

ACTS
Peter's Second Christian Sermon
Acts 3:12-26

What is wrong with modern day preaching? We have in the twentieth century eloquent ministers, intelligent expositors and even fiery preachers, but modern day preaching lacks something. May I suggest that contemporary preaching as a whole is too man centered in that it tries to elevate man and not abase him. There is very little preaching on man's sinfulness and the certainty of his eternal judgment apart from Jesus Christ. The average sermon in evangelical circles is directed towards man's will rather than towards his conscience whereby he sees himself a guilty sinner before a holy God.

This sermon in Acts 3 is a good example of what an evangelistic message should consist. It speaks of sin, guilt, Christ, God, resurrection, fulfilled prophecy, repentance and judgment. The Apostle Peter was able to cut through all the facade of these Jews and get down to the nitty-gritty of life. He preached the facts of Christ and these words cut to the heart of these unbelieving Jews who fell under guilt and conviction for their sins. Peter cut right through the illusions, fantasies and dream world that these Jews put around themselves and the Holy Spirit pricked their consciences about their relationship to God. Peter was no dreamer, politician, backslapper or master of rhetoric. He was a hard-nosed realist who desired to penetrate the world of illusion about the Messiah that these Jews had built around themselves. The results produced from this message were fantastic, for about five thousand were saved (Acts 4:4).

Every sermon should be designed to break through all of man's dreams, illusions and fantasies about himself, Christ and God, and every message should cut the consciences of man deeply so as to cause him to see his sinfulness and the need of establishing a relationship with Almighty God.

GUILT AROUSED Acts 3:12-15

Disclaimed Human Power (3:12)

“But when Peter saw this, . . .” -- It was the healing of the lame man and the excitement generated about this miracle which caused Peter to preach this sermon to his Jewish brethren according to the flesh. Remember how Peter told this lame man who had never walked, “I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene -- walk!” Peter then reached down and extended his hand to the lame man and he grasped Peter's hand by faith and that very moment strength came into his feet and ankles and he was healed. The healed man began walking, jumping and leaping all over the Temple as he was hugging and clinging to Peter and John. This man was excited because his body and soul had been touched by the grace of God. This caused a great commotion with the unbelieving Jews in the Solomon's porch area of the Temple. They were amazed and astonished at this man's healing.

“He replied to the people, ‘Men of Israel . . .’” -- The key to understanding this sermon is in the fact that Peter addressed himself to Israelites. The things mentioned in this message would be familiar to Jews who knew their Old Testament, so much of this sermon has a Hebraic cast to it. The Old Testament had so much to say about the Messiah, the Jews and the earthly kingdom to be established when Messiah would come and the Jews would acknowledge Him as God and Messiah (Lord and Christ). These Jews felt when Messiah would come He would set up His kingdom. If Christ was Messiah, why didn't He set up the earthly kingdom? Peter explained to them when and how the kingdom will be established even though Jesus Christ is the Messiah. Jesus was the Messiah but Israel rejected the Messiah and will not get the kingdom until the nation turns to Messiah in faith. Israel, as a nation, had not responded to Christ, but when they do, they shall get their kingdom.

These Jews should have expected this miracle of the lame man because when Messiah would come, He would do

miracles. “Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. The lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy” (Isa.35:5,6). When John the Baptist was in prison, he sent to find out whether Christ was the Messiah, and Christ sent word back to him: “Go tell John that the deaf hear, lepers are cleansed, the lame walk and the poor have the gospel preached to them.” These were signs that the King had come and the foundations had been laid for the kingdom, if Israel would repent.

“Why do you marvel at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk?” -- Apparently these Jews became enamored with Peter and John and were developing a hero worship of them, for they were attributing the power to do these miracles to some magical powers of the Apostles rather than the supernatural powers of Christ.

Delivered Up Messiah (3:13)

“The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our Fathers, . . .” -- The first thing Peter did was to point out that the God of the Jews is the same God as that of the Christians. Christians are spiritual Israel and accept the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as their God.

“Has glorified His Servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered up, . . .” -- Peter was a bold preacher. He told them that they crucified Christ. They delivered up God's servant, which is an Old Testament title for His Messiahship (Isa.42:1-9). If there was ever a time to compromise the gospel, this was the time. Peter did not bend; he did not compromise. He was Peter, the lionhearted, and told it like it was.

Peter could have reasoned this way, “I must be very tactful how I approach this subject so I will not offend one person. I will give them a little lecture on Messianic prophecy and let them draw their own conclusions. After all if I barge right in and preach Jesus Christ in a hard, harsh and straightforward manner I may stir these people to anger and drive them away.” Thank God, Peter did not reason that way. He told the truth and preached Christ to these people without compromise.

