

The Blessings of Repentance

- Acts 3:17-26
- We saw two weeks ago when we first looked at Acts 3 that there was a miracle followed by a message. God healed the lame beggar through Peter, and then Peter preached Christ to the astonished crowd that gathered to watch the man do cartwheels across the temple grounds. The wonder was followed by the Word. A demonstration of God's power was followed by a proclamation of God's truth. Which was then followed by a demonstration of God's power, as 2000 men came to faith in Jesus Christ!
- Last time we looked at the first half of the chapter and examined the miracle and the first part of the message. We saw that Peter took the occasion to first exalt Christ with five words about Him: Jesus was the Servant of God, God glorified Him, Jesus was the Holy and Righteous One, the Author of Life, and God raised Him from the dead. Alongside the exaltation of Christ, Peter also brought four indictments to the people gathered in the temple: they had delivered Christ over to be crucified; they denied Christ in the presence of Pilate, they chose a murderer over Jesus, and they killed the Author of Life.
- Today I want us to look at the rest of the sermon. Peter deals with three issues in the text: First, the blind ignorance of his contemporaries, second, the blaring prophecy of their ancestors, and third, blessed repentance that is offered by God.
- **Blind Ignorance**
- Peter acknowledges that these men and women standing before him had killed the Author of Life out of ignorance. As did their rulers. Peter doesn't fully develop the idea here that ignorance is not an excuse, or not one that we can rely on, but Paul does later on in Acts. **(Acts 17:22-31)** So, ignorance is not an excuse. Now is the time to repent. But I want you to see another way Peter speaks about the ignorance of the Jews. Verse 18: "He thus fulfilled." In other words, God used your ignorance to fulfill His plan. Your sin, God's sovereignty. It's very similar to what Peter said in Acts 2:23 in his first sermon: "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." God's sovereignty and man's responsibility: two sides of the same coin. Our God is unstoppable. His plan and purpose is immutable.
- **Blaring Prophecies**
- Now Peter gives them a history lesson to help them move from ignorance to understanding. He explains to these Jewish people that Jesus was prophesied about from the mouth of all of the prophets. (verse 18)
- Peter puts Moses at the beginning of this parade of great men of faith, and Abraham at the end of this parade, and Samuel and "all the prophets" in the middle, to build the case that the whole of the Old Testament record speaks to the Messiah coming. In fact, if you combine what Peter preached on the day of Pentecost to this, his second sermon, and then add in the speech he gives before the Sanhedrin in Chapter 4, it is a powerful portrait of Christ. Let me summarize what John Stott says about these three sermons as a tapestry. They portray Jesus from the Old Testament texts as a Moses-like prophet, the Davidic king and the seed of Abraham. That He suffered and died for us as God's servant, and God raised Him from the dead, since death could not hold Him and God would not abandon Him to decay; that God exalted Him to His right hand to wait for His final triumph; that the Spirit was poured out that the Gospel might be preached worldwide, even to those far off, although opposition to Him was foretold; that people must listen to Him or pay the penalty of their disobedience; and that those who do listen and respond will inherit the blessing promised to Abraham.
- To add an exclamation to this part of Peter's sermon about the prophets, he says in verse 25-26, "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.'" Peter says, "Listen, men and women. These promises were spoken by your ancestors. Your great-great grandfathers believed God and spoke these prophecies about His Son, Jesus Christ. And you don't believe in Him! Were your ancestors all liars? Were they all deceivers? Certainly not. You honor them and read their words and thank God for their obedience and faith. Now you must see with your own hearts that the One they wrote about is the same one you delivered over, denied in the presence of Pilate, and put to death."

