

The Church Alive – Getting It Right About Jesus (Part 2)

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. 17 "And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. 18 "But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. 19 "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; 20 and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, 21 whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.

I came across a hymn text this week; a hymn text that in some ways, aptly summarizes this second sermon of Peter that we began looking at last week; a sermon that not only penetrated the hearts of many of Peter's first hearers, but also continues to penetrate hearts today. The hymn is entitled, "What Will You Do With Jesus" – written by A.B. Simpson in 1891.

Jesus is standing in Pilate's hall,
Friendless, forsaken, betrayed by all;
Hearken! what meaneth the sudden call?
What will you do with Jesus?

**What will you do with Jesus?
Neutral you cannot be;
Some day your heart will be asking,
"What will He do with me?"**

Will you evade him as Pilate tried?
Or will you choose Him, whate'er betide?

Vainly you struggle from Him to hide:
What will you do with Jesus?

Will you, like Peter, your Lord deny?
Or will you scorn from His foes to fly,
Daring for Jesus to live or die?
What will you do with Jesus?

**What will you do with Jesus?
Neutral you cannot be;
Some day your heart will be asking,
"What will He do with me?"**

There is nothing more important for any person than getting it right when it comes to Jesus. Last week we looked at the first of three points we identified from our text, each of the points revealing in part our responsibility in helping people to get it right about Jesus. Our first

point was simply this; that we must confront wrong thinking about Jesus. We saw that in verses 11-16. This morning we are looking at the next responsibility we can draw from this text. Before we look at this second responsibility, I want you to know that we are going to camp out here for both this week and next week as there is too much packed into these verses to rush through. So then, the second responsibility is this, in addition to confronting people concerning wrong thinking about Jesus...

II. We must call for right thinking about Jesus (3:17-26).

As we come to the next section of Peter's sermon beginning in verse 17, we find Peter calling for right thinking about Jesus and the way he does this is by extending various invitations. These are not invitations, or altar calls, that those practiced in so many churches today, In fact, what Peter does here is unlike what we find being done in most church. Both this week and next week we will follow, Peter's fourfold invitation, or call. This morning I present to you the first two parts of Peter's call. And keep in mind, you can and ought to use these in your own calling of people to right thinking about Jesus. First then, there is...

A. The call to respond (17-19a).

Beginning in verse 17, we read, "**And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also...**" Notice that Peter does not make himself better than those to whom he is speaking. He calls them "brothers." There is no holier than thou attitude on Peter's part. Nor does Peter see these people as the enemy. Never look at sinners as the enemy. As Spirit reminds us in Ephesians 6:12, "**For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.**" Beloved, sinners are being held captive by the devil, and blind to the truth, and have no hope of eternal life. And never forget that we were once just like these, separated from the grace of God. Just as Peter identifies with his audience, we need to communicate with people that we once were just as they are without Christ.

But with that said, Peter also identified their sin. He wants them to know their sin, their crime against Jesus, even though it was done in "ignorance." Does ignorance excuse sin? If you drive 75 mph in a 35 zone and tell the officer, "But I did not know the speed limit," that your ignorance excuses you from the fact that you broke the law? But the crime of sinners against Jesus is so much more horrendous and people need to be made aware. Recall what Jesus said on the Cross? "Father, forgive them; for they *know not what they are doing* (Luke 23:34)." Sinner's thinking about Jesus is messed up and they do not realize how awful their crime is. But God knows; and God knew what these men of Israel were doing to do as we read in verse 18, "**But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.**"

So, can it be said that God made these people sin against Him and against Jesus. I like what Warren Wiersbe once said, "There are mysteries here that the human mind cannot fully understand, so we must accept them by faith. God had a plan from all eternity, yet His plan did not force men to act against their own will." Why did Christ die on the cross? Because sinful, wicked men rejected Him and killed Him. Did this crime against Jesus catch God by surprise? No, for they acted in accordance with His sovereign, predetermined will. Now why is Peter saying

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

these things? He is setting the stage for his call to them to respond and to respond rightly to Jesus. Notice the two-fold response that Peter invites them to make.

1. *The call to repent (3:19)*

Peter begins verse 19 by saying, “**Therefore repent...**” Just like Peter, we need to call people to repent. Now we have dealt with the meaning of repentance before but it always worth reviewing. To repent is not simply to feel sorry about something you have done, but includes a changing of both the mind, in how you think about something that God says is sin, as well as in the changing of behavior as you stop the sinful action and begin to take up holy or righteous actions. Simply put, we are to call people to right thinking and acting concerning sin, self and the Savior. It has been said that repentance “*involves more than fearing the consequences of God’s judgment...[it] knows that the evil of sin must be forsaken and the person and work of Christ totally and singularly embraced.*”¹ So as Peter says, on the heels of identifying Jesus as the long awaited “servant” of God as promised in the Old Testament, the one who would come to redeem His people from their sin, Peter then call them to repent, to change your thinking and your actions about sin and about Jesus.

