

“Peter’s Sermon at Solomon’s Porch”—Acts 3:11-26

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take a Bible and meet me in Acts 3...

Last Sunday we considered the first ten verses of this chapter where we find a miracle account involving two Apostles—Peter and John—and a man who was lame, unable to walk, since the day he was born. This man had been carried to the (so-called) Beautiful Gate of the temple to sit outside and beg charity of pious Jews who were entering the temple to worship during the hour of prayer and sacrifice. We are told that this was his regular practice (3:2), and thus he was a fixture of the temple. People knew the guy. Maybe not personally, but his presence would have been familiar.

On this particular occasion, he asks Peter and John for money as they were entering the temple grounds. Peter looks him in the eye and says, *“I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!”* (3:6). Peter takes him by the hand and lifts him to his feet. And he doesn’t just walk. He leaps. The scene is one of enraptured joy. And he enters the temple grounds with them—perhaps for the first time—*“walking and leaping and praising God”* (3:8). What a beautiful scene. A touching story.

But as we saw last time, the point of the scene is not really the miracle itself. The miracle communicates the Gospel in miniature. The miracle is the opener, not the main event. It attracted the wonder of the crowd. As we read in verses 9 and 10,

“And all the people saw him walking and praising God,¹⁰ and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.” (Acts 3:9-10)

So what does Peter do? He doesn’t walk away and say, “Well, I guess my work here is done.” No. He understands that the miracle was not an end in itself. The point was not to put on a show. It was to prepare their hearts to receive the Savior. So Peter seizes the moment to preach Jesus. “Just as the Pentecost event had been the text for his first sermon, so the cripple’s healing became the text for his second.”¹ Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter, in both instances, pulls the blinders off the people’s eyes so that they could see the relationship between the miracle they had just witnessed and the Messiah they had recently rejected.² And Peter doesn’t pull his punches.

Let’s take a look at what he says this time. I’ll begin reading in verse 11, and I invite you to follow along as I do. This is God’s Word...

“While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon’s.¹² 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?’¹³ 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.¹⁴ But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you,¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.¹⁶ And his

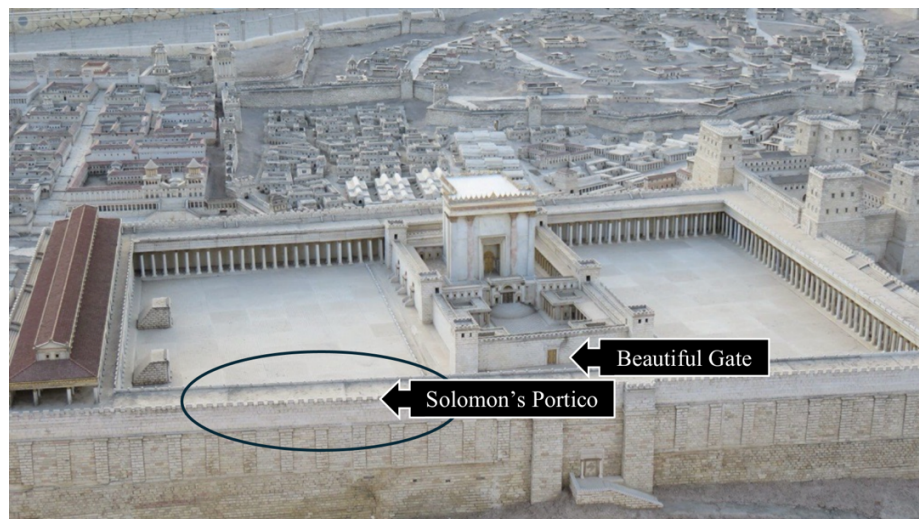
name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

¹⁷ ‘And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ 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. ²² 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. ²³ And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.” ²⁴ And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. ²⁵ 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.” ²⁶ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.’” (Acts 3:11-26)

Now then, let’s begin by...

Setting the Scene (3:11)

Verse 11 tells us that we are no longer at the Beautiful Gate, but “*in the portico called Solomon’s*.” There is some debate among scholars on the exact location of Solomon’s portico in Peter’s day, but Josephus tells us that Solomon’s Portico was about 650 feet long, 50 feet deep, with two rows of support columns, on the eastern side of the temple.³ If you take a look at the image on the screen, you’ll see the most common suggestion for where this particular portico was located.



