

The Church Alive – Getting It Right About Jesus (Part 3)

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. 22 "Moses said, 'THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to everything He says to you. 23 'And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' 24 "And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. 25 "It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.' 26 "For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways." 4:1 As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, 2 being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening. 4 But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

We have been working through this second sermon delivered by Peter to the men of Israel as recorded in Acts 3. Peter's emphasis or his prime focus has been upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. More than anything else, Peter's desire is that these people to whom he is speaking would have a right understanding of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. Peter wants people to be getting it right when it comes to Jesus.

And, we have noted that his account, the inclusion of this sermon in the sacred text is not given then simply to be a record of the early history of the church. Nor is it given to serve as some kind of repository of church sermons. Rather, in addition to such things, this sermon is given to us as an example, as a model by which we can use to help people get it right about Jesus.

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

For the glorious truth is that while Jesus was and is truly Man; He is also truly God, forever in the flesh; while Jesus was and is truly a great, and in fact the greatest of Teachers, He is also Truth; and while Jesus truly came to give meaning and purpose to life, He is also in fact Life itself. And for a world that has lost its way, Jesus is truly the Way and all who draw near to God through Jesus, are, in the words of Hebrews 7:25, saved to the uttermost.

And so, like Peter, our job, our duty, our delight, our purpose, our directive, our commission, our governing principle, the impetus of our lives; that which is to drive us, to motivate us, to correct us, to guide us, to be constantly at the forefront of our minds is to know and to make known the wonder, the majesty, the splendor and the perfections of the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Our prayer ought to be that we would be relentless, unwavering, persistent and uncompromisingly resolute in knowing and making known with as much precision as possible, all who Christ is and has done. Do you know John 17:3? Do you live out John 17:3?

This is eternal life that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

Peter wanted the men of Israel to get it right about Jesus. How about you? Do you desire for people, for your family, for those with whom you any influence to get it right about Jesus. How did Peter do it? This is what we find in Acts 3:11-26; Peter's process by which he helped people get it right about Jesus. Here we have a model of sort by which to base our conversations concerning the person and work of Christ. To that end, as we have already noted in Acts 3:11-16, Peter was first of all, willing to confront wrong thinking about Jesus. Have we become such students of Christ, that when we hear something wrong, derogatory, or demeaning to the Person and or work of Christ, we are willing to confront and correct such thoughts?

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

Then, as we noted last week, it is not enough to confront wrong thinking about Jesus, we must also then call people to right thinking about Him. This is our second key point, to call people to right thinking about Jesus. Peter called people to right thinking about Jesus in verses 17-26 in a four-fold manner, the first two means of which we looked at last week.

First, Peter called the people to respond in verses 17-19 by repenting, that is knowing their sinfulness and forsaking that sin; and then by returning to God, that is running to the provision of God as found in Jesus Christ for the hope of salvation.

Second, Peter called the people to receive three blessings in verses 19-21. One is to receive the blessing of forgiveness, that is their sins to be wiped away. Two is to experience the "times of refreshing" to come from the Lord, which we saw in context speaks of the coming earthly reign of Christ on the earth, but also is experienced by believers in the here and now as we repent and return to God, for then our souls are healed and satisfied with the things of God. And the third blessing we noted is truly Christ Himself as we await the day of His return as explained in verses 20-21.

So then, to call people to right thinking about Christ means calling them to respond to Christ through repentance from sin and returning to God and secondly by calling them to receive the blessings of forgiveness of sin, refreshing of soul and the hope of the return of Christ. This brings us then to our new material, and the third of the calls by which we steer people to right thinking about Christ and it is...

C. The call to reflect (22-25).

Any call to repentance, and any invitation to be blessed by the Lord must be biblically based – it must be found as the teaching of the Word of God. To say to someone that God wants you to be happy is not a biblically based statement. What do we read in Scripture: God wants us to be holy, God wants us to be saved; God wants us reflect the attitudes and characteristics of His Son; for in the long run these will result in our ultimate joy and happiness, but it does not always translate into the best of circumstances in the here and now.

