

The Restoration of All Things

Acts 3:1-26

Today's passage shines a spotlight on a troubling reality in this life, namely, "innocent suffering." There's a sense in which nobody is completely innocent; we are born in sin (Psalm 51). But sometimes people suffer innocently in the sense that they aren't suffering because of their own poor choices. They aren't reaping what they've sown. They are suffering due to influences far beyond their control.

- * Children born with special needs that make them dependent upon parents and others their entire lives
- * People who experience illness and accidents that cause severe limitations
- * Billions of people who've been born into poverty all over the world. . . without clean water, without basic medical care, without opportunities for work
- * People living in war zones around the world (like Ukraine)
- * People experiencing earthquakes (Turkey and Syria) and other "natural disasters"

Innocent suffering raises all sorts of questions: Does God see and does God care? Does God have a remedy/plan for addressing such suffering? Will there be a day when such suffering will disappear? Does Scripture talk about such things?

It turns out that there are many passages in Scripture that talk about the day when God will come in power and restore all things. One such passage is Isaiah 35. There we read that all creation would be remade; physical maladies will be reversed. Listen to a couple verses:

5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
6 then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. . .

In today's passage, Acts 3, Luke makes a direct reference to verse 6. One day Peter and John went up to the temple to pray. As they entered the temple complex, a 40-year-old man who was lame from birth asked them for money. He'd been suffering innocently for 40 years. But instead of dropping a few coins into his basket, they stopped and looked and spoke. Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"

7 And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. 8 And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

That's a very clear reference to Isaiah 35:6; this lame man was "leaping like a deer." The Messiah, Jesus, had done this miracle. And the miracle was indisputable because everybody knew this man. Naturally, a great crowd of people gathered around Peter and John and this man in the courtyard of the temple.

With the crowd gathered around Peter explains the miracle he had just performed. He explains that the miracle was a sign that pointed to the remedy for the entire world and everyone who would accept it. The same Jesus that restored that man would one day “restore all things” (Acts 3:21).

Let’s listen carefully because Peter’s sermon to them has very clear implications for us - both in time and for eternity. Peter masterfully shows us how Jesus is the remedy for all the suffering that we experience in this life (both innocent suffering and the suffering we bring upon ourselves because of our foolishness/sin).

Understand the Rebellion of Humanity: “*You killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead.*” (Acts 3:11-16) The first thing Peter wanted the crowd to know is that Jesus was the One who had healed the man.

11 While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon’s. 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?”

I love the way Peter expresses it: this healing was not through “our own power or piety.” Down in verse 16 Peter will make clear that it was through Jesus’ power that the man was healed. But notice what he says about Jesus in the intervening verses. In verse 13:

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.

By calling referring to him as “his servant Jesus,” Peter is making reference to the “suffering servant” of Isaiah 52-53 who was “pierced for our transgressions.” The God of their fathers had “glorified his servant Jesus” by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand. God could not have a higher opinion of Jesus. He gave him the name that is above every name.

“But you,” Peter told the crowd, “you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him.” We read in Luke 23 that three times Pilate told the Jewish authorities, “I find no guilt in this man. . . he has done nothing deserving death.” In other words, Pilate, the non-Jewish Roman governor, agreed with God about Jesus’ innocence; he wanted to release him. But they demanded that he be crucified. The news gets worse (verse 14):

14 But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you,

They preferred to release a murderer instead of Jesus, the most innocent person who’s ever lived. The news gets even worse (verse 15):

15 and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.

Peter calls Jesus “the Author of life” - in the sense that created life and that he is the one who gives eternal life through his death and resurrection (see John 11:25 and 14:6). Peter tells them, “You killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead.” By raising him from the dead, God vindicated Jesus and declared him innocent! Peter adds, “To this we are witnesses”; Peter is fulfilling Jesus’ statement, “You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem.”

In verse 16 Peter closes the loop concerning the power that healed the lame man.

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.