You’ll notice that the temple was surrounded by various porticos, including the multi-storied one known as the Royal Portico, on the southern side of the temple mount, pictured on the far left. Back then a portico was a place where people congregated for various purposes because of the shade it provided, making in an ideal place for political, judicial, and commercial activities.⁴ It was also a wonderful venue to teach. In fact, the word “portico” or “porch” in Greek is *stoa* (στοά), which is where the group known as the “Stoics” derived their name because Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, famously taught philosophy to his followers at a different portico—“the Painted Porch,” as it was called—in the city of Athens. More relevant to our text, Solomon’s portico was one of the places where Jesus taught (John 10:22), and a common location for the early Church to assemble after His ascension (Act 5:12; cf. 2:46).

On this particular occasion an “*astonished*” crowd of people came “*running*” up to Peter and John, since they attributed the healing of the man to them. Peter will not let that stand, so he opens his mouth and begins to speak. There are two main sections of Peter’s speech, which are each introduced by direct address, “*Men of Israel*” (3:12) and “*brothers*” (3:17). In the first section, verses 12 to 16, Peter is setting the record straight concerning who deserves the glory for this healing and how that fact calls into focus the guilt of those gathered...

Setting the Record Straight (3:12-16): The Glory of Christ and the Guilt of the Crowd

If you look closely, you can detect an interesting rhetorical device that Peter employs called a chiasm, so named because it involves parallelism that works toward a center, giving it a shape that calls to mind the Greek letter *chi* (“X”). The structure is easier to explain if you can see it:

- A - Why do you assume that our power or piety made the man well? (12)
- B - God has glorified His servant Jesus (13a)
- C - You handed Jesus over to be killed (13b)
- D - You denied Jesus before Pilate (13c)
- D’ - You denied the Holy and Righteous One (14)
- C’ - You killed the Author of Life (15a)
- B’ - God has raised Him from the dead (15b)
- A’ - The Name of Jesus made this man well (16)

What this structure helps me to see is that Peter has two main concerns in this opening paragraph. The first is to clarify who was responsible for healing the man. This is the focus of the fringes (A and A’).⁵ Thus, at the beginning and end, Peter is using “a ‘what this is not/what this is’ dialectic” (i.e., method of argument).⁶ In other words, he’s saying, “You’re not going to be able to explain the miracle by looking at us [that’s what it’s not], but only by looking to Jesus [that’s what this is].” Consider Peter’s questions in verse 12:

“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?” (Acts 3:12)

These rhetorical questions, which carry the force of a rebuke,⁷ tell us something about the conclusion of the crowd.⁸ “The crowd inferred that Peter and John had caused the man to walk...either because they possessed special power (δυνάμει) or because they were so godly (εὐσεβείᾳ) that God had responded to their prayers in a special way.”⁹ But both of these inferences are incorrect. These men were not the source of the miracle. They possessed no power to pull it off and in no way was it meant to call attention to their piety. It was Jesus who healed the man. As Peter says in verse 16,

“And his name [i.e., Jesus’ 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.” (Acts 3:16)

Recall from last week that the “*name*”¹⁰ in this context stands for “all [Jesus] is and has done.”¹¹ So “*faith in his name*” is another way of referring to faith in Jesus. Interestingly, he doesn’t specify whose faith is being referred to here. Was it the faith of Peter or the faith of the man who was healed? It’s ambiguous. But the faith of both can be seen in the story.¹² It’s likely that Peter “deliberately leaves that question open so that the focus will be entirely on Jesus.”¹³ He wants Him to receive all the glory. The miracle was not owing to the strength of anyone’s faith, but to the object of faith—Jesus Himself. He deserves the glory.

And Peter's insistence on this fact is a wonderful picture of his maturation. There was a time when Peter would have probably loved to receive at least partial credit for this miracle. Do you remember in Luke's Gospel where the disciples—Peter and John included—were fighting over who among them was the greatest? It happened multiple times (Luke 9:46; 22:24)! Once upon a time, they were glory hungry. But no more. It would seem that these men had finally taken to heart Jesus' warning that *"everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"* (14:11; 18:14; cf. 9:48; 22:26). Peter looks less like his old self here and more like John the Baptist, who famously said of Jesus, *"He must become greater; I must become less"* (John 3:30; NIV). Peter is self-effacing here. Don't look at me. Look to Jesus. He is the source of this miracle. I am just his lowly instrument. As Peter would sometime later write,

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 4:10-11)

This man had come a long way.

But, listen, Peter doesn't just want his hearers to give glory to Christ. He also wants them to acknowledge the guilt they bear before Christ. That's the second concern that Peter highlights in the opening paragraph. In verses 13 to 15, the middle section of the chiasm I mentioned, Peter employs "a 'what you did/what God did' dialectic."¹⁴ In other words, he's saying, "You are responsible for killing the very Jesus who healed this man, but God glorified Him and raised Him from the dead."

