

GOD'S SAVING PURPOSES PREVAIL THROUGH GOD'S GLORIFIED SERVANT: JESUS

Acts 3:11-26

INTRODUCTION

I subscribe to a bi-monthly audio journal called “Mars Hill Audio.” Recently I listened to Ken Meyers, who produces and hosts the journal, interview Stephen Nichols, author of a recent book entitled, “Jesus, Made in America.” In the introduction to the interview Ken Meyers explains how easily our view of Jesus is more influenced by the culture we live in than by what God tells us about Jesus in his word. He uses an audio clip from a movie to show what he means. I’d like you to listen to his introduction to and then the actual clip itself. Play first minute, forty-five seconds of track 3.

To which Jesus do you pray? Do you believe in the real Jesus or one of your own making? Maybe that seems like a strange question to be asking of you. After all, most of those sitting in this room profess to be Christians, that is, followers of Jesus. Many of you have been Christians for many years. Yet I do not think it is a strange question to ask you. There is no more perplexing, nor complicated person than Jesus Christ and so it is not a foregone conclusion that your view of Jesus is correct. This is also an important question because your view and opinion of Jesus matters more than anything else in the universe. Jesus told the Jewish religious authorities that unless they believed he was whom he claimed to be they would die in their sins (John 8:24). In other words, what you believe about Jesus and the value you place on him will determine your eternal destiny. I would urge you not to be complacent about your view of Jesus but rather to closely examine what you think in comparison to the teaching of the NT regarding Jesus. The passage we are looking at this morning is packed with information about the identity of Jesus and the consequences that will come upon you depending upon your response to the Jesus who is revealed here.

Last week we examined Luke’s record of one of the numerous “signs and wonders” that were being performed by the 12 apostles in Jerusalem during the earliest days of the church’s existence. We saw how Peter, in company with John, commanded a man lame from birth to walk in the name of Jesus and he walked. Not only did this man walk but he entered the temple, for the first time in his life, walking and leaping and praising God. We observed last week that this event was a sign that pointed beyond itself to a greater reality, just like road signs point beyond themselves to something else, like a curve in the road or a rest stop. This speech that Peter now gives is his explanation of the reality to which the sign points. As you can see in v. 12, the sign points to the glorified servant of God, Jesus. The healing of the lame man is intended to point to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Luke records, in summary form, Peter’s description of the real Jesus and how he alone is able to save those who repent and believe. I urge you today to compare your view of Jesus with the reality that Peter describes.

MAIN POINT

Only the Jesus who is revealed in the NT can save you because...

I. He alone is the glorified, divine, suffering servant (vv. 11-16)

Our text today opens with the healed lame man clinging to Peter and John and a large crowd running to them in Solomon’s Colonnade, which was a very large covered porch on the outside of the eastern wall of the temple. The people are astonished that this well-known lame beggar is now walking. When Peter sees their astonishment and most likely hears their questions he asks a very strange question. He asks them why they are marveling at or being surprised by this healing? He assumes that they should not be surprised by a man who has been lame from birth to be made whole in the name of Jesus. How could this not be surprising? We know from the end of chapter 2 that the Christians are gathering in the temple every day and that lots of signs and wonders are being done by the apostles. Therefore, Peter is accusing them of being willfully blind to what is

going on. There are all sorts of evidence that these are the last days when God is establishing his kingdom on the earth and so this miracle should not be surprising to them. Peter is repeating the same complaint that Jesus made about the Jewish people: he heals and casts out demons and so they should know that the kingdom of God has come. These people should also know on the basis of these miracles and the presence of this church that the days of God's bringing his rule to this earth are now here.

But also, notice that he rebukes them for presuming that the healing of this man was due to his and John's own power or godliness. Human beings naturally assume that when God does something good for or through someone it is because of some goodness in the person. The key to miracles is human performance; saying the right words, having the right attitude, doing the right things. This is the reason for the Roman Catholic saints, the Hindu gurus, the Moslem holy men, the animists' shamans. How often have you heard someone say in response to some good fortune that a person has experienced, "He must be living right!" This is the assumption that lies behind the entire health and wealth gospel movement: those who are healthy and wealthy are so because of their goodness or faith or piety or something in them. This is the same thing that motivated a Christian I knew to tell another mutual Christian friend who had cancer that the reason he had cancer was that he did not have enough faith. If you'll just believe the right things, say the right things or do the right things God will give you everything you ever wanted. Peter wants these people to know that this miracle had nothing to do with he or John or the lame man's person or performance. Rather, the only true God, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of their fathers decided to glorify his servant Jesus. God did this miracle freely, according to the purposes of his own will, contrary to what Peter, John and the lame man deserved in order to show the beauty and wonder and greatness of his servant Jesus. He did not respond to anything in them but acted according to his own purpose and grace.

