

Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Orcutt Christian Church

A Grace Driven Church for Grace Needing People!

The Terror of Advent Malachi 2:17-3:7; 4:1-2 December 3, 2017

Communion: Ed Saunders

Care Calling: The Saunders

Host: Mike Rylant

Saturday 12/2 Clean Up : The Webb's

1 🎵 **How Majestic**

2 🎵 754 - Lo he comes with clouds descending [ALL] 754

3 🎵 258 - Go, tell it on the mountain [ALL] 258

4 🎵 **Doxology**

5 🎵 244 - Come thou long expected Jesus [ALL] 244

6 🎵 245 - O come O come Emmanuel [ALL] 245

7 🎵 456 - Find us faithful [Once] 456

Malachi 2:17- 3:7 NASB)

17 You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, "How have we wearied *Him*?" In that you say, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them," or, "Where is the God of justice?" 3:1-7 ¹ "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. ² "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. ³ "He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in

righteousness. ⁴ "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years. ⁵ "Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me," says the LORD of hosts. ⁶ "For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. ⁷ "From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept *them*. Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts. "But you say, 'How shall we return?'

Malachi 4:1-2 (NASB)

¹ "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." ² "But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.

It's that time of year, and today is the first Sunday in Advent.
And, can you not recall hearing Andy Williams sing:

It's the most wonderful time of the year
There'll be much mistltoeing
And hearts will be glowing
When love ones are near
It's the most wonderful time

It's the most wonderful time of the year
With the kids jingle belling
And everyone telling you be of good cheer
It's the most wonderful time of the year

But, I ask you, for you is this the most wonderful time of the year?
Are you filled with thrill?

What if you don't have loved ones near
and everyone is telling you to be of good cheer
Do you have high expectations?

Christmas is about expectations.

Do we not sing a song of expectations at this time of year:

“Come thou long expected Jesus”

Isn't that our prayer as we wait for the Messiah?

**Come, Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.**

And, our prophet, Malachi, has something to say about our fears
and sins.

I. An Introduction to Malachi

Our prophet, Malachi, brings us God's dramatic and final words of
the Old Covenant.

These closing words, these final lines of the Old Testament, are
nothing short of astonishing.

While they ring with a promise, they also warn of great peril to
those who do not lay hold of the promise.

The words come forth almost like iron pellets.

And though there is the way through, but it is only by being refined
as through fire and by being cleansed as by lye soap.

Because he was the last of the Old Testament prophets Malachi has
been dubbed, poetically, as "the last flush in the sunset of Hebrew
prophecy."

The name Malachi means "my messenger."

Nothing is known of the life of Malachi except what can be
deduced from the book itself.

He was an excellent teacher.

He was deeply devoted to sincere worship of the Lord.
Malachi's mission was to correct the abuses and attitudes of the Jewish community in the last half of the fifth century before Christ. He furthermore was commissioned to announce the coming of the Sun of Righteousness and the day when men throughout the world would worship God in spirit and in truth.

Malachi is speaking to us of the advent of Christ.
Two advents actually.

Advent is a time to feel the terror of the Lord, and let our confidence be punctured.

II. Rethinking Advent

For many Christians, Christmas is a time of comfort, of peace, and of abundance.

We're fortunate if that is the case.

But what if Christmas is intended to be an annual reminder of our need for a Savior to break into our darkness, our "homelessness," and for us to be convicted of our lack of proclaiming the Good News of the Messiah?

What if Advent, the season leading up to the celebration of the Incarnation, ought not make us sentimental and satisfied but rather challenge us to live out our lives as bold heralds of Christ's coming?

Advent, the prelude to Christmas, is a happy and cheerful time, right?

It's a season of joy and excitement, right?

It's about festive decorations and beautiful music, right?

So why is the prophet saying we should be scared out of our wits with the coming of the Lord?

Advent should scare the breath out of us!

It should scare us witless.

It should turn our legs to pudding, our knees a-shaking and our blood to ice water.

Yes. Although we may associate Advent with emotions of anticipatory cheer, happy holiday carols and the sounds of children laughing, we get a very different view from the prophet Malachi, in the Old Testament -- the last book.

Our text from Malachi, is one of the traditional readings for this time of year.

And Malachi suggests that the initial emotion that's most apropos to Advent is ... terror.

Why should Advent terrorized you?