Can you imagine the scene? This crowd has gathered in excitement. They have come to see how this once lame man has been healed. They were not expecting to be lambasted for their guilt. "Now they are suddenly implicated in Jesus' death."¹⁵ Peter blindsides them. This is not a politically correct sermon. This is a "scorching denunciation of those who had gathered."¹⁶ Just listen to how he piles on the indictments. Look at verses 13 to 15...

"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. ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses." (Acts 3:13-15)

And, by the way, Peter is just getting started. In verse 17, he will accuse them of being ignorant. In verses 18 to 25, he insinuates that they don't understand the Scriptures. In verse 26, he rebukes them for denying their privilege and calls them wicked.¹⁷ This is a beatdown. Peter came for blood. But it's not because Peter despises the crowd. It's because he cares for their souls. He recognized, as John Calvin put it, that "it is impossible to bring them truly to God unless they were first brought to a knowledge of their sins."¹⁸

What makes it even worse, from the crowd's perspective, is the high Christology that Peter laces throughout this text. Darrel Bock called this section "one of the most Christologically rich addresses in Acts."¹⁹ It's not just that they acted wickedly toward some guy. It's the identity of that guy to whom they acted so wickedly that's the real problem for them. It is who this Jesus was and is that makes their actions utterly reprehensible.

Three intriguing titles are given to Jesus in this first paragraph. He is called God's "*servant*" in verse 13. This is a title that will come up later in this chapter and a couple more times in the next. It's generally agreed that Peter intends to call to mind those texts in Isaiah that spoke of the Suffering Servant that God would send to establish His kingdom. "*Behold my servant,*" said the Lord, "*whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations*" (Isa 42:1). And yet, this servant, Isaiah says, would be "*despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*" (53:3). He would

be “*pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities*” (53:5). He would be “*cut off out of the land of the living*” (53:8), but then the Lord would “*prolong his days*” (53:10). The Servant Songs of Isaiah read like the Gospel accounts of the New Testament. They speak of His suffering, death, resurrection, glorification, and the atonement that brings about the forgiveness of sins. Jesus fulfills these texts. He is the Suffering Servant Israel was waiting for, which is what Peter was getting at when he says to those assembled in Solomon’s Porch:

“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.” (Acts 3:13)

But this one that they denied and disowned was not just the Servant figure that Isaiah prepared them for, but also, according to verse 14, “*the Holy and Righteous One*”. They handed over one who was both holy and righteous. They delivered over to death an innocent victim. The coming Messiah was sometimes referred to in Scripture as “the holy one of Israel”²⁰ or “the righteous one.”²¹ But these are also titles that are used in the Old Testament of God.²² They are not just here to indicate Jesus’ innocence, but also His divinity. He is “*the Holy and Righteous One*.” He is “holy and righteous as only God Himself is holy and righteous.”²³ And they traded Him away for a murderer, Peter says in verse 14, referring to Barabbas who was released in His place.

Then, in verse 15, he adds, “*you killed the Author of life...*” What irony! Whatever else this title means,²⁴ we are reminded that Jesus is the source of all life. John tells us that “*all things were made through him*” and “*in him was life, and the life was the light of men*” (John 1:3-4). Paul said, “*For by him all things were created...all things were created through him and for him...and in him all things hold together*” (Col 1:16-17). They killed the source of life.

Peter is laying it on thick. Pressing the guilt into the crowd. If we put it all together, as one author does, Peter is saying:

“Into their hands the Holy and Righteous One had been given. But they had failed to recognize Him when He came; worse, they had disowned Him; worse still, they had handed Him over to the Gentile Roman overlords; yet worse again, they had chosen to liberate Barabbas, a murderer, rather than God’s Messiah; worst of all, almost unthinkably, they had killed Him! They had murdered the Messiah, disowned the divine one, slain the Son of God, killed the King of Glory!”²⁵

Guilty. There’s no escaping it. And the fact that God glorified Jesus (Acts 3:13) by raising Him from the dead (3:15), didn’t just prove His innocence, but established beyond doubt their guilt. That’s verses 12 to 16 in a nutshell: Jesus is responsible for the miracle, and you are responsible for the murder. Peter gives Jesus the glory and presses upon the people their guilt. The miracle that at first excited them had begun to convict them. Peter has set the record straight. What remains is for him to set the people straight by calling them to repentance.

