

Acts 3:12-20

Did you ever find yourself in one of those **embarrassing** situations where you were caught doing something you **didn't know** was wrong? It sometimes happens in situations where we are **new**, and aren't **familiar** with the rules ahead of time - like the out-of-state driver who gets stopped by a local officer for **speeding** and says, "Sorry officer, I didn't **realize** this was only a 35 mph zone." It can also happen when we decide to **overlook** the rules - like the child who tries this line, "Hey Mom, what are you so angry about? I **didn't know** the pie was for something special!" Of course in both cases, the rules still apply, and I'm sure that some form of **punishment** would be carried out. You see, in most instances, **Ignorance Is No Excuse**.

The sermon in our text was preached by the Apostle **Peter** following the healing of a **crippled man** by Peter and John. The news of this miracle immediately began to **spread**, and a large **crowd** gathered around these two disciples. The people **marveled** at their **power**, but Peter made it very clear with this sermon that the man had **not** been healed by **their** power - but rather, by the power of, and in the name of **Jesus**.

Peter's message began, "*The God of **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant **Jesus**.*" Notice how Peter **appealed** to the crowd which had gathered. They were primarily **Jews**, and Peter wanted them to know that it was **their** God who had performed this miracle - the God of **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**. Those men were the **patriarchs** - the individuals who had fathered both the Jewish **nation** and the Jewish **religion**. The Jews took great **pride** in the fact that they were the children of Abraham - so naturally, they would be able to **relate** to what Peter was telling them here. Peter didn't exempt **himself** and **John** either. They **also** were children of Abraham, and they **rejoiced** in the miraculous **healing** which their God had brought about.

However, by the grace of God there were also some **differences** between these two **disciples** and the **crowd** which had gathered. Peter continued, "*You handed (him) over and **disowned** (him) in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. You disowned the **Holy and Righteous One** and asked to have a **murderer** given to you. You **killed** the Author of Life, whom **God raised** from the dead. **We are witnesses** of this.*" Here Peter was preaching the **law** with its full **force**, and he was doing it by means of **comparisons** - comparisons which all revolved around **Jesus**.

First he compared **God** and the **Jews**. God had **glorified** Jesus. The most recent **showing** of that glory was in the **healing** which had just taken place. But God had **also** glorified Jesus in His **life**, and in His **death**; as well as in His **resurrection** from the dead, and His **ascension** into heaven. On the other hand, the **Jews** had not glorified Jesus **at all**. They had **rejected** Him - handing Him over to be **killed**, and **disowning** Him before Pilate. They had delivered Jesus into the hands of the chief priests and elders. They had even cried out for His **crucifixion**.

This is where Peter made his **second** comparison - one between **Pilate** and the **Jews**. Pontius Pilate was a **heathen** Roman governor, but after questioning Jesus several times, he was **unable** to find Him guilty of **any** crime, and he sought to **release** Jesus. But again, the **Jews** wouldn't stand for it, and they continued to push for His **crucifixion**. Even when Pilate had washed his hands of the matter the Jews said, "*Fine. We will **gladly** take the blame. His blood will be on **us**, and on our **children**.*"

They had also begged Pilate to release **Barabbas** to them. Peter made a **third** comparison there - one between **Barabbas** and **Jesus**. The Jews had chosen **Barabbas** - a **disrupter** of society - a **murderer** - a **destroyer** of life. And they had **killed** Jesus - the **Savior** - holy and righteous - the Author of **life**. The disciples were **witnesses** to all of these facts. There could be no **overlooking** them, or **denying** them. The facts were **there**, and the facts were **plain**.

Now please don't **misinterpret** Peter's motives. He wasn't trying to do **away** with the Jewish nation by driving them to **despair**. On the contrary, Peter was very **concerned** about the Jews. Peter **himself** was a Jew, as was **Jesus**. They were his **people**, his **blood brothers**, and Peter hoped that someday they would also be his brothers in the **faith**. That's why he was bringing them this message of stern **law**. They had to recognize **now**, that what they had done in **rejecting** Jesus was **sinful**, even though they hadn't realized it **at the time**.

Their actions, and the actions of their **leaders**, were done out of **ignorance**. They were among the people for whom Jesus **prayed** from the cross, "*Father, **forgive** them because they **don't know** what they are **doing**.*" They **couldn't** have known, for Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*None of the rulers of this world **knew** it. (If they **had** known it, they would not have **crucified** the Lord of glory.)*" They were **ignorant** of their sin, but **Ignorance Is No Excuse**. Sin remains sin. They didn't **know** they had crucified **God's Son**, but they knew they had crucified **somebody** - and they knew that He didn't **deserve** it either. Somehow they had

allowed their pride and their emotions to **run away** with them, and before they knew it, they couldn't **turn back**. They **knew** all of God's laws which exhorted them to deal with one another (even with their enemies) in **love**, but they weren't **applying** those laws to **themselves**.

The Jews didn't **know** what they were doing, but **God did**. We read, "*In this way God **fulfilled** what he had **foretold** through the mouth of all the prophets: that his Christ would **suffer**.*" God had **used** their sinful actions to carry out His plan of **salvation**. God had used their **lovelessness** to show forth His perfect **love**. And the love which He showed by offering the life of His Son, was not going to **end** there.

After hearing the convicting testimony of Peter in his sermon, the Jews may have been on the verge of **despair**. But Peter assured them that God's **love** was still **effective**, and it was being extended to **them**. I'm sure they felt much like Joseph's brothers felt when they finally realized that their brother wasn't **dead**, but rather was the **ruler** of the world's most powerful nation at that time - Egypt. They thought that Joseph would seek **revenge** for what they had done to him. But Joseph only wanted them to **turn away** from their former deeds, and leave them in the **past**. God had **forgiven** them - He had made everything work out for the **best** - and He had **reunited** their family.

There was **forgiveness** for Joseph's brothers, and there was also forgiveness for the **Jews** in our **text**. So Peter told them, "***Repent and return to have your sins wiped out, so that refreshing times may come from the presence of the Lord and that he may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you.***" Peter **himself** had experienced the **forgiveness** which comes with **repentance**. Peter, who was among the **closest** of Jesus' disciples - Peter, who boldly stated that he would **never** fall away. Yes, even **he** had **denied** the Lord, but he had also found **forgiveness**. In **reinstating** His wayward disciple, Jesus had told Peter to feed His **lambs** and His **sheep**. And that's exactly what Peter was **doing** in our text. The message which he **personally** knew to be true, he was now **sharing** with others. **Repent**, and your sins will be **blotted out**.

Just as clouds **blot out** the rays of the sun, or debts are **blotted out** when they have been paid - with one sweep of the **eraser**, our Lord has **wiped clean** all the **sins** which were marked on the world's blackboard. The Jews tried to claim **ignorance** of these things. But **Ignorance Is No Excuse**. And even if it **were**, we couldn't **claim** it for ourselves - because we are **not** ignorant. We have been **told** again and again about the **loving actions** of our Savior, and about His free

forgiveness. Every time we celebrate the **Lord's Supper** the opportunity is here. Will we receive it **regularly** and **frequently**? The Lord wants to take us **back** into His fold. He wants to **forgive** us and make us **strong**, so we will **share** the message of forgiveness with **others** as Peter did. **Repent!** We need to **turn away** from our sins, and leave them in the **past**. Although we **also** are guilty of **killing** the Author of life, and we also are guilty of **disowning** our Lord, Jesus has forgiven it **all**. May the **forgiveness** which our Lord Jesus brings us through His glorious Easter resurrection, fill us with great **joy**, and with an undying **zeal** to carry out His will in our lives. Amen.