

God raises Jesus

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[0 : 00] Let us turn now to the scripture we read in the New Testament in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, the third chapter, and to the last verse of the chapter, verse 26.

And to you first, God, having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you in turning every one of you from his iniquities.

There's a kind of teasing naivete about the question that Peter asked the people as he stood there in the temple.

He says to them, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power and godliness we had made this man whole?

Remember, Peter and John had just made a cripple, a congenital cripple. They had just made him whole again.

[1 : 11] The man was able to stand, to walk, to jump about. He had freedom of movement that he had never known in all his life. Indeed, I doubt if any of us who are normally fit can really understand what it is to be totally dependent upon other people.

To move from one spot to another. To be confined maybe to a wheelchair, to be carried. Not to be able even to go to the bathroom in privacy.

To be dependent on other people to take you from one spot to another. Do we understand? Can we enter into the mindset of people like that?

That's the kind of man that the apostles encountered here. And they made him strong. By the grace of the Lord Jesus, he was able to stand and to walk.

And of course he was making a fuss about it. He was drawing attention, the people's attention, to the fact that it was Peter and John who had brought about this change in his life.

[2 : 21] Even the people, as they looked at him, could hardly believe what they saw and heard. Can you wonder that they rushed together that such a fuss was created.

And people began to gawp and to stare. And even before they could ask any questions, they were staring at this man with whom they had been so familiar as what we would now call, I suppose, a paraplegic.

Somebody who was crippled and unable to walk. And he's holding on to Peter and John, advertising the fact that it's they who spoke the words that communicated this new strength to him. It's no wonder that the people were surprised. And yet, Peter has the coolness to ask them, Why do you stare at us?

Why does this surprise you? And we tell ourselves they would need to be almost bovine, not to be surprised. But of course, what Peter wanted to do was to redirect their surprise.

[3 : 42] To redirect their sense of wonder. To redirect their thinking. So that they would look not at Peter and John, not at the apostles, but beyond them, would recognize them to be the instruments and channels of the power of another.

He wanted, by means of this miracle, to bring about a new relationship. To make them think differently from what they had thought hitherto of Jesus of Nazareth.

It's by his grace, by the grace of God, that is channeled through his servant Jesus, that this man has been made whole and fit.

And Peter is anxious that the people should realize that he's not proclaiming a new or a strange God to them. They are met here in the temple, in Solomon's temple.

They're met here where there has been for decades and for generations, there has been the worship of Israel's covenant God, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

[5 : 04] And that is the God, Peter tells them, that is the God who has honored and vindicated his servant Jesus by this miracle which you see, the effect of which you see before their eyes.

Now, it's at this point that Peter is pressing upon what is a sole point, a sole part in the conscience of these people.

They knew about Jesus. They knew what their rulers and they themselves agreeing with their rulers had done to Jesus.

What had been done was not done in a corner, it was done publicly, it was much spoken about. Jesus of Nazareth had made certain claims he had claimed to be the Messiah, he had claimed to be the Son of God, he had claimed to be worthy of the worship of people, he had accepted worship that should be offered to God alone, he had exercised prerogatives that belonged only to God when he said to people, thy sins be forgiven thee.

they knew all this and they knew that their rulers and themselves had come to the conclusion that Jesus had no right to make those claims.

[6 : 35] They had come to the conclusion that he was an imposter. They had come to the conclusion that he was a dangerous, a politically dangerous, and a religiously blaspheming imposter.

And so they thought that they were acting in God's name and they were acting by God's authority and they were acting with God's approval and they were acting in terms of God's justice and in expectation of God's blessing when they took and crucified Jesus of Nazareth.

What Peter says to them now is you were totally wrong. You were not acting for God. You were acting against God.

You did not act with God's approval but you acted against the light that God had given you.

And the proof of it is here. The proof that you were at odds that you were, that your way and your conclusion and your deed was contrary to God.

[7 : 54] The proof of it is in this that God raised his son Jesus Christ from the dead. God raised his son, his servant Jesus from the dead.

and it is the same Jesus, the Jesus who went about doing good, the Jesus of whom you heard that he healed the sick, that he made the weak strong, that he made the lame to walk.

It's that same Jesus who did these things while he moved among you here in Galilee and Judea and in Jerusalem. It's that same Jesus raised from the dead whose grace and power has made this man strong.

God has raised up his servant Jesus and his servant Jesus has continued his ministry of blessing, his ministry of healing, his ministry of comfort and solace.

And this is the vindication of the claim that he made to be the Messiah of God. God raised up his servant.

