

The Sermon That Brought Persecution #2

Acts 3:19-26

March 13, 2016

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Before preaching Christ and the blessings of the New Covenant, before preaching repentance and turning to Christ, Peter pointed his finger (as it were) at the Jews, who had witnessed the healing of the man lame from birth by the power of the risen and glorified Christ, saying, “You are guilty before God—You rejected, delivered over to the Romans, and crucified the Holy One, the Just One, the Anointed Savior and Deliverer of all who will trust Him.”

Dear ones, it is through faithful preaching that we understand that we are guilty and in need of a Savior, and even after coming to Christ by faith, we continue to need the Spirit’s conviction in our lives to show to us what is wrong with us spiritually and to point us to Jesus Christ as our gracious Savior and Sanctifier (that which He has begun in us He will complete, Philippians 1:6).

Faithful preaching turns hearers from their need to the only one who can meet that need: Jesus Christ (just as Peter did in his sermon, Acts 3:16). And as we shall see from our text this Lord’s Day, faithful preaching must call hearers to action based upon the promises of God in the Gospel. Faithful hearers cannot simply sit and listen, and then take no action. Once God (by His Spirit) has convicted us through faithful preaching, we must trust in Christ, evidence true faith by repenting of sin, and turn to Christ as Lord and Master of our lives. To do nothing is not to be neutral toward Christ—it is to reject the offer of salvation in the gospel; it is to reject Christ; and it is to call God a liar because God’s testimony concerning Christ is not believed (1 John 5:10-11). How you respond to faithful preaching reveals much about the condition of your heart.

Let us continue our study of Peter’s sermon in Acts 4 that was used by the Lord to bring about the salvation of 5,000 men (Acts 4:4, not counting women who may have been brought to faith in Christ), and yet was used by the Lord to harden the hearts of those who would not believe, which brought about the persecution of the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 4:5ff).

The main points from our text in Acts this Lord’s Day are the following: (1) Peter Preaches the Blessings of the New Covenant (Acts 3:19-21); and (2) Peter Preaches Jesus from the Old Testament (Acts 3:22-26).

I. Peter Preaches the Blessings of the New Covenant (Acts 3:19-21).

A. Now it is time for the people to respond to what Peter has preached. The “therefore” in verse 19 draws forth the following conclusion in the form of two exhortations: (1) **Repent**; and (2) **Be converted**. Based upon your guilt in rejecting Christ and turning Him over to the Romans to be crucified and based upon your need of Christ, repent and be converted.

1. Dear ones, there is no salvation apart from repentance—there is no such thing as a Christian that lives in unrepentant sin (“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” Luke 13:3).

a. Repentance refers to that grace by which the sinner has a completely new change of heart toward his/her sin. Whereas before, you may have excused your sin, you may have blamed others for your sin, you may have not realized that you have sinned against God, but when you repent you are humbled before the Lord and you confess with a broken and contrite heart that you have sinned against the Lord. You now grieve and sorrow over your sin against God. Even in the sin you commit against your wife,

husband, children, parents, friends, neighbors, fellow students, or co-workers, you have first and foremost sinned against God because you have broken His commandments (Psalm 51:4).

b. Though repentance is absolutely necessary for salvation, a sinner is not justified by repentance, but is justified by faith alone in Christ alone (Galatians 2:16).

(1) Repentance is a good work and is the necessary fruit of faith in Jesus Christ (Zechariah 12:10). If you were justified before God (forgiven and imputed the righteousness of Christ) by repentance (as taught by the Roman Catholic Church, by Mormonism, by the Watchtower Society, by all promoting such a false gospel), you would indeed be justified by works (by repentance, by love, by good works).

(2) However, the gospel of Jesus Christ is NOT make yourself qualified and worthy to receive God's forgiveness, righteousness, and everlasting life; but is rather come with empty hands as a beggar, and open them by faith to the Lord that He may freely fill them with His unfathomable spiritual riches (Isaiah 55:1). Come to Christ as one who has nothing to offer Christ, as one who is lame, blind, deaf, and dead by nature, and receive by faith alone His healing of your soul and life forevermore (Ephesians 2:5; Acts 16:31).

c. Though faith is not specifically mentioned by Peter here in Acts 3:19, it is nevertheless implied as that grace that leads to repentance. It is implicitly present even if not explicitly stated. Peter had already mentioned in Acts 3:16 that it was by faith in the name of Jesus that the lame man was healed (both physically and spiritually). Since Peter had as a good prosecuting attorney presented to these Jews their guilt before God, now he entreats them to repent, not looking to their own sin as a disqualification or looking to their repentance as a qualification, but rather looking to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus as the basis upon which they were to repent.

d. *The Westminster Shorter Catechism (#87):*

Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, **and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ**, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience.

