

## Acts 3:19

### **Repent then and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.**

A substantial proportion of the book that we call 'Acts' is given over to what was said

- Indeed about a quarter of it is direct speech
- There are 32 speeches in Acts, excluding short statements
- And there are six major sermons of which this is the second
- Though the brief outlines we have in Acts are a very short summary

After Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost

- And a brief description of the practice of the early Christians
- Luke records the miracle story of the healing of the lame man
- Whom Peter and John had met on their way to the temple
- I guess, as with all miracles, the temptation would be to focus on the miracle
- But Peter turns everyone's attention not to the miracle
- And certainly not to John and himself, through whom the miracle was performed
- But to God and particularly to the Lord Jesus
- The second recorded sermon of the New Testament Church
- Reminds us of the importance of proclaiming a complete message today
- There is, therefore, some value in comparing the two sermons

Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost and his sermon after the healing

- Both come in the context of the people wanting to know what is going on
- The attention of the people is won and the gospel is proclaimed
- Some years ago, I dropped Janet to the shops, parked my car outside a large church
- And sat in the car, listening to the radio, watching passers-by
- I looked across at the church, where from time to time I was the preacher
- Any passer-by could have gone by the church wondering what happens in there
- And looking at the place I could easily conclude not much happened there
- Certainly not much that seemed of any interest or relevance to the passers-by
- But this was so different from the New Testament Church
- And the preaching that arose out of it
- People could greet the message of Jesus in all kinds of different ways
- Just as they had responded to the person and preaching of Jesus in different ways
- But the one thing that we would not anticipate is indifference

The content of Peter's sermon here in Solomon's Colonnade is similar to Pentecost

- The writer of one of the newest commentaries on Acts, Ajith Fernando
- Identifies 32 different components of the apostolic preaching
- But I am sticking with the more memorable outline of six

- 1 *Jesus was the promised Saviour*
- 2 *The death of Jesus was part of God's plan*
- 3 *God raised him from the dead as he promised*
- 4 *The resurrection was witnessed and proved*
- 5 *Jesus is glorified now and forever*
- 6 *All must repent and believe*

We will note these in passing as they crop up but we must return to Solomon's Colonnade

- A covered portico that ran the entire length of the eastern portion
- Of the outer court of the temple precincts
- Peter opens the sermon with an exposition of 'the name of Jesus'
- For most of us a name is just a tag by which we identify people
- But in Jewish thought and in scripture, a name is much more than that
- A name tells us something about the whole person
- The name of Jesus is therefore not a 'talisman', a spiritual *abracadabra*
- Where the word is invested with special powers
- The name and the nature of Jesus are inextricably linked

There should be no surprise that a lame beggar has been healed in the name of Jesus

- The God revealed in Jesus, is the God of their forefathers
- The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob
- Jesus' miracles were done by God to accredit him before the people
- Now this miracle has taken place through the Apostles for God to glorify Jesus
- Israel may have disowned and killed Jesus, but God raised him from the dead
- It is through his name and the faith that comes through him
- That the healing of the crippled beggar has taken place
- This Jesus is 'God's servant' (an allusion to the servant-Messiah of Isaiah 42-53)
- The 'Holy One' and the 'Righteous One'
- The 'author of life'
- A prophet like Moses
- And it is in this name that Peter proclaims

I            REPENTANCE: Forgiveness for the past

II            REFRESHMENT: Living in the present

III            RESTORATION: Hope for the future

I            REPENTANCE: Forgiveness for the past

Repentance is a really unpopular word, both in the world and in the church

- People are preoccupied with enjoying life in the here and now
- Any thought that their enjoyment should not be top of their agenda
- Is met by people with huge resistance, even hostility
- The word for this is 'hedonism'
- Of course, we do not want to give the impression that enjoying yourself is wrong
- What is wrong is when the prime motivation for everything is self

One of my devout Christian friends, a school teacher, was invited to teachers' party

- The venue was a place called *TGI Friday*
- I am not sure if there is one in Plymouth, I think the nearest is in Bristol
- My friend asked '*TGI Friday* – What does it mean?'
- He friend replied, 'Thank God it's Friday'
- My devout Christian friend replied, 'Thank God it's Friday?'
- I don't think I'd want to tell my friends that I ate at a venue called
- 'Thank God it's Friday'

Now to be fair, this is not a stance that I would have taken

- But somebody somewhere took a stance
- Doing what pleased her was not the driving force in her life
- She did not want to do what she thought might displease Jesus
- She wanted to do what she thought pleased Jesus
- This is not about rules and regulations for other people
- Though setting a good and godly example is a virtue
- It is about seriously considering what would please Jesus

It is really tempting to work hard at using our creativity

- To find convincing and attractive ways to present the gospel
- To make it all sweet and sugary by saying things like
- You'll never have such a wonderful life as you have being a Christian
- But, of course, the truth of the matter is that we do not know that
- Life might often be more difficult because you are a Christian
- At our recent prayer festival – no one could help be moved
- By those who are suffering because they believe in Jesus
- If the legend is to be believed, Peter was crucified upside-down
- Because he believed in Jesus

Peter records a long list of charges against the crowd in Jerusalem

- You handed Jesus over to be killed
- You disowned him before Pilate, who had decided to let him go
- You asked for a murderer to be released (instead of Jesus)
- You killed the author of life

Now, this is all amazingly tough stuff

- The challenge of it is so direct
- Peter is not setting himself up above the message
- He is the very Apostle that denied the Lord three times
- But when he looked Jesus in the eye, he went out and wept bitterly
- And when the risen Jesus met him on the lakeside
- There was a conversation to be worked through
- The threefold denial had to be superseded by the threefold affirmation
- Peter do you love me? Yes, Lord, you know I love you

