

We began chapter three with Luke's account of one of the miracles of the Apostles after the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. On their way to the temple, Peter and John had an encounter with a beggar. The beggar asked for money, but Peter pronounced a miracle in Jesus' name so that this man, who was over 40 years old, was able to walk for the first time in his life.

The beggar followed Peter and John into the temple, where he was walking, jumping, and praising God. Peter said he was not the power behind the miracle; this man was healed in Jesus name. His testimony was undeniable, because most of the people knew the man from seeing him beg at the temple gate for years. Peter used the opportunity of the miracle to preach his second recorded gospel message. Both of Peter's sermons relayed the same basic information. Jesus was Israel's promised Messiah, and they missed it. Their rejection of Jesus was a great sin, but Jesus died for their sins. The good news for the people comes as a result of the resurrection. Jesus died according to the scriptures, He was buried, and rose again, and forgiveness and salvation are offered in Jesus' name.

Beginning with verse 17, we will see the conclusion of Peter's message as Luke records it. In this passage we see a call to a proper response to the gospel message that is just as relevant today as it was back then. Let's read the passage together beginning with Acts 3:17

Peter's words brought great conviction upon the people in Solomon's Colonnade that day, and they were confronted with a choice; either dismiss Peter's claims about the Messiah, or turn to Jesus in faith. Notice however, that Peter balanced his stern accusation against their sin, with kindness and an offer of God's grace. The people rejected Jesus out of ignorance. They didn't know that Jesus was the Messiah. They thought He was a troublemaker and a blasphemer. He wasn't at all what they wanted or expected Him to be.

The biblical principles seen in this passage serve as a good model for our witness of Christ today. People must be confronted with their sin, but we must keep a careful balance in our presentation by expressing the grace of God that allows for their forgiveness.

This is why I am concerned that many of the street preachers we see on the corners and mediums of our roads are generally ineffective in their gospel presentation. I praise God for their boldness, and God can certainly use that kind of a witness to affect a person's heart, but while I hear words of conviction in their message, I hear very little about God's grace.

In verse 18, Peter gives the reason why the Jews missed their Messiah when He came. They were looking for their promised King, who would rule and reign over them. He would prosper them and make their enemies bow at His feet. He would make Israel the number one superpower of the world, the wealthiest nation ever, and they would live under the full blessings of God. It sounds like heaven on earth, doesn't it?

But, Peter says that the prophets foretold all that had happened to Jesus, and it was part of God's plan of redemption for the Messiah to suffer. When we study prophecy carefully, as it applies to the Christ, we understand that what Peter said is true. There are two veins of prophecy. One clearly portrays the Messiah that the Jews anticipated. He would be the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, and ruler over all the earth. The other vein of prophecy portrays a suffering servant, and predicts Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

How difficult it must have been for the Jews to reconcile these two views of their Messiah. In our flesh we want all the blessings, without all the suffering. But Peter insists that Israel's prophets predicted everything that happened to Jesus. As we reflect on this passage, remember that this is a synopsis of Peter's sermon. How long would a preacher make his sermon

if he had a captivated audience and no time constraints? We can read the whole account in a matter of a minute or two, but the text does not give us every word of the sermon. I imagine that Peter pointed to specific passages, and he appealed to the people's knowledge of Scripture to prove that Jesus was their Messiah, so that they would fall under conviction over their sin.

Peter says to his audience, you did not know that you were sinning against God, but now that you do, there is only one proper response. (VS 19) Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord. Often in the presentation of the gospel, people focus on faith in Jesus, His sacrifice, and the resurrection, but neglect the proper emphasis on repentance. Here Peter spells out that God's offer of grace is conditioned upon a person's willingness to turn away from their sin, and turn to God. To receive God's grace and forgiveness, we cannot go on sinning, as if Christ's sacrifice does not make any difference in our lives.

Pretend that you are a business owner, and you have an employee that you really like, but while checking the books you see that he has been stealing from you, so you confront him with the evidence. When the employee realizes that he has been caught, he confesses his sin against you and asks for forgiveness. Moved with compassion, you tell him that you will not press charges, he will not go to jail, and he can continue in your employment, so long as nothing like this ever happens again.

If the employee is truly thankful for your grace, he will forever feel in your debt, and will probably work harder, stand up for you, and become a model for the other employees to follow. But, what if he promises not to embezzle, but continues to steel from you behind your back. When you find out that he is untrustworthy, and that he has not turned from his sin against you, the offer of forgiveness is withdrawn. At the least you are going to fire him, and you might decide to turn him in to the authorities.

