

Main Idea: It’s all about Jesus. If we’re going to accomplish the mission Jesus has given us, to tell the world about Him, we need to embrace three responsibilities that Peter demonstrates for us in his sermon in Acts 3:11-4:4.

- I. We must confront wrong responses to Jesus (3:11-16).
 - A. This is vital for the preacher (11-13a).
 1. People don’t need to hear about us.
 2. People need to hear about Jesus.
 - B. This is vital for the hearer (13b-16).
 1. We must come to grips with our past sin (13b-15).
 2. We must come to grips with His present sufficiency (16).
- II. We must call for right responses to Jesus (3:17-26).
 - A. Here’s what we must do (17-19a).
 1. We must repent.
 2. We must turn to God.
 - B. Here’s what we will receive (19b-21).
 1. The first benefit is forgiveness.
 2. The next benefit is times of refreshing.
 3. The ultimate benefit is Christ Himself.
 - C. Here’s why (22-25).
 1. This is what God predicted through Moses (22-23).
 2. This is what God predicted through all the prophets (24).
 3. This is what God predicted to Abraham (25).
 - D. Here’s the bottom line (26).
 1. God desires to bless us.
 2. God desires to turn our lives around.
- III. We can expect mixed responses to Jesus (4:1-4).
 - A. Some will reject the message (1-3).
 - B. Some will receive it (4).
 1. They heard.
 2. They believed.
 3. They became part of the church.

Take Inventory: It is all about Jesus. Is that true in your life?

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

It’s all about Jesus.

1 Corinthians 8:6, “There is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.”

Listen to the following jargon and see if you can decipher it: “Scintillate, scintillate, globule vivific, Fain would I fathom thy nature specific. Loftily poised in the ether capacious, Strongly resembling a gem carbonaceous.”

When translated it means, “Twinkle, twinkle, little star, How I wonder what you are, Up above the world so high, Like a diamond in the sky.”²

That’s how I feel sometimes in this age of political correctness. The motto seems to be, why say something in five clear words if you can cloud it with fifty?

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For an earlier development of this text, see the Acts series preached at WBC in 2001.

² Unknown source

When I go to see a doctor, I don't want political correctness. "Give it to me straight, doc!" is what I'm thinking. I want the truth in clear, concise terms. My hunch is that you do, too.

That's what I love about the Bible. It gives it to us "straight," without pulling any punches.

It's also why I'm committed to biblical, expository preaching. When God's Word is clearly preached, it acts as a doctor of the soul. It presents us with the truth about God, about ourselves, and about our desperate need for a Savior.

And if there's one subject where there's no room for empty rhetoric, it's this one. People need to hear the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, *about Jesus*.

That's our mission as a church. God calls us to present *straight talk about Jesus* to the world. But what does it mean in practical terms to talk straight about Jesus? What does God want us to tell people? We find the answer in Acts 3.

Acts 3 records the second sermon preached by Peter after the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost. There are some differences between the sermons Peter preached in Acts 2 and Acts 3, but there's one huge similarity. In both messages, Peter talked straight about Jesus.

We can learn from his example. Indeed, we must. If we're going to accomplish our mission, we need to accept three responsibilities as demonstrated by Peter in his sermon recorded in Acts 3:11-4:4.

First of all, like Peter...

I. We must confront wrong responses to Jesus (3:11-16).

We explored the occasion that prompted Peter's message last time, but let's retrace our steps. One day, Peter and John traveled to the temple for the afternoon prayer time. As they prepared to enter they heard the wail of a crippled beggar. Peter said to him, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk (6)." And Peter hoisted the man to his feet. Instantly, his feet and ankles became strong. It was a miracle!

The healed beggar began to walk, jump, and praise God. The people in the temple were amazed at the sight, for they knew this man. He was over forty years old, and had been lame since birth.

Verse 11 tells what happened next, "While the beggar [notice he's still unnamed] held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade."

It's interesting to see the healed man's high regard for Peter and John. He "held on to" them, no doubt out of gratitude to God, for these were the instruments that God used to heal him. We ought to have great appreciation for those God uses to help us.

One of the things that breaks the heart of a minister is when people he led to Christ shut their hearts to him. That happened to Paul with the Corinthians and it prompted the apostle to pen these words (2 Cor 6:11-13), "We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also."

God is honored when we hold in high esteem the people He used to introduce us to the Savior. This beggar certainly did.

As a result of all the commotion, an estimated crowd of several thousand people gathered in Solomon's Colonnade. When God works in mighty ways it attracts a crowd.