I doubt any of you have had the experience of being Santa Claus in the mall.

I was unemployed in 1989, and a photographer friend said the mall was looking for a Santa.

Believe me that Advent terrorized your children when you made them sit on Santa's lap at the mall, and they cried and screamed bloody murder.

Maybe you may feel terrorized by anti-Christian sentiment that often surfaces in the media at this time of the year.

Maybe you may feel terrorized by the sheer number of things to do before Christmas Eve arrives in just 21 days.

The pressure to perform on Christmas is building.

You think you're losing your mind.

Your legs are like pudding, your knees are shaking and your blood pressure is off the charts.

But this is not the terror Malachi is talking about.

He's talking about heart-clutching fear, "I'm-going-to-die" horror, "This-can't-be-happening-to-me" terror.

Remember that Malachi has two advents in mind.

Another thing to remember is that Advent means "COMING!"

Let's remind ourselves that, on the church calendar, Advent is, in fact, not just a prelude to the celebration of Jesus' birth in a Bethlehem manger.

So Advent is a time to think more broadly about God's coming, not only in the past, when Jesus was born, but also in the future, when He comes again.

And from our perspective, living long after his first coming, it is His second coming that should concern us most.

89 years ago, during Advent, on December 2, 1928, Dietrich Bonhoeffer preached a sermon in Barcelona in which he spoke about the emotion for this season:

"It is very remarkable that we face the thought that God is coming so calmly, whereas previously peoples trembled at the day of God. ... We have become so accustomed to the idea of divine love and of God's coming at Christmas that we no longer feel the shiver of fear that God's coming should arouse in us. We are indifferent to the message, taking only the pleasant and agreeable out of it and forgetting the serious aspect, that the God of the world draws near to the people of our little earth and lays claim to us ..."

Bonhoeffer wasn't making that up, because his advent sermon reflects the prophetic message of Malachi.

Malachi was the last of the Old Testament prophets.

His ministry took place about 460 B.C., almost 100 years after the people of Judah had returned from exile in Babylon and more than 50 years after the temple had been rebuilt in Jerusalem.

Some of the people had hoped -- even expected -- that the completion of that building would launch a new era where Judah would return to her former glory and independence.

But that had not happened, and the people had to deal with the fact that they would remain subjects of the Persian Empire, and that their land was essentially a backwater of that kingdom.

Thus, there was not a lot of incentive for vibrant worship of God. According to chapters 1-2, even the priests had become careless and sloppy in their duties in the temple. And the attitude among many in the general population wasn't much better.

In 2:17, Malachi tells the people that
You have wearied the LORD with your words.

And being self-righteous just like us, they demand to know specifics of how they have wearied the LORD. So, Malachi responds to their rationalizing minds by saying they believe that
"Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them,"

Doesn't that seem to capture our modern politically correct mentality?

I don't know how you would respond, but they retort
"Where is the God of justice?"

Their attitude is that God simply doesn't care how we live our lives.

We all have two choices.

We can reign over sin, or we can let sin reign over us.

Paul make it very clear that **the God of justice** does not condone sin.

Romans 6:23 (NASB)

23 For the wages of sin is death

Paul says

Romans 6:14 (NASB)

14 For sin shall not be master over you

Some acted as though God considered evil to be good, or as though there was no justice in God's world.

Biblical commentator Peter C. Craigie says that the people Malachi addresses

"have become, by their attitudes and actions, functional atheists, not bothering to deny the existence of God, but destroying any link between God and justice, or between the Almighty and good and evil."

III. The God of justice Will Bring Justice

Malachi says in 3:1

1 "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me.

Notice that God is speaking: **"I," "My," and "Me."**

A God has Malachi tell us whom this messenger will be:

Malachi 4:5 (NASB)

5 "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.

Now, you know the identity of the Messenger.

Jesus Himself makes it clear whom the messenger is

Matthew 11:14 (NASB)

14 John himself is Elijah who was to come.

Our text is the scene when Malachi speaks the word of the Lord. Although he himself is a messenger from God, he tells the people of another messenger to come, suddenly and without warning, who will be an advance man for God Almighty.

And that messenger's job will be to make the way ready for the Lord.

Isaiah 40:3 (NASB)

3 A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.

John 1:19-23 (NASB)

19 This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21 They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he *said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22 Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" 23 He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said."

