

Acts 3:1-26

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, may the riches of your grace shine through my words, so that the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts and minds may be pleasing and acceptable in your sight.

! We did three months, encounters with Jesus in the first half of the Gospel of John. Then we did three months called formed by Jesus. We spent one evening, one meal with Jesus the night before he died for three straight months.

And now we're doing sent by Jesus. So encounters with Jesus, formed by Jesus, sent by Jesus. And we're spending 12 weeks in the book of Acts. Seeing what happens when Jesus sends his spirit-filled people into the world.

And the good news of Jesus spreads from people to people to city to city to culture to culture. What happens when God is on the move bringing the good news of Jesus to the world?

[1 : 17] And as we follow this journey in the book of Acts, there's just a couple things that I'm going to be praying for us over the next 12 weeks. The first is that the Lord would deepen our confidence in the power of the Gospel.

Deepen our confidence in the power of the Gospel to save anyone, anywhere, at any time. And the second thing is that the book of Acts would have a catalyzing effect in our lives.

That the Spirit would use Acts to shape and stir and form our imagination for what it means to be witnesses of Jesus right where he's placed us. In the day-to-day, at school, at work, at home, and in the neighborhood.

So with these prayers in mind, let's jump into the book of Acts. If you can open your Bibles to page 911. And it's important as we come here to remember what Jesus told us last week.

At the very beginning of Acts, chapter 1, verse 8, he gave us a road map for the entire book. So the entire book is shaped around this one verse. Jesus says, And so this week in Acts, chapter 3, it's helpful to know that we're at the first stop on the map.

[2 : 37] We're in Jerusalem. The Gospel goes to the very heart of Jerusalem, the temple. As a man is healed outside a gate called Beautiful. So I want to walk us through this passage in three parts.

The first 10 verses is part 1. It's the healing itself. Then verses 11 to 16 are part 2. It's what the healing reveals. And then part 3 are verses 17 to 26.

It's what the healing means for you now. So the healing, what the healing reveals, and what the healing means for you now. Let's begin with the healing. Julia's example of the healing was incredible.

A man leaps onto his feet who has never been on his feet before. And a man leaps into the temple praising God who has never walked into the temple before.

And all the people in the temple recognize this man because for many decades, his friends have been bringing him to the exact same gate every single morning to do the exact same thing because his feet are not strong.

[3 : 43] He cannot work. And so he has to sit by the gate and beg. The people in the temple pass by him every single day. They know who he is. They've seen him before.

And yet it seems that this man is used to being overlooked. The temple gate is called Beautiful. And it's called Beautiful because it was some 75 feet tall.

It was made out of pure Corinthian brass. And had two massive double doors that opened it. And they would reflect in the sunlight. And so the images of this towering beautiful gate.

And of a man humble looking at the dust of the ground. Begging for money. And Peter, when he comes to him, has to say, look at us. He has to call him to look at him face to face.

Because he's probably used to being overlooked. And as some we even experience in our own street corners. They're used to people walking by them and not paying attention.

[4 : 46] And even those who pass by are used to walking by people and looking in the other direction. And here Peter calls this man. He looks at him and he says, please look at us.

And as Peter looks at him, he sees a man who has need that money cannot fix. And he sees a man who needs a gift that money cannot buy. And so he says to him, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.

He grabs him by the right hand. Helps raise him up to his feet. Immediately his ankles and feet are made strong. And he leaps into the temple, praising God.

And everybody is a guest. They're like, what in the world just happened? People are amazed. People are astonished. People are asking questions. So intense and amazing was this experience. That it's as if all the work and all the hustle and bustle of the temple comes to a screeching halt. And the crowds of people in the temple all flood to this one place called Solomon's Portico. Which is a place where Jesus himself used to walk and teach people.

[5 : 52] It's a long corridor along the western wall. Or the eastern wall of the temple. That is made of marble columns and a cedar roof. So if you speak, sound travels really well.

It's a good place to teach crowds. And the crowds are gathering around Peter and John wanting some explanation for how in the world this man is leaping on his feet in the temple.

