

PLACED

Acts 3:12-26

We've seen the bumper stickers and have heard the words "Christ is the answer." If the church had just one message it should be proclaiming to a world that is drowning in problems, this is it. However, the world in which we live has become antagonistic to the message of salvation and we can clearly discern the spirit of anti-Christ in all walks of life. The resistance and rebellion against the Lordship of Jesus Christ do not change the truth that only Jesus can save and that He is the solution to every problem of humanity.

Some Christians have not aligned their lives with this truth and, as a result, the world has not seen many authentic role models of how this truth can make a difference in people's lives. We typically look to other sources and resources for help when various situations arise. When all else fails, then we remember God and turn to him for help. Such was not the case in the first century church.

Peter and John had spent the previous three years in the company of Jesus. They had witnessed the miracles and they had heard His teaching. They were traumatized by the crucifixion, elated by the resurrection and empower at Pentecost. What do you think was uppermost in their minds as they went about their daily tasks? They were thinking about Jesus and what was happening in the Kingdom of God. These were the focus and central theme of their lives. When they encountered the lame man at the entrance to the Temple, they immediately thought of his needs in terms of what the Lord could do for him. The beggar was hoping for money; however, he had his sights set too low. God had something much more valuable to give him and that was wholeness.

Nothing would have happened that day if Peter and John had not been willing to step out in faith in the Risen Lord. If Peter and John had a pocket full of money, would they have just given the man a few coins and gone on to prayer time in the Temple? I hope that would not have been the case. We should not let the fact that we have some physical resources available to us cause us to lose sight of the greater (indeed infinite) resources we have in Christ Jesus. Additionally, we must not let the "duties" of a religious system (going to the temple to pray) blind us to the needs of people that can be solved only in context of the Kingdom of God.

The results of not relying on our own puny resources but of looking to Jesus were miraculous. Peter told the man, "In the name of Jesus, rise up and walk." He then reached out and lifted him up. We can learn from these two actions. First, we must be willing to speak to problems we encounter in accordance with the will and character of Jesus. Those we help should have no doubts regarding our motivation or "where we are coming from." The power (ability) does not reside in us, it only flows through us. We often overlook the second thing that Peter did. He reached out and took the man by his hand and pulled him up. So often, we in our churches "preach at" the problems but do not turn our hands to help turn the situations around. Sometime, we just give money when we see a need and we don't even bother to say anything.

The immediate result was that the man who was healed created a commotion by walking, leaping and praising God as he followed Peter and John into the Temple area. His action attracted the attention of many of the Jews who were there. Such action had been described centuries earlier by Isaiah in Isa. 35:6 "Then shall the lame man leap as a deer."

Recognize – 3:12-16

¹² And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?" ¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the

God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶ And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. Acts 3:12–16 (ESV)

Peter and John intended to engage in a time of prayer at the Temple in Jerusalem and, as they went, there was an opportunity to help someone. They recognized that opportunity to help another person and acted on it. This led to another opportunity which was to tell the Jews about Jesus who was the reason the lame man was healed.

If God is working through us to do great things, then we must be careful to give the credit to Him and use every opportunity to point people to Jesus. Peter was careful to point out to the people that he and John did not have the ability or power to heal anyone, but the God of their fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) had sent His Messiah and it was through faith in the Messiah that this man experienced healing. The people in the temple area had likely assumed that Peter and John had some special power to heal since it would seem to be the obvious explanation. Things are not always as they seem to be and that is why clear communication is so important when anything significant happens.

Some in the crowd may not have recognized to whom Peter was referring when he mentioned that God had glorified His Servant. Peter named this Servant as Jesus. He further specified this Jesus as the One Whom the leaders and the people rejected and denied when they were told to choose between Jesus who was called Christ or Jesus Barabbas who was a murdering insurrectionist. Peter referred to Jesus as the Holy and Righteous One which was likely intended to tell the people that no one had brought a legitimate charge of any sinfulness in the life of Jesus. Even the pagan Roman governor testified that he found no fault in Jesus the Messiah.

The starting point in bringing people to God is a confrontation of the sin in their lives. The Jews needed to be challenged to face up to the terrible sin they committed in rejecting God Who came to them in the person of Jesus. Though they rejected Jesus, God vindicated Him by the resurrection and provided witnesses to share the good news with the world.

The seriousness of what the Jews had done was bluntly (but clearly) stated by Peter. They had killed the Author of Life because they did not recognize Jesus as God Incarnate Whom God had promised implicitly and explicitly in the writings of their sacred Scriptures. They exercised their free will but since what they did was not aligned with God's sovereign will, He overruled what they did and restored life to the Messiah. Hundreds of Jews were witnesses to the risen Messiah before His ascension.

