



The Message that Accompanies the Miracle (Acts 3:11-26)

Commentary: Week Eight

***Scripture divisions used in our series and various commentaries differ from each other.
This is the reason for the occasional discrepancy between
the verse range listed in our series and the commentary notes provided in our Scripture Studies.*

New American Commentary¹

2. Peter's Sermon from Solomon's Colonnade [3:12-26](#)

Comparison of this sermon with Peter's sermon at Pentecost reveals many of the same elements. The elements in common are the address ("Men, Israelites"), beginning the sermon by correcting a false impression, reference to God's "glorifying" Jesus, a contrast of Jesus' death with his resurrection, reference to the apostles' witness to the resurrection, the responsibility of the Jerusalemites for Jesus' death, extensive proofs from the prophets, references to Jesus' exaltation and God's divine purposes, and an appeal for repentance. The two sermons contain significant differences as well. For example, the scriptural proofs in the Pentecost sermon aim at establishing the messianic status of Jesus. Those in this sermon are aimed at the need for the Jews to repent and accept Jesus as the one sent from God. A far greater proportion of this sermon is devoted to the appeal. Also there are new elements in this sermon: an emphasis on faith, a softer treatment of the Jewish responsibility for Jesus' death, and a number of striking, perhaps early Jewish-Christian titles for Jesus, such as Servant, Holy and Righteous One, Author of life, and Prophet-like-Moses. The speech itself falls into two main portions. First, Peter established the relationship between the healing of the lame man and the basic Christian proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ ([3:12-16](#)). Then he appealed to the Jews to repent and accept Christ as the Messiah sent from God ([3:17-26](#)).

[3:12](#) Verses [12](#) and [16](#) go closely together. Verse [12](#) raises the question about the power behind the man's healing. Verse [16](#) provides the answer. In between is inserted the basic kerygma of the death and resurrection of Christ and the Jewish responsibility in those events. The basic function of vv. [13-15](#) is to establish the Jewish guilt in rejecting Jesus. The remainder of the sermon is basically an appeal to repent and affirm Christ.

Peter began by seeking to correct any misunderstanding that he or John had healed the man by their own power or piety. No, it was faith in the name of Jesus that healed the man (v. [16](#)). But how could the name of Jesus have such power? Verses [13-15](#) answer that question. The power is his by virtue of his glorification (v. [13](#)) and his resurrection (v. [15](#)). The "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" had glorified his servant Jesus, raising him from the dead (v. [15](#)). The patriarchal formula was a familiar one in Judaism (cf. [Exod 3:6](#)). It is perhaps not by accident that the same formula appears in [Luke 20:37](#), a passage that deals with the resurrection. God is the God of the living. The glorification refers to Christ's exaltation to God's right hand. As the glorified, risen One, Christ has the power to grant healing in his name.

1. John B. Polhill, *New American Commentary – Volume 26: Acts*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 129-136.

[3:13–15](#) One is struck by the unusual title “servant” (*pais*) applied here to Jesus. It is not a common title for Jesus in the New Testament, occurring only here and in v. [26](#) and twice in chap. [4](#) (vv. [27](#), [30](#)). The usage seems to be basically liturgical in chap. [4](#), for it is applied there to David as well as Christ (v. [25](#)). Here in chap. [3](#), particularly in a context dealing with the *death* of Jesus, it is tempting to see an allusion to Christ as the suffering servant of Isaiah. This becomes even more likely when one considers the possible allusions to the servant psalms that run throughout vv. [13–14](#), in the references to “glorification” ([Isa 52:13](#)), the “righteous one” ([Isa 53:11](#)), and being “handed over” or “delivered up” (*paradidomi*, twice in LXX of [Isa 53:12](#)).

Finally, the most likely prophecies of Christ’s suffering, referred to in [3:18](#), would be those of [Isa 52:13–53:12](#), the passage quoted in [Acts 8:32–33](#). The suffering servant concept is prominent throughout the New Testament. Perhaps the reason the title only occurs in the early chapters of Acts is that the Greek word used in Isaiah for servant (*pais*) can be translated “son” as well and so was assimilated into the more familiar “son of God” confession in the Greek-speaking church. Indeed, that very tendency appears in the *King James Version* of [Acts 3:13](#), [26](#). The emphasis in the use of a servant Christology in [Acts 3:13](#), [26](#) is not on the vicarious death but on the election of Christ as servant. God has chosen him, sent him, and exalted him. The Jewish guilt lies in their rejection and denial of God’s chosen servant.