You will notice that this entire sermon begins (v. 13) and ends (v. 26) with Peter calling Jesus "God's servant." "God's servant" is a key designation in the prophet Isaiah. In fact, by talking about God glorifying his servant in v. 13, Peter is without question identifying Jesus with God's servant as he is described beginning in Isaiah 52:13 and going through chapter 53. In that passage God says that he will glorify his servant and then he describes the suffering of his servant and then ends with another declaration of the glorification of his servant. Peter follows the same pattern here. God glorified or displayed the superiority of Jesus by raising him from the dead, causing him to ascend into heaven and now giving evidence to these facts by healing this lame man. This is in fulfillment of his promise in Isaiah 52:13, "See my servant will act wisely, he will be raised up and lifted up and glorified exceedingly." This promise of glory is for the servant who suffers "for our transgression", as described in what follows. So also, Peter's sermon begins with the glory of the resurrected servant who heals this man. This servant also suffered horribly at the hands of these people.

As Peter seeks to show the wickedness of what these people did he sets their actions against Jesus in contrast to who Jesus is and what God does for Jesus. In v. 14 they disowned the Holy and Righteous one and asked that a murderer be released. When Peter calls Jesus "the Holy One" he is using one of the most common titles for God in the OT. God is repeatedly called "the Holy One." In addition, hundreds of times God is declared to be righteous. In Isaiah 53:11 God's servant who suffers for our sins and justifies many is called, "my righteous servant." Jesus is the holy and righteous God who took on human flesh and so is the holy and righteous servant of God who suffered for the sins of God's people. Then v. 15 is arguably the most ironic statement ever made in the history of the world. "You killed the author of life." This man who was killed on this horrific Roman cross was and is the "author of life." The life of which he is the author is eternal life. Jesus is the creator and sovereign dispenser of eternal life. He possesses eternal life and he gives it to others. It is this author of life that these people killed but whom God raised from the dead.

In v. 16 Peter returns to the event that has prompted all this excitement and that God has used to show forth the glory of his servant Jesus. The main point of the verse is that it is the name of Jesus which accomplished this miracle. That is, it was his power, his authority, his will that accomplished the healing of this man. However, as everyone knows it was done at the hands of the apostle Peter. We already know God did not act in response to anything in Peter or John or the lame man. That is what Peter said in v. 12. However, you will notice that it

was “by faith in the name” and “the faith that comes through Jesus gave this man the wholeness you now see.” In other words there is a necessary human element in this miracle and that element is faith. Most likely it is the faith of the apostles though it also could be the faith of the lame man. Again, we already know that faith is not power or godliness. The preposition, “by” tells us that faith is the instrument that Jesus exercised his power through. It is the tool he used to heal the lame man. Also, the faith is not through the intelligence or spirituality of Peter but rather the faith is through Jesus. Peter has faith as the result of Jesus’ activity. The point that Peter is careful to preserve is this: Jesus performs the miracle and the reason he does it through Peter is because he gave Peter faith and Peter trusts Jesus to do what only Jesus can do. Faith has no power; it simply relies on the power of another to do what the one who believes could never do.

There is nothing praiseworthy in faith. All of you are trusting the chair you are sitting in to hold you up. Your faith does nothing. The chair does all the work. Your faith merely unites you to the power of the chair. The fact that Peter trusted Jesus to perform this miracle is no more noteworthy than is the fact that you trust the chair you are sitting in to hold you up. Refusing to trust one of these chairs to hold you up would be blameworthy because they are so obviously trustworthy. But your faith in the chair does nothing but unite you to the power of the chair to hold you off the ground. If you could imagine another person trying to decide whether or not to trust the chair next to you to hold them up, they are not going to pay any attention to your faith they are only going to pay attention to the chair which holds you up. Notice something else about your union with your chair which is by faith: the chair can only act in accord with its own nature. If you declare that you are going to trust the chair to fly you to California the chair will not fly you to California because that would be contrary to its own nature. Your faith in the chair must be in accord with the "will" and nature of the chair. You can only trust the chair to do what the chair promises to do. The chair is in charge, not your faith. In the same way Peter’s faith is not what is put on display in this miracle but rather the grace and love and power and faithfulness of Jesus. He is revealed as the Holy One of Israel, who is the suffering servant, who is the author of life, whom God has glorified by raising him from the dead so that he could exercise his almighty power in the healing of this lame man through these believers, Peter, John and the lame man himself. These men did the only reasonable thing, they trusted, relied upon, depended upon Jesus to do what only Jesus could do. Jesus acted according to his purpose and nature and promises through the faith of these men.