“And disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him, . . .” -- What a slam to these Jews, for Peter said that a pagan, Gentile ruler had more insight into the person of Christ than did the Jews. Pilate believed Christ to be innocent and the King of the Jews, for he said, “Shall I release your King?” And the Jews cried, “We have no King but Caesar. Crucify him! Crucify him!” Pilate wanted to release Messiah but the Jews disowned Him.

Disowned Messiah (3:14)

“But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, . . .” -- “Holy One” and “Righteous One” are terms for Messiah which recognize His deity, His divine nature and that He would be God Himself. They denied the Giver of Life and asked for a “taker of life,” Barabbas, to be released in His place.

Destroyed Messiah (3:15)

“But put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, . . .” -- The word “Prince” means “author“. Christ, the Messiah, is the author of life, so how could they put the “Author of Life” to death? They thought they killed Jesus but God raised Him from the dead. Death could not hold the Author of Life.

“In Him was life; and the life was the light of men” (Jn. 1 :4).

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me’” (Jn. 14:6).

“And you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life” (Jn. 5:40).

“A fact to which we are witnesses . . .” -- Peter said that he and all the Apostles and many others were witnesses to the fact of Christ's resurrection. The Christian faith is not based on the whims of men, or their religious experiences or on sentimental hope, but upon well attested and well documented facts. These facts can be attested to in a law court even today.

Notice carefully that the first thing Peter did was to arouse a sense of guilt in these unbelieving Jews - “You delivered up Messiah! You disowned Messiah! You put Messiah to death!” Psychologists today claim the worst thing we can do if we desire to help someone is to arouse a sense of guilt within that person. They claim that to make a person feel guilty is to shut the door to helping him. Thank God that Peter was a Biblicist who acknowledged sin and guilt and not a humanistic psychologist who did not believe in sin or arousing guilt. Peter wanted these Jews to feel guilty so this guilt would drive them to Jesus Christ, the Savior.

GUILT ANSWERED Acts 3:16

Faith Is the Key to Healing (3:16a)

“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; . . .” -- Peter used the lame man as an illustration of the nation of Israel and what will happen when the nation truly turns to Jesus Christ. This lame man was part of the nation who cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” He was as guilty as any Jew for his rejection, yet he stood before these unbelieving Jews in perfect health, both in body and in soul. Surely this lame man had some guilt and certainly the nation of Israel was guilty before God. Why was the lame man made whole? Because he placed faith in the name or power of Jesus to accomplish for him what he could not do for himself. The lame man found acceptance before God based on faith in Jesus Christ the Lord. The lame man represents Israel and when Israel repents, it will have the guilt removed and the nation will be made whole.

How is guilt removed? Guilt can only be removed through faith in Jesus Christ who alone has the power to remove guilt. The power to have guilt removed does not lie in men but in Messiah who is God. The answer to guilt, then, is Jesus Christ.

Faith Is a Gift (3:16b)

“And the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.” -- Peter pointed out that even the faith this lame man exercised by his own volition was a gift from God. The faith of the lame man came through Christ. This, of course, deals in the mystery of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Anyone who wants to exercise faith can and, if he does, it was a gift given by a sovereign God.

GUILT AND ACCOUNTABILITY Acts 3:17, 18

Plain Ignorance (3:17)

“And now brethren, I know you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also.” -- Peter declared that what the Jews did in crucifying the Messiah, they did in ignorance. Apparently even the rulers acted in ignorant blindness. These words of Peter are very lenient in light of the awful act of putting Messiah to death. These Jews were still accountable for their acts of sin even though they did them in ignorance. This statement of Peter's, however, shows us God's generosity in offering a free pardon to all who took part in the death of Christ. Forgiveness could be theirs if only the Jews would realize their error, confess their sin and turn to Messiah. Jesus Christ displayed this same attitude when He looked out over His enemies from the cross and said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Actually our Lord's words could be translated, “Father, let them go, for they know not what they do.” Christ was asking the Father to let His persecutors go and not, at that time, bring judgment on them that they might have another opportunity to trust Christ.

Many of man's sins are sins of ignorance. He does things out of blunders and stupidity, rocking along in his darkness, not really knowing everything he is doing is against God. How many people have said, “Oh, I had no

idea I was doing wrong! I look back and see now I was doing wrong but at the time I did not understand and it seemed so harmless!” God, while He understands man's ignorance and is at times patient with it, still holds man accountable for his sins of ignorance. Man blunders along through life and God is ready to forgive a person for his atrocious blunders the moment he turns to Jesus Christ for salvation.