[9 : 12] The explanation, the explanation of what has happened here before your eyes, says Peter, the explanation is this, that God raised up his servant from the dead and sent him to bless you in turning each one of you from his iniquities.

Now to appreciate what Peter is telling the people here, we want to reflect on three things. We want to reflect a little more on the identity of the servant of God of whom Peter speaks here.

Then we want to pay attention to the unexpectedness of the grace which was bestowed. And then we'll reflect on the fullness of the blessing that was given.

Let's think first of all of what Peter has to tell us here of the identity of the servant of God. And to you first, God having raised up his servant, if we were to translate literally, I don't quite understand how the name Jesus is here in the AV, it's not in the Greek text.

And to you first, God having raised up his servant or his child, the word that's used here is not the usual word that describes a son.

[10 : 43] It describes a child. It's the word that has been built into when we speak about a doctor who specializes in the care of children, we say he's a pediatrician.

Well, it's that word, the first part of that is the word that's used here. It can refer to a child or to a servant, a junior member of the household.

God has raised up his servant. Now, in verse 13, Peter has identified for us who that servant is.

The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant, Jesus. And then in verse 18, he identifies this same servant with the Christ or the Messiah.

these things which God showed before by the mouth of all his prophets that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

[11 : 49] What Peter is bringing home to these people is that Jesus came as the servant of God, commissioned as the Messiah of God, and fulfilled the commission which God by his prophets had said would be undertaken by his Christ.

Now, we want to ask ourselves why Peter chooses this particular way, or why the Spirit of God moved him to describe Jesus in this particular way.

I think it's in the interests of the general thrust, the general tenor of the argument that Peter is presenting. As we said already, he was anxious to bring home to these people that this was not a departure, that what he represented as the apostle of Jesus Christ, the apostle of the New Testament, the apostle of the fulfillment, that this wasn't a departure, from the old prophecies, that he wasn't presenting to them a different God, or a God indeed who had changed his mind about anything, but that he was presenting to them the new initiative, that the same God, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God who, with whom in the ritual of sacrifice, the God who in the words of prophecy, the God who in all the details of their most holy religion, they had been taught about.

It was this God sending forth his servant, fulfilling the prophecy. And the prophecies go back to particularly to such parts of the Old Testament as we read in Isaiah, the prophecies concerning the servant of God, behold, my servant shall deal prudently, behold, my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delights, I will put my spirit within him.

God had foretold, indeed Peter reminds them here, that Moses had spoken of God sending a prophet, all the prophets, from Moses, from Samuel, and those that follow after, and as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days, they are the children of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with our fathers.

[14 : 40] The servant of God fulfills the ancient prophecies, and Peter draws attention to a feature in the experience of the servant of God which many of the Jewish interpreters did not associate with the Christ.

There was a large part of the ancient prophecy, a significant part of the ancient prophecies and those that touched upon the experience of the servant of God had to do with suffering.

The portion that we read in Isaiah 53 talked about the servant of God being afflicted, being bruised, that it pleased God to put him to grief.

Now the Jewish interpreters, when they read this, they thought of this servant of God as the whole company of the Jewish people, and they began to talk about those sufferings as what was the experience of the Jewish people.

They didn't associate the sufferings with the promised Messiah, for the Messiah, the Christ in their view, was to be a conqueror. He was to be one who would crush the enemy under his feet, and who would liberate his people, and there would be no trace of suffering.

[16 : 08] They couldn't understand his eyes, his words, his visage was so marred, more than the sons of men, they couldn't associate this with the Christ whom God promised.

And you can understand, in the New Testament, you can realize how obsessively the minds of the people were occupied with the notion of the Christ as the conqueror, and forgetful of Christ the sufferer.

Remember the two on the way to Emmaus? They walked, they walked along talking to one another very sadly, and a stranger joined them and asked them what they were talking about.

We thought, they said, we thought that it should have been he who should have restored Israel. Oh, fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to have entered into his glory? And Peter was well aware that in the minds of the people whom he addressed at this particular moment, the fact of the sufferings of Jesus Christ, the fact that he had been put upon the cross and as they thought perished, that this was a great stumbling block because in their minds there was the fixed conclusion that God wouldn't abandon his just servant.

[17 : 55] It was unthinkable from their point of view that an obedient servant of God, one who was doing God's will, one who was mandated and commissioned by God and who was the Son of God, the Christ of God, that he should be abandoned upon the cross.

they couldn't think of this as a fulfilling of the will of God.

It was quite unthinkable. It's not only at this point but even later on when Peter came to write his letters, his letters to the dispersed, the diaspora, he comes back to this very topic.

