

Prayers

Opening prayer

When I look at You, Lord Jesus, I see the truth about the world, for You were there at the beginning of Creation and You will be there at its end. I see in You the truth about God, for in Your death and resurrection You have revealed the love of God the Father. I also see in You the truth about myself, for You have lived a life on earth and You can look me in the eye and search my heart. Come, Lord Jesus, bless me now I pray, for You are my life and my destiny: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: PREJUDICE

1. For yourself

Ask the Lord to save you from becoming prejudiced in your attitudes to others who are of a different race, age, gender, church, or who are different from you in any other way

2. For your friends and family

Pray for the Lord's protection against any prejudices that may arise within your family; it may be that you alone know what can happen, so you alone must pray for this

3. For the church and its work

Pray to ask the Lord's protection against all forms of prejudice within the church; pray that God will bar this way by which Satan tries to enter into God's Kingdom to spoil it

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray for any in your neighbourhood or in your country who experience prejudice from officials; from the police, from housing authorities, from universities and much more

Meditation

(a word of prophecy for all God's people)

Be liberated, my people, be set free to be.

I made you and I saved you;

no-one is above you in my Kingdom.

Those who do so claim a place that I have never given.

Read my Word, and as you do so, I will guide you:

Pray to me and speak to me; and I will tell the truth to you:

Worship me and seek my face, let nothing else distract you,

Come into my presence with an honest, contrite heart.

I knock, so make your choice to open up the door and trust me:

I am with you as you break the bread, when you remember me:

I build my church through you, I challenge you and empower you,

I have given you your work, and I will go before you and protect you.

Be liberated, my people, by the Gospel you have received;

Love each other, fear no-one but me, and do what I tell you.

But do not stand in my way; let me build my Church.

Bible Study

Bible passage – Acts 3:11-16

¹¹ While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people came running to the place called Solomon's Colonnade, astonished. ¹² But when Peter saw this, he said to them:

'Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if we had made this man walk by our own power or godliness? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, and you handed him over to be killed.

You disowned Him before Pilate, though he had decided to let Him go;

¹⁴ You rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you.

¹⁵ You killed the author of life, though God raised Him from the dead.

Of this we are witnesses! ¹⁶ And by faith in His name, this man whom you see and know has been made strong; in His name and through faith in Him, he has been given this complete healing as you all can see.'

Review

Peter turned on the astonished crowd that had gathered after the lame beggar was healed. He told them bluntly that the miracle had taken place because of the power and authority of a man they had just crucified, Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

After the lame beggar had been healed (3:1-10), something amazing happened. Peter and John had been used by God to heal the man, but Peter assumed the mantle of leadership again and spoke out to the gathered crowd. He was determined to explain the truth to them about what had happened, and tell them that this miracle had taken place in the name of Jesus. It was the second opportunity Peter had to preach after the Holy Spirit fell upon the Apostles (2:1-4), and the sermon is made up of the passage we have read today, and the one we will read tomorrow.

The lame beggar had been healed as Peter and John approached the 'Beautiful Gate', connecting The Gentile Court to the Court of Women in the Temple. After being healed, the man leapt about and praised God, causing something of a scene (3:8f.), and all those involved soon found themselves at the side of the Temple, in Solomon's Colonnade, where an excited crowd gathered (3:11). In those days, people were used to healing miracles because what we call 'faith healing' was offered by a variety of people, and not always for religious reasons. This however, was something far more significant. Regular temple goers were used to seeing a beggar at one of the main Temple gates, so the sight of him leaping about and praising God was astonishing. People would have naturally assumed that this man had received a special touch from God, because all this had happened in the Temple, but the Holy Spirit prompted Peter to take this golden opportunity to witness to Jesus Christ, and he did so in a remarkable manner.

As we read, we must surely be struck by the forcefulness of Peter's language. He begins by stating the obvious, which is that everyone had seen an astonishing miracle beyond all human power and authority (3:12). But with the words, '*God ... has glorified Jesus*', he reveals the true source of the healing power people had seen. At the mention of His name, people would have been stopped in their tracks. This was the man crucified outside Jerusalem just 50 days previously, and to make things worse, Peter accused those present of being responsible for his murder (3:13)!