Many of you may be familiar with the testimony of Joni Earekson Tada. In July 1967, at the age of 17, as an athletic, robust teenager, Joni dived into the water not realizing how shallow it was and broke her neck. The accident has left her confined to a wheelchair as a quadriplegic ever since that day. This once energetic teenager with a real zest for living has spent the rest of her life fighting the most extreme of physical handicaps.

But instead of producing a bitter, angry person full of resentment and hatred towards God, who allowed the ordeal, Joni has matured and grown into a beautiful woman who has depth that would never have been possible had she not faced the confinement of a wheelchair. Joni testifies, "Today as I look back, I am convinced that the whole ordeal of my paralysis was inspired by God's love. I was not the brunt of some cruel divine joke. God has reasons behind my suffering, and learning some of them has made all the difference in the world."

This woman discovered that being a Christian did not immunize her from facing the problem of suffering; and that being a Christian did not always made her happy. Neither did it ensure that she would never face agonizing bouts with depression, discouragement and, at times, even defeat. But it did give her a hope and a confidence that God is still God and His ways are beyond questioning and that as she keeps her eyes on Jesus, she lives with the blessings of sin forgiven, the blessing of a refreshed spirit and the blessing of knowing that one day, not only will Christ return, but she will walk again with Him.

Beloved, her attitude is grounded in the teachings of the word of God. And when we call people to right thinking about Jesus, we must also call them to reflect upon the teachings of God's word. This is what we find Peter doing for the men of Israel in verses 22-26. He is giving a biblical basis as to why they need to have right thinking about Jesus. I would have you see that Peter gives three biblical evidences to substantiate his call to them to think right about Jesus. Notice how all of these are appeals to Old Testament Scriptures and saints.

1. ***This is what God predicted through Moses (22-23).***

"Moses said, 'THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to everything He says to you. 23 'And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'

First, this is what God predicted through Moses. This is quotation from Deuteronomy 18, a text Peter's Jewish audience knew well. Peter is presenting Jesus as the fulfillment of this Old Testament promise of a greater prophet to come. Do you know Jesus to be the fulfillment of what God has promised in the Old Testament? I mean, do you know some of the specific promises and can you show or teach others how remarkable it is that Jesus has fulfilled these? I remember a good friend of mine giving a message once. This friend of mine is an optical physicist, meaning he likes complicated things like math and calculus and equations and such. In his message, he related the insane statistical improbability of any person fulfilling the Messianic prophecies. I do not remember the exact number he gave for it was something like 10 to the 1000th power. I really do not remember. What I do remember is how he illustrated that number. He said, if you were to fill the entire state of Texas with a layer of quarters some three inches

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

deep (a lot of quarters), the statistical probability of one person fulfilling the Old Testament Messianic prophecies would be equal to one person walking into that quarter-filled state of Texas and finding one very specific quarter.

Now, I do not know about all that physics and statistics stuff. I do know that Jesus fulfilled perfect the Messianic prophecies. And all I am saying to you is this, do you know some of them so that you can call a person to reflect upon the fulfilled promise of God as realized in Jesus. Peter identified Jesus as the greater prophet promise by Moses and the Word of God. He wants them to reflect on this, but then, notice the Acts 3:23 as Peter quotes from Deuteronomy 18:19 and Leviticus 23:29 saying in effect that if you reject the Messiah, the consequences will be severe; as you **shall be utterly destroyed from among the people**. In other words, to reject Jesus is to be damned. These men of Israel were risking the loss of the blessings of the Covenant because they were rejecting Jesus.

Oh, that we might call people to reflect upon the promises of God; some to the end of judgment that comes for not heeding God; and some to the end the reveal the blessings we receive as we receive Jesus Christ.