Solomon's Colonnade was located on the east side of the temple. It was a corridor where the Lord Himself had ministered (John 10:23) and where the church met for worship (Acts 5:12). It was a perfect place to preach a sermon.

The first thing Peter did in his message was to confront wrong responses to Jesus. Some of us are not very comfortable with confrontation, but it's vital. In fact, in the act of preaching it's vital for two parties.

A. This is vital for the preacher (11-13a). I want you to notice what Peter did in his introductory words (12), "When Peter saw this, he said to them: '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?'"

There's a great way to start a message, by asking a question. In this Peter asked two. *Why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us?*

Then Peter explained (13), "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus." Notice how Peter put the present miracle in the perspective of redemptive history. We have such an individualistic view of God in our day. We fail to appreciate the past and the corporate nature of God's work.

Not Peter. He made sure his listeners saw the connection. The miracle you've just seen today was accomplished by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

But why? Why did God heal this man? Peter says God did it to glorify Jesus.

Don't miss the first thing Peter did. He put the spotlight where it belongs, on *Jesus*. It wasn't Peter's power that healed this man. It was God's. And God did it to elevate His servant, Jesus. Peter wanted his hearers to know that.

Let that sink in. As servants of God we mustn't take ourselves too seriously. We're merely the middlemen!

Before Sherry and I were married we dated for four years. Most of that time I was living in a different town so we wrote a lot of letters. It was the highpoint of my day to open my mailbox and see a letter with Sherry's name on the return address. But I don't ever recall running after the mailman and giving him a hug! He didn't write the letter. He just put it in my box.

When it comes to preaching, the preacher is the middleman. It's his job to deliver the goods. He doesn't own the goods. He just puts them in the box.

Peter didn't allow the spotlight to remain on him. He didn't take credit for the miracle, and what's more, in his sermon to follow he doesn't talk about himself. His subject is Christ.

Any true servant of God will refuse to take credit for what God does because he's gripped by two realities.

1. *People don't need to hear about us.* Can you give eternal life? No.

2. *People need to hear about Jesus.* "God has glorified His servant Jesus."

The term Peter used is highly significant. He refers to Jesus as God's *servant*. That was a messianic title in the Old Testament. The prophet Isaiah used it, "See, my *servant* will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted (Isa 52:13)." And then Isaiah launched into what is perhaps the most significant Old Testament messianic prophecy, the description of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53.

Peter is saying, "The Servant that Isaiah predicted has come! He's the One responsible for this miracle. His name is Jesus!"

In preaching the preacher must confront wrong responses to Jesus. He must do so, first of all, in his own life. This confrontation is vital for the preacher. Secondly...

B. This is vital for the hearer (13b-16). Know this. No one listens to a sermon without a track record. We've all responded to Jesus before, either positively or negatively.

A God-honoring preacher knows that. He knows that his listeners entered the world with sinful hearts that respond wrongly to Jesus. And he knows that the only course of hope is to face up to those wrong responses. Indeed, the hearer as well as the preacher must come to grips with two realities.

1. *We must come to grips with our past sin (13b-15).* That's what Peter helped his hearers to do. Listen to what he told them—pay careful attention to his use of the second person plural pronoun “you.”

“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.”

I'm challenged by Peter's straightforward preaching. He didn't present his listeners with theories. He challenged them with the facts. To be specific, he confronted them about their wrong responses to Jesus.

He rehearses their crimes. You delivered up Jesus. You denied Jesus (I'm sure that along with the boldness there was great compassion when Peter said this. Remember, he too had denied Jesus). You disowned Jesus in exchange for the murderer, Barabbas. You killed Jesus!

And notice the various titles Peter uses to refer to Jesus. In addition to being God's “servant,” He is “the Holy and Righteous One,” and “the Author of life.” Peter makes it clear that this was no ordinary man they had killed.

These were serious crimes. Is Peter being harsh? Is he simply pointing fingers with all this *you...you...you*? Is he being judgmental? Not at all. He's throwing out the lifeline.

Beloved, there's no hope for us if we're unwilling to face up to our true condition.

Suppose you were in the middle of a huge lake and a storm was raging. And suppose you fell out of the boat and were thrashing in the water. If I threw the lifeline to you, how would you respond? Would you say, “What's that for? Don't you think I can swim? I'm a good swimmer. I'm offended! I can make it on my own. I don't need anybody's help!”? Is that how you'd respond? I doubt it. You wouldn't be offended. You'd take the lifeline, thankful that someone took seriously your precarious condition.

