

Roy's sermon for 1/11/2020

A Cripple Set Free Part 3: "Ignorance; Repentance; And Times Of Refreshing!"

Last time we looked at Acts chapter 3 verses 11 to 16 'A Cripple Set Free Part 2: In Jesus' Name'. We saw that in verse 11 the beggar "was clinging to Peter and John", and "all the people came running to them". The emphasis is placed on the "to them". I said in this is revealed the nature of mankind in their fallen state, seen in the lifting of the creation up above the Creator, God! They were Jews in the temple of God "at the time of prayer", and yet instead of attributing this amazing healing to the Almighty, they would seek to lift up Peter and John! This is one of the great world religions of the day: the creation itself is held up as God. Mankind exalts and deifies it, instead of that Eternal One who made it!

Next we looked at verse 12 "men of Israel why does this surprise you, why do you stare at us?" Yes in the face of the overwhelming evidence of who Jesus was and is, "why does this surprise you, why do you stare at us?" We have no power; this comes from Jesus. I explained the danger of lifting the man or the messenger up above the Message. Peter's words also warn us of this. "Why do you stare at us?" I said that we can fall into that trap of having our favourite or our pinup boy preachers. Forgetting that they are only messengers. The faithful ones will never allow us to do this! Peter says why stare at us? We are just men. That One of whom we preach, you must look to Him.

In Verses 13 to 15 he aims his targeted words as a trained sniper directly at them. "You handed Him over," "you disowned Him", "you disowned Him", "you killed the author of life." Yes, just as at the day of Pentecost, he lay the blame for Jesus' death down at their feet. Indeed, down at our feet! In the Name of Jesus he was made whole. Yes Jesus is "the author of life." All life and power comes from Him. Salvation is found only in Him!

And finally, I explained that Peter healed in Jesus' Name, but Jesus healed in His own Name. One is the servant, while the other is The God and King of the universe!

So now we continue in the account Acts 3: 17 - 21 'A Cripple Set Free Part 3: Ignorance; Repentance; And times of refreshing!' Peter continues his sermon after having healed the man crippled from birth. Verse 17: "now brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance as did your leaders." Friends, as I mentioned last time, Peter's goal, (indeed the preaching of Christ's gospel's goal), is not to drag people down into the depths of despair and leave them there without hope, as though Jesus still lay dead in the grave. No, It is to proclaim who Jesus is as the Son of God and why He came. To set people free from the bondage of sin and death's curse, and an eternity in hell! So it is not only the message of warning, condemnation and judgement, it is also the message of deliverance, freedom and reconciliation. Yes it is God's message of hope!

And I do find it interesting that though Peter is speaking to those who were the chosen nation of God, who had all the Prophets, the Patriarchs; they had Moses, the 10 commandments, and the whole of the Old Testament. And they were standing in the very temple courts of God, and were literally responsible for having Jesus put to death. Remember, "you killed the author of life." But again, I find it interesting, that he says to them, "now brothers I know you acted in ignorance." Surely the question is then, why does Peter say this, because the reality is that they were not ignorant; they were in fact guilty and accountable. And the other thing is that even if they were

"ignorant", which they were not; ignorance, does not excuse us of a crime if we have committed one! For example, if you are driving at 100 kilometres an hour and then the speed limit changes down to 80 kilometres but you are unaware, because you missed the sign, if you get caught, you are still going to get a ticket, it's going to cost you money and some points. And if you've already lost some points, it may well cost you your licence. So again, why does he say that they "acted in ignorance", when they were not ignorant, they were in fact culpable and accountable?

Well the Bible commentator Matthew Henry explains that this was Peter's way of mercifully softening the blow. As I mentioned last time, the goal of the gospel is not to bring people to the depths of despair and leave them there without hope, no. Yes he did lay the blame at their feet, but he softens the blow. Having brought them to the realisation of what they'd done, he then mercifully mitigates the charge by calling them to have "acted in ignorance".