2. This is what God predicted through all the prophets (24).

“And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days”.

In verse 24, Peter calls the men to reflect upon the Scriptural truth that it was not just Moses but *all* the prophets who predicted or “announced” these days. What days did the prophets announce? The days that spoke of Messiah’s coming. Remember that this is Peter speaking in this sermon and now listen to something he wrote almost 30 years later in his first letter. We read in 1 Peter 1:10-11

10 As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, 11 seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.

These are the days they announced. Notice that Peter has appealed to Moses, the great Old Testament prophet; and he has appealed to all the prophets, mentioning by name Samuel. Reflect on the Scriptures where these men spoke. But Peter appeals to yet another great icon for these Jewish men saying in effect that...

3. This is what God predicted to Abraham (25).

“It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.’”

Here is yet another Old Testament quotation, this time from Genesis 22:18. Peter’s knowledge of the Scriptures is remarkable when we remember that was simply a this burly, rash fisherman. Peter had reflected upon the Scriptures himself so that he could rightly call other to reflect upon the Scriptures. We must not forget that when Peter left his house this particular day, he did not know he was going to preach this sermon. But, as the opportunity presented itself, he preached Christ. And He knew the Word well enough so that he could quote it with clarity and conviction. Jesus was the fulfillment of the promise made to all the families of the earth through Abraham, that he would bless the people. And so, Peter came prepared to show people from

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Scripture why they needed Christ. Is this true of you? Are you preparing yourself by the careful reflection upon Scripture, to show people why they need Christ?

So, we have seen that if we are to call people to right thinking about Jesus, we must call them to respond to Christ with repentance and a returning to God, we must call them to receive the blessings of Christ; we must call them to reflect upon the promises of God; and finally then, we must offer...

D. The call to rejoice (26).

"For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."

Peter closes his message by stating two truths that ought to cause us to rejoice; to praise God for His working in our lives. What are these two truths?

1. God's intention is to bless us.

Peter reminds his hearers that when God raised Jesus from the dead He **"For you first...sent Him to bless you."** This was God's intention, that the people of Israel might be the first to be blessed by Jesus. Remember that Peter is talking to the Jews that had rejected Jesus. He told them God sent Jesus *first* to them, implying that God would bless others later; which He did as the gospel spread from Jerusalem, to Samaria and then to the uttermost parts of the world. And so, this reminds us to call people to rejoice that God's intention in raising Jesus from the dead is to bless us; to cause us delight and hope.

2. God's intention is to turn us to holiness.

"For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."

In addition to this, God's intention is to turn us to holiness. Notice this carefully. According to verse 26, the turning is essential for the blessing. In fact, the turning is, as I see it, a part of the blessing. God blesses us *by* turning us from our wicked ways.

This reminds us that God does not bless us with forgiveness of sin, with repentance, with the knowledge of the presence of Christ in our lives so we can keep living in the same old ways we were before Christ. Again, this is something Peter obviously reflected upon. For listen to what he wrote some thirty years later in 1 Peter 1:14-16

14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

Are there ways in which you are living even today that reflect more of your former lusts than of who and what you are in Christ, a new creation; created for holy, set apart, God-reflecting living? When God blesses us, He turns our lives around. We should see and know this in our lives and reveal it to others.

There is an account of a Methodist preacher and evangelist of the late 1800's by the name of Samuel who would pray for "a Lazarus" in every meeting. What he desired of God was for some "great sinner" whose conversion would shock the community, an idea he got from John 12:9-11. God answered this prayer in meeting after meeting as one great sinner after another was converted and became a testimony to the power of the gospel.

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

Peter was preaching to a difficult crowd. They had already rejected Jesus once, but here he calls them to rejoice in God's work in making people holy, utterly different than they were before coming to Christ. This should be an encouragement for us to go after those whom others, and perhaps even we, have written off. No one is beyond the grace of God and in fact, the further away one is from God, the greater testimony their conversion may often be. This is to be our call to others, the call to respond to Jesus, the call to receive Jesus, the call to reflect upon Jesus and the call to rejoice in and because of Jesus.