Listen. If preaching is truly biblical, it will do what Peter did. It will compel people to see their guilt before God. It will insist they come to grips with the painful reality of their past sin.

Have you done that? Have you faced up to your crimes? You say, “But I didn't kill Jesus? I'm not responsible for His death.” Oh really? Know this, dear friend. Christ died, not for His sins, but *ours*.

Alas! And did my Savior bleed? And did my Sovereign die?

Would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?

Was it for crimes that I have done He groaned upon the tree?

Amazing pity! Grace unknown! And love beyond degree!

Yes, He died for *our crimes*. That included the Jews in Peter's audience, but that also includes us.

That's what Isaiah said, “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the

punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isa 53:4-7).”

Preaching that is truly biblical helps the hearer come to grips with his past sinfulness. There must be conviction before there can be conversion. But it doesn't leave him in the past. We must deal with a second reality.

2. *We must come to grips with His—that's Christ's—present sufficiency (16).* Listen to Peter, “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.”

A person can acknowledge his sinfulness and still be lost. Something else is needed. He must grasp *His present sufficiency*.

What does that mean? What is Christ sufficient to do? Peter told the crowd that it was by faith in the name of Jesus that the beggar was healed. The healing came from Jesus. But that's not all, for Peter says the faith came “though him,” too [“by him” in the KJV].

Oh, the sufficiency of Christ's power! When a person places his faith in the name, that is, in the *authority* of Jesus, a transformation occurs. In the beggar's case, a crippled man was given new legs, but more than new legs. He received “complete healing” [“perfect soundness” in the KJV] which included a new heart too, as evidenced by his desire to praise God (9). And it was all accomplished by the power of Jesus' name.

Ponder the name *Jesus*. It's actually the Greek form of the Hebrew name, Joshua, which means, “The Lord is salvation.” It's the name the angel told Joseph to give the baby in Matthew 1:21, explaining, “You shall call his name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.”

Listen carefully. If you perceive Jesus to be only a great teacher or moral example, you've been hoodwinked by a distorted view of Jesus.

John MacArthur explains, “There have been many false views of Jesus throughout history, from noble example to political revolutionary. Yet to imagine a Jesus who was not the Savior is as foolish as to imagine a Shakespeare who was not a writer, or a Rembrandt who was not a painter. His name is Jesus not because He is our example, guide, leader, or friend, though He is all those things. His name is Jesus because He is our savior.”³

It's sad, yet true. There are people all over the world this very moment—some of them are sitting in church pews—who are holding to unbiblical views of Jesus. Consequently, they are still in their sins, guilty before God. What do they need? They desperately need to hear *straight talk about Jesus*.

We must tell them. Like Peter, we must confront wrong responses to Jesus. That's our first responsibility. Here's our second.

II. We must call for right responses to Jesus (3:17-26).

In part two of his sermon Peter extends the invitation. To be honest, it's a very different kind of invitation than you would hear most preachers today give. Peter clarifies four elements for us.

A. Here's what we must do (17-19a). Verse 17, “Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders.” Notice that Peter doesn't talk down to his hearers, but identifies with them. He calls them “brothers.” So many preachers today

³ John MacArthur, *Acts*, p. 108.

talk to and about sinners as though they were the enemy. They're not. They're victims of the enemy just like we once were—and still would be apart from the grace of God.

Peter also acknowledged that they committed their crime in “ignorance.” Did their ignorance excuse their sin? No, but it did indicate they hadn't been fully aware of the heinousness of their offense. Remember what Jesus prayed from the Cross? “Father, forgive them; for they *know not what they do* (Luke 23:34).”

They didn't know what they were doing. But God did. Verse 18, “But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.

Warren Wiersbe is right, “There are mysteries here that the human mind cannot fully understand, so we must accept them by faith. God had a plan from all eternity, yet His plan did not force men to act against their own will.”⁴

Why did Christ die on the cross? He did so because wicked men rejected Him. But these wicked men didn't catch God off guard. They acted in accordance with His sovereign, predetermined will.

What's Peter doing? He's preparing his listeners to make right responses to Jesus. In verse 19 he offers the actual invitation. He calls for the response, a twofold decision.

1. *We must repent.* Repentance is more than simply feeling sorry. It's the change of mind and will that leads to the transformation of life. As the little Sunday School girl said, “It means feeling sorry enough to quit!”⁵

In order to give the right response to Jesus, we must repent. It's a command, an oft neglected command in modern evangelistic presentations, but a command nonetheless. If you are not willing to leave your life of sin, you cannot be saved.