But, Malachi has a second messenger, whom he calls **the messenger of the covenant**

And, the messenger of the Covenant has a different responsibility than John who is clearing the way.

"But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 "He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify

That messenger will function like a **refining fire** that rids gold and silver of impurities, only his fire will purify the people.

He will also be like **fullers' soap**, which is nothing like today's laundry detergents.

The passage combines metaphors, using imagery from both metallurgy and domestic life, comparing the purifying work of the messenger to "fullers' soap," using a pair of rare Hebrew words (and a rare English word, as well, since few people today know what a "fuller" is), the Piel plural active participle of the verb

Kāvas meaning "to tread" (i.e., wash by treading) and the word **bōrîth**, "lye, alkali, potash, soap," found only here and in Jeremiah 2:22.

The image advances the idea of separating the pure from the impure.

(cf.: The Complete Biblical Library Hebrew-English Dictionary. For HiPiel plural cf: John Joseph Owens, Analytical Key to the Old Testament; <http://www.hebrew4christians.com/index.html>; <http://kukis.org/>)

He's not talking about Ivory soap.

In 1874 Procter & Gamble trademarked "Ivory," the name of its new bar soap product.

The name was created by Harley Procter, the founder's son, who was inspired by --

Psalm 45:8 (KJV)

8 All thy garments *smell* of myrrh, and aloes, *and* cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad.

And they hyped it as being "99 ⁴⁴/100% Pure" to demonstrate that Ivory was purer than the soap then available.

Malachi is talking about the soap I grew up with, that my mother made.

She made lye from ashes taken from the fireplace, and running water slowly over the ashes.

And the now strongly leached alkaline water was collected in glass bottles.

She collected fat from lard, bacon grease, and tallow.

She use rain water because it was pure and soft.

I suspect some of you have made your own soap.

From clothes and stains to dirty dishes and floors, even to poison ivy and bug bites, lye soap was the answer for the family's daily cleaning needs.

Well, that's what we bathed with, and what was used to wash clothes.

Mama called it Lye Soap, and she often used it to wash out my mouth when I said something she didn't approve of.

But, the **messenger of the Covenant** is not interested in washing our clothes.

He is interested in washing us.

He is interested in purifying us.

Malachi says

He is like a refiner's fire

I used to have a friend who was a goldsmith, and I occasionally would watch him at work.

He'd take the unpurified gold, and put it in a smelter, a cast iron pot actually, and put his torch on it until it was melted, and then he sprinkled something on it to make the impurities surface when he then skimmed off the dross, the scum or unwanted material that forms on the surface of molten metal .

I know you have listened to Handel's Messiah over and over, and the word "comfort ye my people," ring loud and clear, But, Handel understands the dual nature of the Messiah, when he has "and he shall purify" sung over and over.

The smelting and scrubbing this messenger will do is, in effect, God's judgment for all.

And for some, that judgment will be the final verdict.

Verse 5 speaks of some for whom the messenger's arrival will be only bad news

5 "Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me," says the LORD of hosts. 6 "For I, the LORD, do not change;

They will perish, Malachi says.

Everybody will be judged, but, says the prophet, some will be redeemed.

Malachi doesn't speak about repentance, only God's initiative, but the implication is that those whom God will redeem are those who turn to the Lord.

They will be saved, but it will be a rough redemption, a caustic washing.

For them, the fear is like that of a cancer patient who is facing a treatment regimen that will cure him, but the regimen itself is so ruthless that it fills him with fear.

But to be healed, he must go through it.

IV. A Personal Application

We can apply this word from Malachi to ourselves.

And whether we will be among those who perish or those who will be redeemed, there's reason for terror.

But perhaps we should use Advent to let ourselves **Feel the fear!**

Let's keep in mind that our prophet Malachi is speaking of two messengers, two advents, and two groups of responders.

The question for you and I is "which group of responders are we choosing to be with?"

In the sermon mentioned previously, Bonhoeffer went on to say, "Only when we have felt the terror of the matter, can we recognize the incomparable kindness. God comes into the very midst of evil and of death, and judges the evil in us and in the world. And by judging us, God cleanses and sanctifies us, comes to us with grace ..." (emphasis added).

But which group -- the perishing or the saved -- will we be in? Craigie notes that Malachi's "words are aimed in such a way as to puncture confidence: 'Who can endure the day of his coming?'"