Peter hadn’t healed the man in his own name/authority/power. Rather he had healed the man in the name of Jesus. Jesus had made this man strong. In the second half of the verse Peter says that “the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health.” Peter had faith that Jesus could heal the man; but the implication seems to be that the man himself also had faith. When Peter said to the man, “In the name of Jesus, rise and walk,” the man himself responded with faith which resulted in his healing.

Peter brought the crowd face-to-face with the reality that they were enemies of God, worse than Pilate, preferring a murderer over Jesus. They weren’t merely on the wrong side of history; they were on the wrong side of eternity. Peter wasn’t being mean or judgmental when he told them all of this. He was simply telling them the truth about their rebellion against God so that they would see their need for forgiveness. A superficial conviction of sin doesn’t lead to repentance. Peter wanted them to understand the depth of their sin so that they would repent and believe and have their sin blotted out.

The same dynamic is at play for us. If we have a shallow understanding of our rebellion against God and his Son, we will miss the forgiveness that God offers through Jesus.

You might be thinking, “I wasn’t there when Jesus was crucified. I’m not as sinful as them.” The fact of the matter is that you and I don’t know how we would have responded if we **were** there. We might have shouted, “Crucify him!” Or we might have been more like Peter and the disciples who denied and abandoned Jesus. Whatever the case, what Paul wrote in Romans 5:8 applies to every single one of us: “. . .but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. . .”

If you’re not yet a follower of Christ, I beg you not to shy away from noticing and understanding the depth of your sin. Some people may tell you, “Don’t worry about it; nobody’s perfect.” I think we can all agree that nobody’s perfect; but that’s not the issue. The issue is that you (like me and every human everywhere) have sinned against God and Jesus his Son by nature and by choice. Since he is your Creator, you are accountable to him.

You may or may not have cursed God to his face and told him that you hate him; maybe you've simply ignored him and lived your life the best you've known how. But your sin (rebellion against him) has shown up in the things you've thought and said and done. Today, if you understand and admit the depth of your sin, this could be the best day of your life because now you understand that your only hope is God's grace (which he freely gives to everybody who wants it).

If you're already a follower of Christ, I encourage you not to shy away from remembering ways that you were an enemy of Christ when you came to him for mercy and grace and forgiveness. Paul never forgot about his rebellion against God before he was convicted of his sin. He wrote 1 Timothy 1:13 that before Christ he was "a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent aggressor" (NASB). There is a healthy remembering of our sin that keeps us humble and thankful before God.

Receive the Grace of God: "Repent and turn back. . . sins blotted out. . . times of refreshment. . .restoring of all things." (Acts 3:17-26).

Beginning in verse 17 Peter changes his tone a bit. He makes clear to them and to us that the grace of God is available to everybody who wants it.

17 "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers.

His point is that they really didn't know/understand what they were doing when they called for Jesus to be crucified. They were ignorant about Jesus being the Author of life. In 1 Timothy 1:13 Paul spoke of his own former ignorance: "But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief." That was true of the people who were listening to Peter. They were responsible for their actions, but they and their rulers acted in ignorance.

Chances are that you think of ways that you were (or are) ignorant about the way you've treated Jesus. I sure can. The good news is that our ignorance does not disqualify us.

18 But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled.

The second half of the gospel of Luke emphasizes that Jesus had to die for the sins of the people in fulfillment of Scripture (9:22, 24; 17:25; 18:32-33; etc.). The murderous, ignorant rebellion of the Jewish nation didn't thwart the mission of the Messiah; in the sovereignty of God, their rebellion actually moved his mission forward.

Peter has already spoken of "faith in [Jesus'] name" in verse 16. Beginning in verse 19 he speaks of repentance:

19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out,

To repent means to turn from your sin and turn back to God. Repentance is a gift. God didn't have to give us the option of turning back to him (it could have been "one strike and you're out"), but he did. So Peter commands them (and us) to turn from their sin and turn back to God in faith. We need to admit, "I've been wrong about Jesus. I now understand and believe that he is your Son, the Messiah, the Author of life who died for my sins."