Then in verse 18 he tells them that all of these things, (including their role in Jesus death), were all part of God's plan of Salvation for His people! Verse 18 "But this is how God fulfilled what He had foretold through all the Prophets, saying that His Christ would suffer." So Peter is telling them that Jesus' death on that cross was no accident. It was not as though God had sent His Son to save His People, and yet because of Jesus' death the mission failed, no. It is because of that death that we have the victory! Yes this was the Heavenly Father's plan since the fall in Genesis 3:15. Speaking to Satan and what Jesus would do to him and his evil plan of sedition within mankind: "he will crush your head and you will bruise his heel."

Yes, Jesus was always going to win the victory over Satan, sin and death for humankind, through the pouring out of His Own Blood on that cross! And as Hebrews 9:22 tells us: "in fact the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." So only Jesus is "the author of life", and the restorer of life!

Brothers and sisters, the hundreds of millions, perhaps even billions of sacrifices of animals, which had been offered up for the people's transgressions, (even in accordance with God's Old Testament Levitical law), have never atoned for one single sin. This is because from Adam, to the last person for whom Jesus died, individuals can come to God only through the shedding of His Son's Blood! This was not a failure, with God having to come up with Plan B, no. Verse 18 tells us that this was His Plan all along. "What he had foretold through all the Prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer."

But friends, although Peter does soften the blow with verse 18, explaining that this was God's plan all along, he certainly does not excuse them (or us) of culpability! It is as though he is saying in verse 17: though you were "ignorant", and in verse 18 'it was all part of God's plan, but now that I have explained your guilt to you, it is time for you to act!'

He says in verse 19 that now that he has lifted the veil from their ignorance it is time to repent. As we've seen before, "Repent" is one of those words which seems to have disappeared from much of modern day Christendom. And yet Matthew 3:1-2: "in those days John came preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near." Then after Herod had thrown John into prison and Jesus took the gospel baton from John so to speak, Matthew 4:17: "from that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near." And as we saw in Peter's first sermon on the day of Pentecost, having been confronted with Jesus death and their responsibility for it, the people cry out in Acts chapter 2:37 "Brothers what shall we do?" And then in verse 38 "Repent." And now here again before us in Acts 3:19 the message hasn't changed. "Repent, then, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

Beloved can you see that though Peter mercifully softens the blow, he doesn't withhold the truth. He doesn't say, 'oh it's all OK, you can just keep on living the way that you have been you haven't been so bad, you've been good enough, God will accept you'. No, he says, "Repent, then, and turn to God." So if he tells them that they need to "turn to God", it stands to reason that though they claimed to be His People, they were actually living in a manner which had them going and turning away from God. Friends, true conversion, true Christianity, true faith in Christ, is only genuine if there has been a change in direction in someone's life! Until that time we are all living apart from God going our own way, which is away from God. So we must then "turn to God." Repentance is our genuine response to the truth about Jesus.

True Repentance must bring about that change of direction within our hearts and lives. Look at the words, "so that your sins may be wiped out." Oh yes, Satan will continue to whisper in our ears of our unworthiness and seek to accuse us before God, but to no avail, because the ledger has been "wiped" clean by Jesus' Blood. Psalm 103:11-12 "for as high as the heavens are above the earth so great is his love for those who fear him. As far as the East is from the West, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." Years ago a Christian group called Casting Crowns in one of their songs asked the question, can you tell me just how far the East is from the West? Their answer was from one scarred hand to the other.

Yes dear friends, such is God's great love for us that He has "wiped our sins out". He has washed us clean, with His Son's Own Blood! That hymn that we sing: "My Lord what love is this, that paid so dearly? That I the guilty one may go free. Amazing love, oh what sacrifice: the Son of God given for me. My debt He pays and my death He dies, that I might live, that I might live!" What Peter says next really struck me. Just the phrase "times of refreshing may come from the Lord." To his original hearers, I take it that it means that their "Repentance" would result in the moving of Jesus through His Holy Spirit throughout the then dead religiosity of the Jewish world.