And so Peter stands up and he speaks and explains what has happened. So that's the healing. And as Peter speaks, he starts to tell them what the healing reveals.

This is point two. Let's pause and ask ourselves, is the takeaway, what's the takeaway of all this? Is the takeaway that the church's job isn't to feed the poor, but it's actually to heal the sick?

No. No. No. Is the takeaway that the church should always see miraculous healings like this whenever it goes about ministering in the name of Jesus?

[6 : 55] No, I don't think that's necessarily true. Is the takeaway that if people just had more faith, we would see more healings like this in the world? I don't think so.

Because I think the main point of Acts 3 is not be like Peter and John, try to do like Peter and John. The main point of Acts 3 is there's no one like Jesus. The healing, in other words, isn't really about the healing.

The healing reveals the uniqueness of the healer. The logic of Peter's sermon goes something like this. If this man was healed in Jesus' name, it means there is power in Jesus' name.

And if there is power in Jesus' name, then it means Jesus must be alive. And if Jesus is alive, then it means that God has raised him from the dead.

And if God has raised him from the dead, it means that the people who are listening to Peter speak are in a bit of a predicament because they're the ones that killed Jesus. In other words, Peter is telling those people that in their very act of denying Jesus and disowning Jesus and delivering Jesus over and killing him, they actually did violence to God.

[8 : 10] He was the holy and righteous one. He is the author of life. They have set themselves against God by setting themselves against Jesus. And so you can imagine they are on razor-sharp knife's edge.

Peter is saying, you killed the author of life, and yet God raised him from the dead. And do you notice here how Peter hasn't said anything yet about the healing?

The whole focus of the sermon is fully on Jesus. The uniqueness of who he is, the marvel of his death, and the power of his resurrection.

He wants his hearers to have their attention focused on Jesus. The fact that he is alive, that he reigns, and they have to do business with Jesus now.

So, first, the healing. A lame man leaps into the temple. Second, what does the healing reveal? It reveals that Jesus is alive. God has raised him.

[9 : 12] And if you set yourselves against Jesus, you set yourselves against God. And so we have to reckon with who Jesus is. And the third point is, what does the healing mean for you now?

In verse 17, Peter gets very direct and very personal and pointed. He says, what the healing means for you right now is that you need to repent. Now, I want to talk about what that word repent means in just a moment.

But first, I want us to notice how it is that Peter calls his readers or his hearers into a life of repentance. And he does it with such brotherly affection and spiritual encouragement.

Look at verse 17. He says, and now, brothers. He's talking to his family here. He says, and now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance as did your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets that this Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent, therefore, and turn back.

[10:19] Do you notice that language? That what God foretold by the mouth of the prophets, he would thus fulfill. Peter goes on in this section to name as many prophets as he can in a short period of time.

He talks about Moses and the promises God made to Moses. He talks about Abraham and the promises God made to Abraham. He talks about Moses, and he quotes Moses directly as talking about a future prophet that would come.

He talks about Samuel and all the prophets that come after him. He even has allusions from the book of Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah. So it's as if Peter is viewing the whole sweep of God's saving history as a series of promises throughout the generations.

And he views all the promises like a mighty rushing river that leads to one ocean, the vast grace that God has given people in Jesus Christ.

And he says to the hearers before them that repentance is not primarily a response just to your sin. Repentance is primarily a response to the fulfillment of God's promises for you.

[11:26] God has been mighty to save. He's been rich in mercy. He has been lavish in love in the Lord Jesus Christ. So turn back to him. I think this is a really profound point for us to understand when we talk about repentance.

What motivates our repentance in the Christian life is not simply a hatred for our sin. What motivates repentance is a delight in the goodness and the generosity and the kindness of God for us.

That he has, it's the realization that he's done more for us than we could ever ask or imagine in the Lord Jesus Christ. Last week I finished teaching a theology course at Regent College and there was a student who had been attending online but for the last class he came in person.

And he came up to me after the class and he said, I just became a Christian a few years ago and this is the first time I've ever studied theology. First course I've ever taken on it. And he said, I had no clue there was so much goodness.