Plan Fulfilled (3:18)

“But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled.” -- Christ's sufferings in death were predicted by the Old Testament prophets because this was all part of God's plan. Israel's ignorance was all somehow included in the sovereign plan of God.

The principle here is that through human stupidity and ignorance God's purposes are still working out. Somehow everything is under divine control. Through all the blunders, foolishness and stupidity of man, God is still working His plan.

GUILT ACQUITTED Acts 3:19a

“Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away (blotted out) . . .”

Peter told these Jews if they would repent and turn to God, their sins would be blotted out, forgiven, put away. Guilt is removed when people repent and return to God. Repentance does not mean to weep and cry, but “to change the mind.” These Jews were to reverse their attitude about Christ. They rejected Messiah and put Him to death but they were to admit He was the Messiah and change their whole thinking about Him. They were to get their attitudes in line with God's attitude about Christ. Furthermore, they were not only to have a complete change of mind but were to have a complete turn around in the life. They were living for religion and self, but now they were to live for Christ, displaying a changed lifestyle.

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know then, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand” (Jn. 10:27, 28).

When Israel repents, God will give them the kingdom. This will come at the second advent of Christ when “all Israel shall be saved.” Only a failure to repent as a nation keeps Israel from enjoying the kingdom. Israel will repent when God grants them repentance, for repentance is also a gift from God.

“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you put to death by hanging Him on a cross. He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:30, 31).

Whenever there is a change of attitude about Christ and a turning to Him for a change of lifestyle, there is an immediate dealing with the problem of guilt. God blots out sins. This is a very difficult concept to get people to realize. It is amazing how some people can hear all their lives that God forgives sin and removes guilt on the basis of the death of Christ and still not do anything about it. Guilt is the root of much of our problems as human beings, and yet God promises forgiveness. Yet some people go on trying to work out some human solution for their guilt trying to get some kind of merit before God, trying to do something that will make themselves acceptable before God in order to rid themselves of guilt feelings. The answer to guilt is found in repentance and turning to Jesus Christ who blots out every sin.

When a person comes to the point where he stops trusting in what he formerly trusted and starts trusting in Jesus Christ, he has repented. When a person stops trusting in himself, his good works, his church, his baptism, his church membership, his participation in the Lord's Table and trust only in Jesus Christ, he has truly repented. My oldest son Mark was converted to Christ when he was sixteen. He had been raised all of his life with the knowledge that God removes sin and takes away guilt. After his conversion, he was at a Bible class at the home of Sam Shackelford and Sam made the statement that God wipes away every sin when we trust Christ. Mark said, “He what? Does God wipe away every sin?” Sam replied, “Absolutely.” Mark said, “What a beautiful truth, I never knew that before.” He knew it but he never applied it and it was not real until he was converted.

Refreshing Times (3:19b)

“In order that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” -- The first result of repentance and turning to God is that there will be times of refreshing. In this context, this “times of refreshing” refers to when Israel as a nation will turn to Messiah. There will be a great revival in Israel and this will occur at the second advent of Christ. This will be a time of blessing, peace and prosperity for Israel, times of joy and happiness and relative contentment in society. This will be the time the nation is grafted back into the covenant made with Abraham.

This may not be a reoffer of the kingdom to Israel but it does tell us what will happen to Israel when it does repent as a nation. While the context is about the Jews, the principle of times of refreshing coming when an individual or a nation repents is very valid. The Reformation brought an awakening through Luther, Calvin and Zwingli and was a time of refreshing for the church and many western European countries were greatly blessed. God brought refreshing to the nation of Scotland when the people of that country turned to the Lord Jesus Christ under the preaching of John Knox. England was saved from economic, political and spiritual disaster and delivered from a revolution by the preaching of Whitefield and Wesley. It is estimated that only about fifteen per cent of the nation turned to Christ but this influenced the rest of the nation so that it became a prosperous and dynamic nation.

Whenever the gospel is applied on a personal basis it brings a changed life and refreshing to the soul. Whenever enough people apply the gospel to their lives, the group influences a nation, but the gospel must be individually applied.

A soap manufacturer, not a Christian, was talking with a minister. Said the soap maker, “The gospel you preach hasn't done much good, for there's still a lot of wickedness and wicked people.”

