

Words and Deeds: Times of Refreshing
By Jason Huff
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Proverbs 11:25; Matthew 11:28-30; Acts 3:12-26

Today's Scripture reading is Acts 3:12-26. May God richly bless the reading of His holy and sacred Word. "When Peter saw this, he said to [those who came to them because of the miracle]: 'Men of Israel, 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? 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. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. 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 given this complete healing to him, as you can all see. 'Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you-- even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.' 'Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.'"

Summer's the time for refreshments. Summer to me brings back memories of the ice cream truck coming around the bend playing obnoxious music so that everyone would stream out of their houses to buy something. It's the time of the drive-in movie, which is where you saw ads like "Let's All Go To The Lobby and Have Ourselves a Treat." You go to the baseball game in summer, and some of us like the peanuts and popcorn almost as much as what's happening on the field. And when most people hear the word "refreshments," they think of sodas. Pepsi originally marketed itself as "the light refreshment." Not to be outdone, Coke claimed in ads that they were the "true refreshment." Sprite is now "born to refresh."

The very idea of refreshment, though, means that we're worn out; we're tired; we need to be revived. Summer is the time of refreshment because the heat wipes us out; when it gets hot enough, it gets dangerous. There's a reason that people build their cabins up north and not down south, and if they can, they build them by a lake or stream!

And if we need anything, we need spiritual refreshment. For many of us, coming to worship each Sunday is like an oasis. It's not a chore; it's a welcome break, a chance to get back in touch with God, to give over our week to Him, to take time to enjoy His presence. It's hard work being the church out in the world we live in, and Sunday mornings act as a weekly restart.

In Peter's second major sermon, it's a unique theme – refreshment from God. And it's not the quick fix of a soda or a bucket of popcorn that's quickly gone. God's refreshment is promised until the final coming of our Savior to take us into His Kingdom in the new heaven and new earth. So let's take a closer look at this sermon to find out how Peter outlines the gospel and its promises for us.

Peter very quickly dismisses any idea that he and John are responsible for the miracle they performed in last week's passage, healing a man lame from birth. He wants Jesus to receive all the glory; he states that God has glorified His servant Jesus. It's through faith in Jesus that this healing took place, not through magic or trickery. Peter credits faith and he credits Jesus' name. We do the same thing; we pray in Jesus' name, we talk about the power of Jesus' name. Jesus tells us He will give us what we need when we ask for it in His name.

But that idea is strange to us. In ancient times, words were believed to have power themselves; magic was knowing the right words. But the Bible gives credibility to the idea that names carry weight. To use someone's name was a big deal – even a servant for Caesar would have great power under that name because he had the authority to use it. The Jewish people never spoke aloud the proper name of God for that reason – they didn't want to abuse that power. Even the ways we pronounce God's proper name – Jehovah, Yahweh – they are approximations because no one knows the right vowels. That God even told us His true name means that He has given His people who know Him by name great confidence and strength.

Still don't think that a name means much? Tell that to an identity thief. Research suggests that the losses from identity theft may be astronomical, anywhere from \$1 billion to \$15 billion a year. On the power of your name, you get credit, you buy homes and cars, you get a driver's license. Tons of major things are done in modern society through the power of your name. We back up our names with addresses and phone numbers and passwords, but it's essentially our names that are worth so much.

In the same way, when miracles are done in Jesus' name, they are effective based on His might and say-so. He gives that authority to who He chooses. As we'll see later in Acts 19, Jesus' name is only effective in faith; the unbeliever who attempts to use His name has no right to do so. But even now, as believers, we should be in prayer to ask for Jesus' permission for what we think is right, and then move by faith in His authority and power and name.

Peter then goes on, and he condemns the audience. He puts the weight of the murder of Jesus on their shoulders. He makes Jesus higher by calling Him the servant of God, the Holy and Righteous One, and the Author of Life. He pulls out all these titles to contrast just how horrible what they did was – they handed Him over, they had a murderer set free instead of Him, they disowned Him, and then they killed Him. Later, Peter pulls back a bit – he says they did it in ignorance rather than full knowledge. They didn't kill the Son of God believing He *was* the Son of God. But still, the burden of Jesus' death, Peter places on their heads.