Setting the People Straight (3:17-26): The Call to Repentance and the Fruit of Repentance

When Peter spoke in verse 16 of faith in Jesus and its relationship to the healing of the man, there is an implicit call to faith intended. The hearers need to trust in Jesus just like Peter, John, and now the healed beggar had. But to trust in Jesus requires a change of heart and mind about Him. They would have to turn from their old ways. In other words, they would have to repent. And that’s the focus of this second paragraph.

Peter begins a little gentler in verses 17 and 18,

“And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled.”

When Peter says that the people and their rulers “*acted in ignorance*” toward Jesus, he is saying that they had not realized that Jesus—the one they mistreated—was in fact God’s Servant, the Holy and Righteous One, the Author of Life. It reminds us of Jesus’ words from the cross, “*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*” (Luke 23:34). But “ignorance is not an alibi, however.”²⁶ I think John Stott is correct when he suggests that Peter’s “purpose in saying this was neither to excuse their sin, nor to imply that forgiveness was unnecessary, but to show why it was possible.”²⁷ They have been given another chance. Peter has told them clearly who this Jesus is so now they must respond accordingly.

But this is not their first chance. That’s the point of verse 18. They should have recognized Jesus given the Scriptures they had access to. Peter says that Christ and His work was “*foretold by the mouth of all the prophets*”. *All* the prophets. If that’s hyperbole, it’s not by much. And Peter gives several examples at the end of the chapter. For example, look at verse 22...

“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.’²³ And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’” (Acts 3:22-23)

Moses predicted that God would send a prophet—a greater prophet—to the people (Deut 18:15-20). The Jews understood this to be a messianic prophecy—a promise that would be fulfilled when God sent His Messiah. Peter is saying, God has sent that Prophet. It is Jesus. But what did Moses command? “*Listen to him...*” That’s precisely what the people didn’t do. Which makes Moses’ warning even more terrifying. The Lord said, in that same text, “*whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him*” (18:19). But what’s interesting is that Peter doesn’t quote that last part, where God says, “*I myself will require it of him.*” Instead, he substitutes in its place the language of Leviticus 23:29, which says that those who do not participate rightly in the Day of Atonement will be “*cut off [destroyed] from his people.*” What is Peter saying? I think he is showing that Jesus’ death was what the Day of Atonement was pointing to. To reject Jesus is to reject that atonement. And these Jewish hearers must not expect to be numbered among God’s people if they reject His Prophet, the one Moses anticipated. To reject this Prophet is to reject His atonement. And to reject His atonement is to be cut off from the people.²⁸ That is what is at stake.

But it’s not just Moses who had prepared the people for Christ and His work, according to Peter. “*All the prophets who have spoken,*” according to verse 24, “*from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days.*” We don’t have time to document all the ways the prophets anticipated Christ, but Peter is making the same point I often make from this pulpit, namely, that all Scripture points to Jesus in some sense (cf. Luke 24:44-49).²⁹ “The whole of biblical history, the history of redemption, is structured prophetically in the sense that it points forward to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.”³⁰ And Peter provides one more example of this in verse 25...

“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.’” (Acts 3:25)

This is obviously a reference to God’s covenant with Abraham. This is the promise that formed Israel. It’s what gave them their identity. And Jesus is the “offspring” foretold—the son of Abraham—who brings blessing (salvation) to all the peoples of the earth. God’s work in Christ is at the heart of His founding purposes for Israel. If we didn’t spend the first half of the year studying this covenant in the life of Abraham, we would linger more. But I should at least mention that the language that Peter uses to call to mind this promise is drawn from Genesis 22, the passage where Abraham is told to sacrifice his son. He is not made to go through with it. But as we’ve seen, that story acts out what God the Father would literally do with His Son to bring us salvation. So we have yet another text anticipating the atonement, which they would miss out on if they continue to reject Christ.

And I can't help but wonder if Peter intends to call to mind the various covenants that were vital to Israel, when he mentions Moses (who mediated the Law to Israel, i.e., Mosaic Covenant), Samuel (who anointed David, the king associated with the Davidic Covenant), and Abraham (Abrahamic Covenant). If this is deliberate, then it is yet another way Peter is emphasizing that all of Israel's history pointed to Christ. And together with what we have already said, underscores that the "*ignorance*" that Peter attributes to the people, in verse 17, is a pretty flimsy excuse for what they did to Jesus. In any case, God moved in their ignorance to bring about the salvation God had promised.

