

Pastor Steven J. Cole  
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship  
123 S. Beaver Street  
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001  
[www.fcfonline.org](http://www.fcfonline.org)

## HOW TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL

Acts 3:11-26

By

Steven J. Cole

December 3, 2000

© Steven J. Cole, 2000

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture  
Quotations are from the New American  
Standard Bible, © The Lockman Foundation

December 3, 2000  
Acts Lesson 11

## How to Proclaim the Gospel Acts 3:11-26

We've all had opportunities to share our faith in Christ where we've blown it. A year ago last Thanksgiving Day, Marla and I had run in the Turkey Trot race at Buffalo Park. After the race, a man came up to me and, without any introduction or greeting, said, "How old are you?" When I answered, his next words were, "When was the last time you had your prostate checked?" I must admit that I was a bit taken aback!

He went on to tell me that he was 53 and was dying of prostate cancer. He was going around handing out leaflets to men about prostate cancer and to women about breast cancer. Although he was not in a listening mode, I wanted to say something to him about his eternal destiny, but I stood there tongue-tied. Since then, whenever I have thought of him, I have prayed that God would bring someone else into his life to share the gospel before he dies.

I have had many other opportunities to tell people about the Savior where I could not think fast enough to figure out what to say. About an hour later, I get brilliant ideas of what I could have said, but by then the opportunity is gone. If you're like me, then we all could use some instruction on how to proclaim the gospel when God opens the opportunity.

Peter's second sermon in Acts gives us some help. God had just used Peter and John to heal a man who had been lame from birth. A crowd quickly gathered, amazed at what had happened. Peter did not stand there tongue-tied. Rather, he delivered an impromptu sermon that God used to save 2,000 souls. Since he was talking to "men of Israel" (3:12), Peter used language and concepts that Jewish men could understand. In the same way, we should seek to relate to people in a manner so that they can connect with the truth of the gospel. Peter emphasized three truths that we must emphasize if we want to proclaim the gospel properly:

To proclaim the gospel, we must exalt the Lord Jesus, confront sinners with their guilt and the danger of judgment,

and offer God's grace to those who repent.

The first and probably most important principle is:

1. To proclaim the gospel, we must exalt the Lord Jesus.

Peter's sermon is full of the Lord Jesus Christ, and so should our witnessing be. People must consider, *Who is Jesus Christ?* Is He a mere man who had some good moral teachings? If so, people may choose to adopt some of His teachings and reject others, according to their own preferences. But if He is the Savior and Lord, prophesied of in the Old Testament, crucified in accordance with God's plan, but risen from the dead as He predicted, then He is also the coming Judge of the whole earth. *This* Christ imposes some inescapable claims on every soul. People may reject Him at their own peril, or they may follow Him as Savior and Lord. But *everything* in witnessing hinges on exalting the person of Jesus Christ. We do not proclaim the gospel rightly unless we exalt Him.

- A. To exalt the Lord Jesus, we must deflect any glory away from ourselves.

Peter begins his sermon by deflecting the glory for the miracle away from John and him, as if they had either the power or piety to make a lame man walk (3:12). If God uses us to bring physical healing to another person or to lead that person to saving faith in Christ, it is not because of anything in us. We are just the clay vessels that the Potter uses for His own purposes. To take any credit for anything that God does through us is to rob Him of the glory rightly due to His name. As Paul tells the proud Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:7), "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"

If someone praises you for something that you have done, there is nothing wrong with saying, "Thank you." The person means it as an encouragement, and it is proper to thank them for their kind words. But if they go on and on, or if there is any danger that you are robbing God of glory, you should say, "Thank you for your encouragement, but the Lord should get all the glory. He alone enabled me to minister to you."

- B. To exalt the Lord Jesus, we must tell people who He is and what He has done.

- 1) To exalt the Lord Jesus, we must tell people who He is.

Peter uses numerous titles that apply to Jesus, but they are all summed up in the phrase, "the name of Jesus." He emphasizes this in verse 16, which hearkens back to verse 6, "And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; ..." Jesus' name stands for everything that He is. The Jews had a holy reverence for the name of God, so much so that they would not even dare pronounce it. In the Hebrew Bible, whenever they got to the name, "Yahweh," they would say, "Adonai," which means "Lord." "The name" became a way of referring to God. Peter here exalts the name of Jesus.

