

A MESSAGE ON A MIRACLE

Acts 3:12-26

A lame man had been healed. The people were convinced that a great miracle had been performed. Out of curiosity a great crowd had come together to hear about it. Peter was quick to see an opportunity to preach to them about Jesus Christ. The occasion brought the crowd, furnished the text, and supplied the courage.

Here was a great opportunity for self-glorification, but this was not in the thoughts of the faithful witnesses. On the contrary they furnished a conspicuous illustration of that hiding behind the cross which is the glory of the Christian ministry. The people marveled, as one might have expected. They thought the miracle was the work of the apostles, but Peter and John were but the agents. They considered that the apostles performed the miracle by their "own power or holiness." Peter at once sought to correct the false impression, and to sweep the thought from their minds. Peter wanted all of the glory to be given to his divine Master. As all eyes looked with mingled awe and amazement at the apostles, and every heart trembled with a strange reverence in their presence, Peter was anxious that the Lord have all the glory for what had been done.

He affirmed that their God had wrought the miracle, and that He had done so in order to glorify His Son. God was the author of the miracle, and they were the instruments, and they became the instruments because of their faith in the name of Christ.

Peter immediately disavowing all personal merit in the miracle, connected the healing of the cripple with Jesus of Nazareth, and presented the case in a chain of testimony that is irrefutable. It was Jesus of Nazareth whom they had crucified. Peter rendered himself very unpopular that day. He lost a good opportunity to court the favor of the leaders. He poured out the most scathing rebuke he was capable of uttering. He charged them with the murder of Jesus Christ. He magnified the shame and horror of their crime. He arraigned them before the tribunal of eternal justice, and flashed the fires of hell in their faces.

Along with this, he pointed them unerringly to a way of forgiveness. God hates sin, but loves the sinner. God will forgive the penitent, but will punish the impenitent. He did not minimize their guilt, but he magnified the love and forgiveness of God.

In the history of their conduct, Peter sketched their treatment of Christ. This he did by a graduated method, until he reached the terrible crisis of murder. They "delivered him up." They abandoned Him to His enemies. They rejected Him. They denied His Messiahship in the presence of Pilate. They not only demanded the condemnation of the innocent, but preferred the murderer Barabas to the Prince of Life. They killed Him. Here is the climax of folly and impiety.

God had glorified His Son Jesus. He had raised Him from the dead. He overruled their conduct towards Him.

We observe a strange note in the midst of a scathing sermon. Was Peter's courage failing him? Was he trying to soft-pedal? No. He was always hard on sin, but tender toward the sinner. Peter would have the people and their rulers understand that they had committed a great sin in crucifying their Messiah, even though in doing it they had fulfilled the prophetic word, and even though they had done it in ignorance. Ignorance may explain but does not excuse wrong doing. They did not know the enormity of their crime. Satan blinds men, and they act in darkness. Sin thrives in darkness and ignorance. Sin flees from the light, while righteousness thrives in the light.

Even though they acted in ignorance, they were guilty, and needed to repent. Their ignorance did not excuse them. Ignorance never justifies a wrong or a mistake. A man may take poison by mistake, but his ignorance does not make the results less disastrous. One may violate the laws of nature in ignorance, but he must suffer for his mistake, even though he did it ignorantly. The heathen worship idols in ignorance, but their ignorance does not excuse their mistake, nor justify it. Their ignorance was a willing ignorance; they could have known better, but they did not want to know better. All the prophets had foretold the coming of Christ, and they could have known Him, but they willfully closed their eyes, ears, and minds against Him. So, they must answer for their ignorance. Their ignorance intensified their guilt. To sin against light is worse than to sin in unavoidable ignorance. To sin against opportunity is worse than to sin where there is no opportunity. "I did not know any better" is no justification for a wrong.

What a dastardly deed their ignorance led them to do. They rejected Christ. They preferred that a murderer be released in His stead. They delivered Him to be killed. What an influence ignorance has over man!

Peter admonished the howling mob to repent. Without softening his words he told them that they were out of joint with God, and with all noble and worthy things, and there could never be any peace for them until they were completely reversed.

Conversion means a complete change--a change of mind, a change of desire, a change of will, a change of purpose, a change of spirit, and a change of conduct. The old life will not fit the new standard.

Conversion is not the same as regeneration, although it does accompany it, and is evidences of it. Regeneration is the work of God in the heart, but conversion is the turning of one's life. There may be a conversion without regeneration, but never regeneration without a conversion.

It is not likely that men will reverse themselves on any question unless some factor enters their lives to produce the change. The monotonous drifting of life must be interrupted by something--a new light, a new force, a new desire or new conditions. Realization is a great factor. This is what makes the sick send for a physician. This is what sends a person to school. This is what causes one to become a Christian.

Repentance is another factor that produces a change. It looks back on life with regrets and remorse, but it looks forward with desire and yearning. Resolution is also a factor. "I will arise and go to my father," was the turning point in the life of the Prodigal Son. Resolution is the turning point in any life. Repentance and desire are of little value until one comes to this hour in life.

From verses 21 and 24 we learn two things: first, God has not left Himself without a witness in the world, and second, these witnesses have agreed in their testimonies about God. The stillness of each generation is broken by the call of some divine voice. It is not always the same voice. He spoke to Adam audibly; He has spoken through prophet, priest, king, and judge; He has spoken through tragedy, as the flood; or through national lives, as the Jews. All of these were used to call men back to God. All of these messengers, without a single exception have unfolded God's will. They have all agreed in their testimonies about God. Christ is the subject of all prophecy (24), and salvation is the greatest of all themes (26). Here is a striking word-- "God snet Him to bless you,"--God, Him you; and the blessing is in being turned from our sins, and turned to the Saviour. The appeal here emphasizes the fact that the children of privilege have responsibilities; and upon their fulfillment of such responsibilities depends the continuity and the enlargement of privilege. If our privileges are high and holy, our responsibilities are correspondingly great.