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- *And because...*

II. He alone is the Messiah, the promised agent of salvation (vv. 17-21)

On the surface, verse 17 feels like Peter is making excuses for why these Jewish people betrayed, denied and killed God’s servant, Jesus. It almost sounds like he’s saying they just made a mistake which would seem to contradict everything he just said. The word ignorance is not being used here in an amoral fashion. In other words Peter is not saying they didn’t have enough information about Jesus and so they couldn’t have known that they were killing God’s servant, the Holy and Righteous One. In Acts 13:27 the apostle Paul says in another sermon to Jewish people living in Pisidian Antioch, “For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they were ignorant of him and the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him.” Notice that these same people are being referred to here as well. Paul also called them ignorant. However, notice that they are ignorant of the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath. In other words, their ignorance is not due to a lack of information but rather it is due to a willing blindness to the information they possess. This is exactly what the apostle Paul says about Gentile people in Ephesians 4:18. He says, “They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.” Their ignorance is due to their hard hearts. In the case of Peter’s audience it is true that they did not think they were killing God’s servant. They were ignorant of who Jesus was. However, their ignorance is an inexcusable ignorance. It is the same ignorance that Jesus condemned the Jewish leaders for having when he told them that they should believe he was the Son of

God, the Messiah both because they had the OT Scriptures which were about him and because they had the evidence of his miracles.

Notice again in v. 18 that it was by means of their inexcusable ignorance that God accomplished his plan to kill Jesus as he foretold in the OT prophets. This is not the last time you are going to see this in the book of Acts. God is the one who planned Jesus' suffering and death and he planned that it be carried out by these people because of their ignorance and he made sure that exactly what he planned came about. Yet, obviously, these people are guilty of a great wickedness and subject to God's just anger. God caused his Son to suffer and they caused his Son to suffer and God is not guilty of doing evil but they are. Their guilt is the reason that Peter next tells them in v. 19 that they must repent and turn to God so that God might blot out their sins. Clearly here repentance and turning to God relates directly to their view of Jesus. They treated him as an imposter and criminal while God was treating him as his servant. God says he is the Holy One and the Righteous One and the author of life. They said he was guilty of sedition and blasphemy and worthy of death. Therefore, to repent and to turn to God is to reverse their view of Jesus. They must think of Jesus as God thinks of Jesus and they must treat him as God treats him. They must bring their thinking and affections about Jesus into line with God's thinking and affections.

If they will do this, then God will do three things. First, he will wipe away their sins. God says in Isaiah 43:25, "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more." God will, for the sake of the name of Jesus, blot out the transgressions of all who stop being indifferent and/or hostile to Jesus and who embrace him just like God the Father embraces his Son. This verb, "wipe away" or "blot out" was used in the ancient world to describe how ink was washed from a papyrus parchment. Ink did not bond with the papyrus sheet but sat only on the surface and so you could wash a piece of papyrus clean of all ink. That is what God will do to the sins of these people who murdered his servant if they will embrace Jesus as God's suffering servant.

Second, not only will sins be blotted out but also God will send times of refreshing from his presence. "Refreshing" is a very rare word in the Bible. However, in light of the fact that the next benefit that is given to those who repent is the return of Jesus when he restores all things, I think this is most likely referring to the coming of the HS from the presence of God to refresh the souls of his people prior to the return of Christ. "Times of refreshing" is parallel to the promise given in Joel 2 when "in the last days God will pour out his Spirit" on all his servants without distinction, which Peter refers to in his first sermon. Listen to how the coming of the HS is described in Isaiah 44:3-4, "For I will pour water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams." If that does not sound like a "time of refreshing" I don't know what does. Jesus says the work of the HS in John 7 is like a never ending fresh water spring that fills us and quenches our thirst for God. All who repent of their rebellion against God and against his Christ will have the HS present in them to give them joy and peace and hope as they trust in Christ.