*Jesus* comes from the Hebrew name, Joshua, which means, "Yahweh saves." The angel told Joseph to name Mary's son Jesus, because "He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). *Jesus* also points to our Lord's humanity, since he was given that name at His birth, having been miraculously conceived in Mary through the Holy Spirit.

Peter also refers to Jesus as the *Servant* (a better translation here than Son) of "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (3:13). The word "servant" is used in the Greek version of Isaiah 52:13-53:12, where the prophet predicts that the coming Servant would be "pierced through for our transgressions" and that the Lord would cause "the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (53:5-6). As the Lord's Servant, Jesus did not come to do His own will, but rather to submit fully to God's will, especially the cross.

Peter also calls Jesus "*the Holy and Righteous One*" (3:14). Jesus was without any sin of His own. Thus He could offer Himself as the substitute for sinners, without needing to make atonement for His own sins. Only God is truly holy and righteous. In his first sermon, Peter quoted from Psalm 16:10, where David declares that God will not allow His Holy One to undergo decay (Acts 2:27). On another occasion, Peter affirmed his belief that Jesus is "the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69). Even the demons recognized Jesus as the Holy One of God (Luke 4:34). "Righteous" focuses on the fact that Jesus had done no wrong (Isa. 53:9; John 8:46).

Peter also refers to Jesus as "*the Prince of life*" (Acts 3:15). The word "prince" means the leader or the author or originator. It is used in this sense in Hebrews 2:10, where Jesus is called "the author of [our] salvation," and in Hebrews 12:2, where He is called "the author and perfecter of faith." He originates our salvation and our faith and He brings it to completion. As the Prince or Author of life, He originates life, both physical and spiritual. He declared that He is the life (John 14:6). He said, "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes" (John 5:21).

Peter refers to Jesus as God's *Christ*, appointed for you (Acts 3:18 & 20). Jesus was not a self-appointed Christ. God appointed Him as His Anointed One (the meaning of "Christ" or "Messiah"). As such, He fulfills the many Old Testament Messianic prophecies.

Peter goes on (3:22) to show that Jesus is also the *prophet* whom Moses predicted in Deuteronomy 18:15 (see John 1:21, 25; 6:14; 7:40). Not only that, Jesus was the one of whom all the prophets, from Samuel onward, had spoken (Acts 3:24). While Samuel himself made no recorded prophecy about Messiah, he did anoint David as king and spoke of the establishment of his kingdom through his descendent, which was fulfilled in Jesus (1 Sam. 13:14; 15:28; 28:17; 2 Sam. 7:12-16).

Furthermore, Jesus is *the seed of Abraham* through whom all the nations of the earth shall be blessed (Acts 3:25). Peter concludes (3:26) by stating again that Jesus is God's *Servant*, whom He raised up (in the sense of 3:22, not a reference to the resurrection) and sent to bless them by turning them from their wicked ways. Thus Peter, in relating to his Jewish audience, has shown Jesus to be in line with God's promises to Abraham, Moses, and David.

When you are sharing the gospel, people will try to get onto all sorts of rabbit trails. While sometimes you must answer their questions, keep in mind the central fact, that the person needs to see who Jesus is. They may never have read the Gospels, and so they may need to read them before they can make an intelligent decision to follow Christ. Or, you can take them to verses where Jesus makes astounding claims, such as John 5:19-47, 8:31-59, or 14:1-11. The main thing is to bring the person face to face with who Jesus is.

- 2) To exalt the Lord Jesus, we must tell people what He did.

Peter makes it clear that the Lord Jesus died on the cross; He was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven; and, He is coming back again to fulfill God's promises to Israel and to judge all who have rejected Him.

*He died on the cross.* After showing who Jesus is, God's Servant, the Holy and Righteous One, the Prince of Life, the Christ, and the Prophet, Peter's audience should have realized that while they killed Jesus, at the same time He laid down His life willingly. They were responsible for their sin of putting Jesus to death. And yet, at the same time, it had been announced beforehand by God's prophets "that His Christ would suffer" and now God had fulfilled His word (3:18). As Isaiah 53 shows, God's servant would bear the sins of His people. The apostles themselves had not understood this clearly until after the resurrection, when Jesus explained to them that the Christ had to suffer these things before He entered into His glory (Luke 24:26, 46).

