

Times of Refreshing

Acts 3:11-26

June 17, 2001

“Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.” Of all the elements of the gospel in this passage— crucifixion and resurrection, healing and faith, prophecy and fulfillment, proclamation and humility, truth and confidence, suffering and glory, strength and health, listening and blessing—of all the elements of the gospel in this passage, this is the one which has attracted me the most: “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”

“Times of refreshing” sounds like a wonderful thing to me! Would you like a time of refreshing? Is not that the reason we take vacations? Is not that the reason people go to the river? Is not that the reason people set aside their work? Is not that the reason people come to church? I think we yearn for “times of refreshing.” We need “times of refreshing.” So, what are they? Where can we find them? How can we receive them? What will we do with them?

To start with, we need to back up a little bit. Peter says, “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” “Repent” means, of course, to turn around, but there is something that comes even before that. Peter says, “Repent therefore.” Something happens before the repenting. There is an antecedent. There is a reason. There is a cause. There is something that happens which gives us the impetus, the reason, the cause, the energy, the purpose, the drive, and the wherewithal to do what we need to do, to turn where we need to turn, to say what we need to say, and to be what we need to be. What is this something that happens? This something that happens is Jesus Christ, the son of the living God, crucified and resurrected, dead and yet alive again, born to the people of Israel, risen to all the world. He is the reason for repentance. He is the source of all “times of refreshing.”

Behind Jesus stands “the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers.” Thus Peter spoke as one Jew to other Jews. “The God of our fathers glorified his servant Jesus.” This is as far back as you can get. God himself is the source of the cause of the “times of refreshing.” God himself has acted in the world

for our good and for our benefit. God himself has sent his servant to us to act on his behalf. God himself has had mercy on us, and we are sore in need of it.

It is good to know that God has acted in our favor. Sometimes the government works against us. Sometimes the economy turns against us. Sometimes our families hurt and wound us. But God has already taken action in our favor. God has already provided for our deepest need. God has healed our deepest wound. God has made us his very own. Thanks be to God!

How has God accomplished this? Most of all, he has done it through his son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Jesus was the servant of God. He came from God. The actions he took were on behalf of God. The words he taught were from God. The miracles he worked were by the power of God. And yet, he was the rejected one. He was betrayed, delivered up, crucified, killed, and buried. The one who is the author and source of all life had life taken from him. But that was not the end. If it were the end, we would not remember him today. Too many people have been killed and forgotten. We cannot remember their names. But that is not what happened here.

Instead, God raised him from the dead. Did you hear that? God raised him from the dead. That has never happened before. We are not talking about resuscitation. We are not talking about restoration to this life. God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, the same person but a new and different life, forever beyond the reach of pain, forever immune from disease, forever without decline, life without death, life eternal, life forever and ever, the promise of our own. Of this Peter and John were witnesses. This is what they saw. This is what they knew. This is what they preached. This is what they staked their lives on. This is what they gave their lives for. God raised Jesus from the dead. Sin, death, and evil were defeated. Nothing was the same. Everything was new. Thanks be to God!

So, it is the God and Father of Jesus Christ who stands behind Jesus Christ and who is the source of times of refreshing for us. How does Jesus win this for us? How does Jesus bring us this relief? How can he lift our burdens? How can he set us free? Jesus Christ died in order that we might live, and he lives in order that we might live eternally. That is easily enough said. What does it mean? First, Jesus Christ died in order that we might live. The servant of God served God all the way by being obedient unto death. It is easy to be obedient on sunny days. It is almost impossible while nailed to a cross. Jesus served God to the very end. They never broke him. He kept believing, he kept obeying, and he kept loving, even when he breathed no longer. They could not break him. If he had quit believing in God, we would have no reason to believe in God. If he had quit obeying God, there would be no hope for us. If he had quit loving and those about him, he would have been no

better than us, and we would not remember his name or his life, for he would have failed us just as we have failed ourselves. But that is not what happened.