It can be a good thing to have our pride punctured if that confidence keeps us from serious commitment to God, or causes us to take our salvation for granted.

Polls continue to show that most Americans who believe in heaven also believe they are going there.

Yet the percentage who think they have a spot reserved in eternity is much larger than the percentage of people actively engaged in following Jesus.

Advent calls us to examine our assumptions about our destiny and look at our priorities.

Malachi's good news is that God takes the initiative and does the needed purifying, so we need not live constantly in terror.

It doesn't hurt, however, to be reminded that God's grace is not cheap, and that redemption is a strong cure, worth going through because of the outcome, but not something to be thought of lightly or assumed as our prerogative.

Remember the famous painting that shows Jesus standing at a doorway in a garden, patiently knocking on the door?

It's usually understood as picturing Christ's asking admission into our hearts.

From his prison cell in Flossenbürg, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote:

“By the way, a prison cell like this is a good analogy for Advent; one waits, hopes, does this or that—ultimately negligible things—the door is locked and can only be opened *from the outside*. Advent reminds us that misery, sorrow, poverty, loneliness, helplessness, and guilt mean something quite different in the eyes of God than according to human judgment; that God turns toward the very places from which humans turn away; that Christ was born in a stable because there was no room for him in the inn—a prisoner grasps this better than others. And for them, this is truly good news.”

For many of us, our surrender to Christ came not because he gently asked permission to come into our lives.

It was more like he kicked the door in and entered like an intruder, commandeering space and making it clear that he was present. Eventually we made a choice about whether or not to let him remain.

That kind of roughness squares with Malachi's words about redemption.

While a few of us may have found discipleship an easy path to walk, others of us had to be catapulted onto it from self-centeredness, sin-blindness and self-righteousness.

And being catapulted is not comfortable.

It's clear in the New Testament that the gospel writers understood John the Baptist as the messenger about whom Malachi spoke (see Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 1:76).

And we note that John's call for repentance from sin was not a soft and tender moment either.

But that was the first Advent.

It's the second Advent that's ahead for us.

Jesus is coming again.

So, during this season, feel the fear!

Let your pride be pierced.

But then reaffirm your commitment to Christ and know the grace of walking with him as a faithful disciple.

Bonhoeffer said in the 1928 advent sermon:

“Perhaps we have thought so much of God as love eternal and we feel the warm pleasures of Christmas when he comes gently like a child. We have been shielded from the awful nature of Christmas and no longer feel afraid at the coming near of God Almighty. We have selected from the Christmas story only the pleasant bits, forgetting the awesome nature of an event in which the God of the

universe, its Creator and Sustainer, draws near to this little planet and now speaks to us. The coming of God is not only a message of joy, but also fearful news for anyone who has a conscience.”

Remember that there are two groups who respond to God's terms of pardon.

There is one group of whom **the LORD of hosts** says

Malachi 4:1-3 (NASB)

1 "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze"

But of the second group, **the LORD of hosts** says

2 "But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall."

Alas, tis sad that the first group refused to comply with God's terms of pardon.

And, you ask, "What are God's terms of pardon?"

We find God's terms of pardon clearly in the book of Acts.

1. Faith that Jesus is the Messiah, and our Savior.
2. Remorse that we have chosen to contaminate the purity with which God created us.
3. Publicly confessing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.
4. Being immersed into the body of Christ for the remission of our sins.
5. Choosing to live for Christ through thick and thin.

When Malachi says "**behold, the day is coming**" that word "**behold**" means a shocking event will happen in the blink of an eye.

You can't risk telling **the LORD of hosts** that "I'll do it someday when I get around to it."

You need to make a decision today, while it is still called today.

Kittle says "'Today' is used to refer to the period of man's activity in a day up until evening, the period of time man presently has at his disposal. It could possibly be the final time he has."

Please choose to remove yourself from this first group, because the second group has **the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall**

The first group has the responsibility to choose God's terms of pardon, and the second group has the responsibility to sharing the Good News of God's blessings.

Without doubt, the people of Christ should rejoice that

John 1:14 (NASB)

14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John the Baptist's father, Zacharias, said to the infant John:

Luke 1:76-79 (KJV)

76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; 77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, 78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, 79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and *in* the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Malachi's title **the messenger of the covenant** and Zacharias's **the dayspring from on high** are equivalent titles for the One to whom we say "I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Without doubt, the people of Christ should rejoice that He will **give light to them that sit in darkness and *in* the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.**

But we must also be reminded that the birth of Jesus brings judgment on those who do not know him.