2. The second response called for by Peter from the multitude in the temple was—"be converted" (Acts 2:19). Literally, Peter said, "Repent, ye therefore, and **turn**." Turn from rejecting Christ to submitting to Christ. Turn from your pride in yourself to humility in bowing to the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Master of your life.

a. This follows very closely and conveys very much the same idea as repent—turn from your sin unto God. You are headed one direction, make a 180 degree turn and head the other direction.

b. You see, repentance is not simply voicing your sorrow over sin to God and to others; it is changing directions and turning from what you previously and sinfully said and practiced. You cannot be all talk and no action, dear ones, if you have repented; for you have also turned in your speech and in your conduct from the sin that once controlled you to now submitting yourselves entirely to the control of the Holy Spirit and to the Lordship of Jesus Christ (**endeavoring** new obedience). You now profess and practice that you are under new management. The old management of sin is crucified with Christ, and now the new management of pursuing holiness is alive because you have been raised with Jesus Christ (Romans 6).

c. Finally, this turning is not to be delayed, procrastinated, or treated with a careless unimportance as if tomorrow will be just as good as today. This is a call to immediate action to turn and turn right now! To delay and to wait only demonstrates that you really do not care about your soul because there are so many other things in life that are more important to you. Many reason within themselves, "God will be there tomorrow." But dear ones, this is to test the Lord God—"I will continue in my sin and you must show me mercy when I am ready to repent." It doesn't work that way, my friend. This is also

what the fool in the parable of Jesus said as well (Luke 12:16-20). Things may be going well with you and you may think to yourself, “I do not need to repent of sin and turn to Christ’s lordship in my life—things could not be going better for me.” But remember the warning of the Apostle Paul in Romans 2:4-5.

B. Peter not only exhorts the Jews in the temple to take swift and immediate action to repent and to turn (without delay), but he also offers to them the blessings of the gospel: **forgiveness** and **eternal life**.

1. First, Peter offers to the Jews **the blessedness of forgiveness** (“that your sins may be blotted out, when [literally, “so that”] the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” Acts 3:19).

a. The blotting out of sins is a graphic portrayal of what God does to your sins when you are justified in the sight of God. To “blot out” is a financial expression that sees us as being indebted to God due to all of our sins committed against Him (which are so many that they could not be numbered). And instead of God requiring the full payment of sin from us (and the hell which we deserve), when we trust alone in Christ alone, He wipes the debt entirely clean and writes over our account, “Paid in full by My beloved Son.” There is absolutely no sin in that legal, heavenly ledger before God since Jesus paid the debt of our sin once and for all—all of our sin (past, present, and future) is paid in full.

b. And if that is not amazing enough, we are not left with a mere clean legal account before God, but the perfect righteousness of Christ is then imputed to us by faith alone. We go from having a debt we could never pay off for all eternity in hell—that is why those in hell never leave it, because they never pay off the debt of sin to having all our sins are blotted out. And then through faith in Christ we have credited to our heavenly account an infinite supply of righteousness that can never, ever be taken away. Jesus, the righteous, would have to be taken in order for His righteousness in our account to be taken away.

c. No wonder Peter further explains this blotting out of all our sin as bringing times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19). The word “refreshing” here means “rest” (times of rest). Isn’t that what the Lord Jesus promised in Matthew 11:28? Whereas you were once at war with the Lord, and His wrath was upon you, now through faith in Jesus, you are at peace and at rest with the Lord. God is no longer a holy Judge whose wrath burns against you for your sin. He is now a reconciled Father, whose love burns toward you forever with even greater intensity than ever His wrath burned against you when you were His enemy.

d. The promise of forgiveness to the Jews may be interpreted as theirs and ours individually through faith which issues forth in repentance and turning to the Lord. But there is also a sense in which this blessing of forgiveness will be Israel’s as a nation when they believe and repent (Zechariah 12:10) as it will be to all nations during the future millennium—a reign of gospel peace on earth (Isaiah 2:2-4).

