

*Please read also Deuteronomy 18:15-19, Exodus 19:5-8, Genesis 22:15-18*

Peter and John had gone to the temple for prayer and a miracle had occurred. They healed a man crippled from birth. This event caused quite a stir. People flocked to them, so Peter seized his opportunity to tell them why this had happened. Thousands were at church that day listening to Peter explain what happened and why.

Are you one of those people who have to know why? Recently a young Christian woman said to me, “Tell me why I should spend time seeking God rather than doing what I normally do?”

That’s a good question. We all must be able to answer it. But I admit: it’s a hard question. We can’t always see the reason or the reward for devoting ourselves to Jesus. So we must ask

Why love God? Why turn to Jesus? Why be more than a Sunday morning churchgoer?

Those were the questions posed to Peter that morning.

Peter began his sermon. He said, “Jesus brought this miracle,” he said, “but you handed Him over to Pilate. You rejected this Holy, Righteous One. You asked for a murderer to be released instead. You killed Him but God raised Him from the dead!”

Wow, those are strong, accusatory words. But it was the truth. Sometimes the truth hurts. But the truth helps too. This was the truth about Jesus, and all of us church folks have at one time ignored, scorned, and turned our backs on Him.

Peter said, “This miracle, this healing was from Jesus.” Are you as quick to give Jesus credit when things go well for you? Do you testify to others, ‘Jesus has blessed me; Jesus has given me good gifts; Jesus has brought a miracle to me!’ Are you bold to give Jesus Christ credit?

The truth is, every good thing that comes to you, and all the blessings that come to this church are from our heavenly Father. It’s our responsibility to acknowledge that, in a loving, truthful way. Here’s how Peter did it. READ Acts 3:17-19

Peter was full of grace – “friends, you did all this in ignorance . . . and besides, God was at work; it was God’s plan.” But then he said “repent.” Wow! Is that what we are supposed to do? Have you called people to repent and believe in Jesus? Peter did.

One question I ask myself when preparing a sermon is *who in my life illustrates the message of this passage?* I couldn’t think of anybody who recently had this experience of repenting and turning to Jesus. Do we not get it? Are we not repenting? But then on Wednesday morning I met a man named Luke. I sat on an airplane working on this sermon and after awhile we began to talk about Jesus. (It pays to write sermons!) He told me his story, and it was as if he was in that crowd that Peter told to repent. Luke defined it perfectly; Luke experienced this very call. He gave me permission to share his story with you.

Luke explained he was an average person with a great job, a wife and three kids, and fine parents. They lived the good life. Only over the years he fell into a routine. He would get up, read the paper, go to work, come home, have a beer and watch TV. The next day, hit replay, only over time two beers became many. Then he added weekend golf and before you know it, his relationships with his wonderful family were replaced by his personal appetites and self-centeredness.

After a number of years he found that all his relationships were on the rocks.

Then a series of events began to unfold. His father was diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer. His children grew up and were moving on. His 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary was coming; but his wife informed him she had had enough. His company was reorganizing and his job might be terminated.

All these things bore down on him until one day he saw the truth. Perhaps he was the problem for the broken relationships, not everyone else; not circumstances. So he decided to change.

He turned to Jesus Christ. He decided to go to God and repent in the true meaning of the word, go to Christ and simply say, "I'm sorry, I'll change." He prayed, "God fix my marriage. The Lord answered, "Nope, it's going to be you just coming to me." So Luke humbly listened. He submitted himself to God. He went to his church to learn to let go of destructive things and embrace a relationship with God instead. That's repentance.

Well, that may seem radical to you. But we have a radical God who does radical work by blessing us enough to let us see the truth about ourselves. Through Peter, the Jews learned the reality of their behavior. They had despised the Lord Jesus Christ. But they could change all that.

Chuck Colson is another guy who repented. He was Richard Nixon's hatchet man during Watergate days in the 1970s, a man who used his power to win at all costs, to annihilate the opponent. He described his religion as "Episcopalian; nothing important; just another membership." But a client of his, the president of Raytheon, Tom Phillips, had committed his life to Jesus Christ and told Chuck about it one day. "It has been the most marvelous experience of my whole life," he said.

Chuck thought, "What are you talking about? Jesus Christ lived 2,000 years ago, a great moral leader, doubtless divinely inspired, but why would you commit your life to Him or accept him as if He were around today?" And to him, the thought was absurd.

But a few months later the pressure of the Watergate scandal mounted and he left town for awhile, and as coincidence would have it, (and we know in God's kingdom there are no coincidences), he met with Tom Phillips again. Tom urged him to repent. He read this from C.S. Lewis:

"There is one vice of which no one in the world is free and which everyone loathes – and that is pride or self-conceit. Pride leads to every other vice and it is the complete anti-God state of mind."

“In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that – and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison – you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.” (*Mere Christianity*)

Tom asked him to turn to Jesus that night. Chuck Colson couldn't do it. As soon as he walked out the door and down the driveway he turned around to go back, to change his mind. But he saw the lights go out in the house. He got into his car and the tears started coming. He drove only a few yards then he stopped. Sobbing he humbled himself, asking Jesus to take the driver's seat in his life. It was the first real prayer of his life. He said, “God, I don't know how to find you, but I'm going to try! I'm not much the way I am now, but somehow I want to give myself to You. Take me.”<sup>1</sup>

That's repentance.

It is realizing you have been a problem for Jesus; you have been blind and proud, stuck in your own ways, but then being willing to release it to Him. All of us can come to that – this is a message to church people! A message of hope! And when you do that then amazing things happen; astounding things come your way. Listen to it: READ Acts 3:20-21

Chuck said immediately he felt release. His tears were no longer tears of remorse, but tears of cleansing, refreshing water washing over him and removing every bit of stain, cooling him with relief.

Forgiveness and freedom from guilt are the most refreshing thing that can happen to you. In my own life there are times when I might have just as well crucified Jesus myself I was so rotten, but I turned back to Him. And I am done with being a half-hearted Christian because the closeness I experience when I say – Jesus you can have all of me; there is nothing like it! It is a truly transforming place to be.

Luke agrees. He wanted Jesus to fix his problems but Jesus said, ‘You just give yourself to me.’ Then, over time, Jesus didn't give him back what he had; Jesus did much more - He transformed his marriage into something Luke never imagined it could be.

That is the time of refreshment Peter talks about. We can expect it when we sincerely turn to Jesus, giving Him everything. And things improve from there.

But we must heed the message because it's our promise, as part of God's family. READ Acts 3:22-26

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<sup>1</sup>Charles W. Colson, *Born Again: What Really Happened to the White House Hatchet Man* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Chosen Books, 1976).

Peter's sermon should be read by every church. We are just like the churchgoers standing in Peter's audience. Just because we attend church does not mean we qualify to receive this promise. The church is just like Israel – we too can lose our vision and be cut off. One way to regain vision is to see the restoration that is coming.

The last year some of our friends from this congregation have gone on to meet Jesus in heaven. I wonder what they would tell us if they could. I am certain they would say – it's true, it's all true! And it's worth the sacrifice to gain it.

Have habits and circumstances cause you to step away from Jesus Christ? Luke would say, "Turn back!" Does pride get in your way of humbling yourself before Christ? Don't ignore the testimony of Chuck Colson! Listen to the amazing refreshment and transformation we talk about week after week. Don't let knowing God slip through your fingers! Gain the promise. Believe and receive. It's magnificent.

AMEN