The Jesus of the manger is also the Jesus foretold in **Malachi 4:1-3 (NASB)**

1 "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." 2 "But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. 3 "You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the LORD of hosts.

This is a demand of you and I to go in His name and a boldly tell of Good News.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (NASB)

23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Acts 13:32-33 (NASB)

32 "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 33 that God has fulfilled this *promise* to our children in that He raised up Jesus,

Acts 8:12 (NASB)

12 But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.

Romans 10:14 (NASB)

14 How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?

1 Timothy 4:16 (NASB)

16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

Prayer and Invitation

Lessons - Unit 1: The Early Church Proclaims Faith in Christ

December 3 Lesson 1 (NIV) Faith in Jesus

Devotional Reading: Psalm 118:1-14

Background Scripture: Acts 3

ACTS 3:11-21

11 While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. 12 When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. 14 You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. 15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. 16 By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see. 17 "Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. 18 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. 19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. 21 Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

KEY VERSE

By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.—Acts 3:16

Introduction

A. Five-Tool Players

When looking for a future superstar, most baseball scouts seek players that excel in five facets of the game. Those five are hitting for average, hitting for power, base running, throwing, and fielding.

Such “five-tool players” are rare, however. In the history of the game, only a handful merit that designation. Willie Mays was one. A lifetime .302 hitter, he had 660 career home runs and collected 3,283 hits along the way. Mays was also a great base runner, stealing 338 bases. “Hammerin’ Hank” Aaron slugged 755 home runs, drove in 2,297 runs, and stole 240 bases while posting a career .305 batting average during his career. Ken Griffey Jr. was named to his league’s all-star team 13 times and won seven Silver Sluggers awards. Other players fall into the five-tool category, but the list is short.

As scouts look for five-tool players, employers look to hire someone who is the “complete package,” and we admire a person who seems to “have it all together.” But the Bible tells us that there is only one way to be perfectly whole.

B. Lesson Background

The book of Acts narrates the history of Jesus’ followers in the first generation following his death and resurrection. Written as a companion volume to the Gospel of Luke, Acts portrays the church as the continuation of God’s work, in Jesus, to reclaim a people for himself from all nations (Acts 1:1, 8). God accomplishes this purpose as Christians testify to what they have seen and heard: that in fulfillment of God’s promises, Jesus willingly surrendered to death and was raised to life again by God. The resurrected and ascended Jesus remained active through the words and deeds of his followers as they were empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The conflict between the Jewish council (also known as the Sanhedrin) and Jesus continued as persecution of Jesus’ followers. The council consisted of the high priest and 70 leaders appointed

by him. Under the watchful eye of the Roman overlords, the council supervised operations of the temple of Jerusalem and served as something of a combination legislature and judiciary. Members of the council had seen in Jesus a rival to council authority and vested interest (John 11:48). Thus council members had fomented the movement to put him to death, although the decision was not unanimous (Luke 20:19; 22:66-23:1, 50, 51). The people feared the council (John 7:13; etc.), but the council also feared the people (Mark 11:18, 32; Luke 20:19; 22:2; etc.).

The center of the council's power was the temple. The temple was not merely a building; it was a 35-acre complex that included courtyards and semi-enclosed areas where people could gather. Jesus had taught in these environs (John 7:14, 28; etc.), and there his followers continued to teach and pray after his ascension (Acts 2:44-3:1).

Immediately before today's text begins, the apostles Peter and John had come to the temple. As they did, they crossed paths with a man who was disabled and begging. Rather than give him money, Peter declared "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (Acts 3:6). The man's instantaneous healing was reminiscent of Jesus' own healing miracles (compare Luke 5:17-26; 6:6-11). The man then entered the temple courts on restored legs and praised God, by whose power he had been made whole (Acts 3:8). Today's text picks up as people reacted.

