus must be exactly who He claimed to be, that is Lord, the Son of God and indeed then very God of God.

To quote CS Lewis concerning the Lunatic, Liar, Lord trilemma, *"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great*

The Church Alive

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human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. ... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.”

I find it interesting that those who want to discard this argument do so by saying that it is not right or fair to give us only three options from which to choose. Some want an option that says that perhaps Jesus never really called or referred to Himself as the Son of God but this was just added to the Bible much later. Such a person knows nothing of overwhelming evidence supporting the trustworthiness of the Scriptures and therefore what Jesus and others said concerning Himself. But perhaps the so called greatest argument against the Lord, Liar, Lunatic trilemma, one that is clung to by a number of skeptics is this, that Jesus never even existed, that He is made up, a fictional character of man’s imagination. The upside to this argument is that one does not have to deal then with who Jesus is, for if He never existed, then He can neither be Lord, Liar or Lunatic. The downside to this argument is its stupidity – yes stupidity; for while you might argue about what Jesus said in contrast to what we have recorded in Scripture (which I understand and know to be the accurate record of Jesus), to try to claim Jesus never existed in light of all the evidence to the contrary is in fact lunacy itself.

Now, why am I all riled up about this? I am riled up about this because of what I would desire to present to you as the big idea of our text in Acts 3:11-4:4- that idea being this: ***that God’s people are to know and communicate with accuracy who Jesus really is.*** In other words, we need to make sure that we are getting it right and saying it right when it comes to Jesus. And this is in fact what we find Peter doing in our text; having gotten it right about Jesus, He now communicates, with accuracy, who Jesus is before this crowd of Jews. Peter wants no wrong thinking concerning Jesus. I submit to you then that what we find in our text are three actions of Peter that ought to become three responsibilities we accept that present with accuracy who Jesus really is. Let me give you the three responsibilities and inform you that time will only allow us to examine the first one; but so you will know where we are going, here are the three responsibilities that I would call you to accept. For like we see Peter doing in our text...

- I. We must confront wrong thinking about Jesus (3:11-16)
- II. We must call people to right thinking about Jesus (3:17-26)
- III. We must expect a two-fold contrast in what is thought about Jesus (4:1-4)

This text is all about Jesus. As I recently read how one preacher put it, “...if there’s one subject where there’s no room for empty rhetoric, it’s this one. People need to hear the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, about Jesus.” We must be getting it right when it comes to Jesus. This is the very purpose of the church, to proclaim with accuracy the Person of Jesus. The world needs to know who Jesus is and it is our job, our responsibility to make Jesus known.

Now then, what does getting it right about Jesus mean in practical terms? What is it that we are to communicate to others? We have the answer here in Acts 3. Beginning in Acts 3:11 we find the second sermon preached by Peter after the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost. We have already examined the first sermon of Peter in Acts 2 and while there are some differences between that sermon and the one in our text, there is something extraordinarily similar. What is that similarity? It is this, that in both messages Peter is ultimately concerned that people are getting it right about Jesus. And we need to learn from this example. So this morning

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:3).

we are going to look at the first of three actions of Peter that we must accept as our own responsibility. First of all, like Peter...

I. We must confront wrong thinking about Jesus (3:11-16).

Before we look at Peter’s sermon, let us be reminded what it was that prompted him to preach. Remember that Peter and John were making their way to the temple at about 3 in the afternoon for prayer. As they approached the entrance, they heard a man begging for alms, begging for money so that he might eat and care for himself. Peter’s response to the man is recorded there in verse 6, **“I do not possess silver or gold, but what I do have I give to you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene – walk!”** And then, in typical Peter fashion, Peter seized the man’s hand and hauled him up. Instantly, the beggar’s feet and ankles were strengthened. It was a miracle! We read that the unnamed man immediately began to walk, leap, and praise God. The people in the temple were filled with wonder and amazement because they knew this man had been lame for over forty years. This brings us to our text in verse 11 where we read, **“While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement.”**

I love what this text tells us about the healed man’s respect for Peter and John. He “was clinging” to them, a word that means to grip or hold with all one’s vigor. This man was grateful to God for what had happened to him and how God had used Peter and John to accomplish this. This ought to remind us to appreciate those whom God uses to help us in our faith and walk with God. The apostle Paul would later expound on this principle calling the believers in Thessalonica, **“12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.”**

Beloved, our God is glorified when we hold in high esteem the people He used to introduce us to the Savior and continues to use to instruct us in the way of the Savior. This is what we find the beggar doing and as a result of his walking, leaping, praising and clinging, a number of people, mostly like several thousand, **“ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement.”** The people were wondering what was going on. Now the portico of Solomon was located on the east side of the temple and was a corridor or walkway where the people would gather. The Lord Himself had ministered as we are told in John 10:23 and it is also where the church would meet for some time to worship according to Acts 5:12. I suspect that the acoustics were perfect for preaching. But as the people were gathering, full of amazement, our text suggests that they were under the wrong impressions about what was happening along with who was responsible for what was happening. Perhaps people were saying things like, “Look at the power of Peter and John in healing this man!” “What is it that Peter and John have done to this beggar?” “Look at how this beggar has changed his life!” And so, the first thing Peter does as he addresses the crowd is to confront wrong thinking about Jesus. Most of us do not like confrontation, certainly not to receive it but even more so not to give it. Yet, if we be faithful followers of Christ, it is absolutely imperative for two parties; first for ourselves as the heralds of the gospel of Christ and second for those who will be the hearers of the gospel of Christ. Let me show you how Peter did this.