Even though God glorified Jesus, the Jerusalemites did the opposite, handing him over to death and disowning him before Pilate (v. [13b](#)). The best commentary on this statement is the passion narrative in [Luke 23:13–25](#). There Pilate is shown to have attempted to release Jesus three times, each being rebuffed by the Jews. So here Pilate is said to have decided to let him go. Both here and in the Gospel, Pilate was primarily a witness to the guilt of the Jerusalem Jews. He “surrendered Jesus to their will” ([Luke 23:25](#)). Likewise the Jewish request for Barabbas, a “murderer,” is fully set forth in [Luke 23:18–19](#), [25](#). One should not miss the irony in v. [14](#). The Jerusalemites requested that a murderer be released to them, for they were themselves murderers. They killed “the author of life” (v. [15](#)). But the seeming defeat of the cross ended in victory: “God raised him from the dead.” Peter and John were themselves witnesses to the reality of his resurrection. The guilt of the Jerusalem Jews was well established. Their real guilt was, however, not so much in their delivering God’s chosen one to death as in their denial of Jesus (vv. [13–14](#)). Peter continued to emphasize this in the remainder of his sermon. God sent the Christ to bless them, the sons of the covenant (v. [25](#)), but they disowned him.

In vv. [14–15](#) three additional terms are applied to Christ—the Holy One, the Righteous One, and the Author of life. The Holy One is a title in the Old Testament applied to Elisha ([2 Kgs 4:9](#)) and Aaron ([Ps 106:16](#), RSV). In the New Testament it appears to be a messianic term. Demons ([Mark 1:24](#)) and men ([John 6:69](#)) confessed Jesus as “Holy One of God.” It occurs also in [1 John 2:20](#) (“holy one”) and in [Rev 3:7](#) (“him who is holy”) as a designation for Christ. There is some evidence for the messianic use of Righteous One prior to Christianity; it appears as a title for the Messiah in *1 Enoch* 38:2; 46:3; 53:6 and *Pss. Sol.* 17:35. In [Zech 9:9](#), a Christian *testimonium* (cf. [Matt 21:5](#)), the messianic King is described as “righteous.” The title appears also in [Acts 7:52](#) and [22:14](#). Finally there is the term “author [*archēgos*] of life.” The term occurs only here, in [5:31](#), and twice in Hebrews ([2:10](#); [12:2](#)). The word has a double nuance, meaning either leader/pioneer or author/originator. In this passage either meaning could be applied. Christ is either the author, the originator and source of life, or he is the leader in the resurrection-life, the firstborn from the dead (cf. [26:23](#)). The term is not a messianic title as such but an apt summary of the work of Christ in a context that deals with resurrection.

[3:16](#) Having established that Christ has been exalted by God in light of his resurrection, and consequently that he is now in the position to dispense the divine Spirit and power, Peter answered his original question about the power behind the lame man’s healing (v. [16](#)). The Greek is complex and somewhat obscure, but the NIV probably renders it as clearly as it can be by separating it into two parallel statements, both of which emphasize two things active in the man’s healing—faith and the name

of Jesus. Ultimately the name, the power of Jesus, healed the man—not Peter’s or John’s power. But the power of Jesus worked through faith. Whose faith? That of the apostles or that of the man? Perhaps Luke deliberately left it open. Surely Peter worked by faith. But what about the man? If he had little faith to begin with, the miracle that led him to this point—clinging as he did to the apostles (v. [11](#))—was already bringing about in him the greater miracle of faith in Christ, the Author of life. Perhaps this is what Luke wanted us to see by emphasizing faith alone rather than the possessor of faith. For after all, faith is the greatest miracle of all, and that miracle stood open to all in Solomon’s Colonnade that day.

The concluding portion of Peter’s sermon can be divided into two parts, both relating to the need for the Jews to repent. Verses [17–21](#) give the basic call to repentance and the blessings God will grant them as a result. Verses [22–26](#) give scriptural support for the appeal.

[3:17–18](#) One is struck by the conciliatory tone of vv. [17–18](#). The Jews in Jerusalem acted “in ignorance” when they did not recognize Jesus as the Holy and Righteous One, the anointed Servant of God. In actuality he was the author of life for them, but they sent him to his death. This was a sin of ignorance. Had they known him for who he truly was, “they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” ([1 Cor 2:8](#)). Such sins were considered by the Jews as forgivable sins and were distinguished from conscious, intentional sins, which the Old Testament describes as those done “with a high hand” (RSV). Means of atonement were available for sins of ignorance, but not for intentional, deliberate sins (cf. [Num 15:27–31](#)). Jesus himself had recognized their ignorance in crucifying him and had already prayed for their forgiveness ([Luke 23:34](#)). Thus, Peter was offering the Jerusalem Jews a second chance. Once they had disowned the Christ. It was, however, a rejection in ignorance. Now they could accept Christ and be forgiven. Should they fail to do so once Peter gave them a full understanding of Christ’s true identity, it would be a wholly different matter, a deliberate, “high-handed” rejection.

