

**Text: Acts 3:12-19**

**Theme: Repent and Turn to God**

**Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi on 26/04/2009 at 10.30am.**

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After the miraculous healing of the crippled beggar at the temple gate, the people were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to the man. What does this mean? This question provided Peter with the only excuse he needed for his first sermon. In this sermon Peter reminds his listeners of their Jewish ancestry and promises earlier made by God to Abraham.

Peter makes it clear which God he is speaking of. In our modern world, there are so many different (and strange) ideas about God, it is helpful for us to be clear about which God we serve and speak about. We can say “God” when talking to someone else, without realizing that our idea of God and their idea of God are completely different. Perhaps it would be helpful for us to more carefully define the God we are speaking of: The God of the Bible, the **God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**, who took on the human flesh on that first Christmas.

Peter establishes the link between this God and Jesus Christ, His servant. The focus of the sermon is not about Peter or anything he has done, but all about Jesus. This is the same person that you handed over to be killed. You disowned him. (3:13).

Peter boldly lays the guilt of Jesus’ death squarely where it belongs. **Pilate**, the Roman governor, was **determined to let Him go**, but the Jewish mob insisted on the crucifixion of Jesus (John 18:29-19:16).

Were the Jews guilty of the death of Jesus? Yes, but so were the Gentiles. The Romans would not have crucified Jesus without the Jews, and the Jews could not have crucified Jesus without the Romans. God made certain that both Jew and Gentile shared in the guilt of Jesus’ death. Assuming that few if any of the individuals within the sound of Peter’s voice were literally involved in Jesus’ death, inasmuch as many years had now passed since that event, he must have been referring to what we might call corporate guilt. In other words, while they had not literally “delivered up” Jesus, yet the same values and emotions, the same characteristics of human nature which had been at work in the people involved in the crucifixion, are working in human hearts today. The relevance for us is that it’s no less true for us than for Peter’s hearers. It’s a mistake to assign responsibility for Jesus’ death to the Jews or the Roman soldiers any more than to the rest of us who, had we been present, would almost surely have done much the same as those who were there.

In fact, it was not political intrigue or circumstances that put Jesus on the cross. It was our sin. If you want to know who put Jesus on the cross, look at me – or look in the mirror.

Peter was not afraid to confront their sin, and he shows amazing boldness. “One commentator says that the miracle of the speech of Peter is a far more wonderful one than the miracle wrought in the healing of the man who lay at the Beautiful Gate.” (Morgan)

One of the ironies of the crucifixion of Jesus is that while the crowd rejected Jesus, they embraced a criminal and a murderer named Barabbas (Luke 23:13-25, John 18:39-40). Peter is boldly confronting this audience!

**“By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know is made strong.” (3:16).** Peter emphasizes that it is in the **name** of Jesus that this man has been made whole. The healing has occurred through the authority and power of Jesus, not the authority and power of Peter. Peter will not even take credit for the *faith* that was exercised in the healing (**yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this complete healing**).

“In Semitic thought, a name does not just identify or distinguish a person; it expresses the very nature of his being. Hence the power of the person is present and available in the name of the person.” (Longenecker)

Despite all the evil they did to Jesus, it did not change or derail God’s plan. God can take the most horrible evil and use it for good. Joseph could say to his brothers, “*you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good.*” (Genesis 50:20) The same principle was at work in the crucifixion of Jesus and is at work in our lives (Romans 8:28). God has a way of taking the most unlikely things and somehow fitting them into His purposes and using them for his plans. In everything, God works for good. Robert Leighton, after a serious illness said: “I have learned more of God since I came to this bed than in all my life before.” It was out of the thorn in his flesh that Paul discovered the all sufficient grace of God (2 Corinthians 2:7-9).

Here, we have a great response to a powerful sermon - the people at the end of the sermon ask the preacher, “What can we do?” How I wished that more of our sermons evoke that kind of response.

### **3:19-21**

Peter tells them, “Repent and turn to God.”

There's a lot to think about here and to understand the full measure of this promise we need to define some of our terms. Words like "repent" and "sin" are not easily defined words for the average person today, even those who take seriously their Christian faith. One theologian has observed that sin is a darkness discernible only by the light of salvation. But how about repentance?

Richard Trench said: “It is that mighty change in mind, heart, and life, wrought by the (Holy) Spirit.”

- It is a change of mind that relates to the three “S”- Sin, Self and the Saviour.

Often, we confuse Regret, Remorse and Repentance as though they mean the same thing:

Regret is being sorry - mentally (King Saul for example).

Remorse is being sorry - mentally and emotionally (like Judas Iscariot).

Repentance is being sorry - mentally, emotionally, and volitionally (with your will).

The Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*, is composed of two parts: *meta*, meaning change, and *noia*, meaning mind. A change of mind, direction, and will.

Repentance does not describe being sorry alone, but describes the act of turning around. And as he used it in chapter two, here also Peter makes **repent** a word of *hope*. You have done wrong, but you can turn around to get it right with God! Turn to God, be **converted**: Conversion is a work God does in us. Being a Christian is not “turning over a new leaf,” it is being a *new creation in Christ Jesus* (2 Corinthians 5:17). Peter is saying, turn around in your thinking and actions.

Look inside yourself and you will find ignorance and lack of knowledge, the type that made the mob deny and send Jesus to the stake. Peter is bold in addressing sin, yet like the Saviour, he also is bold in extending mercy. You might be ignorant and guilty, but there is hope. You might be rebellious and scornful, but there's hope. Look at the cross and see what your sin did and there find forgiveness if you will but turn to God. The very things you are guilty of are why Jesus died.

Our text says that your sins will be wiped out! What good news! No more washing our hands like Pilate. No more Barabbas guilt. Do you know what it means for sins to be wiped out? It doesn't mean it was crumpled up and thrown away. Wiped out does not mean saved in a file only God can find on his computer. Sin is not even burned in a fire where only ashes remain. When Jesus died on the cross and when we are forgiven, it's as if our sins, which were written in black on an erasable memo board, are forever erased with no shadows or residue remaining. It's a brand new board! What Peter's hearers thought of was the precursor to the modern kitchen's memo board. In those days, scribes wrote on papyrus and the ink used had no acid in it. Therefore it did not sink into the papyrus, like our modern ink does. One could simply take a sponge and wipe it away. Colossians 2:13-14 says, "He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross."

Who do you know that is ignorant to the claims and truth of Jesus? There are plenty in this day and age. Ignorance is not an excuse, but it does give us a beautiful opportunity to tell others the truth.

As the airplane was filling with passengers before takeoff, a lady saw a vacant seat beside a preacher. "Is this seat saved?" she asked. "I don't know," he replied, "but I am. Sit down and let me tell you about it." It's not me. It's Jesus! And you need him!

Let me close by telling you of an incident in a court room:

*The whole town had gathered in the courthouse for the trial. The prosecuting attorney called his first witness, an elderly woman, to the stand. He approached her and asked, "Mrs. Jones, do you know me?"*

*She responded, "Why, yes, I do know you, Mr. Williams. I've known you since you were a young boy. And, frankly, you've been a big disappointment to me. You lie, you cheat on your wife, you manipulate people and talk about them behind their backs. You think you're a rising big shot, but you haven't the brains to realize you will never amount to anything more than a two-bit paper pusher. Yes, I know you."*

*The lawyer was stunned. Not knowing what else to do, he pointed across the room and asked, "Mrs. Jones, do you know the defence attorney?"*

*She replied, "Why, of course I do. I've known Mr. Bradley since he was a youngster, too. I used to baby-sit him. And he, too, has been a real disappointment to me. He's lazy, bigoted, and has a drinking problem. The man can't build a normal relationship with anyone, and his law practice is one of the shoddiest in the entire state. Yes, I know him."*

*At this point, the judge rapped the courtroom to silence and called both counsellors to the bench.*

*In a very quiet voice, he said with menace, “If either of you ask her if she knows me, I’ll hold you both in contempt of court!”*

*Many of us go to great lengths to hide the truth about ourselves. We live behind all kinds of masks that conceal who we really are. We buy into the philosophy that image is everything.*

*Why do we do this? In most cases, it’s because we’re afraid of rejection. We don’t think people will like us if they know anything about our past, our failures, our inadequacies, or our problems. So we do everything we can to look cool, successful, or happy—when, in reality, we are none of those things.*

*Keep in mind that the people who love you the most are those who know you the best. Most parents are a good example of that. You may hide a lot from them, but they know you pretty well. They’ve been there when you messed up again and again—yet they keep right on loving you.*

*God knows more about you than even your parents know. In fact, he knows more about you than you know about you (Psalm 139). Yet he loves you more than you will ever know.*

*Does God just ignore your past? No, but he can forgive it. And when he forgives, he forgets. That doesn’t mean he doesn’t know what you’ve done; it just means that he no longer holds what you’ve done against you. Your sins are blotted out, removed from your life’s résumé “as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12).*

*In the story, the judge was afraid to hear what that woman might say about him. But we don’t have to be afraid to hear what God has to say about us. If we have received forgiveness for our sins through faith in Christ, he has nothing but good things to say! Draw near to him and listen to his voice.( Youth Specialties)*