And the promise is that if you repent and turn back to God in faith, "your sins [will] be blotted out" - meaning completely removed. They will be gone permanently. The death of Christ paid for our past, present, and future sins. In the first half of verse 20 Peter speaks about what those whose sins are forgiven experience:

20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus,

When you repent and believe, God gives you the gift of the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit brings about "**times of refreshing**. . . from the presence of the Lord." While we wait for Christ to return and right all wrongs and wipe every tear from our eyes, God refreshes us; he gives us seasons of relief from all the suffering and heartache of this world. This refreshing comes as we pursue the life we talked about last week: we devote ourselves to the Word and to one another and to prayer (Acts 2:42).

In the second half of verse 20 Peter assures them that one day God would "send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus. . ." Notice what happens at the return of Christ (v. 21):

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.

Here Peter says that Jesus will remain in heaven "until the time for restoring all things." This **restoration of the entire created order is Jesus' final remedy for everything that's wrong in this world**, including the innocent suffering we experience AND the suffering we experience because of our sin.

But what specifically does that mean? There's a fascinating clue in the next chapter which suggests what Peter had in mind when he spoke about "the restoration of all things." In Acts 4:2, we are told that the reason the Jewish authorities arrested Peter after this sermon was because he was "**proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead**." If the Author of life had been raised from the dead and could heal a man lame from birth, he has the power to bring about "the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:2).

The Hebrew prophets spoke about this in numerous places. It's not as specific as the New Testament in talking about the resurrection from the dead, but it's there. Daniel 12:2 reads:

2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Isaiah 25:8 says that “[God] will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces.” Isaiah 65 and 66 speak of God creating “new heaven and a new earth” without death or disease.

Peter stood up before the crowd and declared that when Jesus returns he will bring about this “restoration of all things,” including the “resurrection from the dead.”

In 1 Corinthians 15 we’re told that when Christ returns believers will be raised bodily from the dead and will be given bodies that are “imperishable” and “immortal” and “glorious.” Unlike our earthly bodies, our resurrection bodies won’t be subject to death and disease and weakness. They will be uniquely suited to dwelling with God in the new heaven and earth. That’s the plan. That is the remedy for innocent suffering; and that is the remedy for all the suffering brought on by our rebellion against God.

If you’re not yet a follower of Jesus, this remedy is available to you as a free gift of God. But you have to opt in by turning back to God through faith in Jesus. If you do, your sins will be forgiven now and one day your salvation will extend even to your body. Why would you not do that? Today if you hear God’s voice calling you to himself, don’t harden your heart. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

If you are already a follower of Jesus, “fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (as Peter wrote years later in 1 Peter 1:13). Whether you are young or old, whether your body and mind are strong or weak, if you feel invincible or if you know that your remaining days on earth are few, fix your hope completely on the grace that will be yours when Jesus returns and restores all things!

And please understand that God calls us to an ongoing ***lifestyle of repentance***. We are fully forgiven when we first believe; but we experience ongoing cleansing and ***times of refreshing from the Lord*** as we continue to turn from our sin when it’s revealed.

I was talking with a friend this week who was telling me that he has struggled with insecurity his entire life; he never feels like he’s got what it takes to do what God’s called him to do. He said that he has realized that beneath his insecurity is pride, thinking that he knows better than God what he’s capable of doing. When he told me that, I didn’t tell him, “Don’t be so hard on yourself. . .” No, I love that God has opened his eyes to his pride. I love that he’s learning to turn from his pride and the lies he’s believed. I love that he longs to experience times of refreshing from the Lord.

That’s what I want for myself and that’s what I want for you. In this life while we wait for God to send Jesus from heaven to restore all things, we are called to adopt a lifestyle of repentance so that we can experience times of refreshing from the Lord.

In this context please consider joining us for the “Season of Seeking” that begins on Wednesday. Our pastoral staff has put together a devotional guide. We’re going to read through the gospel of Luke together; we’ll begin in Luke 1 on Wednesday and finish up

with Luke 24 (the resurrection of Jesus) on Easter morning, April 9th. There's a daily devotional centered on 7 core disciplines in the Christian life. The discipline highlighted each Thursday is repentance. Each Thursday there's a different Scripture to ponder to help surface ways that we might need to pursue repentance.

Let's seek God together during this Easter Season.