The cross of Christ must be a central feature of our witness. It will be foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those being saved, it is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18). The cross humbles our pride, because it robs us of the glory of being our own savior. It also humbles us by showing that we aren't pretty good people who just need a little boost from God to get into heaven. If we were, then Christ died needlessly. We are lost sinners, alienated from God and unable to do anything to save ourselves. If Christ had not died for us, we would be eternally lost.

*He was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven.* It would be impossible for the grave to hold down "the Prince of life"! Peter testifies that God raised Him from the dead, "a fact to which we are witnesses" (3:15). If Jesus' body had still been in the tomb or if the Jewish leaders knew the whereabouts of Jesus' body, Peter and the rest of the apostles would have been laughed out of town for making such a claim. The fact that Peter could boldly declare this and 2,000 people that day believed it proves that the resurrection was not just a figment of the apostles' imaginations. Jesus was raised bodily from the dead. This is the central fact of Christianity, without which everything else falls to the ground (1 Cor. 15:12-19).

If Peter's audience wondered, "If He is raised, where is He?" Peter explains that He is *in heaven* "until the period of the restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time" (3:21). This refers to the future millennial kingdom, when Jesus will literally fulfill God's promises to Israel. Note also that Peter affirms the divine inspiration of the Old Testament prophets. God spoke through them.

*He is coming back again to fulfill God's promises to Israel and to judge all who have rejected Him.* Jesus will restore all things (3:21) and bring the times of refreshing (3:19) at His second coming, when God will send Jesus (3:20), who will be bodily present on earth again (3:19). When He comes, "every soul that does not heed" [obey] Him "shall be utterly destroyed from among the people" (3:23). He will come again as the Savior of those who believe in Him, but as the fearful Judge of those who disobey Him.

Thus Peter shows us that to bear witness properly, we must exalt the name of Jesus: who He is and what He did, including what He will do when He comes again in power and glory.

2. To proclaim the gospel, we must confront sinners with their guilt and warn them of impending judgment.

Perhaps Peter was making up for his cowardly denial of Christ a few weeks before, but he is not diplomatic in hitting his audience with the terrible sin that they have committed in crucifying Jesus. At the outset (3:13), he nails them for delivering and disowning Jesus when Pilate would have released Him. The word "disowned" means "to deny." He repeats the word in the next verse, where the word "you" is emphatic: "*You* disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead" (3:14-15). He is showing how they were opposed to God Himself. He also shows the utter folly of rebellion against Jesus Christ. You can kill Him, but you can't triumph over Him, because He is the Author of life itself. Like those punching bags with sand in the base, you can knock Him down, but He's going to come back up and knock you down!

Unlike Peter, many modern preachers try to tiptoe around the matter of sin and guilt. They don't want to offend people. Be-

sides, if someone has low self-esteem, hearing that he is guilty might drive him to despair. So they give them strokes, tell them how much God loves them, and encourage them to receive Jesus so that they can reach their full potential. But if we omit sin and guilt, there is no need for a Savior!

Jesus didn't die on the cross for pretty good folks so that they could feel better about themselves and to help them succeed in life. He died for them because they are sinners who are under God's wrath and judgment. Without a Savior, they face both physical death and the second death, eternal separation from God in the Lake of Fire. The reason for their condemnation is that they have not heeded [obeyed] God's Prophet Jesus (3:23). Peter sticks the knife in all the way to the handle when he tells them that instead of Jesus, they asked for a murderer to be freed and killed the Prince of life (3:14b-15a).

While the Jews in Jesus' day literally killed their Messiah, as Spurgeon points out, "Every sin in the essence of it is a killing of God" (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* [Ages Software], vol. 14, "Apostolic Exhortation," on Acts 3:19). If you are living for sin rather than for the Lord Jesus, you are choosing a murderer instead of Christ. You may be choosing alcohol or drugs, lust or greed, or some other sin. But whatever sin it is, it leads to death and eternal judgment. It is a murderer that will kill you.