Charles Spurgeon, in a sermon on this very verse noted, “*Perhaps there is no better definition of repentance than that which is given in our little children’s hymnbook—*

*Repentance is to leave
The sins we loved before,
And show that we in earnest grieve,
By doing so no more.*

Repentance is a discovery of the evil of sin, a mourning that we have committed it, a resolution to forsake it. It is, in fact, a change of mind of a very deep and practical character, which makes the man love what once he hated, and hate what once he loved.” If a person is going to get it right about Jesus, he must begin with this kind of repentance, for the truth is, until a person is willing to leave his life of sin, to put off what he now knows to be against God, he cannot be saved. Have you repented like this? And if you have, do you call others to repent like this?

2. *The call to return to God.*

So the first call is to “repent” and the next call is found again in verse 19 as we read a bit further, “**Therefore repent and return...**” There is a lot of similarity between the meaning of the words “repent” and “return”. The command to “return” means to convert, that is to turn about or change one’s direction; but to do so purposely, passionately, intensely. And expanded translation of this phrase could be read, “*Therefore repent from your sins and flee to God...*” Remember that Peter’s audience is the men of Israel. The use of this word “return” or “flee” would have mostly likely brought a powerful image in the minds of these men. In Old Testament Israel there were found some six cities of refuge. These cities were provided as a place for a person to flee if he accidentally killed someone. For in Israel, if you did not flee to such a place, any relative of the deceased could call for your head in retaliation. These cities were not shelters for real

¹ MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Study Bible*, pg. 1603

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

murderers, for if you were guilty of intentional killing, you would be tried and executed. But if the killing was accidental, then the killer could flee to the city of refuge and be protected.

Here is the idea Peter presents to his hearers. It is not that their crime was accidental, for it was their sin, and ours as well, that put the Son of God on the cross. We killed God. But the God of grace has provided a place of refuge, a place of hope apart from which relative of the Son of God, that is Jesus, can justly call for our heads. Where is this place of hope, this city of refuge? It is not a place, but a person, for the refuge is Christ Himself. We are called to repent and flee, or turn to the provision of God, that is Jesus. Again, listen to how Spurgeon paints the picture for this word “return” or “convert.” He wrote, “*Conversion, if translated, means a turning round, a turning from, and a turning to--a turning from sin, a turning to holiness--a turning from carelessness to thought, from the world to heaven, from self to Jesus--a complete turning.*”

This is what we must do if we are to be saved. This is what we are calling others to do, if they are to be saved. If people are to get it right about Jesus, they must be called to right thinking about Jesus which means they must be called to repent and to return. But just what happens as a person does repent and return. This brings us to the second thing we must call people to....

B. The call to receive (19b-21).

As we progress in our text, we find that Peter informs his hearers of what happens to a person as he or she repents and turns to God. After this call to repent and return to God in verse 19, we find Peter calling his hearers to receive three benefits that come as a result.

1. The first benefit is forgiveness (3:19b)

Back to verse 19 where we read a bit further, “**Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away...**” If we have a right understanding of the hideousness of sin, then the verb “**wiped away**” becomes vivid and miraculous. In both Old and New Testament times, people wrote papyrus, a much more dense material than our modern paper. What this means is, that the ink used did not always penetrate or absorb into the papyrus, but rather just laid on the surface. So, if an author made a mistake while writing and wished to erase it, he simply wiped it away with a wet sponge. With reference to the charge and crime these men of Israel had committed against Jesus by killing Him and sinning against God, a crime we are all guilty of, here we read that for those who repent and return to God, their crime is “wiped away.” What a beautiful picture of what God does with our sins! John Newton, the former slave trader turned preacher and author of the beloved hymn, “Amazing Grace” also penned these amazing words:

*Alas! I knew not what I did,
But now my tears are vain;
Where shall my trembling soul be hid?
For I my Lord have slain.*

*A second look He gave, which said:
“I freely all forgive;
This blood is for thy ransom shed;
I die, that thou mayest live.”*

*Thus, while His death my sin displays
In all its blackest hue;
Such is the mystery of grace,
It seals my pardon too.*