Now you know this would not fly in today's church. We're supposed to be positive and encouraging. You're overcomers, you're conquerors, destined for great things with God. Get Jesus into your life and you'll have more of everything good and less of everything bad. Jesus is the means to a good end. We rush by sin, if we even call it that – Jesus saves us from mistakes, bad decisions, poor life choices. To suggest that God might be angry with you for treason against Him, which is what sin is – nobody likes that. And Peter says this to a whole crowd, many of whom weren't involved in any way, some of whom might have cheered when Jesus entered Jerusalem. It seems incredibly harsh to say, "Y'all killed Jesus" when this crowd at least two months later – if not longer – may not have even been there when Jesus was crucified.

And yet, what we learn is this: *real guilt is good when it leads to true repentance*. Bad guilt comes in two forms. One kind of guilt is when we feel bad for something done to us that was so bad that we feel responsible for it. Victims of abuse often feel guilty and ashamed, that somehow they could have done something to avoid it or to not have motivated their abuser. That's bad guilt because it's not real. We shouldn't feel guilty for something where we genuinely had no power to influence it. In the same way, I am not responsible for what my ancestors did three hundred years ago. If I profit from their actions now and do nothing about it, I'm responsible for what I can change, but not for their sins. That form of bad guilt is one we really need to get past to deal with our real issues.

Another form of bad guilt is guilt over getting caught or disappointing someone. In this form of guilt, we're not sorry we did it; we're sorry that someone is upset with us or that we might have to pay for our actions. This is the kind of situation where someone says, "I'm sorry you were offended." This guilt is for something we really did; what we feel is real; we have real sorrow. But it does nothing to our hearts and minds; we don't change our actions; we just feel bad for a while until we forget about it. In 2 Corinthians 7:10, Paul said, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." This is the worst kind of guilt because it only condemns us more.

But real guilt that leads to godly sorrow is blessed. Guilt that leads us to the foot of the cross not only to ask forgiveness but also leads us to change our ways makes us into Jesus' disciples. Good guilt won't leave you alone. Good guilt isn't indigestion, just a bad feeling in your stomach. Good guilt makes you say, "I have got to deal with this." Good guilt nags at you and haunts you until you run to the Savior. In Psalm 32, David described it this way: "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD' -- and you forgave the guilt of my sin."

All of us are guilty of sin. All of us in some way are responsible for Christ's death because it was our sin that required His death. If you have unconfessed sin in your life, sin that you haven't yet repented for and changed your ways about, do it right away. There is a way for your guilt to be taken away and to feel free of sin, for you to be free both of the guilt of sin and the power of sin over the rest of your life. All it takes is repentance – turning to God and rejecting the things you once did, changing your lifestyle. It is not easy, but every hard journey can be completed with a single step. And this is that step.

Peter unpacks for us a three-fold blessing that will happen with our repentance. He says these three things have happened or will happen when we repent: “Repent then, and turn to God, so that *your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you -- even Jesus.*” That’s the three-fold promise you can count on when you truly become a Christian.

First is the wiping out of sin. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, this was the same word used to describe the great flood, when God said He would “blot out” every living thing on the face of the earth. It is also found in Exodus, when God says that he will “blot out” the names of the unrighteous out of His book of life. David pleads with God in Psalm 51 to “blot out” his transgressions in the matter of Bathsheba.

When we repent, God forgives us completely. There is no record of our sin. There’s no trace of what we have done left. Sometimes I’ve heard of people going to court hoping that the police officer that pulled them over won’t be there so they can get out of their traffic ticket. But imagine if you went to court and nobody could find the traffic ticket itself. That’s an incredibly minor example, but it’s the same thing. The judicial record has been purged; the slate is clean. Jesus paid the debt for all our sins, so the record is expunged. From God’s point of view, they are completely and totally gone. What a relief that is!