Verse 17 is difficult to understand in light of Jesus' words in John 15:22, "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin [meaning, guilt], but now they have no excuse for their sin." Also, Peter's words seem to go against Stephen's bold charges against the Jewish Sanhedrin, where he accuses them of receiving God's law, but not keeping it when they killed Jesus (7:51-53). In what sense had Peter's audience and their leaders acted in ignorance when they killed Jesus?

As I explained in my sermon on Jesus' prayer from the cross to forgive His enemies ("Our Great Need, God's Greater Grace," Luke 23:34 [6/25/2000]), I understand Peter to be reflecting the Hebrew concept of unintentional sins of ignorance as opposed to sins of willful defiance (Num. 15:22-31; Lev. 4:2; 5:18; 22:14). For sins of ignorance, an offering was available to remove guilt (Heb. 9:7). But for willful, brazen defiance, which I understand to be

tantamount to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:30-32), the person was without hope.

In Peter's audience, there were varying levels of ignorance when it came to the death of Jesus. Peter was offering the hope of God's mercy to any who would respond. Some of the Jewish leaders had committed the unpardonable sin, attributing Jesus' works to Satan. They were not ignorant and they could not be forgiven. Other Jewish leaders, like Paul (and only God knew their hearts), were zealous for their Jewish system, but they were ignorant of Jesus' true identity. Others in the Jewish crowd were even more ignorant and were wrongly swayed by their evil leaders. But, while the level of spiritual ignorance may lessen the level of guilt, ignorance is no excuse when it comes to the final judgment. All stand guilty and condemned before God, as Paul argues so forcefully in Romans 1-3. If they did not heed Jesus after hearing Peter's sermon, they would face His awful judgment (Acts 3:23).

We have not adequately presented the good news of Christ as Savior unless we confront people with the bad news, that they have chosen a murderer instead of the Prince of life. They have killed Jesus by their sin. If they do not repent, they will face God's certain and awful judgment.

But, thankfully, there is a final element that we must include:

3. To proclaim the gospel, we must offer God's grace to the repentant.

After Peter's indictment of his audience, you would expect him to say, "You're all going to burn in hell for crucifying Jesus," and walk off and leave them. But rather, he exhorts them (3:19), "Repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away." If they would repent, God would send Jesus to bring times of refreshing and to restore all things (3:19, 21), a reference to the millennial kingdom. There will be a major revival in Israel just before the return of Christ (Matt. 23:39; Rom. 11:26; see Zech. 12:10; 14:9). He tells them that God sent His Servant Jesus "to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways" (3:26).

If God is so gracious as to offer forgiveness and His kingdom blessings to those who crucified His Son, then surely He offers grace to *every* sinner who will repent. The apostle Paul was the

chief of sinners, but he found mercy, so that in him as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life (1 Tim. 1:15-16). God sent His Servant Jesus to bless *you*, by turning *you* from your wicked ways!

What is repentance? It is a change of mind that results in a change of one's entire life. It means to turn to God from our sin. Spurgeon (*ibid.*) says that there is no better definition of it than in the children's hymn: "Repentance is to leave the sins we loved before, and show that we in earnest grieve, by doing so no more." No matter how terrible your sins have been, if you will repent, you will experience in advance "times of refreshing" from God, because He will wipe away your sins and bless you.

### Conclusion

So whenever you get an opportunity to talk to someone about spiritual matters, seek to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ. The sinner needs to know who Jesus is and what He did. Don't hesitate, out of fear of giving offense, to confront the sinner and warn him of impending judgment. He needs to feel his guilt so that he realizes his need for a Savior. And, don't fail to offer God's grace and forgiveness to everyone who will repent. And whether God uses your witness to save 2,000, as He did with Peter's sermon, or maybe just one, you will be filled with joy to know that by turning a sinner from the error of his way, you have been used to save his soul from death (James 5:20).

### Discussion Questions

1. How much does a person need to know about God and Christ in order to be saved?
2. Is conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8) lacking in much of today's evangelism? How can we correct this?
3. Is it right to appeal to felt needs (other than forgiveness) in presenting the gospel? Cite biblical examples.
4. How can we be prepared to take advantage of opportunities to share the gospel?

Copyright, Steven J. Cole, 2000, All Rights Reserved.