I had no clue there was so much goodness. And I think that's what leads us into repentance is that sort of experience of God. What this means, I think, is that growing in a life of repentance, which is a whole lifelong thing, does not happen just by having a try harder, do better mentality.

[12:49] I think this also means that growing in a life of repentance doesn't happen just as we become more and more aware of our sin. I mean, that's really important. But you can become more and more aware of your sin and yet just become more and more depressed and discouraged about your life.

And depression and discouragement doesn't lead us to repentance, does it, brothers and sisters? The scriptures tell us that it's the kindness of the Lord that leads us to repentance. And so the growth in a life of repentance happens as we lift the sails of our life through faith and we let God's promises fill our lives with the awareness of his kindness.

And you never know exactly when it's going to hit you. You never know when the penny's going to drop. You never know when you're going to be in that moment of desperation, in the pit of despair, and you'll need those promises to hold you fast in a way that you've never needed them before. But the moments will come when there's a particular promise of God, a particular way he has made that promise come true in Jesus Christ, that will grip your heart.

You'll have that aha moment. You'll be like, wow, that's what God did for me. And his grace will start to settle in in a new way, and that's when you'll start growing in a life of repentance, as you experience more and more of the love that he has for you in Jesus Christ, which nothing in the world can separate you from.

[14:14] So the first point I just want you to know about repentance is that it doesn't rest on your own effort. It rests on God's promises to you and the fact that in Jesus he is fulfilling those promises.

But now we must ask, what in the world does repentance look like? What is it? What do we do? And Peter highlights two main activities, two simple things.

He says repentance is turning away and listening to. Turning away and listening to. Repentance means turning away. It literally means to change your mind to think differently. In this case, you can imagine Peter basically saying, you need to think differently about Jesus. You've got him wrong. And you need to reconsider. You need to repent and change the way you think about him.

But repentance is more about just our mindset or our attitudes towards someone. Repentance is a matter of your concrete actions and decisions in life as well.

[15:16] Repentance is a matter of your mind. This is why Peter says in verse 26, he calls them to turn from their wickedness. In Acts chapter 3, wickedness, I think, is defined specifically as any denial or rejection of Jesus.

So anything I do that denies the uniqueness and the supremacy of Jesus in the world is something that I need to turn away from. So anything that I do that rejects the graciousness and kindness of Jesus in my life is something that I need to turn away from.

Because repentance means realizing that I've gotten something fundamentally wrong about Jesus. That I need to rediscover something about Jesus. That I need to come to him for a truer understanding of who he is and a firmer grasp of what he's done for me.

Which is why I think listening is highlighted in verses 22 to 24. By Moses himself. Listening is highlighted as the main posture that we should have toward Jesus.

We turn from our wickedness, but we turn to Jesus to listen to him. Because it's by listening to him that we come to know him more and more.

[16:32] There was a... There was a... I once... Well, I knew a guy who once got lost driving on Galliano Island.

I won't tell you who that guy is. Somebody after the early morning service came up to me and said, How did you get lost on Galliano Island?

There's like two streets. It's like, fair enough. I guess I just went the wrong direction on one of them. But I remember. I remember leaving the house.

I left the house without downloading directions. And I thought, I'll just make it there. It will be fine. My wife said to me, It's not going to be fine. It wasn't fine.

And the amazing thing about it is the more lost we got further and further in the forest, the more determined I got on figuring it out on my own.

[17:28] I was even admitting that we were lost. And I was not willing to turn around. And sometimes that's what happens, right? See, in repentance, just thinking and knowing that we're lost, but trying to figure out on our own, that's not repentance.

The moment of repentance is knowing that you're lost. And when you finally listen to the person that's sitting next to you saying, you should probably turn around. Go back to the house.

Get accurate directions. Go back out the driveway and take a left turn instead of a right. So repentance isn't just about knowing that you're going the wrong direction, but you're going to figure it out.

Repentance is about listening to the voice that is telling you to change course and what you need to do to make amendment of life. And the final thing that Peter teaches us about repentance isn't just that it's based on the promises of God, not just that it's a turning away from our sin and wickedness to listen to Jesus, but the final thing he teaches about repentance is that when you live a life of repentance, God will unleash blessing upon blessing upon blessing in your life.

