

“Choosing Our Father”

by Pastor Steve Hammond on 6/21/2020
Text: Acts 3:11-26 at FBC of Newport, NH

//11 While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. 12 When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? 13 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. 14 You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. 15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. 16 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 3:11-26 (NIV)

It's Father's Day. It's return-the-baby-bottles-with-your-donations-for-the-Pregnancy-Center day. And it so happens our text in Acts 3:11-26 has a lot of references to fathers in it. But of course if I only emphasize fathers here I won't be emphasizing the main point of the text, which is the need for us all to put our faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Still, it's good to know that our fathers agree with that point. At least they do if you're an Israelite in the first century. At least most of them. Well, at least the prominent ones of note, the prophets, the authors of the scriptures, the founding fathers and most important of all—the “God of our fathers”. All these fathers agree with the main point here. They are all pointing to it, to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. —Acts 3:13a

So, what's the problem here? Seems like everyone should be in complete agreement. Well here's the situation.

Peter has just healed that crippled man who always sat by the gate called “Beautiful.” Everyone knows a miracle has taken place, so the only question in the air is: “What do we make of it?” Peter's answer is to point to Jesus Christ. Trouble is, Jesus was crucified only a couple months ago by the authorities. They declared him to be a false messiah, worthy of death. How then can a miracle be taking place in his name?

But Peter isn't simply making an assertion and expecting everyone to bow at his word. Peter has back-up. It goes like this:

First, there's the healed man. There's no denying he was healed. And the man himself supports what Peter is saying.

Secondly, Peter is not taking credit for himself, something a lot of people might be tempted to do if they were trying to get people to bow at their word.

Thirdly, Peter, instead, gives the glory to God (and then to Jesus Christ). Not just any old god either, but to the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the “God of our fathers,” he says. Peter goes on to quote from Deuteronomy:

//The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. 16 For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb ...// —Deuteronomy 18:15-16a

Fourthly, he contrasts this glory given to Jesus with the killing and disowning of Jesus on the part of the authorities and the Jewish crowds.

You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. —Acts 3:15

Here is one of the biggest barriers for this crowd of Jews to face regarding belief that the crippled man was healed by the power and name of Jesus. And Peter doesn't dance around it. In fact, it's in his wheelhouse. He and the other apostles are indeed eye witnesses to the unjust trial and killing of Jesus—and to Jesus' resurrection. Peter is also in a position to know the crowd that cried for Jesus' death and for the release of Barabbas. Plus, those in the crowd know what they themselves have done. And they know Peter knows.

But Peter is not calling this crowd to despair. Nor is he calling them to grovel before him in order to make amends for what they've done. Instead, he gives them the Gospel. This is the main point of the passage. It's God's main point for why the crippled man walks in the first place. Peter explains how the man was healed, he backs up what he says, and then he calls everyone there to repent of their sins and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

//17 “Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. 18 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. 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 3:17-19

And a significant part of Peter's back up comes from the fathers of old, the fathers of Israel, and the God they all claim to worship.

So what can this crowd do but believe? How could they go against their own fathers and all the other things pointing them to Christ?

Well, in fact, many of them did go on to believe. The next chapter goes on to say the number of believers grew to 5,000. But it also goes on to show there was serious opposition to this new message of God's Good News in Christ.

But even with that opposition, this is an improvement. This is a vast improvement over the way most people face life and death decisions. Most people find their choice has already been made for them before they're even born. In the history of this world everything would seem to hinge on what father and what fatherland you're born to. If you're born high, you live high; born low,

you live low. Royalty begets royalty, but also merchant raises merchant, craftsman, soldier, serf or slave do much the same. It comes down from one's father. War and peace, prosperity and poverty can also come from one's fatherland.

The Jews themselves bank on this heavily. They claim Abraham as their father. And because of that they figure they've already been born into the right home and homeland.

But that is not how God is operating here. This crowd, and the nation of Israel behind them, has already chosen a murderer over the Savior. They have already disowned their own Messiah and King. But Peter acknowledges they did this in ignorance. So God, through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is giving them a second chance, an opportunity to make a real choice. In a sense they are getting the chance to choose their own Father. (How many children get to do that?) For if they believe in God's Son, God will be their Father, too. If they reject him? Well, that is their choice as well.

However, if they reject him their father will not be Abraham. It will be the devil himself. And they will have only themselves to blame.

The Anointed One of Israel has introduced us to his Father and his Father's love. Jesus Christ (who taught that we must be born again in order to enter the kingdom of God) has actually brought us to the point where we can choose whether we'll be born to God as our Father, or be a stillbirth through our rejection of His love. All other fathers give us no choice in the matter. God gives us Christ, so one might choose: Just Who Will Our Father Be?

This is not just a choice for those in the first century. People are still making this choice today. We are hearing a lot about racism right now, slavery and freedom, dividing lines of black and white. This is the world born into the chaos its abusive father the Devil himself. It begets violence and hatred. It's been going on seemingly for ever. And it can seem hopeless.

But there's another way through this world. A way of miraculous healing, even salvation. God has given us a real choice in the matter. He has given us the Gospel of Jesus Christ, his Son; he has given us himself as our Father—if we'll have him.

Just Who Will Our Father Be?

The choice is ours.