

Sermon – 28/03/2010 am

Author of Life

Study Text: Acts 3:14-15

Advances in medical science in recent decades have been astonishing. Heart disease is treated with new medication and surgery techniques. The word ‘cancer’ is no longer the death sentence it once was. All this is prolonging life. But the fact remains that in the end we all die. There is no treatment for death itself – at least not from a medical perspective.

The secret of life is not known to science. How did life as we know it begin? Evolutionists think that there was a big bang billions of years ago and that life somehow appeared after this. I remember some scientists putting various gases together in a jar and zapping them with electricity in the hope of creating life of some form. They were trying to recreate what evolutionists think were the conditions in which life first appeared on earth. The experiment failed. The question of how life began remains unanswered by evolutionary theory. Those who believe in God are not haunted by this question because God tells us in the Bible that he made man and he breathed into man the breath of life (Genesis 2:7).

Jesus is the source of life. In him was life. Jesus said *I am the bread of life. You are not willing to come to me that you may live* he said to the Jews (John 5:40). Even though Jesus had healed a man who had been a cripple for 38 years they would not believe he was the Son of God; they had no answer but still refused to believe the simple truth. In the name of Jesus, Peter and John healed a cripple of over 40 years. The people were amazed to see this man walking and leaping and praising God. The gathered around Peter and John to hear what they had to say.

Wicked Men

You killed the Prince of life Peter told the crowd at the temple (3:15). Rather than ‘prince’, the Greek word ‘archegos’ is better translated as ‘author’ or ‘originator’. *You denied the One who is holy and righteous and asked for a murderer instead* (3:14).

‘Away with this man! Crucify him!’ The cries echoed in the streets of Jerusalem as the sun rose on the morning of Passover. The Jewish leaders had arrested Jesus and conducted what we would call a kangaroo court trial during the night. Many bore false witness against him but their testimonies did not agree (Mark 14:56). Eventually under oath Jesus testified that he was the Christ, the Son of God. He was the anointed of God, the one spoken of repeatedly by the Old Testament prophets, including Abraham and Moses.

‘*Crucify him, crucify him!*’ yelled the crowd as they were stirred up by the Jewish leaders. They delivered Jesus up to Pilate in order to have him put to death. Under Roman law only the governor was allowed to hand down a death sentence. Pilate hesitated. He knew what was going on in the city. He knew these priests were acting out of envy. He knew Jesus was innocent. But he was a man without principles. Pilate cared only for himself. As the crowd yelled he gave in to their demands for the sake of expediency.

Just a week before the Passover this crowd was praising Jesus as he rode into the city on a colt. They were shouting *Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord* (Mark 11:9). Then on the Friday they were yelling *crucify him, crucify him!* Just over seven weeks later this crowd

gathered before Peter and John in the temple marvelling at the miracle they had performed in the name of Jesus.

Are we surprised by the behaviour of this crowd, one moment praising Jesus and the next calling for him to be crucified? They were acting just like sheep – and just like the prophet said *we all like sheep have gone astray* (Isaiah 53:6). If a sheep sees the one ahead of them jump over the cliff they will follow. That is the nature of sheep. If your friends are going to the movies, or your family is having a party when you normally go to church, what do you do? Are you like sheep?

Today you are here praising Jesus. Where will you be tomorrow? Where will you be next week? Would you have joined the crowd shouting ‘crucify him’? Oh! But that is different you say? Just how different is it? ‘Those who are not for me, those not following me with all their heart, are against me’ said Jesus. Remember the words of Joshua – *choose this day who you will serve. As for me and my house we will serve the Lord* (Joshua 24:15).

Peter was not a crowd pleaser. He took no glory to himself. Moreover, he told the crowd they were the wicked ones who put Jesus to death. *You killed the author of life* he said. *You denied the holy and righteous one*. These Old Testament titles for God were familiar to the Jews. These wicked people chose a murder to be released when Pilate foolishly tried to compromise with the screaming mob.