‘Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out’ (Acts 3:19)

- The verse is capable of misunderstanding
- It is not the act of repentance that wipes our sins out
- Some people think, quite wrongly, that all we have to do is say sorry to God
- The erroneous view that many of us were taught in Sunday School
- ‘a little talk with Jesus makes it right, all right’ – I don’t think so
- it’s the pierced hands and feet, the wounded side, the disfigured face
- the shed blood of the cross that makes it right, all right – not the little talk
- it’s his dying, not our talking, that makes it right
- it is this that we are capturing in the ‘name of Jesus’

Here is the responsibility of proclaiming a complete message today

- we may well begin our proclamation with the felt needs of people
- but soon, in our witness and evangelism, we must present the truth of the gospel
- the specifics of circumstances might change
- but the unchanging truth of God's mercy revealed in the Saviour, Jesus, do not
- people who see Christian faith primarily as an answer to personal problems
- will find it difficult to continue in the path of obedience
- if they see no immediate solution to their problems
- that is why I resist the song with the line 'and in his presence our problems disappear'
- I guess I could put a bright spin on that – but the plain meaning is simply not true
- For the believer, there is not always an immediate solution to our problems
- There is the security that the crisis is not as big as it seems, that we are not alone
- But in the darkest night it is often the case that the realities remain unchanged
- In such circumstances, faith accepts that God remains on the throne
- Therefore, we trust him, do all we can to obey him, knowing we are in his hands

Peter goes on to say that if his hearers repent, 'times of refreshing may come from the Lord'

## II REFRESHMENT: Living in the present

Refreshment (times of refreshing) is, of course, a much more palatable idea than repentance

- But it is really important to note that you cannot have one without the other
- A lot of people are looking for God's blessing but not interested in repentance
- But this is wanting to have your cake and eat it
- A commitment to the realm of self-interest, self-gratification, hedonism, evil
- Will give the transient rewards of that realm
- We might have fun, we might enjoy ourselves, we might be having a rare old laugh
- But we cannot avoid that this realm and its rewards are passing and temporary
- The only eternal reward of this realm is death
- But a commitment to the Kingdom of God in Christ
- Is a commitment to the realm of self-denial, pleasing Christ, worship and service
- It might be tough, the way might not always be easy
- But even in adversity, times of refreshment will come for living in the present

It is necessary to repent, it is also necessary to believe, Peter tells them what to believe

- They must believe that Jesus is the promised Saviour (or Messiah)
- He is the promised seed of Abraham (3:25) through him all nations are blessed
- They must believe that the death of Jesus was part of God's plan
- God foretold through the prophets that his Christ would suffer (3:18)
- They must believe that God raised him from the dead as he promised
- You killed the author of life but God raised him from the dead (3:15)
- They must believe that the Apostles are witness to the resurrection of the Lord
- God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this (3:15)
- They must believe that Jesus is glorified now and for ever
- He must remain in heaven (for now) but his time will come (3:21)
- In the meantime, the Holy Spirit has come upon his people
- So that they might know the blessings of God through Jesus

The blessings of this refreshment (3:19) are like a cool shade from the heat of the day

- This is scarcely powerful imagery for us – but in a hot and dry land
- The prospect of refreshment is a great hope
- The promise here is that their sins may be wiped away
- This is not something that is passing and temporary
- But will continue eternally in the presence of the Lord
- The forgiveness of sins is the privilege of those who embrace the good news
- But it is not a right, it is a gift
- By the grace of God, sin is blotted out as a debt is crossed out when remitted
- When God forgives, he remembers no more
- All the bitter things that stood against our record are blotted out
- Wiped away, as if with a wet sponge over a slate or a blackboard
- But there is no remission of sins without repentance
- To benefit from the Lord's refreshing they must be converted, turn around
- Just as Peter himself had done
- This needs to be reflected in living and believing
- For us those are convenient compartment but they are not really watertight
- How we live is really symptomatic of what we believe
- What we believe will always spill over into how we live

The believer has good reason to be joyful at heart, however difficult life might be

- If we realise the crushing burden of our sins, when we are forgiven
- It is the greatest time of refreshing
- And anticipates the final blessing of our forgiveness on the day of judgment
- Not because of ourselves but because of Jesus
- On that day when God shall wipe away every tear
- Until then we must live by faith in him, which is the evidence of things not seen

We should remember that Peter is preaching to a predominantly Jewish crowd

- The believers are the righteous remnant of Israel
- Consequently they make reference to Israel's great leaders of the past
- Who are the three great characters in the Old Testament?
- None other than Abraham, Moses and David

Times of refreshing may begin for believers living in the present

- But there is also a promise of

### III RESTORATION: Hope for the future

The time will come when God restores everything

- It is a promise unparalleled in the New Testament
- But 'restoration' is often used in the Old Testament to refer to a renewed Israel
- As Peter preaches in Solomon's Colonnade
- He commends to them one greater than Solomon
- He preaches of one who is the promised seed of Abraham
- Samuel, the last of Israel's judges, anointed David to be King
- And spoke of the establishment of his Kingdom

He commends to them one greater than Moses

- He proclaims that true belief in Moses, the law-giver, will lead to belief in Jesus
- For through Jesus God speaks to us supremely
- Moses delivered people out of bondage in Egypt and was their guide in the wilderness
- But now someone greater than Moses had come, Jesus
- As the people murmured against Moses, so they murmured about Jesus
- Even to the extent of handing him over to Pilate to be crucified
- But God has raised him up – and he is now in heaven
- And through him will come the restoration of all things
- And this is the blessed hope of the believer

This is a time of salvation but it is also a time of judgment

- God has blessed his people many times
- Through raising up servants turning people from their wicked ways (3:26)
- Those who respond in repentance and faith are heirs of the promise