

More Amazing than a Miracle

3rd Sun. of Easter – 04/14/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Acts 3:7-9, 11-21 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 15, [Peter says to the Jews,] “... **you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead.**”

v. 19, “**Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out,**”

Introduction

✘ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ No surprise – miracles attract crowds. It wasn't long after Christ's resurrection that Peter and John, as they were entering the Temple for the 3:00pm time for prayer, that they healed a lame man who sat daily at the Temple entrance, begging for alms. And wow! Once the man jumped up, “walking and leaping and praising God” (v.9), everybody else came running too.

→ Who wouldn't? I would certainly check it out. I'm sure you would too. An amazing thing had happened, really impressive, but moments later, once the man went with them into the Temple, when Peter began to preach the sermon that we have in our text for today, another amazing thing took place. And this, I would confidently submit, was actually even more amazing than that miracle. God offered the full forgiveness of sins to those who had actually killed Jesus, His uniquely begotten Son!

→ Yes, more amazing than an earthly miracle is the life-saving miracle that God offers of forgiveness to all sinners of all time!

I. No sin worse – killing the Author of Life

✘ Now, let's think about that for a moment. Who was Jesus? He was – more accurate – He is God Himself who also became true man in order to save us.

→ And in His ministry, what did He do? He helped people; He healed their diseases; He cast out their demons; He raised their dead; and He forgave their sins – especially the sins of tax collectors and sinners who readily admitted that they needed that forgiveness.

→ In all of this, did Jesus do anything that actually deserved death? No. Not even close. As Peter says in verse 13, even Pontius Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent, which is why he planned to release Him.

✘ So what happened? The Jewish leaders were jealous; they resented Jesus' rebukes to their pride and hypocrisy. As far as they were concerned Jesus was a menace to their position; to their power, so they determined that He had to go.

→ And the people? Well, on Palm Sunday they hailed Jesus as a hero, but only a few days later a small, but very vocal crowd screamed at the top of their lungs, “Crucify Him” (Mk. 15:13)! And to add insult to injury, as a confirmation of their guilt and hypocrisy, they choose Barabbas, a murderer. And they demanded Pilate to set him free instead of Jesus. They wanted Jesus dead. And that's what they got. So, just as Peter told them point blank, “You killed the Author of life” (v. 15). As John 1:3 says of Jesus, “All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.” So, it is absolutely accurate that Peter was declaring this judgement: “You killed God!”

✘ I can't imagine any sin worse than that, can you? Even Adam and Eve's choosing a piece of fruit at the price of death doesn't seem as bad as crucifying the Son of God! So if anybody deserved hell, it was these people standing in front of Peter that day.

→ But instead of handing out God's curse, what does Peter say in verse 19? “Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out” – wiped out, erased, gone for good!

→ In essence, Peter is looking at these Jews boldly, yet with compassion and saying to them, “Don’t let your pride get in the way of your salvation. Don’t let your obsession with control and power; or your concern for what your peers may think of you; or your anxiety over what the world may think or say; or your fear of being wrong; or any other stumbling block that you might come up with – don’t let these things stop you from this.”

“Just confess your sin in full transparency and turn back to Jesus as the Promised Messiah; as the Son of God; as the Savior of your souls in all humility and faith. And then you, like this man in front of you here who used to be lame; you will be leaping for joy and praising God without shame and in full view of all people from this day forward!”

✘ That’s forgiveness, full and free from God just as He promised: All of your sins cast into the deepest depths of the sea (Mic. 7:19); separated from you as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12).

→ And all because, Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

II. Christ’s resurrection – the victory over all sin

✘ Yes, the forgiveness of their sin; of any sin is possible for only one reason, because of the kind of God we have. Think about it: when Adam and Eve sinned first and then all the rest of mankind followed, including you and me to fill up the measure of man’s wickedness, what did God do? He acted as only He could do to save us. His mercy; His love is far greater even than the sin of Peter’s hearers who were guilty of killing God’s only-begotten Son. So what’s that mean for you and me? His mercy and love are greater than all of our sin too!

✘ Not only did He promise – starting with Adam and Eve – that He would save us sinners, He also kept His promise and sent His Son, whom He knew would die to pay for all sin. But, as Peter proclaimed earlier to a group of Jews on Pentecost in Acts 2:24, “God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it.” Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

→ That’s right, God could not stay dead! Jesus, the great sin-bearer (bearing all of our sin), and the great death-dier (who died our death, taking our punishment, and experiencing our hell); He won the victory when He rose from the grave! Not sin, not death, and not the devil had won, but Jesus, and Jesus alone won. Sin had been blotted out. That, you see, is what Peter was offering as God’s witness and servant, even to those who had killed Jesus. Yes, even the worst imaginable sin is conquered and wiped clean in Jesus’ resurrection.