What happens next is remarkable, and I have attempted to make it easier to understand by highlighting the three, distinct, 'bullet points' delivered next by Peter. In three terse sentences, Peter does two things, he attacks the Jews for having killed Jesus, but in so doing, he says some powerful things about Jesus. The attack on the Jews is relatively easy for us to understand. He accuses them of having Jesus killed although he was innocent (3:13), of rejecting their Messiah in favour of a murderer (3:14), and of the heinous sin of 'deicide', that is, of murdering God (3:15). If we look more deeply into these three verses, however, we will find that there is more.

Verses 13-15 have been described as some of the most potent in Scripture because of what they tell us about Jesus. For although Peter's words arose from the circumstances in which he preached, the Holy Spirit used them, as so often with the preached Word, to say far more. To begin with, Peter says that Jesus is innocent as charged before Pilate. Jesus' sinless nature is now a basic tenet of Christian faith, and for centuries, the church has proclaimed Jesus' innocence even by the legal standards of the day (3:13). Next, Peter describes Jesus as the '*Holy and Righteous One*', words that are reserved in Scripture for God's chosen one, His Messiah; but Jesus was rejected by His own people (3:14), as prophesied by Isaiah (Isaiah 53). Lastly, Peter proclaims the resurrection as proof of Jesus' divinity (3:15), and in so doing describes Jesus as '*the author of life*', that is, one who was with God even at the beginning of Creation.

Now today, we take such powerful truths for granted and they are regarded as the groundwork of Christian theology. But it needed the Holy Spirit to inspire Peter to say these things for them to be fully appreciated by the Early Church, and then become established as Christian theology. So probably without realising it, Peter preached a sermon of profound theological significance for the Christian church.

Lastly, Peter continues in the same vein, revealing powerful and important truths about Jesus in his preaching. He proclaims that healing comes *'through faith in Him'*, and talks about believing in Jesus Christ and the power of His 'name' (3:16). Today, we do not now place as much emphasis on people's names, but Peter reminds us that to call on Jesus' name is to exercise faith and call on the authority of God Himself, which He has vested in Jesus, His Son. We therefore use His name in reverence and awe.

We will discover that throughout the rest of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, healing miracles and the preaching of the Gospel go hand in hand. The one aids the other, and the Holy Spirit uses these things to reveal more and more about Jesus, so that the Church might grow.

Going Deeper

- Notes on the translation of the passage
- Solomon's Colonnade (3:11)
- The 'glory' of Jesus (3:13)

Notes on the translation of the passage

V14 'You rejected the Holy and Righteous One'

Other translations:

'You denied the Holy and Righteous One' (English Standard)

'You disowned the Holy and Righteous One' (NIV)

The different Bible versions arise because the ancient manuscripts are divided between two Greek words at the beginning of this sentence, the first reading *'You denied ...'* and the second reading *'You oppressed ...'*. The various translators have attempted to find words that best express either one of these readings, but I have selected the translation *'You rejected ...'* because it is a good and helpful interpretation of the best attested manuscript, which in my opinion is the first above.

V16 'And by faith in His name, this man who you see and know has been made strong ...'

Other translations:

'and it is the name of Jesus which, through faith in Him, has brought back the strength of this man whom you see here and is well known to you' (New Jerusalem Bible)

'and by faith in His name, His name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know' (NRSV)

You can see from the different Bible versions that this is a difficult verse to translate! This is because the original Greek is somewhat difficult to interpret, and scholars are divided as to whether the awkwardness of the Greek sentence is stylistic, or plainly wrong. I have accepted that it is rather awkward, but have taken the simplest reading of the text possible. However, this translation does not mention Jesus' name specifically, it merely refers to 'His name'; it says that the miracle of healing has been done through 'His name', meaning through the name of Jesus (see study notes).

Solomon's Colonnade (3:11)

People might well wonder whether this part of the Temple has anything to do with Solomon's Temple, but the connection is not as clear as we would like. The Temple in Jesus' day was built by Herod the Great and completed around the time of Jesus' birth. It was the second Temple built on the site after the destruction of Solomon's temple around 587BC by the Babylonians.