Does this raise theological difficulties? Of course. How do we reconcile their ignorance and guilt with prophecies that seemed to require it? If it was God's plan all along, then why count the people as guilty? And now we are back in the realm of theological compatibilism, which we have discussed at length many times. Here's how Brian Vickers addresses it in his commentary:

"Once again Peter lays out both responsibility and sovereignty without resolving the tension (recall 2:22–24). He is presenting not a philosophical question but an assertion concerning God's plan and the means of fulfilling it. That plan is not to leave people in their guilt, caught between God's sovereignty and their responsibility, but to stress a hopelessness that drives to repentance. We cannot forget that salvation through Christ's death is the fulfillment of God's plan. Confrontation with both responsibility for sin and a sovereign God causes everyone to face judgment, and in doing so they find God's intention to save."³¹

In other words, Peter is not asking them to sort out how God's sovereignty relates to their sinful actions. He's asking them to acknowledge their guilt so that they can receive God's mercy. And this leads us to the rhetorical heart of the sermon, which I would locate in the commands of verse 19—"repent therefore, and turn back..."³² They must turn away from their sin (that's repentance) and turn back to God. This is why repentance and faith must go together. They cannot repent until they have changed their minds about Jesus. He wants them to see Jesus rightly, so they can respond accordingly, which is to say, in repentance and faith. That's the goal of Peter's sermon. He doesn't want them to wallow in their guilt. He wants them to see that Jesus died for the guilty. He wants them to see that Jesus offers them hope and absolution. And he helps them see that by articulating three blessings of repentance in verses 19 to 21. What is the fruit of repentance?

First, Peter says, it's the forgiveness of sins. Look again at verse 19...

"Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out..." (Acts 3:19)

William Barclay helps us imagine how the original audience might have visualized this:

"Ancient writing was upon papyrus, and the ink used had no acid in it. It therefore did not bite into the papyrus as modern ink does; it simply lay upon the top of it. To erase the writing a man might take a wet sponge and simply wipe it away."³³

Now imagine all of your sins are recorded on that papyrus sheet. Every single one of them. The ones no one knows about. The ones you have long ago forgotten. And then the judge comes along and wipes them from the page and from memory. Today, we might think of the image of a whiteboard with every infraction against God recorded in bold ink. But what if someone comes along, eraser in hand, and removes every trace of ink. All of it. The board is left bright white. That is what God does for His people. He removes their sins. He blots them all out (cf. Ps 51:9; Jer 18:23). Not because He ignores them, but because Christ bore the punishment for them. And Peter is saying God forgives when we, in faith, turn from sin and turn to Christ for mercy. He lifts that great burden of guilt. He cancels the record of debt (cf. Isa 43:25; Col 2:14). He counts us as innocent. What grace!

And if that's true, then how would it feel to freely receive such forgiveness? Tony Merida writes to the believer,

“...imagine sitting there pondering the weight of your sin record and the certainty of coming judgment without having any hope of changing your sad reality. But then, when you feel eaten by shame and fear, someone marches in and forever wipes that record of your wrongs off the board. He declares you innocent. Would that not make you soar in worship to the one wiping away your sin? It should! That’s what’s happened! Jesus Christ has wiped out our wrongs. We have no guilt. We are under no condemnation. And as sure as Jesus wipes our sin away the moment we ask him to do so, he will wipe our tears away later (Rev 21:4).”³⁴

Sounds refreshing, doesn’t it? It should because that’s the second blessing of repentance that Peter notes. Look at verse 20...

“[Repent therefore, and turn back...] that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...” (Acts 3:20a)

The translated “*refreshing*” there is a word that can mean “rest, relief, respite or refreshment.” Stott calls it “the counterpart to forgiveness” because “God does not wipe away our sins without adding his refreshment to our spirits.”³⁵ It reminds me of the invitation of Jesus—“*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*” (Matt 11:28). We are invited into His presence. And in His presence, there is relief. There is peace.

Eckhard Schnabel suggests that we should associate these “*times of refreshing*” with the Holy Spirit’s work in us. He argues this, in part, through some parallels between this sermon and Peter’s sermon in Acts 2. You’ll recall that he concludes that sermon with a call to repentance as well. Acts 2:38 tells us that “*Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’*” Compare that with Acts 3:19-20 and you will notice some parallels.³⁶

Acts 2:38	Acts 3:19-20
Repentance Demonstrated in Baptism	Repentance
Forgiveness of Sins	Forgiveness of Sins
The Gift of the Spirit	Times of Refreshing

So perhaps these times of refreshment are an aspect of the Holy Spirit’s ministry to us. If this is correct—and I think it is—then these blessings take on a Trinitarian shape.³⁷ The first one, as we’ve seen, relates to the forgiveness of sins (which comes from God the Father) and the second blessing relates to these times of refreshing (which come through the Spirit of God), which would lead us to expect that the third one may have something to do with the Son of God. And, sure enough it does, as it relates to the restoration of all things at the return of Christ. Look at verse 20 and 21...