I. Wholeness—From Where?

(Acts 3:11-15)

A. Looking for Human Saviors (vv. 11, 12)

11. While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade.

Having received an unimaginable blessing from *Peter and John*, the formerly disabled man vigorously grabs the two apostles in joy and gratitude. No one who witnesses the scene can doubt that he believes that these two have played a key role

in his being granted wholeness of body. The man familiar to everyone as the beggar who “used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful” is now seen by all “walking and praising God” (Acts 3:9, 10). We can imagine a crowd of hundreds being *astonished* by this miracle. They are more than ready for the explanation!

12. When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?”

Peter addresses the crowd as fellow members of the nation of Israel who share a common knowledge of God’s actions and promises. Their common background of being covenant people is the context for understanding this miracle. That context should remind them that Peter and John have no *power or godliness* of their own by which to have *made this man walk*.

They, like all humans, are imperfect, subject to frequent failures of judgment and action (examples: Luke 9:51-56; 22:31-34).

The people should know that the power to bring the miraculous wholeness now evident belongs to God alone.

What Do You Think?

How can we ensure that people can see that it is God’s power that undergirds our accomplishments?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding our reaction to compliments and criticism

Regarding the scale of our undertakings

Other

B. Rejecting the Divine Savior (vv. 13-15)

13. “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.

Peter has explicitly called on the authority and power of Jesus in commanding the man to stand and walk (Acts 3:6). Now Peter gives credit where credit is due, meaning that he and John are only instruments of the miracle (compare 14:8-15).

Peter stresses that it is none other than *the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob* who is due the credit. This phrasing condenses much of the storyline of Scripture; knowing that storyline is the key to understanding the healing miracle just performed. The storyline is further condensed in the phrase *the God of our fathers*. Those *fathers* include the three patriarchs mentioned by name here (compare Hebrews 7:4).

Those men were the first to receive the promise that God would reclaim his rebellious world by blessing all nations (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26:4). That reclamation is underway, and the miracle points unmistakably to God's *servant Jesus* as the one with the power to have made it happen. Thus Peter joins the story of Jesus with that of the ancient patriarchs.

The Greek word translated *servant* here and elsewhere (examples: Luke 1:54, 69; 7:7; 12:45; 15:26) can also be translated "boy" (examples: Luke 2:43; 9:42). By using the term *servant*, perhaps Peter is remembering that God's servant is a key figure in the book of Isaiah. The song of God's servant in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 predicts that exalted servant's debasement and rejection by his people. Even so, he is willing to be punished and killed for the wrongdoing of others. But in the end God gives him the place of victory and strength. Isaiah says that God will absolve guilt and restore wholeness through one in whom all rejection and suffering will climax.

That is the story of Jesus' life. His rejection and crucifixion fulfill promises God made through Isaiah. Jesus willingly took the lowliest of positions to serve others; in so doing, he fully expressed the glory of God before the world. That glory continues to be displayed as a man with a severe disability is healed by the power of Jesus, the once lowly, crucified servant who now sits at the right hand of God (compare Hebrews 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22).

What Do You Think?

What are some ways that our personal limitations can serve as a basis for bringing glory to God?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding what other see in us
Regarding what we alone see in ourselves

14a. “You disowned the Holy and Righteous One Peter now underlines and personalizes the tragedy of underestimating Jesus. He is *the Holy . . . One* in a way like no other. He is *the Righteous One*, meaning just in all his ways. The concepts of being just and right (or righteous) are frequently interchangeable in Scripture, and that is the case here (compare Deuteronomy 32:4; Ezekiel 18:5; Romans 3:26).

14b. “and asked that a murderer be released to you. When Pilate offered to release Jesus, the crowd called instead for the release of Barabbas, a man imprisoned for insurrection and murder (Luke 23:13-25). Thus the long story of human rebellion against God reached its lowest point. But the Son of God, supremely innocent, did not stop the process. The innocent gives his life willingly for the guilty as a guilty man is set free.

In this way members of the crowd now present had denied Jesus. Peter knew of this all too well since the climate of that moment had led to his own denial (Luke 22:34, 57-61). He therefore speaks not as a pure example but as an impure but forgiven messenger of the one who forgives.

15a. “You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead.

The word translated *author* brings with it the idea of originator or “pioneer,” as it is translated in Hebrews 12:2. Peter therefore may be referring to Jesus both as the divine Creator (compare John 1:3; Colossians 1:15, 16) as well as the one whose death restores life. The spiral of irony boggles the mind: without realizing it, the angry crowd had sent to death the one who came to restore life to humanity trapped in the grip of death. Yet it is by Jesus’ death that life is restored because his death paid sin’s price (Isaiah 53:5; Romans 3:21-26; 1 Peter 2:24).