2. *We must turn to God.* The Greek text actually says, “Flee to God.” “That was probably intended to suggest a powerful image,” says James Boice. “In Israel there were cities set aside from other cities as ‘cities of refuge.’”⁶

Do you remember the purpose of these cities? If you accidentally killed someone, you could flee to one of these cities and be protected from an avenger of blood. No relative of the deceased could call for your neck in retaliation.

These cities were not shelters for real murderers. If you were guilty of intentional killing, you would be tried and executed. But if the killing was accidental—what we might call “manslaughter” rather than “murder in the first degree,” then the killer could flee to the city of refuge and be protected.

That's what Peter told his hearers to do. Yes, you committed a serious crime, but there's hope for you. God has provided a place of refuge, and the refuge is Christ Himself. Repent and turn to God.

That's what we, too, must do. “What will happen if we do?” you ask.

B. Here's what we will receive (19b-21). Peter says that if we will repent and turn to God, we will receive three benefits.

1. *The first benefit is forgiveness.* Verse 19, “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.”

The verb “wiped out” is quite vivid. In ancient times, writers wrote on papyrus and the ink had no acid in it. Consequently, the ink didn't bite into the papyrus like modern ink does with paper. It merely lay on the surface. Thus, if a man made a mistake and wished to erase it, he simply wiped it away with a wet sponge.

⁴ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Vol. 1, p. 413.

⁵ Wiersbe, p. 413.

⁶ James Boice, *Acts*, p. 68.

What a beautiful illustration of what God does with our sins! Many years ago John Newton pondered this amazing truth and penned these words:

*Alas! I knew not what I did,
But now my tears are vain;
Where shall my trembling soul be hid?
For I my Lord have slain.
A second look He gave, which said:
"I freely all forgive;
This blood is for they ransom shed;
I die, that thou mayest live."
Thus, while His death my sin displays
In all its blackest hue;
Such is the mystery of grace,
It seals my pardon too.
With pleasing grief and mournful joy
My spirit now is filled,
That I should such a life destroy,
Yet live through Him I killed.*

O sinner, do you hear what God offers you? You can experience forgiveness! Your sins can be wiped out.

You may be thinking, "But what I've done is too wicked. I'm too far gone for God." No! Those who killed the Author of life weren't. Peter offered them forgiveness. And the offer goes for us, too.

2. *The next benefit is times of refreshing.* Notice the conclusion of verse 19, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that...times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

This primarily is a national promise. Remember, Peter is talking to a group of people, Jewish people. He's calling not only for personal repentance, but also for *national* repentance. He's inviting the people that had just rejected their Messiah to repent of their crime. If they did repent as a nation, and if they did believe, the Messiah would return and establish times of refreshing.

Of course, the nation did not repent—as God knew they wouldn't—and in time the gospel moved from the Jews to the Samaritans (Acts 8) to the Gentiles (Acts 10).⁷ God's not through with Israel though. One day Israel will repent and the times of refreshing will come. Romans 11 talks about that.

I also see here a promise for the individual. Without God life gets pretty stale. Our souls feel barren and dry as a desert. But that all changes the moment we repent and turn to God. We then experience times of refreshing.

3. *The ultimate benefit is Christ Himself.* Listen to Peter again, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that... [verse 20] he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you -- even Jesus.²¹ He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets."

Right now, Christ is in heaven. But the day is coming when He will return. When God's plan for this age is complete, God will send His Son back and we who know Him will be with Him! At that time Christ is going to restore everything just as He promised in Scripture.

⁷ As Wiersbe explains, p. 414.

Think of what those words meant to Peter's audience. They'd just missed the Messiah. But they didn't just miss Him. They killed Him! For fourteen centuries they'd waited for the Messiah, and when He came they blew their chance.

How Peter's words must have soothed their broken hearts! It wasn't too late. The Messiah was coming again, and by repenting and turning to God now they could still "get in on" the benefits of His messianic kingdom. Element #3...

C. Here's why (22-25). In verses 22-25, Peter tells his audience why they must respond rightly to Jesus. He gives them three evidences to substantiate his invitation.

1. *This is what God predicted through Moses (22-23).* "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.²³ Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.'"

That's a quotation from Deuteronomy 18, a text Peter's Jewish audience knew well. Moses said that if you reject the Messiah, the consequences will be severe. You will be *cut off*.