- **Blessed Repentance**

- Now we can go back to verse 19 and talk about the call to action. Peter has acknowledged their ignorance. He has turned the light on to expose them to the truth. Now let's see how he calls them to respond. "Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out."
- Repent. Turn around and go the other way. Turn back to God. Remember where Peter is preaching. He is in Solomon's temple, and he is preaching to the religious people of the day, the devout Jews. These were men and women who believed in Jehovah God but who had stumbled over His Son. They believe themselves to be OK, to know God better than anybody in the city, even in the world. But they didn't know God at all. Jesus had said this plainly many times, to these same people, most likely! John 5:37-40, And the Father who sent Me has himself borne witness about Me. His voice you have never heard, His form you have never seen, ³⁸ and you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom He has sent. ³⁹ You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to Me that you may have life."
- What if we stop refusing to come to Jesus? What happens when people repent? Peter lists three powerful blessings that come attached to true repentance.
- First, when we repent, our sins are blotted out. William Barclay (whom I do not recommend for doctrine but is excellent for cultural and historical background) said, "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 on top of it. To erase the writing a man might take a wet sponge and simply wipe it away." In the same way, when we repent and turn back to God, He wipes our hearts clean.
- Second, the promise is "that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." (verse 20) Bob Goff tells the story of his son Richard playing the game "Bigger and Better" with some friends of his. You start out with a dime and the winning team at the end of the day is the one who has come back with the biggest and the best thing. So Richard went to the first door and said, "Hi, we're playing Bigger and Better. I've got a dime and I'm hoping to trade it for something bigger and better. Do you have anything you can trade me?" The guy at the door had never heard of the game, but he got excited about it and yelled to his wife, "Hey, marge, there's a kid here and we're playing bigger and better. What do we have that's bigger and better than a dime?" Richard walked away with a mattress. He and his buddies went to the next door and traded the mattress for a ping pong table. They wheeled the table to the next house and traded for an elk head. Bob said, "How cool is that? I would have stopped there, but Rich didn't." He kept trading up and that night, when Rich came home, he didn't have a dime or a mattress, a Ping-Pong table or an elk head, or the other five things he had traded up for. Richard drove home in a pickup truck. No lie. He started with a dime and ended up with a Dodge. That's a picture of a glorious reality, that when we repent, we trade up. We get "times of refreshing from the Lord." Instead of guilt and shame and burdens, when we repent we find freedom and joy and rest! We trade in what was killing us for the Author of Life. Pretty good trade.
- Third, the blessed result of repentance is "that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus." (verse 20) We understand the time frame by looking at the next verse. This is a

promise about Jesus' return. Repentance brings times of refreshing now, in this life, but the greatest joys await us then, when Christ returns for His own. Repentance now promises the fullness of joy then.

- Can we look at what happens next in chapter 4? **(Read verses 1-4)** You will notice that the sermon is cut short, something some of you probably pray about on the way to church every Sunday! But the reason it is cut short is because the preacher is arrested, something I hope you do NOT pray about, ever. Then we are told that two thousand men responded to the Word and repented. Again we are not told about the women and children who responded to the Word and repented, but a conservative estimate is that now, after Peter's second sermon, the church has ten thousand members. But there are two things I want you to consider with me about how this sermon ended, and the first thing we will get into in more detail next week as we see Peter and John on trial. First, there was no altar call. Peter didn't ask anyone to come down the aisle. He didn't even ask them all to bow their heads and then get the ones under conviction to raise their hands so that only he could see and pray for them. Peter was hauled out of there before there could ever BE an invitation. What he did do was preach Christ and tell them to repent. And that's exactly what they did. "Many of those who heard the Word believed." That's the protocol for salvation. That does NOT mean that you can never have an altar call. But when those who hear the Word believe, they become converted, and it is always and only can be an act of God. When those who hear the Word respond to an altar call, they may or may NOT have believed. They may simply have been moved. Those who have believed will be saved. Those who were simply moved may become false converts.
- Second: being the witness that God called us to be will sometimes bring great trouble on us. Jesus promised it, didn't He? He said in Matthew 10:24-33 that the servant is not above his master, and if they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, what will they call the servants? So don't be afraid of the one who can kill the body. And don't be concerned about what you will say when you stand trial. God cares about the sparrow. He cares much more about you. Sometimes being the witness God calls us to be brings great trouble. But read it again in Acts 4:4... **But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.**
- **It was worth it.**