How the prophets, even the prophets in ancient times, when they prophesied beforehand about Christ, were perplexed by this.

They searched, he says, what manner of time the spirit of God that was in them did signify when he prophesied beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.

[19 : 15] But what Peter wants to emphasize here is that the sufferings having been endured and having been endured on behalf of the people of God because Christ took our sins on his own body on the tree, that the sufferings having been endured, God vindicated his son.

God attested the virtue, he attested the obedience and he attested the validity of the claims that Jesus had made.

This is the glory that should follow. The sufferings were endured in fulfillment of the prophecy, the sufferings were endured in order to the expiation of the sin and guilt of his people, in order to the putting away of their iniquities.

and God has vindicated his son by raising him from the dead. In the spirit of faith, in the spirit of confidence, in the father whom he trusted, Jesus had said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.

In fulfillment of the prophecy and as our Lord was sure of the fulfillment of the prophecy that the psalmist had uttered, thou wilt not suffer thine holy one to see corruption, thou wilt not leave my body to suffer my body to see decay.

[20 : 50] So, the totality of the obedience of Jesus as the servant of God is central to the gospel of salvation. How does the son of God eternally co-equal with the father, how does he become the servant of God?

By a voluntary self-subjection in the interest of our salvation. And so he becomes this last Adam to undo the damage that had been done by the first Adam who proved to be an untrustworthy servant. But the second Adam comes as the trustworthy servant, the faithful servant, the servant who fulfills the will of the God who sent him, and who redeems the race from the curse that had come upon it by the fall of the first Adam.

So God has vindicated his servant, the obedient one who committed himself into the hands of God. God has vindicated by raising him from the dead.

As Paul puts it, God declared him to be his son with power by the resurrection. from the dead. So here is the identity of the servant of God.

[22 : 29] He is the Messiah whom God of whom the prophets had spoken. He is the Jesus with whose life and times these people had been entirely familiar.

So let's think briefly about the unexpectedness of the grace bestowed. We ought to remind ourselves that grace by its very nature is unexpected.

Grace by its very nature is the giving of what is not due. It is essentially unforced.

Grace is never a matter of obligation. It is never owed. And when we think of the grace of God we think of something that comes in sheer grace and sheer kindness and love and generosity.

Not something that we are entitled to look for except in terms of God's own promise. Now see how this is demonstrated here.

[23 : 46] We want first of all to ask some questions. We might ask who were first and foremost in the rejection of Jesus of Nazareth?

By whom was it that he was put away? It was by his own kinsmen according to the flesh.

He came as John tells us at the beginning of his gospel. He came to his own estates and his own people did not receive him. Whose were the voices that were raised so stridently against Jesus when Pilate was determined to let him go?

Whose voices were they who cried out crucify him? Crucify him! Was it not the voices of these very people who were there assembled a lot of them before Peter in the temple at that time?

Who were the people who laid themselves under a permanent curse crying out his blood be on us and on our children?

[25 : 05] Was it not these very people who had pressurized Pilate into doing what was against this sense of Roman justice? Now let's ask some different sort of questions.

What people given that God had prophesied that God had promised that his son would come into the world to save sinners?

Who should have been first and foremost in the recognition of him? Who but the people to whom had been given the lively oracles of God?

Whose were the prophets and whose were the fathers? They were the people who should have been in the forefront of the welcomers of Jesus for one brief moment for one brief moment only was there some indication as to what should have been the true state of affairs when the people welcomed him to Jerusalem and cried out Hosanna blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord but that was short lived and was not really representative of the attitude of the people they were the people the people who should have been his welcomers were in fact those who repudiated him what did they do?

See how Peter lays emphasis how Peter emphasizes and drives home the guilt of the people in respect of Jesus you disowned you handed over you killed the Lord of glory what you did Peter tells them what you did you did not by a temporary lapse of judgment not by a political failure of nerve not by a sudden onslaught of temper but by a deliberate decision a deliberate decision that was come to in the councils of the nation come to coldly and deliberately that Jesus should be put away this deliberate decision to repudiate

[27 : 38] Jesus and to put him away you had persisted in you had maintained it in face of the pleading of Pilate when he was determined to let him go what Peter is driving home upon them is that this was deliberate opposition to God you said Jesus was wrong you said Jesus was wicked you said he was a wicked imposter you said that if God were on his side even God was wrong and now God has vindicated the claim of Jesus God has shown that Jesus was right in the claims that he made God has shown that Jesus was entitled to the worship and adoration that he claimed but now ask another question given all that given that you are the people who repudiated