But not only do we have the promise of relief from guilt and our debt of sin, we are promised “times of refreshing.” This is a unique Greek word; this is the only place it’s used in the Bible. And it means the cool breeze that you might get off a river or a lake in the heat of summer. It’s what makes life bearable when things are at their worst. And because of the way the sentence is structured, now are the times of refreshment. It is in the here and now that God promises to relieve us when we are burdened and stressed, when we can’t carry on. Sometimes living as a Christian is really, really hard. But God promises us refreshment, relief, even enjoyment that continues on and on. In the midst of the struggle, God provides for us over and over again. And it lasts longer than a bottle of soda!

Third is the promise for the future – God will send you the Christ. In one sense, we see this fulfilled in the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ lives with us even now and guides our paths. But in a deeper sense, this is the promise of His return. One day, when God has brought the full number of Israel into His Kingdom, then the second coming will occur – as Peter puts it, Jesus “must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything.” In some way, the Jewish believers thought that Jesus’ return was dependent on the descendants of Israel turning to Him. Even now, we wait for His return until every last person to be included in God’s Kingdom has repented and believed. So Peter’s sermon tells us that there’s an immediate blessing – the forgiveness of sins – a blessing for now and the future – God’s refreshing – and a far future blessing – that the Messiah will return.

Peter’s third major idea is that *the Jewish hearers of his sermon are the heirs of all the promises of the covenant with Abraham, and soon we Gentiles also will become heirs alongside them.* An inheritance isn’t as big a deal as it once was because people live longer and spend more in retirement, but we’ve all probably inherited something. An inheritance is a bittersweet blessing; it can help us in many ways, but it also usually means we lost someone we love.

But imagine an inheritance that has waited generations. For nearly two thousand years, the Jewish people knew that all nations on Earth were to be blessed through Abraham's descendants and through the promised Messiah. For fifteen hundred years, they had waited for the prophet like Moses to be raised up. For a thousand years, they waited for the true successor to David's throne, the King from David's line who would reign forever over all the nations. The prophets warned them and reminded them of this coming inheritance. But year after year, nothing happened, or so they thought. Generation after generation died never having experienced the promise fulfilled.

But in Peter's generation, the Jewish people's expectations were finally realized. The people alive during Jesus' lifetime were the generation who received the long-awaited promise. It didn't all go down like they thought, but it's better than they imagined. They thought they would get a Messiah that would take over the Roman world; instead, they got a Messiah of a different Kingdom that has already begun and will last forever. They thought they would get a Messiah that would crush their enemies; they got a Messiah who crushed the greatest enemies of all – sin and death.

And now, everyone who believes in Jesus is an heir. Everyone who believes gets a share in the inheritance. Everyone who turns to Jesus receives a stake in the Kingdom of God. The inheritance hasn't ended; it belongs to all the faithful ever since. When things are hard, when trials come, when you're struggling to do what's right, remember: as an heir of God, you have been blessed, you are being blessed, and you will be blessed. This is your portion and prize. Hold on to it.

Last thought ends where we began: *the glory and honor for our salvation belongs to Jesus and not to us*. Peter ends with this statement: "When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways." Who does the action here? It's Jesus. Jesus blesses us by turning us from our sin. Are we involved? Absolutely. At the end of the day, we're no longer facing in the same direction we once were. The difference is the action is being taken on us. We don't turn ourselves. Instead, God in His mercy and grace sent Jesus so that all He would call into His Kingdom would repent and receive His forgiveness. Yet even that repentance happens because God did the turning.

So when we go out into the world, we don't do it with a sense that we have done something extraordinary. No, God did the extraordinary, and thanks be to God, He did it to us. It also means that anyone is a potential candidate for the Kingdom of God. Because if it were on us, we'd be hopeless. I'd write off so many people – too unwise, too selfish, too flighty, too old, too young. But I'd have to write off myself too, because I am not someone who deserves salvation. I know I cannot do this in my own strength. But Jesus in His own strength made it happen, so I give Him praise and honor and glory today. We can share the message with anyone, knowing that God may use our sharing if He so chooses to change someone's eternity.

Be refreshed, my friends. God's salvation is here. Our sins are wiped out. We have life in Jesus' name. Go in peace this weekend to love and serve the Lord, knowing all that He has done for you. And as you do, you will feel that sweet breeze of salvation that comes when we have confidence that He has saved us now and evermore.