In these passages that deal with the Jewish responsibility for Jesus’ death, it should be borne in mind that there are four mitigating emphases. One is this emphasis on ignorance. A second is that Acts nowhere contains a blanket condemnation of the Jews: only the Jerusalem Jews are given responsibility in Jesus’ death. In Paul’s speeches to the Jews of the dispersion, he never charged them with any guilt in Jesus’ crucifixion but made clear that only the Jerusalemites were responsible (cf. [Acts 13:27–28](#); cf. [Luke 13:33–34](#)). Third, the Gentiles are shown to have shared in the culpability (“lawless men,” [2:23](#); Pilate, [3:13](#)). Finally, the suffering of the Messiah was bound up with God’s own divine purposes (v. [18](#)): God foretold it, the prophets had spoken it, and the death of Christ fulfilled it. The mystery of the divine sovereignty worked through the tragedy born of human freedom to bring about God’s eternal purposes for the salvation of humanity (cf. [2:23f.](#)). God took the cross, the quintessence of human sin, and turned it into the triumph of the resurrection. But where did the prophets predict this suffering of Christ? Luke referred to such predictions often (cf. [Luke 24:46](#); [Acts 17:3](#); [26:22f.](#); significantly also [1 Pet 2:21f.](#)). The servant psalm of [Isa 52:13–53:12](#) immediately comes to mind, but the early Christians did not fail to note many other Old Testament passages as finding their ultimate realization in the passion of Christ (e.g., [Jer 11:19](#); [Zech 12:10](#); [13:7](#); [Pss 22](#); [31](#); [34](#); [69](#)).

[3:19–20](#) Peter gave the call to repentance (v. [19](#)) with two expressions: “repent” (*metanoēō*) and “turn to God” (*epistrephō*). The Jerusalem Jews were to have a complete change of mind, turning from their rejection of Christ and turning, or “returning,” to God. In rejecting God’s Messiah they had rejected God’s purpose for them. Accepting the Messiah would thus be a return to God. In vv. [19b–20](#) Peter gave the threefold result of their repentance: (1) their sins would be forgiven, (2) the “times of refreshing” would come upon them, and (3) God would send the Messiah whom he had appointed for them. The forgiveness of sins is clear enough. Throughout Acts repentance is closely connected with forgiveness; indeed it is the basis for forgiveness (cf. [2:38](#)).

The main sin Peter laid upon the Jerusalem Jews was their sin of ignorance in rejecting the Messiah. True forgiveness could only have come from their turning to God by accepting his Messiah. Then only would “the times of refreshing” come from the Lord. The phrase “times of refreshing” (*anapsyxis*) is difficult. The basic meaning of the word is the cooling off that comes from blowing, like the refreshment of a cool breeze. This rare biblical word occurs only here and once in the Septuagint ([Exod 8:11](#)), where it refers to the relief that came to Egypt after the plague of frogs ceased. It appears in the Jewish apocalypse [4 Ezra 11:46](#), where it refers to the final messianic times of Israel’s redemption. What is unclear is whether it indicates a temporary period of respite during the period of messianic woes preceding the end time or whether it pictures the final time itself. Probably the latter is intended. The term is likely synonymous with the concept of “restoration” in v. [21](#) and reflects Jewish messianic expectation. It was particularly appropriate to Peter’s sermon to the Jews in the temple square. The same can be said for the third result of their repentance—God’s sending the Messiah to them (v. [20](#)). This seems to reflect a common Jewish expectation that the Messiah would only come on the repentance of Israel. The reference is surely to the Messiah, as the presence of the articles indicates, “*the* Christ,” the Anointed One. He is described as having been “appointed for you,” i.e., “you Jews.”