By raising Jesus, God reaffirmed the Son’s identity, brought him to

the heavenly throne as divine king, and fulfilled ancient promises to restore humanity to wholeness. Jesus' resurrection is the definitive proof that in him God's gift of eternal life will triumph.

Reading this text today, we must listen carefully. In centuries following the writing of the New Testament, many misread this text and others as saying that all Jewish people bore responsibility for the death of Jesus. But Peter makes the statements we see here only about the people of Jerusalem, some of whom were in the crowd that called for Jesus' death (Acts 13:27).

15b. "We are witnesses of this."

The concept of witness is vital to the establishment of fact (Deuteronomy 19:15-21; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; etc.), and the word appears dozens of times in the Bible in that regard. Pharisees tried and failed to discredit Jesus on the basis of inadequate witness (John 8:12-18). Peter's stress on *we are witnesses of this* should be understood in this light (see also Acts 2:32; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31).

THE SERVANT LEADER

Victor Herman (1915-1985) accompanied his father to Russia in 1931 to help build a car manufacturing plant. When Victor became an adult, he refused to become a Russian citizen and was imprisoned for 18 years. His memoir *Coming Out of the Ice* tells the story. He and 15 other prisoners were locked in a small cell 24 hours a day, forbidden to move or speak. At night they slept jammed together on the cold concrete floor.

How to Say It

Barabbas Buh-rab-us.

Deuteronomy Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.

Ezekiel Ee-zeek-ee-ul or Ee-zeek-yul.

Nazareth Naz-uh-reth.

Nehemiah Nee-huh-my-uh.

patriarch spay-tree-arks.

Pilate Pie-lut.

Sanhedrin San-huh-drun or San-heed-run.

One man, “the Elder,” voluntarily took a place near the door. The spot was closest to the stench of the latrine. This position also made him the first to be beaten by sadistic guards. The Elder made sure that each man got his daily bowl of soup. Herman says the Elder’s example of servant leadership in that horrible setting taught him that “only the one who is most exposed to the blows of the system can claim authority to lead and serve.”

Peter informed his audience that Jesus placed himself in the greatest jeopardy in order to bring salvation. He served in a way no other can so that we would be servants of sin no more (John 8:34; Romans 6:6-18; etc.). What should we learn from Jesus’ example?

—C. R. B.

II. Wholeness—From Whom?

(Acts 3:16-18)

A. Jesus’ Name, Our Faith (v. 16)

16. “By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

No human power has made the man whole. Only God could do so. It happened by the power of Jesus (Acts 3:6). The miracle done *in the name of Jesus* demonstrates the truth of all Peter’s claims.

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to stay mindful of the ways God has shown his power in our lives?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In our worship

In our families

In our private devotions

As the righteous, divine king, Jesus acts on behalf of his people—people who, like Peter and John, have faith in him. They have confessed him as king and have sought his mercy, mercy that he

always gives to those who seek it. Jesus' self-sacrificial death and God's raising him from the dead give the basis for this faith. The man's healing is a visible manifestation of the invisible but no less real wholeness that King Jesus grants to his faith-filled subjects.

B. Jesus' Payment, Our Debt (vv. 17, 18)

17. "Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders.

Those who had called for Jesus' death had no idea of the gravity of their deed (Luke 23:34). Even Jesus' closest followers did not understand what was unfolding before their eyes (18:31-34). God's purpose, though revealed in Israel's Scriptures, remained hidden until he had accomplished it. Only with Jesus' resurrection could others understand who he truly was and how he had fulfilled God's promises (24:25-27, 30-32, 36-48). Now Peter passes the truth along. Ignorance is now ended, and the people are without excuse. They must seek the king's mercy urgently.

What Do You Think?

How can we help each other get past blind spots in understanding Jesus properly?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding methods used by Jesus himself

Regarding methods used by the apostle Paul

Other

18. "But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer."

