



Surrounding the Chernobyl disaster area in Ukraine is a 1000 square mile exclusion zone. There are signs and barriers warning of the danger and death that can result from radiation exposure. Even after 37 years it remains so radioactive that it is deadly for humans to have too much exposure. And the most dangerous areas won't be safe for tens of thousands of years. Just imagine if someone was riding their bicycle right into that danger, they'd need to heed the warning signs. But imagine they were somehow ignorant or heedless of their danger. Then a driver in a car pulls up and sees them heading right into the exclusion zone. The person in the car pulls up and talks to them. They offer them a drink of water and give them a pat on the back as if to encourage them. They say to the bicyclist headed into danger, "I just want you to know that God loves you so much." And then the driver just leaves and maybe heads in the same direction towards the danger.

It all sounds so dangerous and ridiculous. But this is the scene that is playing out in many places across the world. There are people in great spiritual danger and are ignorant of that danger. And those who should know better and have read the warning signs are not helping those headed towards danger. Instead, they simply tell them that God loves them, and they let them continue right in the same direction towards the deadly goal. We know where we are now headed because of Jesus. We are headed to our resurrection goal. But what does God intend his people to do as they head towards that goal? God wants us to tell the world that he loves the world. But if that is all we ever preach to a world headed towards the danger of hell, we are missing something crucial and heedless of the dangers of sin. Today we continue our series looking at how we reach our resurrection goal. And as we look at the preaching of Peter in Acts 3 we will find out one crucial truth. We reach our resurrection goal with repentance in the preaching.

Acts 3 records a faith healing event. Have you ever witnessed a faith healer do their thing? Today many healers will broadcast their worship events. Maybe you have seen the large crowds reached by some faith healers. They often help someone who is facing some type of temporary illness or ailment that can easily and quickly seem to disappear. Of course, I'm not saying that faith healers can't exist. In fact, Jesus promised his apostles they would perform miracles. Today we will look at one of the most prominent examples of a preacher of the gospel healing someone.

Firstly, note that the healing recorded in Acts 3 was unlike most other faith healings. To begin with, many healers today ask for money. Peter came near a man who was paralyzed and unable to walk, begging for money because he had nothing to give. That's because that man had been paralyzed from birth. He was now forty years old and the only life he had known was living as a paralyzed beggar. You can be sure that after forty years he had earned a reputation and was well-known by all who frequented that area of the temple. Peter evidently had preached near this man before because we read that the man had faith. One day Peter told the man to get up and walk in the name of Jesus. And an inescapable fact suddenly amazed everyone in that part of the temple courtyard: a man who spent forty years unable to walk could suddenly walk! He was walking along with Peter and John and following them around as they preached. A crowd gathered. And they were sure Peter had done something totally miraculous.

What would most preachers be tempted to do when they get the attention of a large crowd? Would they perhaps urge them to give more money to God? Would they assert their position of authority? Would they try to use the opportunity to build themselves up? Peter used the opportunity to point the people away from himself and to Jesus. He told them right off the bat, "*Why are you so amazed as if by our own power or our own godliness we made this man walk?*" Faithful preaching begins with the preacher admitting that they are no better than their hearers and have nothing special of themselves. Faithful preachers point to Jesus as the sole source of goodness.

But faithful preaching involves more than humbling yourself. It also involves humbling your hearers. And that includes those who are outside of church. Peter was surrounded by many who were indifferent or even opposed to the message of Christ. So, what does a preacher share with unbelievers? Maybe they would share a message that everyone can get behind, a message so watered down that it was void of real preaching and empty of God's Word. Perhaps they might proclaim a message like many preaching to thousands at a time, "God loves you. You are so special."

But that type of message is only half of the truth. Peter was given the opportunity by God to reach so many hearers that day. He didn't just want to be the guy they all loved. He wanted to be God's spokesperson. He wanted to share God's message for sinners. Peter's message was one that first humbled himself and then also called for repentance.

Repentance is not a popular message today. Preaching repentance calls for pointing out people's sins. It calls for exposing the sins that people don't acknowledge as wrong and the sins that people in their blindness are ignorant of committing. There are billions of people who are on a road far more dangerous than the road to Chernobyl. They are ignorant or obstinately on the road to hell. The warning signs are there in God's Word. They might have even heard it before. The signs that say, "Danger, death awaits you and hell follows with it," have been clearly proclaimed for centuries by faithful preachers of the Word of God. But like so many lost and blind in sin they believe they are the exception. They believe that the dangers which await are over-exaggerated. When Russia sent troops to invade Ukraine, they foolishly went into the

exclusion zone around Chernobyl. Perhaps they were just fearfully following orders. Or perhaps many believed the lie that it only took 35 years for it to be safe to drive and bulldoze the area instead of the estimated 20,000 years or more. God isn't exaggerating when he says, "You will surely die." And it is not a lie when God says that the wicked will be thrown into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. The danger is eternal. It is real. And what God calls his people to do is to recognize it and preach it.