[3:21](#) Verse [21](#) concludes Peter’s appeal with an explanation for why the Messiah was not then present. He must remain in heaven until the final time when God will restore everything. The best commentary on this concept is to be found in [1:6–11](#). The concept of restoration is basically the same as that about which the disciples questioned in [1:6](#). The Messiah’s present location in heaven presupposes the ascension and return at his Parousia ([1:9–11](#)). The question still remains: does [3:19–21](#) presuppose a Jewish messianic concept that understood the first coming of the Messiah as being predicated upon the repentance of Israel? The passage could surely be so viewed if taken in isolation from its context. In the context of Peter’s sermon, however, something quite different is expressed. The difference lies in the reference at the opening of his sermon to Jesus’ death and resurrection. The Messiah indeed has come as the glorified Servant, the Holy and Righteous One of God. But the Jerusalem Jews did not receive him as Messiah; they disowned him. He is indeed the Messiah appointed by God, but they failed to recognize and receive him as their Messiah. The Messiah will come again to restore his kingdom to Israel ([Rom 11:25–26](#)). Whether that will be a time of refreshing for Israel depends very much on their repentance and reception of Jesus as the Messiah. What was true for the Jews in Solomon’s Colonnade still holds true today. Only in receiving the Christ of God by repentance and turning to him is there forgiveness, refreshing, and restoration.

[3:22–23](#) Still continuing his appeal, Peter then gave the negative side. Jesus is depicted as the “prophet like Moses” whom God will “raise up” and the people must heed (v. [22](#)). Whoever does not listen to him will be utterly rooted out from the people (v. [23](#)). This is basically a quotation of [Deut 18:15, 19](#), supplemented by [Lev 23:29](#). The passage in Deuteronomy gives Moses’ promise that after he is gone God will continue to speak to Israel by raising up prophets who will speak his word.

Already before the coming of Christ, this passage was being interpreted messianically in some Jewish circles. Evidence exists, for instance, that the Qumran community expected a prophet like Moses as a part of their messianic expectation, and the Samaritans hoped in a prophet-messiah called the Taheb. In his Gospel, Luke often likened Jesus to a prophet (cf. [Luke 4:24](#); [7:16](#), [39](#); [24:19](#)), and in Stephen’s speech the Mosaic-prophetic typology is treated in detail (cf. [Acts 7:37](#)).

Two motifs in the tradition of Deuteronomy were particularly applicable to Christ. One was the prophetic motif. A new prophet would come, a newer and greater prophet than Moses—one whom the people must hear. The second was the reference to God’s “raising up” (*anistēmi*) this prophet. In the original context of Deuteronomy the word simply meant *to bring forth*, but in application to Christ it was sure to be seen as a reference to his resurrection. Most significant of all, use of this text shows Moses himself to have been one of the prophets who witnessed to Christ. [Leviticus 23:29](#) originally dealt with those in Israel who refused to observe the Day of Atonement. They were to be “rooted out,”

totally “cut off” from the community. The application to Christ means that those who do not listen to him and turn to him in repentance will no longer be a part of the people of God (v. [23b](#); cf. [Heb 2:3](#)).

[3:24–25](#) Moses was not the only prophet who predicted the Christ. “All the prophets from Samuel on” did so (v. [24](#)). Samuel was considered the first prophet after Moses, with Moses being the very first (cf. [13:20](#)). Thus all the prophets foretold these days, i.e., the days of salvation, the coming of Christ. For whom did the prophets speak if not for Israel? The Jews themselves were “the heirs of the prophets” (v. [25](#)). With their fathers God established his covenants. To take comfort in their privileged position was easy. John the Baptist had already warned them of the danger of relying on their descent from Abraham and membership in the covenant community ([Luke 3:8](#)). Here Peter reminded them of the content of the covenant with Abraham: “Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.” It was not Peter’s concern to emphasize the missionary imperative implicit in this promise to Abraham ([Gen 12:3](#)). At this point he probably was largely unaware of it himself; God had to prod him pretty hard to witness to Cornelius (chap. [10](#)). What Peter was concerned to do was to convince his Jewish hearers that God’s covenant with Abraham was fully realized in Jesus.

[3:26](#) The word “offspring” is singular here. Much as in [Gal 3:16](#), the Abrahamic covenant is related to Christ. He is that sole offspring in whom blessing would come. First and foremost, he was Israel’s Messiah. God sent him “first to you” (v. [26](#)). Verse [26](#) serves as a suitable closure to the sermon because it recapitulates various earlier themes: the servant role of Christ (v. [13](#)); God’s “raising him up,” with its overtone of resurrection (vv. [15](#), [22](#)); the need for the Jews to repent and “turn” (v. [19](#)). God sent his servant to them, to fulfill God’s blessing to Abraham by turning each of them from their evil ways. There is significance in the little word “first,” just as there is in Abraham’s blessing extending to “all peoples on earth.” It may have taken the apostles some time to fully realize the implications of the missionary imperative, but there it is. Peter was primarily concerned with the Jews. The gospel was preached to them first. Soon it would reach far beyond the boundaries of Judaism “to all the peoples on earth.”