

Acts 3:11-21 While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. ¹² And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶ And his name-- by faith in his name-- has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. ¹⁷ "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Jesus Christ: Your Unburnable Bridge

They say that when the Roman Army would venture into a new land to conquer, the commanders would burn the bridges as they went so that the troops knew there was no going back; they must move forward. They say that Hernan Cortez, the Spanish Conquistador, when he landed in Mexico with his men to conquer the Aztecs, he burnt his ships, so that his troops would know they were fighting for their lives; there was no going back. The idea of burning bridges, is not usually something we like to do. It's so final. There's "no going back."

Although sometimes people will burn their bridges happily, thinking it's a good thing. I had a co-worker once that hated his job, and one day after receiving another job offer decided to burn his bridge to his current job. He walked into the office and chucked his ID badge across the room and said, "I QUIT!" Well, a month later his new job fell through, and he came crawling back to his old boss begging for his job back, but it was too late. His bridge had been burnt to nothing. Imagine if those Roman armies met their match in the field, but the bridges were burnt behind them and they had no where to flee. Or imagine if those Spanish armies were overpowered by the Aztecs, but their ships were no more. With no way out, it would be a massacre.

I wonder if the Jews that Peter was preaching to on this occasion felt this way about God. Look at what He says to them starting in v. 13 of our text that "**God. . .glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him.**" — Pilate, a pagan unbeliever, he did better than you because he recognized Jesus was innocent! He goes on. "**But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life.**"

Imagine the terror that Jesus' resurrection must have meant to *these* people that had actively seen to his death. They crucified the Son of God, and now he was back? What type of revenge would He be looking for? They couldn't deny any of it, the proof was right in front of them. It says in our text, they all flocked around Peter and John and were "utterly astounded." You see, right before our text, Peter and John had been walking through Jerusalem to the temple, and they came across a beggar who had

been crippled since birth. They spoke to him and commanded him to walk in the name of Jesus Christ. And he walked! And we're told that *everyone* recognized him as the man who had been lame for his entire life, now walking and leaping and praising God.

The man is clinging to Peter and John, the people are flocking around them astounded, and Peter says, "We didn't do this, JESUS did this. WHOM YOU KILLED!" Wouldn't that feel like the biggest burned bridge of all time? "God sent you His son. And you killed Him. He sent you your Savior, and you crucified him. He sent you Your KING and you rejected Him!" Imagine how they must have felt at these revelations? It could have been nothing other than absolute despair.

Perhaps sometimes a person who has fallen into great sin and shame can feel this way: *"I've gone too far, I've sinned too much, I've burned that bridge to God and there's no going back."* And while sincere Christians can certainly struggle with those thoughts, you often hear non-Christians saying things along those lines. They will joke and say, *"Well I'm too far gone. I'm going to hell anyways."* And though they joke about it, you can tell it's not really a joke, because people don't joke about those things unless they're also partly afraid of it. But that's because they believe their relationship with God depends on what *they* do, so they figure now that they've sinned, *"There's no hope now, I've already burned that bridge, might as well enjoy my life as much as I can!"*

Sometimes, we might have an attitude like that as well. After giving in to some temptation, maybe we might think, *"Well, I already crossed the bridge, I might as well go on and sin all the way."* Or, maybe we're being tempted by something and think, *"I can always repent later, and I'll just sin now."* And while it is generally true that you can repent later, in this context it is entirely false. When "repenting later" is used as an excuse to sin, that's not the voice of God but the voice of the devil! That's not a message of God's grace, but a twisting of scripture to lead us away from Christ.

You see, this is how the devil operates. In the midst of temptation, he will try to convince you, *"It's ok, just do it this one time and you can always repent later."* But after the law strikes at your heart and you feel the guilt of what you've done, the devil suddenly changes his tune and says, *"Look, what you did? There's no hope for you. There's no retreat. You can't repent of that, God doesn't want you anymore, you have BURNED THAT BRIDGE!"* One of my all-time favorite movies is Disney's "The Lion King." In it, Simba's dad dies and his evil uncle Scar tells lies to Simba and convinces him, *"YOU DID THIS! You killed your father, everyone's going to blame you, you've burnt this bridge."* And so Scar says to Simba, *"Run away, and NEVER come back."*

So the devil likes to try to convince us, when it comes to our relationship with God. *"Run away, and never come back!"* This is how he would have been preaching to the Jews about Jesus' resurrection, *"Look you killed Jesus, and now he's back! You're in trouble now, he's going to want revenge!"* The devil would say *"Look, you chose a MURDERER over him! Look at how wicked you are! He was going to be released and you had him killed! There's no going back for you, he wants blood."* How many times have we done the same? Choosing something over God, choosing some sinful vice over the Lord's Word, knowing right from wrong and choosing the wrong almost every time. And so the devil whispers in our minds, *"You've burned the bridge, there's no way God will forgive you, there's no going back."* Dear friends in Christ, this is a LIE.

This is not what the Holy Spirit was saying through Peter that day. Peter says some of these same things, he doesn't sugarcoat it. He says, ***"You chose a murderer over him, you killed the author of***

life!” He says all this to condemn them of their guilt. But he doesn’t preach about the resurrection to terrify them. For next he says, **“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.”** Peter is saying, “This bridge is NOT BURNT! Because Jesus is alive!”