2. Second, Peter offers to the Jews **the blessedness of eternal life** (Acts 3:20-21).

a. This promised blessing will come when God shall send Jesus at His bodily Second Coming after the millennial peace has ended. This blessing looks forward to the new heaven and the new earth that is spoken of in Revelation 21:1,4,5 (after the final judgment). This, my brothers and sisters, is what is meant by “the times of restitution of all things” or “restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21).

b. This is not a restoring of some things to a greater degree of rest and peace than we presently have, but this is the full restoration of all things when sin, death, and pain shall be no more—when God’s original paradise will be restored even to a much greater degree than the original heavens and earth that were all created “very good”. No tempter will be there. No sin or chance of falling into sin will be there. No more potential for a curse—only fullness of joy in the presence of your Savior that will overwhelm you every second that you are there. These are the blessings of the gospel that Peter preaches to the Jews that witnessed the healing of the man born lame from birth. These are the blessings that I likewise preach and proclaim to you. They are fully yours through faith in Jesus Christ—and a faith that bears the fruit of repentance and turning to Jesus as Lord and Master of your life.

II. Peter Preaches Jesus from the Old Testament (Acts 3:22-26).

A. Peter then turns to the Old Testament Scriptures to prove to these Jews that their own prophets had long ago prophesied concerning this same Jesus (“which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his prophets since the world began” Acts 3:21). Peter mentions three prophets from the Old Testament by name that no one would have contested at all: **Moses, Samuel, and Abraham**.

1. **Moses** prophesied concerning Jesus in His office of Prophet—a prophet like unto Moses, from among the Jews, who knew God face to face (Acts 3:22-23—Deuteronomy 18:15,18-19). This is not Mohammed. This is not Joseph Smith or any other so-called prophet today—this is Jesus Christ, Peter says.

2. All the prophets from **Samuel** to the end of the Old Testament likewise prophesied concerning Christ. The prophecies from the Old Testament make it clear that the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah, would be born in the town of Bethlehem to a virgin, that He would perform many miracles, and that He would preach and accomplish true liberty from sin through His own death and resurrection. Peter is simply proclaiming to the Jews that all of these prophecies point to the person, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and that they will not be left in doubt that He is the one that would come to usher in these times of blessing for which they waited.

3. And finally Peter declares that these Jews who listened to his sermon were the children that learned from the prophets of the Old Testament from their earliest childhood, and that they were also the natural children of the covenant God made with Abraham, wherein God promised to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham’s seed—the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 3:25). This points to the fact that the Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant are not two essentially different covenants, but are essentially the same Covenant of Grace that began in Genesis 3:15 (the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent) and continued to Abraham, to Moses, to David, to the prophets, and was fully realized in Jesus.

4. And Peter concludes that to the Jews these prophesied and realized gospel blessings were first proclaimed through Jesus and the apostles. That should not have made them proud, but should have rather humbled them, that they above all people were first given Jesus and all His covenanted blessings to receive by faith and to enjoy now and forever. With such privilege comes great responsibility. To reject such privileges will greatly aggravate their sin and your sin as well (you who have sat and listened, but have not believed in Jesus as Savior, have not repented and grieved over your sins, and have not turned to Jesus to be the Lord of your life).

B. Dear ones, I want to speak some closing words of application to you in regard to the importance of repentance.

1. How do you practically show forth repentance in your life? The state of your soul and the maturity of your faith will be greatly evidenced by whether you are repentant when convicted of sin or when confronted with sin by your husband, wife, children, parents, or fellow Christians; or whether you defend yourself, justify yourself, blame others, or become more hardened in your sin.

a. When you are convicted by the Spirit or confronted by others, do you list all of the good deeds that you have done; or do you humble yourself and confess you are guilty as charged?

b. When you are convicted by the Spirit or confronted by others, do you shift the blame to others or begin to point out the faults of those who bring your sin to you; or do you take responsibility before God and before others and honestly and transparently grieve over your offense?

c. When you are convicted by the Spirit or confronted by others, do you minimize your sin by comparing your sin to the sins of others; or do you declare that you have not only sinned against man, but have also sinned against God (“Against thee, thee only have I sinned” Psalm 51:4)?

2. Dear ones, you who are trusting in Christ and in His death and resurrection for you, have

no sound reason to play games with true and sincere repentance. Your entire debt is blotted out by God and the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to you by faith alone. God is no longer an angry Judge, but is a reconciled, loving Father, who only gives that which is good to you, His beloved child. Everlasting life is yours (and it is everlasting). The new heaven and the new earth are yours. All things are yours in Christ. Let not conviction of sin or confrontation of sin shake you, for repentance is a gracious gift like all the other blessings just mentioned. Let us rejoice that we are able to repent before God and others. It is evidence of a sincere faith in Christ and of a blessed inheritance that is ours now and for all eternity in Christ Jesus. Amen!

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