Peter went right to the core for the crowd before him when preaching repentance. That crowd was blind to one of the most blatant types of sin. They had condemned an innocent man and let the guilty go free. *"You handed him (Jesus) over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you."* This was an injustice and perversion of what is right. That's what sin does to us. We justify our guilt, and we condemn the innocent. We become blind to the ways that we flip God's justice upside down. The world attacks innocent servants of God and lets the people who are really guilty of terrible things go free. Christians for example, are persecuted, jailed, and killed for serving their God all around the world. Meanwhile many of those who abuse women, who say it is okay to kill infants and the unborn, who support the sterilization of children are allowed to go unpunished by the world. It is a mess! That's what happened at the crucifixion of Jesus. An innocent man was tortured and killed, and the guilty man got away!

But it was far worse than that. The one they had disowned, and killed was "the author of life." They had killed the one who made and sustains all things! They killed their Lord and Messiah! This crowd was guilty of the worst sin – rejecting, condemning, and killing the Son of God. But what Peter points out about their great sin is a great lesson for us and for all who are invited to repent! Repentance is turning away from rejection of the Word of God and confessing the wrongs against God himself. Every sin, in the end, is a rejection of the Word. And every sin is an obstinate attack on the author of life. This crowd had committed it in the most open way when they disowned and killed Jesus, crying out only a few weeks earlier, "Crucify him!" Pilate asked, "Shall I kill your king?" And along with the rulers they all said, "We have no such king." And "His blood be on us!" This was God's target audience through Peter's preaching! Repentance is for all, even the worst of sinners, the worst evils. And all need to repent, even those who might consider themselves the least of sinners.

Peter assured the crowd that God has raised the same Jesus back to life. And it was Jesus' power and faith in him that brought the miracle for all to see that day. It was all done according to God's plan that his chosen one, the Messiah would suffer and rise, and all who hear would repent and believe the good news. *"I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. <sup>18</sup> But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. <sup>19</sup> Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, <sup>20</sup> and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus."*

Ignorance of sin is not an excuse. But it is a reason for God's wakeup call. Once when I was working out at a gym, I thought I knew what I was doing on one of the exercise machines. But I was making a wrong turn which could have caused a lot of pain and injury. Thankfully an older man at the gym saw my mistake and approached me to point out the wrong turn I was making on the equipment. He explained what that mistake could lead to in bodily injury if I wasn't careful to use the machine right. I might have been ignorant of my error, but it was still a dangerous error. And how foolish of me if I were to stick to that same routine without turning aside from the error! How awful for any Christian preacher to see the danger someone is in but not warn them. How foolish to not heed that warning!

Or let me illustrate it another way. I was hiking around a mountain the other day on a ten-mile loop. About halfway I was in the middle of nowhere and there were hardly any other hikers around. I passed a group of hikers who warned me that they saw a rattlesnake on the trail ahead. Could you imagine how heartless they would have to be to see me headed right in that direction but not to tell me that they encountered that danger there, knowing I was headed right that way? A call to repentance is a warning given in love to those headed into danger! It can be nothing else!

Repentance includes turning from sin, away from its awful ugliness and danger, and turning to God. The crowd that day heard of the ugly danger they were in. They were guilty of killing the author of life. They were told they had disowned and murdered God's Son. But they were also told this was part of God's plan. God foretold of the one who would sacrifice himself for sinners. God's prophets were pointing them to their rescue. And God's apostles called the people to repent. Then they were promised forgiveness of sins, refreshing, and that God would send them his Christ, Jesus. The same is true today. Faithful preaching tells people of their sins, even the ones which they commit in ignorance. The guilt and sin is real -whether a person recognizes the danger or not. Faithful preaching with repentance points people to the Christ who paid for their sins according to Scripture. And faithful preaching invites them to the free gift of forgiveness for all who believe.

Brothers and sisters, fellow listeners of the gospel. We preach a message of repentance for forgiveness of sins in Jesus! We are on our way to join with him who lives forever! We preach a message to turn the sinner from the error of their ways to the forgiveness and life of Christ! There is no other way to reach our resurrection goal. It includes a call to repent. It includes sin, and grace. This is God's plan and his will for a world oblivious of the danger or a world obstinately set against the danger despite the warning. He wants his people to preach repentance. We reach our resurrection goal with repentance in the preaching.