



way
of
life

Peter and Paul absorbed the reality of God that comes from our salvation in Jesus Christ. They worked to translate that reality to the word in a number of powerful sermons in the book of Acts. Through our series, **Way of Life**, we'll be looking at these powerful sermons and how they call us to action. Early Christians were known as "People of the Way," as though they were fighting for a new way of life. They were advocating for a way of life, but that way of life is Jesus Himself. Presenting Jesus as Savior and Lord competes with the alternative ways of life presented in culture. By digging into these sermons in Acts, we will see how the way of Jesus is better than any alternative offered by the world.

GOD'S RULES ARE BETTER • Acts 3:11-21 • Tim McConnell • September 18, 2016

What do you do to rest and refresh? I asked the staff this week to list a few things they do to refresh themselves. Watch a movie, one said. Go to a game, said another. Take a nap. One said, "I like to align all staff members, volunteers, and ministry teams to use resources and energies most effectively *to prepare all generations to impact lives for Christ.*" That was the best answer, we all agreed. How do you unwind? How do you allow the gears of your inner machinery to cool off? Sometimes we are so overworked, our vacations become pretty desperate. I need this vacation to work! You walk around telling yourself constantly, "Relax! Now relax! Have fun!" Like when you need a good night's sleep for a big day and you lie in bed with your eyes wide open yelling at yourself, "Sleep! Sleep!" I'm reminded of the movie *City Slickers* from the 1990's. Billy Crystal's character was desperate for a vacation to work to relieve his stress, but he got wrapped up in all kinds of trouble out west on a dude ranch. Each time things turned bad, he yelled, "But I'm on vacation!" It's hard to find refreshment for our souls. If I asked you to write a list of what refreshes you, how low on the list would I find the word, "repent"? But that's just what Peter says we need today. That's what our passage argues.

We are looking for the way of life found in Jesus as we study these sermons in Acts, and along the way we are recognizing the bankruptcy of competing ways of life found in the world. We have seen that living in God's presence beats living as practical atheists. We have seen that the way of life beats the way of death. Last week we learned that the living with Jesus as our Lord and Messiah beats trying to be our own lords. Remember, Peter concluded his Pentecost sermon, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, Whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah." (Acts 2:36) We don't get confused by that word "made"—it isn't that God created a Messiah out of a normal man named Jesus, but by raising Him from the dead, God proclaimed, declared, proved that Jesus is Lord and Savior. Today, along with Peter, along with our Scripture, I am going to make the argument that repentance is better than pleasure seeking; confession beats hedonism. "Good luck, pastor!" God's rules, God's ways of holiness...repentance beats seeking pleasure through nice things in this world. Better than a rich meal with fine wine; better than box seats at the Broncos; better than a spa day with friends; better than an all-expense paid trip to Cancun...maybe I better stop there. Better than all the pleasures we can find for ourselves in this world is humble repentance and the forgiveness of our sins before God. This is the way of life.

Peter must have still been processing the events of Pentecost. Unsure and unprepared, he opened his mouth to preach and explain what was going on, and the next thing you know three thousand people were baptized and joined to the church. The Jesus movement, almost over, was now exploding. Every day more were joining in. Peter and his friend John had just healed a lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." (Acts 3:6) The man was leaping and running and dancing around praising God! Clinging to Peter and John—and again the work of the Spirit drew a crowd. Peter again begins to explain. "It isn't our power; it's God's power." Again Peter tells the truth: "What you see here in this healed, saved, forgiven man is the power of Jesus." Let's read it, "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed Him 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. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through Him that has completely healed him, as you can all see." (Acts 3:13-16) You killed Jesus, says Peter. Do you know that isn't a very nice thing to say? This is not a nice sermon, Peter! The people thought, "What? I didn't kill anybody." But they did. That's the truth. They killed Jesus. And that's the truth for us, don't you realize? We are in the crowd. We killed Jesus. Jesus went to the cross because of our sins. Your sins. My sins. We killed Jesus.