Jesus served God to the bitter end. And thus he died that we might live. He gave up his life to defeat the enemies of our lives. He sacrificed himself in order to save us. Can you see that something new and qualitatively different has happened here? Nonbelievers are always wanting to reduce Jesus to the status of being a good example. Do you think you could die on a cross without wavering? Jesus is not an example. That is not the point. In fact, that misses the point, hides the point, obscures the point, and denies the point of his death. Jesus is not an example. He is our Savior. You cannot be a savior. I cannot be a savior. Jesus is not an example of a savior so that you and I can be little saviors. Jesus is the Savior. There is none beside him. There is no other savior. He stands alone. And he stands for you and me. Jesus Christ died in order that we might live. Thanks be to God.

Second, Jesus Christ lives in order that we might live eternally. It is not simply the case that Jesus died well. He did, but that is not the end of the story. God raised him from the dead to a new and different life. God accepted the sacrifice which Christ offered and made. God approved of all that Christ did and stood for. God acknowledged that Christ's service to the end defeated the massed powers of sin, death, and evil. And so God vindicated the betrayal, denial, conviction, and execution of his only Son by raising him from the dead. God overturned the conviction. God reversed the court. God overruled the sentence. God made Jesus Christ alive again, and nothing has been the same since. The creator of the world recreated life from death. The redeemer of the world redeemed the redeemer from death. The provider of the world sustained his creation from oblivion by relighting the light of the world. And this has made all the difference.

“And his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong whom you see and know; and the faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.” The name of Jesus Christ is the name above all names. By him and by him alone are we saved. It is not our own strength. It is not our own goodness. It is not our own wits. It is not our own wealth. By him and by him alone are we saved. In him do we trust. In him do we believe. In him do we place our faith. In him do we put all our confidence. By him and by him alone are we saved. We cannot overcome our sin, but he has forgiven it. We cannot conquer evil, but he has defeated it. We cannot escape death, but he has won us new life beyond death.

Therefore repent. Therefore turn around. Therefore do an about face. Therefore turn away from sin, death, and evil, and turn toward God and his Christ. This is all the reason we need. “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive

until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.” Yes, Jesus will continue in heaven until all of God’s plans and purposes are fulfilled. Then he will send Jesus Christ back to us. But in the meantime, let us seek and enjoy the “times of refreshing.” We embark upon this by repenting. We enter upon this believing. We continue in it by faith, worship, joy, and holiness of life. We cannot get to heaven by doing more of the same old stuff we have been doing. That will not work! The call is to repent, to turn around. We cannot win God’s approval by ignoring his commandments. Not that we have to win his approval, or that we can win his approval, but why would we want to be knowingly disobedient? If you are at all interested in the times of refreshing, the times of salvation, the times of new life, turn around. Leave the past. Abandon every self-centered security. Cast yourself upon the mercy of God. Trust in Jesus Christ alone. Then “times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”

What are these times of refreshing? In these times the anxieties and fears of life shall disappear and go away. In these times hatred shall be dissolved. In these times sin shall be forgiven. In these times we shall be fed by the word of God through the preaching of the gospel and the teaching of the scriptures. In these times we shall be nurtured by the sacraments, baptism marking the beginning of new life and the Lord’s Supper feeding us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation. In these times we shall be lifted up by praising and worshiping God and we shall be sustained by making our prayers to God. In these times we shall enjoy each other’s company as we come to know each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. In these times we shall be saved from all that has gone wrong and from all the wrong we have done. In these time we shall love one another because he has first loved us.

Brothers and sisters, we live in a world weary of strife, hunger, war, and hatred. We live in a church around the world torn by disbelief and misbehavior. We live in families, or what is left of them, torn by hatred, contempt, and infidelity. We live our own lives captive to the harsh masters of sin, death, and evil. Are we ready for a change? Would you like to be and to do something different? Do you want to be a part of something which is not only the biggest movement in history but which is also the work of God lifting us out of this world and into the next? Are you ready for the times of refreshing?

You have heard the good news of Jesus Christ. “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.”

To God be the glory, forever and ever! Amen.

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