But for us today on a personal level, what would "times of refreshing from Jesus" mean? Well, I did wrestle with this for quite a while and the thing which struck me firstly was that these "times of refreshing", as in our text before us, would come about after a new found "Repentance". Yes "Repentance" seems to be the key, because an unrepentant heart has no understanding of who God is, and the price which by Him has been paid for the sake of our eternal souls! A person with an unrepentant heart seeks to come to God, not through His Son's agony, but by their own merits. Yes they stand in their own strength and self-sufficiency, weighing up their good deeds against their bad. Believing always, that they are on the right side of the ledger. But "repentance" reminds us of who we are, and it brings us back to God. Indeed it brings us to God by His grace, for the very first time! Our self-worthiness has been stripped away, so we can truly begin to hear Jesus speak to us in our heart, through His Word. So I guess, yes, on a personal level, that's when "times of refreshing from the Lord" through His Holy Spirit really began to come, as He breathes new life into our souls!

Acts 9:1-5 "Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting", he replied."

Isaiah 6:1-7 "In the year that King Isaiah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings, with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And

they were calling to one another, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. "Woe to me", I cried, "for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "see, this has touched your lips, your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

And friends, may I suggest that God can visit us with those "times of refreshing" throughout the whole of our lives as we walk with Him. Whether it as with Saul, on our own road to Damascus, or as with Isaiah confessing and lamenting the wickedness and evil of the nation in which he lived! It is easy to become stale and perhaps apathetic and complacent in our faith. Perhaps taking for granted the wonder of God, which He has done for us through His Son. We can wander away until He brings us back. Then we wander away again and He brings us back again. For such is the mercy and tenderness of God! And as I was thinking of these things I was reminded of King David's words in Psalm 23:1-2 "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside still waters; he restores my soul." Yes I really do feel that this is how we can apply these "times of refreshing from the Lord" to ourselves personally, when we are convicted of our sin. And as we turn back to God in "Repentance", our relationship with Him through Jesus is "refreshed", our soul is renewed, "restored." But again, Repentance, that turnabout face, is the key!

Malachi 3:7-8 "Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me and I will return to you", says the Lord Almighty. But you ask, "how are we to return?" Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, "how do we rob you?" In tithes and offerings." Friends, this "turning to God", or as in Malachi, "returning to God" is wholehearted. It permeates the whole being: mind, heart, body and soul. Both Saul's meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus and Isaiah's vision of God upon His throne affected their whole being! In Malachi's day among other things, the people were tight fisted toward God's temple and His Work. It was a reflection of their hard hearts, their lip service. So God calls them through Malachi, Repent, return to Him, that blessing would again rain down upon them. Indeed "times of refreshing." On the road to Damascus, Saul was blinded by his murderous religious hate and zeal. And for Isaiah, it was the evil and wickedness of the people who claimed God's Name, which wounded his soul before the Lord.

Yet with both men, "times of refreshing" came both personally, and for God's people among whom they ministered! Friends, this is often how God works. He "refreshes" he "renews" the soul of even one amongst a body of believers, and then the Holy Spirit breathes new life into tired old souls, even a whole congregation! Yes "times of refreshing from the Lord." Do you remember the old hymn? "I praise thee, Lord, revival comes from Thee. Send a revival, start the work in me. Fill me with fire, where once I burned with shame!"

Oh beloved, what does the nation of Australia need today more than "times of refreshing from the Lord?" That He would once again fill our churches to the overflowing! That men would once again preach the message of Christ's gospel fearlessly and unashamedly. That God, through His spirit would again light the lamp of eternity across our nation, in the lives of men women and children, and that Australia would once again become known as a Christian nation. One people under God.

But for us dear friends, here in this place, in this little building in Burrill Lake or in Canberra, or in Medowie, or in Sydney, we need to pray that God would send "times of refreshing from the Lord",

into our hearts and lives. So that each of us would be able to say with confidence that it is well with my soul. O beloved, if we set ourselves to pray without ceasing, as Paul often writes in his letters in the Bible, that God would send revival, yes that he would send times of refreshing from the Lord, then I believe with all my heart that we cannot imagine what He can do. That He will pour out such an abundance upon us as we have never seen before in the nation of Australia. But we need to pray 'Come Lord Jesus, Come; send "times of your refreshing."

Yes: Ignorance; repentance; and times of refreshing from the Lord.

Let's pray.