*With pleasing grief and mournful joy
My spirit now is filled,
That I should such a life destroy,
Yet live through Him I killed.*

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

Do you what Peter was preaching to the men of Israel? Do you see what the Spirit of God is proclaiming to all sinners? There is forgiveness to be received; pardon for your crimes. Your sins can be wiped away. Do not think you are too far-gone; too great a sinner; too wretched of a person. The “Prince of Life” has purchased forgiveness. His blood is the sponge with which God will wipe away your sins and forgive your crimes. Peter is calling the people of Israel to forgiveness; and the Spirit continues to call all sinners to receive this same forgiveness offered through Jesus Christ, to all who believe, to all, who by faith, repent and return to God. And there is a second benefit, not only forgiveness, but also...

2. *The benefit of times of refreshing (3:19c)*

Look at how verse 19 ends, **“Therefore, repent and return...in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...”**

We must not forget that Peter is speaking to the “men of Israel.” Therefore, we must first know that what Peter said here was primarily a national promise for Israel. For while Peter is calling people to personal repentance, he is also calling Israel to *national* repentance. Just as a nation they had been guilty of rejecting the Messiah and killing Him (the context of verses 14-15), he is now calling the nation to repent, declaring that if they did, if they would believe upon Jesus as being Messiah, if they, as a people, would repent and return, He would return and establish “times of refreshing.” What are the “times [or era, epoch] or refreshing? This is a reference to the millennial kingdom, the 1000 year early reign of Christ upon the earth. At this point in the book of Acts, God continues, or extends yet another offer to Israel to receive the blessing of the gospel of the kingdom. But once again, Israel, as a nation, did not repent—as God knew they would not, and the gospel and its blessings would move now from the Jews to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and on to the Gentiles (Acts 10). We know however, that God is not finished with Israel yet, for Romans 11 (as well as other passages) clearly teaches that one day Israel will repent and the times of refreshing will come; the literal, physical establishment of Christ’s kingdom on earth, will arrive. This is not to say that we, who are not Israel, and even individual Jews who did repent and did return to God, do not and did not experience **“times of refreshing.”** For the truth is that any person who repents and returns to the Lord has their dry and barren souls filled with joy, hope and with the presence of the Lord. And this leads us then to the third benefit that comes as we respond to the call to receive; that third benefit received is that of Christ Himself.

3. *The ultimate benefit is Christ Himself.*

You should just about have verse 19 memorized, but again beginning in verse 19, follow the progression into verse 21, **“Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; 20 and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, 21 whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.**

Where is Christ right now? We know He is in heaven. But the day is coming when He will return. And when will Christ return? He will return when God’s plan for this age is complete. We know that His return begins a process by which He will restore all things just as promised in the Scriptures.

The Church Alive

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

Now I need you to try to think in terms of being a first century Jew. I know its not easy for we are so far removed. But Peter is addressing the very hopes and fears of the Jewish people. Their hope, their expectation, their anticipation was that of God's Messiah coming to redeem and release them from the tyranny of their enemies. Over the past few weeks since that strange Passover celebration that included seeing the Man named Jesus crucified, many of these Jews were coming to learn that not only had they missed their Messiah, they had Him killed. They had prayed for and waited for Him ever since He was first prophesized back in Genesis 3:15 as the One who would crush the serpent's head, but somehow, due to their sin and ignorance, they had missed Him.

How crushing must these words have been. Just as crushing as it is to the one who begins to realize how dreadfully alienated and separated he is from God because of his own sin. But the word of Peter, the call and invitation he gave, O how it must have been like a healing salve to their broken hearts! It was not too late; Messiah was coming again; but they must first receive the benefit of Christ, the presence of Christ in their lives, by faith, by repenting and returning to the Lord.

And the same hope of presented here by Peter, the hope of forgiveness of sin, of times of refreshing, and of possessing the very presence of Jesus in one's life, is extended to all of us today. This is the gospel. This is the message of hope. And the question for you is simply this; how will you respond? May I ask you, have you repented and returned to the Lord? Have you seen the sinfulness of your sin and of the greatness of what Jesus did on that cross for you! Then repent and return. And for those of us who have repented and returned to the Lord, is this call, is this invitation on your mind and on your lips as you go about your day, as you go to work; go to school, sit down with a friend, or whatever you do? For we, like Peter, have a duty, an obligation to help people get it right about Jesus and we help them get it right as we invite them to respond to Jesus in repentance and in returning to the Lord; and as we invite them to receive forgiveness, times of refreshing and the fullness of Christ Himself.

Soli Deo Gloria

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