“[Repent therefore, and turn back...] that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ 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.” (Acts 3:20-21)

Translation: It gets better. Christ is coming back. And when He does He will bring every divine promise to fruition. This restoration of all things is “nothing less than [the] new heavens and new earth” (cf. 2 Pet 3:13).³⁸ The healing of the man in Acts 3 was meant, as we saw last week, to be a foretaste of that glorious day. It whets the appetite for the day when God makes all things new at the return of Christ. And the repentance of faith we experience now gives us hope that the return of Christ will be good news for us. It reminds us that the best is yet to come.

What a glorious offer, then, that Peter gives to the people. Despite their guilt, if they would turn from their sin and turn to Jesus in repentance they would receive blessings from the Lord. That is the fruit of repentance: Total forgiveness of sins, spiritual refreshment, and the hope of universal restoration. And, friends, these blessings can be yours as well, if we would take Peter's sermon to heart.

Setting Us Straight

What a tragedy it would be for us to come to the end of this text of Scripture without seeing its relevance to our lives. We are not meant to listen to Peter's sermon with the smug satisfaction that he is giving the Jews what they deserved because, after all, many of them were, weeks before, cheering on Christ's execution. Oh no. They are no more guilty than we are of Christ's death. You and I may not have held the hammer and nails, but we were no less the reason that the Son of God was bruised and pierced. He died for our sins. He bore our guilt. He hung on the tree in our place too. We are not innocent of this. We had a hand in it too.

And this should be sobering to us. We need grace and mercy every bit as much as them. So don't sit in judgment over them. Sit humbly under the words of God's Apostle and heed the same invitation—believe and repent. We are called to the same thing. And the fact that the invitation has come to us is just as much of a grace to us as it was to them. It's undeserved.

It's grace because we did not deserve an invitation to the table, but it is offered. It's grace because even the call upon us—faith and repentance—are themselves gifts that God works in us. Do you see that in this text? Why was the man healed? Verse 16 answers, faith in the name of Jesus. But where does that faith come from? What does it say? It says that this "*faith in his name*" (first half of the verses) is "*the faith that is through Jesus,*" which is to say that Jesus is not just the object of our faith, He is the source. He works it in us. He gives it. It comes through Him. This is the consistent teaching of Scripture. "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast*" (Eph 2:8-9; NIV). Our salvation—including the faith that lays hold of it—is all a gift of God's grace.

And the same is true for our repentance. Look at the final verse of the chapter, 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.*" How does God bless them? "*[B]y turning every one of you from your wickedness.*" That's repentance. He blesses them with repentance. He turns them to Himself. As Paul told the Philippians, "*it is God who is at work in you, both to desire and to work for His good pleasure*" (Phil 2:13; NASB). That doesn't empty the force of the imperative—Repent and Believe! But it ensures that, when we do, He receives all the glory. What a grace it is that God can give what He commands (as we saw last week).

And what a grace it is that it is possible to be guilty of crucifying Jesus and still be forgiven!³⁹ As Chrysostom said, "The crucified Jesus blessed his crucifiers."⁴⁰ Think of the litany of accusations Peter levied on his hearers, and yet they were freely offered salvation in Christ. If that was true for them, why not you? What have you done that is worse than Peter's accusations against them? Peter himself could attest to God's grace. Twice he accuses them of disowning Christ, knowing full well that he did so three times.⁴¹ He's not above them. He's with them. He's pleading with them to receive the same forgiveness that he himself came to know.

And he pleads with us too, or at least the Holy Spirit does in this text. Trust in Christ's work as the sole basis of your salvation (that's faith). Turn from your sin and turn to Him (repentance). Call upon His name to save you. And He will. He delights to do so. And He will give to you the same blessings promised by Peter. He will forgive you of all your sins. And when you walk in the knowledge of that full forgiveness, you will know present refreshing. The refreshing that can only come from knowing that "*there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Rom 8:1). And when you understand what that spiritual refreshment anticipates—the coming day when God makes all things new—you will long for Christ's appearing. You will hope. And that hope will not disappoint.

So I commend Christ to you today as your only hope in life and in death. I call upon you to see your guilt and need and receive Christ as Lord and Savior. He demands repentance and promises blessing. So turn from your sin and trust in His name for the forgiveness of sins, the refreshing of your soul, and hope eternal. How will you respond?