How terribly blind and ignorant men and women can be. How gullible and foolish some people are! After all the warnings they hear about the so-called Nigerian get-rich-quick schemes some still fall for the lies they read in the email. The lust for money blinds them to the obvious. The desire for love and popularity similarly blinds many to the danger of ungodly relationships. The desire for peace blinds others to the false claims of religions and gurus. There is a guru in India who has been shown to be a fraud and a liar but millions still flock to his ashram. Scientology has been totally discredited but still people get taken in by false claims.

Jesus warned the people again and again about the hypocrisy – what he called the leaven – of the Pharisees and Jewish leaders, but still they allowed themselves to be manipulated. The Pharisees preached legalism. ‘You must be circumcised and keep the law if you want to go to heaven’ they said. This great deception of the devil continues today. Merit based salvation is the basic doctrine of all religions today – including much of Christianity. What we just said about coming to worship rather than go to the party is not about earning salvation but about living as a person who puts Christ first in your life because he loves you and gave his life for you.

Will Of God

Peter told the crowd that the cripple was healed through faith in the name of Jesus. He told these *men of Israel* that *the God of our fathers has glorified his servant Jesus* (3:13). ‘You wicked people put Jesus to death, you handed him over to Pilate, screaming for him to be crucified, but God raised him up’ (2:24). The author of life could not be held by death.

Peter was just as surprised as anyone at seeing the risen Jesus. But after receiving the Holy Spirit he understood that what Jesus had said to him many times was the truth. On one occasion Peter actually rebuked Jesus for saying that he must be killed and after three days rise again (Mark 8:33). He now realised how foolish he had been. It is very foolish to disagree with anything that Jesus has said because he is the Son of God. Let those who think they can pick and choose what they like from the Bible take heed!

Jesus was no longer dead but alive. Peter became a new man. The cripple was healed and now believed in Jesus. He was a new man. Some five thousand men who saw this man and heard the apostle believed in Jesus Christ and became new people. What a great day this was! How wonderful it would have been to be there. How wonderful it is that we can be here praising Jesus today. We would love to see many more doing the same but let us not be discouraged. Do not be tempted to follow the crowd. Stand fast upon the truth. Stand fast in Jesus Christ for in him alone you will find rest for your soul.

Wicked men put Jesus to death but it was the will of God for him to die. From the very beginning God ordained for Jesus to be crucified (Acts 2:23, 3:18, 4:28). The Cross was a case of an innocent man being executed. People today believe what Pilate believed – that Jesus did nothing wrong. The men who killed him were wicked. Many see the Cross as a tragic miscarriage of justice but nothing more. Some see Jesus as a martyr, giving up his life for a good cause – for the poor or the outcaste. They put Jesus on a pedestal with Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. It is disturbing to see TEAR Fund printing and selling T-shirts with a picture of Gandhi on them.

But God raised Jesus from the dead – *of which we are witnesses* declared the apostle Peter (3:15). Surely Jesus must be in a different category to mere men like Gandhi and Mandela. Surely the resurrection proves that Jesus is unique. Jesus is very special in the eyes of God. That is why he raised him from the dead. But why did God allow Jesus to die in the first place? Because it was his will and because of your sin.

Why?

Why was Peter telling these things to the crowd? He was explaining how the cripple had been healed, but that was not the end of his message. He told the people how wicked they were to kill Jesus, but that was not the end of his message. He told them that it was God's will for Jesus to die. This was God's wonderful plan for their salvation. Peter called for a personal response from them – from each person in the crowd.

On the day of Pentecost the people responded asking Peter *what must we do?* (2:37). Peter told them at that time, and he tells them again here, *repent that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the Lord* (2:19). Peter preached the amazing grace of God. You killed Jesus but you did so in ignorance. He died because of your blindness and your sin. God calls you to repent, to turn around and believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. God will refresh your troubled and weary soul.

Peter's message needs to be heard afresh today. The hearts of men and women have not changed. We are still like sheep that have gone astray. We still follow the crowd. The call to repent and believe in Jesus Christ remains. The promise of refreshing remains. In Jesus you will be refreshed at the fountain life. In Jesus you will drink of the cup of salvation today, tomorrow and every day until he comes. Are you drinking at this fountain of life? Has Jesus quenched your thirst, or are you still going after the things of this world and remaining unsatisfied.

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