God was and is willing to confirm the truth of His message to the world by miraculous interventions in the lives of people. He has promised to answer our request for anything we ask according to His will. What the Jews had just witnessed was confirmation of the truth that “faith placed in the person of (name of) Jesus enabled the lame man to be perfectly healed and provided validation of Jesus' claims.”

Repent – 3:17-21

¹⁷ “And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. Acts 3:17–21 (ESV)

Acknowledging that the people and their leaders acted in ignorance was in agreement

with the words of Christ from the Cross when He said “Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing.” One of the biggest lies ever uttered is the saying “What you don’t know can’t hurt you.” The ignorance of the leaders was different from the ignorance of the people. The leaders consented to and promoted the crucifixion of Jesus because they misjudged His confession that He is “God’s Messiah” as blasphemous. That seems to be to be bordering on “willful ignorance” in that they ignored all the evidence they had that Jesus fulfilled known Messianic prophecies. The ignorance of the people was caused by misinterpretation of the prophecies pointing to the coming of the Kingdom of God. They were looking for a physical kingdom, but the promises were for a spiritual Kingdom. The people would have been rabidly supportive of Jesus if He had shown any tendency toward ushering in a revolt against the Romans and setting Himself up as an earthly king who was a physical descendant of David.

Another point of ignorance (perhaps by both the leaders and the people) was that the prophecies regarding the suffering servant were misrepresented (or misinterpreted) to mean that “Israel” would suffer rather than applying that suffering to the “Messiah.” I think that orthodox Jews still hold that same viewpoint today. Peter pointed out to them that Jesus’ crucifixion was the fulfillment of what was written by several of their prophets.

The remedy for the Jews who sinned (all have sinned) and for the Gentiles who were estranged from God is the same message that John the Baptist proclaimed and that Christ preached: Repent, that you may receive forgiveness. Albert Barnes noted “Sin cannot be pardoned before man repents of it. In the order of the work of grace, repentance must always precede pardon. Of course, no man can have evidence that his sin is pardoned until he repents.”

Following justification, the salvation process is that of “making all things new.” We often refer to that as sanctification which is an ongoing working of God in our lives that transforms us and conforms us to the character and nature of Christ Himself.

We understand this to be the work of the Holy Spirit. Following His ascension, Jesus is in the seat of power, (the right hand of the Father), and from the seat of power, He dispenses and pours out and grants His Holy Spirit to His people. Peter’s emphasis in verse 21 that the Heaven must receive Christ was intended to correct the commonly held Jewish belief that when the Messiah came, He would reign on the earth forever, John 12:34. Based on this misinterpreted belief, the Jews claimed that Jesus could not be the Messiah. Therefore, it was important for Peter to establish the fact that He had ascended to heaven. Jesus told His disciples that He was going into the spiritual realm in order to prepare them to be a place for God to reside through the Holy Spirit in each believer.

The restoration reference in verse 21 was with regard to bringing the Gentile nations (which were estranged from God since the Tower of Babel event) back to a right relationship with God. Peter then continued to provide support from the words of Moses, Samuel and other prophets so that the people would have confidence to believe what he was telling them.

Remember – 3:22-26

²² Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. ²³ And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’ ²⁴ And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. ²⁵ You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ ²⁶ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.” Acts 3:22–26 (ESV)

A prophet like Moses certainly pointed to the Messiah and was convincingly fulfilled by what we know of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was definitely from “among the

brothers” of Israel. Both were shepherds: Jesus said “I am the good shepherd” and Moses also tended sheep – figuratively and literally. Both fasted for 40 days and nights. Both spent time in Egypt as children. Both were born at a time when evil kings pronounced death to all Israelite baby boys. Both were tempted by Satan. Both were called by God to lead and save God’s people. Both did miracles that testified to their God-given authority. Both instituted a covenant of blood that brought salvation for many. Both were given God’s public stamp of approval with an audible voice from heaven. Both gave up great riches to lead a humble life of service and poverty. Both were initially rejected by the Jews when the foretold salvation didn’t seem as if it was going to happen. Both were willing to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of those they were leading. Both of their faces shone with the glory of heaven, as was noted by people who saw them. Moses chose 12 spies to explore Canaan, and Jesus chose 12 disciples. Moses appointed 70 rulers over Israel, and Jesus sent 70 disciples out to share the gospel.

Although Peter mentioned that the promise that God had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that “in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed,” he (perhaps at that time) did not realize that this was reference to the Gentile nations coming back to God through the completed work of Christ.

In Peter’s message to the people, we’ve seen several references to Jesus as the “Servant of the Lord.” This terminology would have likely reminded the Jews of the various references from the Scripture that pointed to the coming of the Messiah. According to Alexander MacLaren, “The ‘Servant of the Lord’ means that Christ, in all which He does, meekly and obediently executes the Father’s will. As He Himself said, ‘I come not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me.’”