I hope better than the religious leaders of Peter's day. We'll examine their response, Lord willing, next Sunday. To be continued...

Pray with me...

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church, and the World* (BST; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 91.

² "Not surprisingly, there are similarities between this sermon and Peter's previous address on the day of Pentecost. For example, he opens this sermon by identifying with his audience as 'fellow Israelites' (3:12, 17) as he did similarly in his first sermon (see 2:14, 22, 29). As was required on Pentecost, Peter also begins by clarifying a misconception held by the crowd (see 2:15). The same word used of Peter's focused gaze at the lame man (translated as 'looked straight,' 3:4), is now used to describe the amazement of the crowd as they 'stare' (v. 12) at Peter and John. In this case, Peter makes clear it was not by their own power that this man was healed (v. 12), but by faith 'in the name of Jesus' (v. 16). Furthermore, as Peter calls upon his audience to repent from their sins (v. 19), he does so in the same way he did on Pentecost (2:38)." Dean Pinter, *Acts* (SGBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 101-102.

³ See *A.J.* 20.9.7; *B.J.* 5.5.1; John D. Harvey and David Gentino, *Acts: A Commentary for Biblical Preaching* (KC; Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2023), 121.

⁴ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 207.

⁵ Pinter, 102. The chiasm was adopted and adapted from this work, which itself is indebted to the observations of Gordon Fee.

⁶ Bruce Milne, *The Acts of the Apostles: Witnesses to Him...to the Ends of the Earth* (FBC; Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2010), 97.

⁷ Mikeal C. Parsons and Martin M. Culy, *Acts: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), 55.

⁸ The truth is we often think like the crowd. Perhaps we've never seen someone healed in such miraculous fashion as here in Acts 3, so we've never been tempted to misplace the credit as they were. But we have prayed for people's healing, perhaps even our own, and when God has not granted such request, what have we been tempted to think? We chalk it up to our unworthiness, our weakness, our lack of piety. Tony Merida writes, "Some people think the reason God has not yet healed them is because they aren't worthy of healing. Some think God doesn't answer their prayers for someone else to be healed because their prayers aren't perfect enough to merit his attention. But that kind of thinking is wrong. I'm not saying a person's moral life doesn't matter. I simply want to point out what Peter (a godly man!) said: This miracle came because the all-powerful Savior decided to intervene and perform a wonder! You see, Jesus is on the throne, ruling and reigning, and he can decide to intervene and perform a miracle whenever he pleases. On this day he was pleased to do so. Peter says, 'It's not about me; it's about him!'" Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (CCE; Nashville: Holman Reference, 2017), 48.

⁹ Harvey and Gentino, 207. Schnabel notes that "[t]he datives 'power' (δυνάμει) and 'piety' (εὐσεβείᾳ) are instrumental or causative." Schnabel, 207. According to Patrick Schreiner, "The reference to power echoes Acts 1:8 and Luke 24:49, when Jesus tells the disciples they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes, thus defining what sort of power." Patrick Schreiner, *Acts* (CSC; Holman Reference, 2021), 159.

¹⁰ "As at Pentecost, the 'name' of Jesus receives emphasis; Acts 3-4 have eight references to it. Longenecker sees this as significant because 'the Name (to *onoma*) was a pious Jewish surrogate for God and connoted his divine presence and power.'" Ajith Fernando, *Acts* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 139-140.

¹¹ Stott, 92. Cf. Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan* (NSBT; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 158-159. Schnabel believes the lame man's faith may be the more likely referent on account of Acts 14:9. Schnabel, 211.

¹² See Brian Vickers, *John-Acts* (ESVEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 371.

¹³ Fernando, 142.

¹⁴ Milne, 99.

¹⁵ Schnabel, 209.

¹⁶ R. C. Sproul, *Acts* (SAEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 86.

¹⁷ Merida, 53.

¹⁸ Quoted in Milne, 104.

¹⁹ Bock, 165.

²⁰ Sproul, 81-82.

²¹ E.g., 2 Sam 23:3; Isa 32:1; 53:11; Zech 9:9.

²² For “the Holy One”: see 1 Sam 2:2; 2 Kgs 19:22; Job 6:10; Pss 16:10; 22:3; 71:22; Isa 1:4; 6:3; 57:15; Hos 11:9; Hab 1:12; for “the Righteous One”: see Ezra 9:15; Pss 11:7; 116:5; 119:137; 129:4; 145:17; Jer 12:1; Lam 1:18; Dan 9:7; Zeph 3:5; cf. Exod 9:27. These texts were compiled by Pinter, 102.

²³ Schnabel, 225.