But Peter doesn't offer condemnation. Even for these unbelieving, cynical, Temple leaders who led the way in getting Jesus killed, Peter doesn't condemn them but offers them a way out. He doesn't say, "You killed Him! Shame on you! Get out of here!" No. He says, "I know you didn't know what you were doing when it happened. But now that you do know the truth, repent." Verse 19: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." (Acts 3:19) Repent. As we heard last week, it means turn around. Turn around. Stop going the direction you're going and start going the opposite direction. Stop walking away from God, whether you knew you were walking away from God or not, stop walking away and turn around and start walking toward. Quit the disobedient things, start the obedient things. Stop following after

your own rules and habits and methods of pleasing yourself, and start following after God's rules and loves and ways. Repent, and be forgiven of your sins. There is forgiveness available. Turn to God so that your sins may be "wiped out." Your sins can be wiped away, wiped out, you can come clean. So that what? So "that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

Now, how did Peter know all this was possible? Let's review. Peter first met Jesus when He taught from his fishing boat, then miraculously filled the empty boat with a haul of fish. Clambering over the slippery mess, Peter hit his knees before Jesus—"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" he said. (Luke 5:8) But Jesus doesn't need perfect, He needs penitent. Peter later stepped out of a boat and walked on water with Jesus, but faltered when he got nervous and started sinking down. Calling out to Jesus, he was saved again. Jesus doesn't need powerful, He needs prayerful. When Jesus was getting arrested, it was Peter who grasped a sword and swung it at a helpless slave, hacking off his ear, which Jesus had to reattach and heal. Jesus doesn't need force, He needs faith—learned Peter.

By today, we might have found a pretty confident and prideful Peter. A sermon grows the church by three thousand, a healing in the Temple gathers a crowd, and Peter and John are standing in the light of Solomon's Colonnade like a couple of prophets, religious rock stars! But Peter remembers. He can't get too proud. He remembers how he told Jesus "I'm with you to the end, you can count on me," but as he watched Jesus taken away to be beaten, falsely accused, flogged and sent off to Calvary to his execution... Peter remembers. He denied he even knew the man. Three times. His eyes met Jesus' eyes in the courtyard as the soldiers dragged him away, and Peter heard the cock crow—and his heart sank like a stone. Now Peter hears a rooster crow every morning. Every morning. And each time he hears it he remembers the look in his loving master's eye. But he also remembers another morning, when the resurrected Lord Jesus sat with him on the beach eating fish and asked him, "Do you love me, Peter?" "Oh, Lord! Oh, I do!" And all was forgiven and restored. No, it's not too late for you. Even as Peter looked over the guilty crowd he thought, "No, it's not too late for you to be forgiven. If Jesus forgave me, He will forgive you. Come. Repent. Turn, and be restored."

Repent. Confess your sins. "You want me to feel guilty. You want me to feel ashamed. That's why I hate church. I don't need you making me feel bad." No,

I don't want you to feel shame. I want you to come clean. I want you to get over your pride and hit your knees before Jesus, and tell Him the truth. Forgiveness is possible. There is no burden like the burden of sin, and there is no refreshment for your soul like forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Another ball game won't do it, another drink won't do it, another night in front of the computer screen won't heal your soul. But Jesus can.

Psalm 32 says, "Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to You and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.' And You forgave the guilt of my sin." (Psalm 32:1-5) Or we could go with Psalm 107: "Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. ...Some sat in darkness, in utter darkness, prisoners suffering in iron chains, because they rebelled against God's commands and despised the plans of the Most High... Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness, and broke away their chains." (Psalm 107: 4-5; 10-11; 13-14) Forgiveness is possible, and it brings incredible freedom, joy, healing, redemption, wholeness, salvation—refreshment for your soul. How long would you prefer to chase your own pleasures before you turn, believe God's ways are better, ask forgiveness, and with the great worship leader Charles Wesley proclaim: "My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee"?