Peter affirms, as Jesus did also (Luke 24:27, 44), that the suffering and death of the Christ was the event to which all the words of the prophets pointed. The divine drama of Jesus' death, resurrection, and heavenly enthronement were not just predicted by a few prophets in a few texts such as Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Rather, it is the outcome of everything that God said *through all the prophets*, whether the subject was that of people's sin and its judgment, God's mercy and grace, his people's suffering and oppression, or humanity's longing for

true justice and goodness to be realized. Jesus' death brings all prophetic declarations to their focal point, resolving human need by means of divine self-sacrifice.

III. Wholeness—When?

(Acts 3:19-21)

A. Beginning with Repentance (vv. 19, 20)

19. “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, Those who have rebelled against the true king must abandon their rebellion and seek the king’s mercy. This is the meaning of *repent*, a turning away from evil—first of all the evil of having revolted against the rule of the divine king.

To *turn to God* is the step that complements the first. Thus we do not just abandon rebellion and seek the king’s mercy; we further commit as loyal subjects, obediently to trust the king to provide, protect, and rule.

What Do You Think?

What should others see in us as evidence of genuine repentance?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding changed speech patterns

Regarding changed behavior

Regarding changed goals

Regarding changed attitudes

The phrase *times of refreshing* refers to the promise of God from the first instance of human rebellion forward, the promise to break the destructive cycle of human rebellion. This revives humanity to the state of blessed life that God intends.

These times of refreshing are the hopes expressed by the prophets: of the gathering of scattered Israel, the establishment of God’s true temple, the turning of the nations to the true God, and the reign of God as king to the farthest reaches of the earth. The fulfillment of

those promises has begun with Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. Peter's audience can receive the benefit if they embrace the truth (compare Acts 2:38).

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE?

Conor McBride walked into a Tallahassee police station on March 28, 2010, and said, "You need to arrest me; I just shot my fiancée in the head." He was telling the truth. He and Ann Margaret Grosmaire had argued for 38 hours. Then he shot her. In the hospital, Ann was unconscious when her father was sure she said "forgive him" before she died.

Conor was charged with first-degree murder, but Ann's parents didn't want him to spend his life in prison. A prison chaplain told them about the concept of restorative justice. It's an approach to sentencing in which the prisoner, his family, officials, and the family of the victim try to agree on a lesser sentence than the law requires. It happened; Conor's sentence for murder was only 20 years.

God's system of restorative justice works differently. We are offered a restored, right relationship with him only on the basis of Christ's payment for the penalty of our sins. A more appropriate designation for God's system of restorative justice is *grace*. This system requires no gathering of various parties to agree to a reduced sentence. God's grace means there is *no* sentence! Why would anyone reject such an offer?

—*C. R. B.*

20. "and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.

The promised times of refreshing will climax with Jesus' return. His life, death, and resurrection show that he is the Christ, God's promised king. Christ's rule as king would seem to be a disaster for those who had called for Jesus' death. But the king offers mercy. He invites repentant rebels to be restored as his subjects by their faith in him and his offer of grace.

Those who respond to that offer anticipate Jesus' future return

as king as do faithful servants when their absent master returns (Luke 19:11-27).

B. Finished at the End of the Age (v. 21)

21. “Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.”

As Peter announced previously, Jesus is enthroned at God’s right hand until his victory is complete (Acts 2:34-36; compare Psalm 110:1). That period of heavenly enthronement grants his enemies the opportunity to turn from their rebellion and seek his mercy. But it is not an unlimited opportunity. The king is determined to see his kingdom come in its fullness. He will indeed renew the world to his design. To wait is foolish. Now is the time to put faith in him, acknowledging him as the king that he is.

Peter’s message to the gathered crowd prompts many to do exactly what he says, and the company of Christians grows from about 3,000 to 5,000 (Acts 2:41; 4:4). But not all the rebels turn. The same Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus to death goes on to arrest Peter and John (Acts 4:1-3) and orders them not to preach (4:17, 18), an order boldly defied (4:19, 20). No earthly authority can silence the faithful witnesses of the true king!

Conclusion

A. Finding Genuine Wholeness

The challenge of trust confronts every generation. Will we continue to put our trust in ourselves, with our miserable record of failure and our evident brokenness? Or will we find genuine wholeness as we faithfully commit to the risen King Jesus?

B. Prayer

Father, we submit to your Son Jesus as King, our Sovereign Lord. We trust in his merciful forgiveness. Strengthen us to live out your gracious gift of wholeness in lives that reflect your renewal of

creation, already begun. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Only Jesus fills the God-shaped hole
to make us whole.

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