Solomon's Colonnade is the name given to part of the outer wall of the Temple compound on the East side. Tradition has it that this side was situated where Solomon had built a large hall for passing judgement, and some of the walls and foundation of this hall were incorporated into that side of the new Temple building. It is said that Levites and other Temple officials resided in this part of the Temple. Of course, the whole of this Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, and very little of this is now left, so this leaves us very uncertain about what to make of this. The source behind this information is largely the Jewish historian Josephus, who describes the Temple in his annals.

The glory of Jesus (3:13)

In this verse, Peter speaks of Jesus firstly by saying that the God of Israel has given Jesus His 'glory'; '*God ... has glorified His servant*'. In general, the word 'glory' refers to the value or worth of something, and because God is the 'author and creator of all things', He has all 'glory'. The Old Testament speaks in very personal terms of God's 'glory', and it was believed that the glory of God 'dwelt' in the Temple (1 Kings 8:11, Ezra 9:3)

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Discipleship

Application

The rich variety of ways in which Jesus is described in the Bible

This study should help you understand something of the rich variety of names given to Jesus in the Bible, and the different ways He is described. Today, we are easily led to using names of Jesus found in modern hymns and songs, because these often powerful songs stay in our minds and spirits. However, we will be blessed if we pay attention to this Biblical heritage.

The trouble is that Biblical language is sometimes rather different to the language we speak every day. For example, we may speak of Jesus as 'glorified', and know what this means, but we need Scripture to help us understand what this means (God gives back to Jesus His 'glory' after He has completed His work on earth and has ascended – the divine wonder and mystery that He laid aside to become human). We cannot assume that people at large will understand this.

If we spend time getting to know the different things Peter says about Jesus here (see above) then we will indeed be blessed, and God will be able to use this to His ends.

The power of the preached Word of God

Peter's sermon is an example to preachers not just of the material to be preached (that is, Jesus) but the overall task of preaching and its effect. Peter's sermons at this stage in the book of Acts are impromptu events, nevertheless used by God to bless His people. In this case, Peter was willing to declare God's Word even to a potentially hostile crowd so that Jesus may be glorified.

What seems to have happened here is that in the crisis of this moment, Peter blurted out some of the essential truths about God he had learned from his youth as a Jew, and mixed this with his immediate experience. He called on God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (3:13), he quoted Scripture calling Jesus the 'Holy and Righteous One' (3:14), and he spoke of the power of the resurrection, only a few weeks previously (3:15). This is always a potent mixture, and the preacher should never be afraid to mix up Scriptural truth with current experience, for the first is necessary to validate the second.

Lastly, as Paul himself says in his letters (see especially in 1 Corinthians 1:23-2:2) the power of the preached word lies in the proclamation of Jesus Christ, and Peter's sermon is an example from the earliest days of the church of the importance of preaching Christ. It was Peter's intention to speak forthrightly to his hearers to tell them to recant their rejection of Jesus and turn to Him, to be saved. In all our 'contextualisation' of the Gospel today, we cannot leave behind this straightforward Gospel truth, that unless the preacher declares Christ and Him crucified, then the Gospel is not preached.

Questions for groups

1. What does this passage of Scripture teach us about the person and work of Jesus Christ, and how is it backed up by the rest of Scripture?
2. Discuss in your group what you might have felt like when hearing these words, if you had been a Jew in Jerusalem at the time?
3. Is it appropriate for God's people to 'use the name of Jesus', and if so, when might this be appropriate?

Discipleship challenges

- *Try writing down on a piece of paper what you believe about Jesus Christ. How many of the things you write can you back up in Scripture? Now look at this passage of Scripture again and see whether you can extend what you have written.*
 - *To what extent are you open to discovering new Scriptural things about Jesus? Seek the Lord in prayer and ask Him whether you have as yet discovered all you need to know about your Saviour. Make yourself open to the Lord's guidance*
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Final Prayer

How can we thank You enough Lord God, for the gifts You have given, and all that You have done so that we can feel secure in our faith and our redemption. We thank You for Jesus, and for His life and witness, for the life of the Church, for our friends in Christ, and for the Scriptures, by which we judge and assess all things. May we use all that You have given to Your praise and glory, Lord God, AMEN