III. Christ’s resurrection – victory over your sin

✘ Still, it is widely understood by those in this world that some sins are just too big to forgive. In fact, many of us here today – maybe all of us have a sin, or sins that we think are too big to forget.

→ Well, consider the story of what Pastor Henry Gerike experienced in 1946 while he served as a Lutheran chaplain in the army. During World War II he served competently at the age of 55, tending to the battered bodies and souls of wounded and dying GIs outside of London. But it was after the war, when he was assigned to be the chaplain to the Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg, Germany that the depth of God’s love and forgiveness really became apparent to him.

→ Gerike dreaded this assignment because, after all, he would be ministering to men who were accused and then convicted of the most atrocious war crimes, involving the deaths of millions. Some of his peers, Allied officers actually resented his ministry. All they wanted was to send those Nazi prisoners straight to hell. But Gerike served as he was commanded because Christ had died for all, even the Nazis. He conducted services and invited everyone to come. And

some did. Gerike prayed with them, heard their confessions, even communed four of them in order to assure them that Christ's blood had washed away even their horrific sins.

→ After these men had been convicted of their crimes, Pastor Gerike even walked to the gallows with some of them. One of these men, Wilhelm Keitel, had been general field marshal, second only to Adolf Hitler. Just before his execution, Keitel prayed aloud a prayer that both he and Pastor Gerike had learned from their mothers. That prayer, as it is recorded in this book, *Mission at Nuremberg*, goes like this, "Christ's blood and judgment are my adornment and robe of honor; therein I will stand before God when I go to Heaven. Amen" (*Mission at Nuremberg*, Tim Townsend, Harper Collins Press, © 2014, pg. 272-273).

✘ That's how amazing God's forgiveness is. His resurrection proclaims His victory over all sins, including those of Nazi war criminals. When they repent of their sin, Christ's blood and victory wraps even them in His righteousness before God.

✘ What about you, dear people? Perhaps the sin that you struggle with is something really embarrassing or something really scandalous that nobody knows about except you; something you just can't forget. Or maybe it's a reoccurring sin that you can't stop doing; that you can't overcome. As much as you know it is wrong; as much as you fight against it, you still do it again and again and again. Maybe it's an addiction to pornography, or alcohol or cigarettes. Perhaps it's anger or resentment toward someone close to you – unloving words or actions; hurtful words that you think are funny but they are not. Or is it a lie that you thought started out as harmless, but now it festers deep inside of you and you're afraid of what would happen if anyone ever found out. We've all got those sins. And in God's eyes, every sin is an affront on His love; an offense against His holy Commandments; against His will for us as His children.

→ Sins like these can trouble us, haunt us and refuse to leave us alone ... often leaving us to wonder: Does God really forgive this sin?

✘ Friends, listen to Peter and listen to me carefully: Yes, God does forgive this and all sin. There is no sin too big to forgive, even if you never forget it. God forgave David, an adulterer and murderer. He forgave Paul, who persecuted Christians and sent them to be killed because of their faith. He even forgave Peter, who publically denied Him three times; the same Peter who now healed the lame man in Jesus' name and proclaimed God's promise in verse 19 that those who repent and believe in Jesus will have all of their sins "blotted out".

→ Peter described God's forgiveness in verse 20 as the promise of "times of refreshing that come from the presence of the Lord"; the One who will send Jesus back on the Last Day to restore all things; to resurrect the bodies of all believers in Christ and join them with their souls to be with Him forever in Heaven; even those people who had "killed the Author of life" but now believe with all of their hearts and souls, that Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

Conclusion

✘ Yes, they killed Jesus, but as you just proclaimed it, He didn't; He couldn't stay dead. Because you see, Easter is God's answer to sin – yours, mine, all of it.

→ And boy, there's a lot of sin. The whole world is full of it and history is its record. But Jesus is so much greater than sin, and He is a part of history too.

→ And God – almighty and all gracious, because of His great love for every one of us, He entered this world in the fleshly person of His Son, Jesus to redeem us; to die and to rise back to life; to blot out all of our sins. That, my friends, is more amazing than a lame man jumping up onto his feet. It is the most amazing work of God ever!

→ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.*