Finally, notice that all who repent and turn to God will be part of that final restoration of the created universe when God sends Christ back from heaven to restore all that is broken in this universe. This word "restore" is most often used in the NT for what happens when Jesus heals people. He restores withered arms and paralyzed bodies and blind eyes. In the Greek translation of the OT it is used in the prophets most often for God's restoring of God's people to their land. Notice in v. 21 that Peter says that this restoration was promised by God in the holy prophets. In other words, everything that the OT says will be true for the people of God in that final great day will be true for all who repent and turn to God. As Paul says in another place, "all of God's promises are yes in Christ Jesus." There is a great restoration of this world to its original condition coming and you will be part of it if you will repent of your indifference to Jesus and embrace him as the most important person in your life.

The point here is that Jesus is the agent who will accomplish all of God's saving work. First, he is the one who suffered so that your sins can be blotted out. You can right now be free from all guilt. You can right now be

free from all condemnation. The sin which is written on your life can be washed off, wiped away by Christ. Second, he is the one who obtains the refreshing work of the HS in your life now. You can know right now the loving presence of God by his Spirit. You can be at peace in the midst of this crazy world by the comforting presence of God through his Spirit. Third, he is the one who will one day return and restore this universe and us who have repented and turned to the Lord to our original condition. Every promise of restoration that is contained in the OT belongs to you. There is a day coming when all of creation will be released from its bondage to decay and enter into the glorious freedom of the children of God. All this will be yours if you will repent of your indifference to and your erroneous assumptions about Jesus and accept God the Father's estimation of his servant.

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III. He alone brings God's blessing to God's people (vv. 22-26)

In the last part of his sermon Peter demonstrates how all the OT prophets promised that it would be Jesus who would restore all things. He begins with the greatest of the OT prophets, Moses. He quotes a part of Deuteronomy 18 and Leviticus 23. When Moses says thousands of years before Christ came that God is going to raise up a prophet like him to whom they must listen he is talking about Jesus. Jesus is the last and greatest prophet of whom Moses was the foreshadowing. When you read about Moses you are reading about Jesus. So just as Moses was the one who spoke to God for the people and spoke to the people for God so Jesus is our intermediary. Notice in v. 23 that anyone who refuses to listen to Jesus will be cut off from God's people. That word, "cut off" is a huge OT term that refers to the annihilation of God's enemies.

Then in v. 24 Peter talks about Samuel and the prophets who followed him. He says that Samuel and those other prophets described "these days." What days? The last days that Joel prophesied. Those days when God would be at work setting up his kingdom on this earth. These are the days that are recorded in 2 Samuel 7 when Nathan the prophet tells David, "The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son." These are the days, beginning at Pentecost and continuing to the day of Christ's return, when God is establishing the kingdom of the Son of David who is also God's son.

Finally, Peter reminds them that as Jewish people they are the recipients of the prophetic word and of the covenant which God made with Abraham. In that covenant God promised that it would be through his "Seed" that he would bless all the families of the earth. Jesus is that seed through whom God is blessing all the families on the face of the earth. That blessing that is coming to all the families of the earth came first to the Jewish family. Jesus came to the Jewish nation and the church was born in the midst of the Jewish people. God blessed them first. He blessed Jewish people first by turning, at this point in the story over 3000 of them from their wicked ways. Notice that the blessing is Jesus turning people from their wicked ways. So Peter ends his sermon that began with the glory of Christ seen in the healing of a lame man with declaring the glory of Christ who turns people from their wicked ways. The repenting and turning of sinners from their sin to Christ is accomplished by Christ. The blessing of God, through Christ, is not merely the opportunity to be forgiven but also the desire to be forgiven, to trust in Christ, to turn from sin. You can know that Christ has blessed you if you are a person who repents and turns and trusts in Christ. Salvation is from beginning to end a work of free grace, accomplished entirely by the great Son of God, who is the suffering servant, the Holy and Righteous One, the author of life who was killed by wicked men according to the word of the prophets. He is Moses and

David's greater Son and the Seed of Abraham. O that we would trust this great Christ alone, as he is revealed in the Scripture and not some figment of our own imagination.

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