When God raised Jesus from the dead, He was doing more than saying, *“You were wrong and I was right!”* In Jesus resurrection, God was accepting Jesus’ sacrifice for the sins of the world, so He was really saying, *“I have made all of your wrongs, RIGHT!”* He was undoing their crimes, rebuilding the bridge they had burnt because Christ is our bridge to God. Paul says to Timothy in 1 Tim. 2, **“there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”**

When you’ve fallen into sin and think, “I’ve already gone this far, I might as well keep going,” Christ our Mediator is there saying, *“No! Stop, repent, turn back.”* When you’re tempted to sin and think, “Well, I can always just repent later,” Christ says, *“No! Stop, repent, turn back!”* When you’re struck with your guilt and the devil says “Now there is no going back for you, the bridge is burnt between you and God,” Christ says, *“NO! I am here, I am always here. Stop, repent, and turn back.”* For Christ is arisen! That means He has become an unburnable bridge by which we may always retreat in repentance and by which our sins have been blotted out.

This is the comfort that Peter is giving these people in the text. We’ve all done things which we greatly regret, sins which weigh on our minds and cause us to lose sleep wondering if we could ever be forgiven for them. The sin of these people that Peter is talking to? They killed God. They falsely accused and murdered their Savior. How could they ever be forgiven for that?

Well, notice the contrasts that Peter draws out in our text, both to convict them of this sin and then to comfort them in Christ their Savior. The contrast is between what they were doing and the acts of love that God was performing through their actions. First, in v. 13 Peter says, **God glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied.** At the same time as the Jews were denying Jesus, the Father was glorifying him, because the Crucifixion was Jesus’ glory. For that reason He was born; for that reason he had come into the world—His humility until the point of death on the cross was His glory. For by it he was showing the depths of love that God has for sinners and the power of that love to save. So God was glorifying his servant even while the Jews were rejecting Him.

The second contrast, He says in v. 15, **you killed him, and God raised him from the dead**—that’s a pretty big difference. And the third contrast starts in v. 17 **you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled.** They acted in ignorance. Ignorant because they SHOULD HAVE RECOGNIZED who Jesus was. They should have known because God had laid out all of the signs for them. But while they did all of these things in ignorance, while everything they did was terrible and evil and sinful and wrong—through it, God was accomplishing the salvation that he had been planning from the beginning of time. God was carrying out his will to save sinners as He had promised through the prophets.

Yes the contrast between human’s sinful actions and God’s loving actions, it’s as stark a contrast as could ever be. But Peter wants this point to stand out—though *they* crucified the Author of life, God used these things to give life. So he says, **“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.”** Blotted out means erased, as if it never happened at all.

Think of it this way: Their crime was killing Jesus, but Jesus was alive! Imagine that Neil was convicted of killing me, and he was on trial for the murder of Sam Rodebaugh. He's standing before the judge, and all the charges are being read against him. Suddenly I walk into the courtroom, yelling, "No, I'm still alive!"—the charges would be dropped immediately.

And that's what Peter is saying to these Jews—your crime is gone! You killed Jesus, but He's alive so there is no guilt if you believe in Him and His power to save! And that's true of all our sins; for on the cross Jesus bore all of our sins, and it was you and me as much as anyone else who was responsible for his death. But when He rose from the dead, it was a blotting out of every single sin you've ever sinned, as if they'd never happened. Because God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, and this has come personally to you and to me through faith.

Notice how Peter emphasizes the importance of faith in this text, he says, **by faith in His name** he had made this man well. He means that the power was Christ's. The authority was Christ's, not Peter's. Peter had accomplished this healing through faith. This was a special privilege God had given to the apostles, that they would have power from Him to heal and to do miracles in order to prove that their word was true. So when Peter healed this man who had been lame since birth and made him walk, he was simply laying hold of Jesus' promise through faith. Through faith, it was accomplished.

Now you and I have not been promised the authority or the power to heal people or to do miracles. If we tried to do those things it would not be an act of faith but of unbelief, because we wouldn't be basing it off of God's Word. But we have been given an even greater promise that we can latch onto in faith—we have been promised the blotting out of our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is a much greater power and authority, which gives us a wholeness of soul now and which promises wholeness of body in resurrection. The miracle that Peter had performed upon this man, even though we can't do that now, it's a picture of what will happen to us on the last day, when Christ returns and restores all things to glory.

And Christ will come again, that's what Peter saying to the people in our text, that "Christ will come at the appointed time." Not for revenge, not to come back and hunt down all these people with vengeance in his heart, but He's coming again to save. He had come once, and those men and women had crucified Him, but God says He's giving them a second chance. So before He comes again, Peter tells the people to repent and believe that Jesus is the Christ, so that by believing they would have life in His name.

That's the time we find ourselves in right now, still waiting for Christ to return. God has given us more time. And that means that right now, it is not too late to repent. That means that right now you are not too far gone, you have not sinned too badly, you are not "going to hell anyways." Because Jesus Christ is our unburnable bridge! As He was crucified for us and the Father raised Him from the dead, we know now that through Him we can *always* retreat from sin through repentance. We can come to His cross and the empty grave, and forever find free forgiveness for all of our sins. Through Jesus, our bridge to God has been restored. Through Him we will cross over from death into life, and we will dwell in peace with God forever. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.