God's offer of grace and forgiveness is conditioned upon repentance. If a person does not have a genuine heart for repentance, if he or she thinks that they can go through the motions of repeating a prayer, joining the church and getting baptized, without repentance, God is going to know it. If a person is unwilling to come to the Lord on His terms, there will be no saving grace. This does not mean that God will remove our salvation if we mess up, it simple means we must have genuine repentance in our hearts, so that our desire is to turn away from sin, and towards God.

The word of God promises that if we come to God on His terms, if we turn away from our sins and trust Him with our lives, our sins will be wiped out and times of refreshing will come from the Lord. We experience a spiritual cleansing. God removes the stain of sin, refreshes our souls, and fills us with His peace. Through faith in Christ, God also gives us confidence about the life to come. He seals us with His Holy Spirit, and empowers us for service. He makes our lives glorious in spite of our circumstances.

In verses 21 through 24, Peter gives his audience insight into the proper interpretation of the prophecies concerning their Messiah, which further points them to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, who died for their sins, must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything as he promised long ago, through His holy prophets. The Jews could not, in their minds, reconcile the prophecies of the suffering servant with those of the king of kings. In their yearning for the Messiah, they only saw the end game. Here Peter is helping them to see that the Messiah came the first time as the suffering servant, who would take away the sins of the world, and He is coming a second time as King of Kings, and will restore the kingdom to Israel in fulfillment of God's covenant promises to His chosen people.

The rapture is all about the church, but the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, is all about God keeping His covenant with Israel. There will be tribulation here on earth, and sometime during that tribulation period, Jesus will rapture His church. If you are a born again believer who is alive on that day, you will be caught up with Christ in the air, and delivered from the earth before God begins to pour out His wrath. Those who have not been saved at that time will face the consequences of God's wrath. If there are any here who have not made a commitment of their life to Christ, please, turn to Jesus in faith, so that you can escape the terrible day of the Lord. It is so unnecessary for you to suffer, because God wants to forgive you and bless you.

After the destruction of those days, the bible speaks of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven, and the Millennial Reign of Christ. Jesus will deliver Israel from her enemies, and reign as King of Israel, and the world, from Jerusalem, just as all of the prophets of the Old Testament promised.

Where does that leave the church? What will happen to you and me? According to the scriptures, we will rule with Him, and serve with Him. We will become a part of God's blessings upon Israel, in the Millennial Kingdom. After the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth will come the great white throne judgment, where each person who never received Jesus as Savior and Lord will be eternally condemned. Then God will create a new heaven and a new earth. Since we are promised eternal life, we will have some role in God's plan in His new creation.

We do not have the fine details of how or when God will do all of these things, but all of the prophets who wrote about the Messiah and the end of time spoke about these things, and we look forward to the fulfillment of all that they promised.

Verses 25 and 26 tell us God's reason for sending Jesus the first time. In God's covenant with Abraham, He promised that through Abraham's offspring, all peoples on earth would be blessed. Jesus came from heaven, lived as a man, but without sin, sacrificed His life, taking upon His flesh the cost of the penalty of our sin, so that Jew and Gentile alike might receive God's grace, through the forgiveness of our sin. Once we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, we become a part of the kingdom of God and inherit eternal life. God's covenant with the decedents of Abraham still stands, but the New Covenant of grace through faith in Jesus Christ is God's offer of blessing to all the people of the earth.

In verse 26 we learn that Jesus came specifically to the Jews first in order that they would turn away from their sin so that God could bless them, as individuals, and as a people. This verse strengthens Peter's emphasis on repentance, and it is equally important for the Jew as it is for the Gentile. It also reminds us that God's people cannot fully enjoy the blessings of His grace while living in sin. This is true of the Jew living in the hope of the Old Covenant, and for the Christian living in the hope of the New Covenant. Jesus died to deliver us from sin, so willful sin should have no place in the life of a Christian. That does not mean that we will never sin, but in our hearts we have turned away from sin and toward God.

I believe that Peter's sermon was affective in the hearts of some of the people because Luke said at the end of chapter two that the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. God's word did not return void. The response of the religious leaders, however, was not what we might hope for, and is the subject of chapter four, which we will begin to examine next time.

To summarize chapter three, let me remind you of some key points. When God does a miracle, there is probably a greater purpose behind His actions beyond the blessing that comes to the recipient of that miracle. We should be quick to use the miracle of answered prayer to point

people to Jesus, and to share the gospel message. The message should include a proclamation of who Jesus is, His sinless life, His sacrificial death, and His resurrection from the grave. Do not lose sight of the fact that repentance is central to our salvation, and our ongoing relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is coming again, and please make sure you are ready. If you have not trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord, turn to Him in faith, even tonight. Confess and repent of your sins, trust Jesus and His sacrifice for your forgiveness. Invite Him into your heart. Follow Him in this life, and you will inherit eternal life.