How do we get there? Peter started with the truth, didn't he? "You killed Jesus. You killed the author of life." That's pretty bad. But it's the truth. As long as I hid it, David said in the Psalm, so long as I kept it hidden, kept silent before God, lied about it and practiced deception, lying about my sin to others, lying about my sin to God, lying about my sin to myself... so long as I did that, my bones rotted in my core, my conscience was seared with the heat of the July sun, the weight of it pressed down on me every day. Every morning I arose to hear the rooster crow my sin again. But when I confessed it...

John Wesley (Charles Wesley's much more famous brother) came to Christ late in life. Actually he marks his conversion long after he became a minister! After a failed effort at ministry in the New World, John Wesley was back in London at a small group Bible Study, as he wrote: "In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where someone was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death." It's one thing to believe Jesus takes away sins. It's another thing entirely to have Jesus take away *your* sins.

Repent, says Peter. Confess. Start with the truth and run to Jesus. Come clean before the Lord and let Him bring you forgiveness—that times of refreshment may come to your soul. We are good at seeking pleasures to refresh ourselves. It's easy, and we're experts. In fact, I've never had anyone come to me as a pastor and say, "Pastor, I need some help. I just have no motivation to pursue worldly pleasures. I don't have any idea what to do. Can you give me some hints, or just a place to start?" No, we are pretty good at seeking pleasure to satisfy ourselves, and usually we do it by disregarding God's rules for a healthy and joyful life. And are we then refreshed? Are we then restored? Do we feel our inner being vitalized by our pursuit of empty and superficial pleasures? Or could it be the case that God was right all along, that God's rules are better, and that we will only feel disturbed and unsatisfied until we trust in Jesus Christ? Our little disobedient ways, our harmless pleasure seeking, our little choices, and little thoughts become little habits. By the time we are aware of them, they are already chains. Chains so binding we feel helplessly burdened. Chains so loud and clamorous we can't even hear the voice of God calling us home. Repent, says Peter. It's not too late for you. The Jesus I know is able. The Jesus I know can find you, release you, forgive you and set you free. By faith in the name of Jesus this man was made strong.

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STUDY GUIDE

"God's Rules Are Better" • Acts 3:11-21

Start It

- Think for a moment of the most restful and restorative experience in your last year. What made it so refreshing?
- Make a list of the ways you refresh your soul.

Study It

- Read Acts 2:42 - Acts 3:10. As we study the sermons of Peter and Paul, we miss a lot of action in between. What are the marks of the church according to Acts 2:42? Do you see First Pres doing a good job at these four key activities? Take note that the healing of the lame man is what prompts Peter's next sermon. What strikes you as you read that story of healing?
- Peter now moves into his sermon at Solomon's Colonnade, or Solomon's Porch. This is an important feature of the Jerusalem Temple, a series of columns and a porch where many would gather to talk or even to teach. This area of the Temple allowed women and men to gather and be taught, where other areas were limited to men. Peter and John stop to heal a well-known man brought there every day to beg as people walk in and out of the Temple. The healing must be explained.
- What similarities do you find between this sermon and the sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41)? If you had to outline Peter's message, would it be a similar outline between the two sermons? Can you summarize Peter's understanding and proclamation of the Gospel?
- Peter remarkably offers forgiveness and restoration to the crowd, even after he explains to them that they were complicit in the death of Jesus, whom we now know was God's Son, the Savior. Are you surprised that Peter offers "refreshment" from the Lord? Have you considered repentance as a vehicle for refreshment?

Pray It

Merciful God, I am so quick to seek refreshment in the wrong things. It is hard for me to believe that the richest way of life includes open confession of my sins. Grant me courage to be open with you, to allow your Holy Spirit to show me the truth of my disobedience, and to believe that forgiveness is possible in Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Live It

Explore your methods of refreshment. How do you soothe your soul and find calm? Try prayer and reading of Scripture, not just when you are in your appointed time of prayer, but when your spirit is disturbed within you and you feel a desperate need for peace and comfort.