But let us quickly wrap up this section by noting one more thing. We need to know that confronting wrong thinking about Jesus and calling people to right thinking about Him will result in two general responses. And therefore...

III. We can expect a two-fold contrast in thinking about Jesus (4:1-4).

4 But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

Here we find that Peter's sermon resulted in two contrasting ways of thinking about Jesus. We should expect nothing different as we proclaim Christ. For, when we preach Christ...

A. Some will reject the message (4:1-3).

1 As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, 2 being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening.

If you recall the account, Peter and John had healed the lame man about 3:00 pm. This created the stir, causing a crowd to gather where Peter began to preach. The end of verse 3 tells us that it was "evening" when the authorities seized them. We know that Pentecost occurs around the first part of June meaning that Peter and John were arrested around 6:30 or so. Jewish law prohibited holding a trial after sunset so they put them in jail until the next day.

And thus, we have the most common reaction to a faithful call to people to think right about Jesus. If you cannot deny the message, then eliminate the messenger. We will see that this is exactly what the Jewish leaders intended later in Acts, but the point is, there will be those who will refuse to look objectively at the evidence concerning Jesus and will seek to silence the messenger rather than deal with the message. F. F. Bruce, commenting on this said, "*It is particularly striking that neither on this nor any subsequent occasion (so far as our information goes) did the Sanhedrin take any serious action to disprove the apostles' central affirmation—the resurrection of Jesus. Had it seemed possible to refute them on this point, how readily would the Sanhedrin have seized the opportunity! Had they succeeded, how quickly and completely the new movement would have collapsed!*" But since they could not disprove the message, they rejected and sought to censor it. It is interesting that there is no mention of opposition after Peter preached his first sermon as recorded in Acts 2. Now, just a few days later, the opposition to the gospel begins. And all of this reminds that just because what we say about Jesus may upset some people, this does not make the message we speak bad. Never forget that some, if not most, will reject the message. That is the first response, but notice the second response to the gospel that stands in contrast to the first...

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

B. Some will receive the message (4:4).

But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

Let us quickly note what Luke identifies as necessary in order to receive the message of the gospel. There are three things:

1. *The message must be heard.*

“But many of those who had heard the message...” As Romans 10:17 reminds us, **“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”** If the message is to be heard, we must be proclaiming it. And these heard the word of the gospel.

2. *The message must be believed.*

“But many of those who had heard the message believed...”

What was it that caused these to believe? Was it because they had seen the lame man healed? I do not think so, otherwise they would have believed before. They believed because they heard the message; they responded to the call of Peter as he walked them through the person and work of Christ.

3. *The message will call them to unite with the church.*

“and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.”

I love the testimony as Luke records that **“the number of them came to be...”** The people of the early church know who was part of the church and who was not. In the early church, when a person became a believer in Christ, he became part of the church. It was as simple as that. The believer became a known part of the body of Christ. It is interesting to see that Luke records the size of the church as having 5,000 men. This is the last specific number given as to the size of the Jerusalem church most likely because the church grew so large and so fast it became difficult to keep up with the records.

But the point and call to you is this. We have a desperate need to be busy doing what Peter did for these first hearers of the gospel. We need to be busy helping them get it right about Jesus by confronting any wrong thinking about Jesus, by calling people to right thinking about Jesus and then realizing that there will be one of two contrasting responses, either they will reject the message or receive the message. Our mission is simply to give them the message straight and leave the responses to the working of the Spirit of God. But before you can call others to right thinking about Jesus, let me ask you this, have you come to have right thinking about Jesus. Have you responded to Jesus, received Jesus, reflected on Jesus and rejoice in Jesus. If not, would you pray to do so today?

Soli Deo Gloria

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