2. *This is what God predicted through all the prophets (24).* "Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days." Not just Moses but *all* the prophets predicted these days. What days? The days in conjunction with the Messiah's coming. Do you need more proof? Here it is...

3. *This is what God predicted to Abraham (25).* "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.'"

There's another Old Testament quotation, this time from Genesis 22:18. I'm challenged by Peter's knowledge of the Scriptures. Remember, he didn't know when he left the house he was going to preach this sermon. But when the opportunity presented itself, he preached Christ. And He knew the Word so well he could quote it with clarity and conviction. He was prepared to show people from Scripture why they needed Christ.

Is that true of you? Then came element #4 in the call for a right response...

D. Here's the bottom line (26). "When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

Peter brings his message to a close by talking in bottom-line-terms. Two things are true.

1. *God desires to bless us.* When God raised Jesus from the dead He sent Him "first to you to bless you." I recognize that Peter here is talking to the Jews that rejected Jesus. He told them God sent Jesus *first* to them, implying that God would bless others later.

Which He did. And which is why there is hope for us today. God desires to bless us.

2. *God desires to turn our lives around.* Don't miss this. The turning is essential for the blessing. God blesses us *by* turning us from our wicked ways. He doesn't bless us so we can keep living the same old way we were. When He blesses us, He turns our lives around. And no one is beyond the power of His reach.

According to the record, the Methodist preacher Samuel Chadwick used to pray for "a Lazarus" in every campaign. By that he was asking God for some "great sinner" whose conversion would shock the community, an idea he got from John 12:9-11. In meeting after meeting God answered his prayers as one wicked man after another was converted and became a testimony to the power of the gospel.⁸

⁸ Wiersbe, p. 415.

Beloved, let's go after the hard cases! Let's confront wrong responses to Jesus. Then let's call for right responses to Jesus. If we do...

III. We can expect mixed responses to Jesus (4:1-4).

That's what Peter's sermon produced as the first four verses of chapter 4 reveal. It will be no different for us. When we preach Christ...

A. Some will reject the message (1-3). "The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people.² They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.³ They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day."

Remember, Peter and John healed the cripple around 3:00 in the afternoon. Then the crowd assembled and Peter began preaching. It was "evening" when the authorities seized them. We can assume it was mid-summer since Pentecost had occurred at the first of June. That would indicate they were arrested around 6:30 or so. Jewish law prohibited holding a trial after sunset.⁹

Here's a common reaction. If you can't deny the message, eliminate the messenger. That's what the Jewish leaders did for reasons we'll consider further next time.

But for now, notice how they refused to take an objective look at the evidence. F. F. Bruce explains, "It is particularly striking that neither on this nor any subsequent occasion (so far as our information goes) did the Sanhedrin take any serious action to disprove the apostles' central affirmation—the resurrection of Jesus. Had it seemed possible to refute them on this point, how readily would the Sanhedrin have seized the opportunity! Had they succeeded, how quickly and completely the new movement would have collapsed!"¹⁰

They didn't try to disprove the message. They just rejected it.

After Peter preached his first sermon, there's no opposition mentioned. Now it begins. Just because what we say upsets some people doesn't mean the preaching was bad. The fact is, some people will reject the message. But thankfully...

B. Some will receive it (4). "But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand."

What's involved in receiving the message? Luke mentions three activities.

1. *They heard.* They heard the word.

2. *They believed.* Why did they believe? It wasn't just because they saw the healed man, but according to the text because they "heard" the message.

Beloved, the preaching of God's Word is powerful. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Rom 10:17)." There's a third activity that accompanies a proper response to the Word.

3. *They became part of the church.* Luke says "the number grew." What number? Did the early church have a roster? Probably not on a piece of paper. But they knew who was part of the church and who wasn't. When a person became a believer in Christ, he became part of the church.

Luke mentions the number 5,000. As of this day that was the number of men in the Jerusalem church. It's the last mention of a specific number in Acts, probably because from this point on the church grew too fast to keep an accurate count.

⁹ William LaSor, *Church Alive*, p. 63.

¹⁰ F. F. Bruce, *Acts*, p. 103.

There's a desperate need today for what Peter gave his first century audience—*straight talk about Jesus*. We must confront *wrong responses* to Jesus, call for *right responses* to Jesus, and not be surprised by *mixed responses*. That is our mission. Will you accept it? Will you resolve today to do what Peter did? One final matter...

Take Inventory: It is all about Jesus. Is that true in your life?