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:3).

A. Confronting wrong thinking about Jesus is imperative for the herald of Christ (11-13a).

Look with me at how Peter begins his address in verse 12, **“But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, ‘Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk?’”** Peter began his message by asking a question, actually two asking in effect, *why does this amaze you?* And, *why are you gazing (fixing your attention upon) at us!?*

Then notice how Peter seeks to change their gaze upward saying in verse 13, **“The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus...”** Peter takes this present miracle and throws it back into the light of God’s workings in the Old Testament going all the way back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. What Peter is saying is that it is Israel’s God who has done this thing. And why did God do this? Peter said clearly that the God of their fathers did this to bring glory to Jesus. God has glorified His servant Jesus. This was not to be a Peter or John thing; rather it was all about Jesus. Peter quickly declares that it was not his power or his piety; not his own mightiness or righteousness, but rather it was God and God did this not to elevate any disciple but rather His servant, Jesus. Peter needed his hearers to know this.

Beloved, we must make sure that anything good, anything wondrous, anything that we do for which other may want to exalt us, that we would seize the opportunity to correct such thinking and point people to Jesus. Any good that you do is actually the good of Jesus working through you, for you are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand so that you would walk in them (Ephesians 2:10). Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from the Father above. While it would be wrong thinking of people to consider that what we do, we do in our own power or piety, it is also wrong of us to ever give that impression to others. Peter confronted and corrected this thinking on the part of the crowd. Peter did not allow them to gaze long upon him, but turned the light upon Jesus. Peter did not take any credit for the miracle. Come on now, is not true that we sometimes think perhaps that we sometimes deserve a little bit of credit. I mean Peter was obedient, available and took action; should he not be able to say, well thanks for noticing that I did this for God. No, he takes no credit for His subject is Christ.

And here is a truth to grapple with; the true servant of God will refuse to take credit for what God because knows two things. First, he knows that people do not need to hear about him, but rather about Christ. Can any of you grant eternal life? Can any of you grant eternal forgiveness of sin? Then when you do something that you or others somewhat comprehend as being from God, our purpose is to give God all the credit. This leads us to the second truth that the true servant of God knows, namely that people need to hear about Jesus. For God **“has glorified His servant Jesus.”** The word Peter uses here to describe Jesus is profound. By calling Jesus God’s servant, the Jewish crowd would have instantly known that this was an Old Testament Messianic title of the Coming One. It is God Himself who used the word servant to describe the Messiah. In Isaiah 52:13 the Yahweh said, **“Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.”** In the very next chapter, Isaiah 53, we read one of the most incredible descriptions of the coming Messiah, a description that depicts all His sufferings for His people’s salvation. So, when Peter says that God “has glorified His servant Jesus,” he intended and said that the very Servant that was predicted to come by Isaiah the prophet has come! Not only that, He is the one who is responsible for the healing of this beggar. And the name of this servant is Jesus!

"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:3).

So we find that the herald of Christ must confront wrong thinking about Jesus, first in his own life. It is Jesus who is to be exalted. It is Jesus who is to be the subject of our lives. It is Jesus who does the good, gives the strength and is to receive the credit. But not only is the confronting of wrong thinking imperative in the life of the herald, but secondly....

Peter is saying, "The Servant that Isaiah predicted has come! He is the One responsible for this miracle. His name is Jesus!" In preaching the preacher must confront wrong responses to Jesus. He must do so, first of all, in his own life. This confrontation is vital for the preacher. Secondly...

B. Confronting wrong thinking about Jesus is imperative for the hearer (13b-16).

As Peter begins to expose his hearers to the truth concerning Jesus, he knows that part of having wrong thinking about Jesus is due to people having wrong thinking about themselves. While we all agree that sin is horrible and has done the most devastating of things to humanity, we tend to think of sin as not being quite so bad or as devastating in us. Sure, sin wrecked havoc in and through Adolph Hitler, but then I am no Adolph Hitler. Sure sin reared its ugly head in the atrocities that Saddam Hussein committed against his own people in Iraq, but then I am no Saddam Hussein. People, particularly unbelievers, struggle to realize how sinful they are and how sin has kept them from thinking and responding rightly to Jesus. So, as we have opportunity to confront wrong thinking about Jesus in others, we must present the only course of hope – namely that we must face up to our wrong thinking. What is right thinking concerning ourselves and of Jesus? Peter presents two realities in our text.