In other words, repentance feels a bit like the beautiful gate at the temple. It's the doorway into the presence and the refreshment and life of God.

[18:51] And in verses 19 to 21, Peter names three blessings, three fruits of repentance. Number one is the removal of our sins. He says, repent therefore and turn back that your sins may be blotted out.

A modern day image of this would be say the whiteboard. You write something on the whiteboard, the ink doesn't actually sink into it like it does with paper. It's just on the outside and you can wipe that away.

It's this image of sins being removed. The second blessing of repentance, says Peter, is the refreshment of your spirit. Verse 20, repent. The times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord for you.

And then the third blessing is the restoration of the whole world. Verse 20, repent that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for the restoring of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

So you have the removal of sins, the refreshment of our spirits, and the restoration of the world. Isn't that pretty good? Like if any given day you were like, I could experience one of the three of those things, that would be a good day.

[20 : 11] But any day that we could live in the hope and taste glimpses of any three of those things, you would say, that's going to be one of the best days of my life. And Peter is saying, this is what repentance unlocks for you.

And one way to think of it is in terms of the beginning and the middle and the end of the Christian life. Let me see if I can illustrate this. I once went on a hiking trip on Catalina Island.

Any of you heard of Catalina Island before? It's right off the coast of Los Angeles. And I went on a five-day hiking trip with a group of people. We hiked 10 miles a day in 35-degree weather, and we had no showers.

It was an incredible experience. And I was a sight to behold by the end. On the last night of the camp, my boss said to me and my coworkers, it was like a team-building thing for work, he said, I want to wash your feet, which was a bit of an awkward experience after five days.

So he peels our socks off and has a bucket of water, water, and he digs in. And he blots out.

[21 : 28] He wipes away. He scrubs. He removes all the dirt. And it's like the first blessing of repentance. Your sins may be cleansed and washed away.

And then the next day, we hiked down the mountain to the ferry terminal, and we happened to get there an hour early, and so we couldn't resist, and we jumped in the ocean. And oh, I have never had a swim so refreshing in my entire life.

In the hot California sun, being surrounded by the cool, crisp, clean waters of the Pacific Ocean, glistening blue, and it was an amazingly refreshing experience.

And it was like, I had my feet washed the day before, and that was an amazing experience, but now I was being refreshed in the presence of this water in a way that I hadn't experienced before.

And it's like the second blessing of repentance. Repent, repent. The times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. And that's the gift of ongoing repentance, is that the Lord brings ongoing refreshment into our lives, day in and day out, when we most need it and when we least expect it.

[22 : 41] And then finally, I boarded the ferry an hour later. We're on our way home. I finally get to my home. I take a shower. I get into a fresh change of clothes. I get into my soft bed with my own pillow, and I feel like, ha ha.

All is right again. And that's the third blessing, repentance, says Peter. Repent, and you may know that God is sending Christ for you.

And when Christ comes, he is going to restore all things in heaven and on earth are going to be made right again. And the work that he has started in your life is going to be brought to completion in the day of Jesus Christ.

The work that he has started in your brothers' and sisters' life will be brought to completion in the day of Jesus Christ. The work that he has started in his creation will be brought to completion in Jesus Christ.

And with all his saints, you will be leaping and bounding in the temple of the new creation, praising God with the man who was healed on that day, say, glory to God for his great mercy and grace toward us.

[23 : 48] Brothers and sisters, this passage isn't primarily about a healing one day 2,000 years ago. This passage is about the man whose name has the power to heal.

This passage tells us that this man rose from the dead by the power of God and that he lives even now. And that if you have faith in his name, if you repent and turn to him, you can have your sins completely cleansed.

You can experience refreshing in your life that you've never experienced before and you can have the hope of everlasting glory. And so the only question is, will you turn from whatever it is that the Lord's asking you to turn from?

And will you discover in Jesus all the riches of God's kindness and mercy toward you? I speak these things to you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.