²⁴ “The term translated as ‘author’ (ἀρχηγός) is used in three ways: (1) ‘one who has a preeminent position’ and is thus a ‘leader, ruler, prince;’ this sense used for military leaders and political rulers, e.g., for Israel’s judges in the LXX; (2) ‘one who begins something that is first in a series, thereby providing impetus for further developments’ and who is thus a ‘pioneer;’ it is in this sense that Aristotle calls Thales the ‘pioneer’ (ἀρχηγός) of philosophy; (3) ‘one who begins or originates’ and who therefore has special esteem, ‘originator, founder,’ used of founders of cities, but also of God (often in Plato). All three uses apply to Jesus; the title is used again in 5:31 (cf. Heb 2:10; 12:2). Jesus has a preeminent position as the ‘prince of life.’ Jesus is the ‘pioneer of life,’ who opened the path to (eternal) life on which others can follow. Jesus is the ‘founder of life’ in the kingdom of God and in the new covenant in which God’s people enjoy the fullness of life. In 26:23, Paul identifies Jesus as ‘the first to rise from the dead’ (πρῶτος ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν), which suggests that the second meaning may be in view here. At the same time, a connection with the healing which Peter explains in this speech is likely—the new lease of life that the lame man had received ‘in the name of Jesus’ (v. 6) was possible only on account of Jesus, whose power as the messianic Servant of the Lord whom God had exalted after his death healed the lame man (vv. 12–13).” Schnabel, 210.

²⁵ Milne, 100.

²⁶ Derek H. W. Thomas, *Acts* (REC; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 87.

²⁷ Stott, 93. Similarly, Vickers writes, “Ignorance does not excuse evil actions. Neither the people nor the rulers understood that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but that does not exonerate them of his murder. In fact, their ignorance was the means of fulfilling God’s word through the prophets (v. 18). But, if the people did not know Jesus was the Messiah, why are they condemned for his death? For one, ignorance can hardly be an excuse for demanding the death (in exchange for a murderer) of a man whom Pilate found not to be guilty. Furthermore, they had ample evidence of Jesus’ messiahship through his miracles and teaching, as well as the Scriptures that foretold his coming. Their lack of understanding is itself enough to condemn them.” Vickers, 372.

²⁸ See Schnabel, 218. Garland writes, “[The prophets] understand that what happened to Jesus is the pinnacle of the unfolding story of salvation history. It results in a necessary redefinition of who belongs to Israel and who does not.” Garland, 41.

²⁹ “When we recognize this about the OT, as the early church leaders like Peter did, the OT becomes for us a gift and an authority and not merely a tedious introduction to the “real thing” in the NT. If we don’t read the OT through Jesus, or ‘Christocentrically’ as some theologians like to put it, Paul says we read it with a veil over our eyes and will never see its glory (2 Cor 3:7–16).” Pinter, 108.

³⁰ Thomas, 81.

³¹ Vickers, 372.

³² “The two imperatives express the call to conversion, which involves abandoning previous ways of thinking, believing, and acting (μετανοήσατε), and which involves adopting new ways of thinking, believing, and acting (ἐπιστρέψατε).” Schnabel, 213-214.

³³ Quoted in Stott, 93.

³⁴ Merida, 53-54.

³⁵ Stott, 93. Waters notes that “[s]ome commentators understand these ‘times’ to coincide with the return of Christ at the end of the age. To be sure, these times are eschatological—they pertain to the end of the age, as the following clauses suggest. Peter, however, holds out these ‘times of refreshing’ as a benefit presently available through the Spirit to those who turn to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith.” Guy Prentiss Waters, *A Study Commentary on The Acts of the Apostles* (Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP, 2015), 111.

³⁶ Schnabel, 214-215. “This finds support in the Symmachus translation of Isa 32:15 where “refreshing” (ἀνάψυξις) is used instead of ‘spirit’ (πνεῦμα; “till the Spirit is poured on us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest”).” Ibid., 214. Also followed by Schreiner, 165.

³⁷ Harvey and Gentino, 123.

³⁸ Waters, 111-112. “Peter is not saying that the timing of Jesus’ return is suspended upon these Jews’ repentance. After all, Peter goes on to say that Jesus must remain in heaven ‘until the times of the restoration of all things which God has spoken through the mouth of the holy prophets of old’, a moment set by the eternal counsel of the Father and revealed to no human being (cf. Matt. 24:36).”

³⁹ Thomas, 87.

⁴⁰ Cited in Schreiner, 168.

⁴¹ Russ Ramsey, *The Mission of the Body of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2018), 30.