God and that you were the people who should have been in the forefront of those welcoming his servant where should you expect to rank if God is determined to show mercy to whom would you think God would show grace after all that well you might say if God is going to be merciful to anybody those people who were in the forefront of the rejecters and the repudiators will be at the very end of the queue of those who await God's mercy and this is the unexpected announcement that Peter has to make to you to you who were first in rejection to you who were first and foremost in repudiation to you who ought to be lost in any further consideration of mercy to you first God having raised up his son Jesus God having raised up his servant sent him to bless you and this is an outstanding feature of divine grace this is the historical fact that when God had raised his son Jesus from the dead the first to whom the announcement of mercy the first to whom all the privileges and riches of the gospel were offered were the people who had first rejected him that's the historical fact it doesn't of course amount to an ongoing mandate but it is the first it is the historical fact that it was to these people to these Jews who had rejected him that the gospel in its full grace was first offered and this is a feature of divine grace

Paul speaks in terms of his own surprise at this he says it is a saying that is worthy of all acceptance that Christ came into the world to save sinners even the chief and I obtained mercy that in me who was the chief of sinners Christ might show a pattern of long suffering to me the first in sin has this grace been given says Paul and this is the word that comes home to us still there may be many here who can say I have been privileged oh yes I've been privileged to hear God's word right from my infancy right through my youth and childhood and adolescence I've been acquainted with I've heard the word of God I've read the word of God the offer of salvation has been made to me there have been many impressions of the truth that have been laid upon me and I've proved impervious I've rejected up all those years I've been resisting the gospel of grace really if I were to speak the truth I would have to say this if a day of mercy were to dawn in this nation if a time of reviving were to come in this community I could expect to be lost in the queue because I've resisted I've thrown aside so much I've resisted so often the mercy of God even if reviving should come I think I would be at the very end of the queue of those who might look for blessing take encouragement what Peter is telling us here is that there is mercy there is grace there is sufficiency of grace indeed there is a primacy of grace in God to those who have been in the forefront of rejection this is the pattern the unexpected pattern of the divine kindness so then let's look finally at the fullness of the blessing to you first

[33 : 20] God having raised his servant Jesus sent him to bless you in turning every one of you from his iniquities we rightly lay a great deal of emphasis upon the forgiveness of sins it's a marvelous thing to hear the word of the saviour thy sins be forgiven thee what a relief what peace what gladness what gratitude dwells up within us upon the assurance of forgiveness the burden of our guilt rolled away but what then more is needed than just the forgiveness of our sins more is

needed than just a change in our situation and in our prospects more is needed than just relief from the burden of guilt a change of disposition a change of heart a change of outlook a change of life a change in the total mindset by which we approach everything in our experience it's not enough just to say I'm sorry for the past it's not just enough that we're fed up with things as they have been it's not enough that we are revolted by some of the things that have entered into our experience we need a new attitude and that's what the that's the blessing that Peter tells us this is part of the fullness of the blessing that accompanies

God's forgiveness turning you away from your iniquities of course this turning away from iniquities is only accomplished as we turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and to you God has sent him to bless you it's when our eyes are drawn to the Christ it's when our hearts are devoted to the Christ it's when we follow him that we are delivered from the ways of iniquity the psalmist puts it this way sinners shall shall then be converted unto thee it's as we know as we recognize as we follow the Savior that we know this total change of life that we learn to hate that which is evil and to love that which is good one other thing see how the fullness of this blessing sets the divine pattern for what ought also to be our behavior toward one another you remember how

Christ taught his disciples insisted upon something that's very hard and seems to us in our in our characteristic attitude seems to us unnatural he said to the disciples you must bless your enemies love your enemies bless your enemies pray for those that spitefully use you when the Lord said that to his disciples they realized how far short they came of that standard they said to him Lord increase our faith and here is the pattern upon which our faith concentrates God is doing here the very thing that Christ insists that we should do toward one another to you first the people who least deserve it to you first God having raised his servant sent him to bless you

God is bestowing the riches of his favor upon those who have been in the forefront of enmity isn't that what makes Paul proclaim with such jubilation when we were enemies in our minds by wicked works God reconciled us unto himself by the death of his son this is the fullness of the blessing the turning away from our iniquity and part of the demonstration of the turning away of every one of us from our iniquity is that we begin to learn to love one another even as Christ also has loved us an unexpected favor and a blessing that in its fullness passes all measurement the length and the breadth and the height and the depth of this grace who is there that can measure let us pray oh do thou help us to lift up our hearts to thee and to give thanks for the abundance of thy mercy toward us and grant us thy grace that day by day realizing that we owe all to the finished work of Christ we may show forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light grant us thy presence and blessing in Jesus name Amen