The preacher made no immediate reply, but they soon passed a child making mud pies. He was exceedingly dirty. It was then the preacher's turn, and so he said: “Soap hasn't done much good in the world, I see; for there's still much dirt and many dirty people.”

“Oh, well,” answered the manufacturer, “soap is useful only when it's applied.” “Exactly,” was the minister's reply, “so it is with the gospel we proclaim.”

Return of Christ (3:20)

“And that he may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, . . .” -- At or around the second advent of Jesus Christ, the nation of Israel will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Millions of Jews will respond to Christ, for at that time “all Israel shall be saved.”

“For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB. AND THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS” (Rom. 11:25-27).

Restoration of All Things (3: 21)

“Whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration (establishment) of all things, about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient times.” -- This verse is prophetic and tells us what will happen when Israel turns to Christ at the second advent. At that time, there will be a “restoration of all things.” Literally it says, “fulfillment” or “establishing of all things.” This certainly is not teaching that when Christ

comes there will be a universal restitution of all things and everyone will ultimately be saved. No, this is talking about the establishment of the earthly kingdom which was spoken by the prophets of the Old Testament. Christ will come and reign as King over this earth!

Notice also that Christ will remain in heaven until He returns to establish His kingdom. He will not return twice but only once, for He will not leave heaven until the “restoration or establishment of all things.”

GUILT AND APOSTASY Acts 3:22-26

Rejection of the Prophet (3:22, 23)

“Moses said, ”HE LORD GOD SHALL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN: TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED IN EVERYTHING HE SAYS TO YOU. AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERY SOUL THAT DOES NOT HEED THAT PROPHET SHALL BE UTTERLY DESTROYED FROM AMONG THE PEOPLE.” -- Peter quoted the Old Testament (Deut. 18:15) to show that Moses, the greatest Old Testament prophet, predicted that God would raise up The Prophet of all prophets, even Jesus Christ. Moses also said that those who do not heed the words of the Great Prophet, Jesus Christ, shall be utterly destroyed from among the true people of God. Only judgment awaits those who do not accept Jesus as Lord, Christ and Savior, who do not repent and accept Him as God, Messiah and Deliverer. Unbelievers will be separated from the true people of God and utterly destroyed in judgment.

Peter was not afraid to preach judgment to his generation and we must not be afraid to preach it to our generation. Only Jesus Christ can keep an individual or a nation from the certainty of experiencing God's eternal wrath against sin.

Realization of the Covenant (3:24-26)

“And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken from Samuel and his successors onward also announced these days. 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.’” -- God made the Abrahamic Covenant with the Jews. The Jews had the covenant which promised the Messiah and physical and spiritual blessings through Him. These Jews were apostatizing from the spiritual meaning of the covenant because of their apathy towards Christ, the Messiah. Yet, all the Jews had to do was repent and turn to Messiah, the final fulfiller of the covenant and they would be saved and spiritually inherit the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant.

“For you first, God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning everyone of you from your wicked ways.” -- Historically the gospel was to go to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. Peter makes the first coming of Christ and His death for sin very real to these unbelieving Jews. -- “God sent Him to bless, and to turn everyone of you from your wickedness.” The Jews had the prophets; they had the Law; they had the covenants. Why then were they not saved? They did not accept the Messiah of whom the prophets spoke, the Law foreshadowed and covenants promised. They refused to apply the death of Christ to themselves. They refused to repent and turn to the God who sent the Messiah. They refused to make their relationship personal and no one is saved until Jesus Christ is made one's personal Savior by faith.

CONCLUSION

What was Peter's message to the Jews and to you and me? Life for the lame man, for Israel and for all men is in Christ only and this life is given by God in grace and appropriated through the faith of the believer in Christ. Life is in Christ. Spiritually lame, sick, blind and deformed sinners can have eternal life. How? God in grace cancels man's inability and communicates ability to believe in the Lord Jesus. It is in the name or power of Jesus that a sinner comes alive and is enabled to lay hold of Christ for salvation.

There is no power in the name Baptist, or Presbyterian, or Lutheran, or Methodist or Roman Catholic or Grace

Church. There is no power in any preacher or Bible teacher. There is no power to save except in the name of Jesus Christ. He breaks the power of sin. He sets the prisoner free.

No matter how good you may think you are or how bad you think you are, if you have not received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you are lost and headed for eternal destruction. You are a guilty sinner, not only because you have broken God's law in thousands of ways, but because you are guilty of the greatest of all sins - the rejection of Jesus Christ! How can you remove your guilt? Repent and turn to Jesus Christ, who is God, Messiah and Savior!