1. The reality of our past sin (13b-15).

Pulling no pushed, notice how Peter exposes their sin by using the second person plural pronoun "you" – meaning "you all" beginning in verse 13 again: ***"13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and [you] disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. 14 But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and [you] asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 but [you] put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses."***

Notice that Peter is not offering suggestions to better living. He is not telling stories. He is presenting his hearers with the facts. Specifically, Peter confronted them about their wrong thinking and responses to Jesus. He recounts their crimes. You sold out Jesus. You disowned Jesus in exchange for the murderer, Barabbas. You killed Jesus!

And its not just Jesus, notice the grand titles assigned to Jesus. Not only is Jesus God's ***"servant,"*** but He is also ***"the Holy and Righteous One,"*** as well as ***"the Prince of life."*** What is the point? The point is that Jesus was no ordinary man. They had killed God's servant, the Holy and Righteous One and the very Prince of life. How serious were these crimes. Was Peter being judgmental or inappropriately harsh? Where is the love Peter? All we see is him pointing his finger at the crowd saying all of this is on *you...you...you?*

But this is not cruelty on Peter's part but an act of love. For until these people or any sinner comes to grips with their true condition there is not hope. Let us illustrate this - Imagine you are out on Beaver Lake when an incredibly severe storm arises. Hurricane force winds and waves arise and as the boat is making its way to the shore, you fall out, leaving you. fell out of

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the boat and were flailing in the water. Now, I throw you a rope, how would you respond? Would you say, "What's this for? I can swim! I do not need your help! Now I am offended! I doubt that many, if any would respond like that. Nor would you be offended. I suspect that you would be grateful that someone cared about your most precarious condition.

If we are rightly confronting people's wrong thinking about Jesus, it will cause them to see their guilt before God. It will force them to consider the painful reality of their past sin. Have you come to this point? Have you been confronted with your crimes against Jesus? Do you know that you, yes you are a rebel, an enemy of Jesus. Someone might say, "Hey, I did not murder Jesus. You cannot hold me responsible for death." That is wrong thinking about Jesus for the truth of Scripture is that, that Christ is said to have died, not for His sins, but *ours*. As Isaac Watts penned:

*Alas! And did my Savior bleed? And did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?
Was it for crimes that I have done He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! Grace unknown! And love beyond degree!*

Jesus groaned and died on the tree for *our crimes*. Every Jew in Peter's audience was confronted with that truth here, but it is a truth that we are also confronted with. Jesus died for our crimes. As we are reminded in Isaiah 53:4-6,

4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. 6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

When we confront wrong thinking about Jesus we must help our hearers come to grips with their own sin. There must be conviction before there can be conversion. But there is a second reality that must be presented, not only must the hearer be confronted with their past sin, but they must be presented...

2. The reality of Christ's present sufficiency (16).

Look at what Peter says in verse 16, ***"And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all."***

There is a sad and devastating truth and it is this, that a person can acknowledge his sinfulness and still be lost. Recognizing oneself as a sinner is only half the issue. The other half is knowing that Jesus has full taken care of the first half. It is knowing that Christ is fully sufficient. What does it mean to say that Christ is fully sufficient? What is it that Christ is able to do? Peter declared to the people that it was on the basis of faith in the name of Jesus that the beggar was healed. Again, the point is that the healing was from Jesus. But there is more, not only was the healing from Jesus but also the very faith that saved this man's soul was "through" – ***"the faith which comes through Jesus."***

The Church Alive

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How completely, how fully, how wonderfully is Jesus able to save? How sufficient is Jesus? Beloved, when a person places his faith in the name, in the *authority* of Jesus, a transformation occurs. In the beggar’s case, a lame man was given not only new legs, but he received – notice our text “perfect health”, which I would take to include a new heart too, as we already saw back in verse nine in his desire to praise God. What brought all of this about? Peter? John? This lame man’s faith? No, it was all accomplished by the power of Jesus’ name.

Do you know what the name *Jesus* means? It is the Greek translation of a Hebrew name, the name Joshua, which means “The Lord is salvation.” In Matthew 1:21, the angel of God told Joseph the name to give to Mary’s child, that name was “Jesus” – why? “For,” as the angel explained, “He will save His people from their sin.”

Beloved, if Jesus were only some great moral teacher, then your thinking about Him would be wrong. We must beware of distorted thinking about Jesus. John MacArthur, in exhorting about the dangers of a distorted view of Jesus once explained, *“There have been many false views of Jesus throughout history, from noble example to political revolutionary. Yet to imagine a Jesus who was not the Savior is as foolish as to imagine a Shakespeare who was not a writer, or a Rembrandt who was not a painter. His name is Jesus not because He is our example, guide, leader, or friend, though He is all those things. His name is Jesus because He is our Savior.”*

Beloved, it can be rightly said that what we believe about Jesus is the most important thing about us. Let us beware of dishonoring thinking concerning Jesus. Too many people, many of whom will be sitting in church pews today, are guilty of holding to unbiblical views of Jesus. Let us confront such wrong thinking about Jesus, first in ourselves and then in others. May our prayer be, “Lord, use us to help other get it right about Jesus.”

Soli Deo Gloria

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