

Mistaken identity!

English preacher Rico Tice talks about a night he was invited to dine in a London restaurant. He had to wait in a waiting room with a young man he thought he recognized. As is often the case in waiting rooms, there was an exchange of greetings but no more than that. Rico Tice thought he recognized the other man, but his identity escaped him. After a few minutes, a door opened and a waiter said to the other gentleman, "Please follow me your Highness!" It was young Prince William. Rico Tice was in the presence of the future king, but he was unaware of his true identity and he missed an opportunity to speak with the future king of England.

In the passage before us this morning, it is about people who risk missing an opportunity, people who have previously mistaken the identity of a man. The man it is not the future King of England. The man they don't recognize is Jesus Christ.

In verses 1-11 of this chapter, the healing of the lame man draws a large crowd. People in the crowd are familiar with the lame man. They would have seen him, day after day, year after year, sitting outside the temple begging. But now they see him standing, walking and jumping. They see a healed, restored man praising God. They see that a miracle has taken place but do not understand how. Their astonishment, their amazement is evident in verses 10 and 11.

These people seek to understand what they have just seen, and Peter takes the opportunity to reveal the true identity of Jesus. He doesn't want people to be in the dark. He helps them understand certain things. He helps them understand what Jesus Christ is doing to heal, to save, to restore. He explains to them how they can be healed, saved, restored. And his message is still relevant to us. Despite all the means of communication, despite all the evangelistic efforts, despite all the resources available, there is confusion about Jesus, about salvation, about life in Christ.

Even in the church there can be this confusion. There may be people who see the salvation of others, who see radically changed lives, but who do not understand how it is possible. Peter explains 4 things to understand.

Understand the true identity of Jesus.

Peter seems to be surprised by the crowd's lack of understanding. Look at verse 12 where he asks, "Why are you marveled at this? Why are you staring at us?" For Peter, the crowd has no reason to be surprised. These are the same people who saw the miracles of Jesus. They had seen the miracle of tongues on the day of Pentecost. They had heard Peter's explanation in Acts 2. Yet they still do not understand.

So, to respond to their desire to understand, Peter directs their gaze to God, more precisely, to Jesus. He begins in verse 13 by talking about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is the God of the Jews, the God of this crowd, the God of their Scriptures. Peter shows that to fully understand Jesus, you have to go back to the very beginning of the history of the Jewish people. He will speak later of Moses (22), of the prophets (18, 21, 24). He will speak in verse 24 of "All the prophets since Samuel and his successors." He will speak in verse 25 of the Covenant that God made with our fathers. In verse 13, Peter explains that God "glorified his servant Jesus". For Jewish listeners, identifying Jesus as the servant of God means identifying him as the Messiah of whom the prophet Isaiah often speaks. Peter thus explains that the true identity of Jesus can be traced back to the first chapters of the Bible and then throughout the scriptures. He is the descendant of Abraham. He is the Messiah of God, the servant of God. He's the one the prophets spoke of. And as such, God glorified him. So these Jews know their scriptures well yet they did not understand anything about the identity of Jesus. Peter explains the true identity of Jesus.

But Peter also explains what happens when we get the identity of Jesus wrong. He explains the catastrophic consequences for those who do not recognize the real Jesus. We see this from verse 13: "You delivered him up and denied him before Pilate." V14 Instead of recognizing Jesus as the Holy One, the Righteous One, they made the choice to free a murderer. And then the worst thing in verse 15: "You killed the prince of life." They did not understand that Jesus came to give life and they took his life away from him. Do you see the catastrophic choices we make when we are wrong about the identity of Jesus?

Despite their knowledge of the Scriptures, despite everything they had seen in the life of Jesus, a holy and righteous man, despite the life that Jesus came to bring, they rejected him. They killed him. The apostle John was right to write: "He came to his own, and his own did not receive him". Peter wants his listeners to understand the true identity of the one they have rejected, denied, killed.

Understand the need for faith in Jesus. (Verse 16)

Let's not forget that the crowd is trying to understand the miracle they just saw. Peter says in verse 12 that the crowd believed that the miracle happened through the power or the godliness of Peter and John. But his explanation in verse 16 leaves no doubt. Having fully explained the true identity of Jesus, Peter said, "It was by faith in his name, it was faith in Jesus that gave him this complete recovery." Peter has faith in the name of Jesus but more importantly, the lame man believes in the person of Jesus and when he puts his trust in Jesus, the power of the Risen Jesus Christ flows through his body like a torrent of water to give it strength, to heal it, instantly, completely. Peter emphasizes the need for faith in Jesus. This verse is a key verse in this sermon from Peter. Without faith in Jesus, there is no healing. Without faith in Jesus, there is no new life. This will be the message of the book of Acts, without faith in Jesus, there is no salvation. Jesus Christ alone is powerful to save, to heal.

And that is still the message that is at the heart of everything we teach today. It is the need for faith in Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus Christ, Jesus alive. It is Jesus victorious over death. It is Jesus who reigns and Jesus who will return. The Christian faith is not a list of rules to follow. It's not a philosophy. It is a relationship of love, of trust, a relationship of faith with a person. It is living by faith in a person, in Jesus. It is trusting him to do what he came to do. What did he come to do? He came to save and reign. Do you remember what we saw in Matthew 9, people healed, saved, forgiven? Jesus sees the faith of the people. He sees that they recognize in him his divine power. They believe in Jesus and they are saved. Peter says to the crowd here, he says to us: Understand the need for faith in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is before you this morning. Can you say to him: Jesus, I recognize you. I know exactly who you are. I believe that you are the Christ, the Holy One, the Righteous One, that you died on the cross, that you rose victorious, that you are alive, that you reign, that you are coming back. Jesus, I trust you as my Savior and my Lord. Can you tell him that this morning?

Understand the true identity of Jesus. Understand the need for faith in Jesus.

Then look at the first 2 words of verse 17 "And now". These words show us that Peter is moving on to a new part of his sermon. He switches, if you will, to the personal application. He has explained the true identity of Jesus. He has explained the need for faith in Jesus. In the next part of his sermon he says two more things that the crowd must understand and so must we: Understand the need for repentance (17-19) Understand the blessings for those who repent (19 -26).

Understand the need for repentance (17-19)

In verse 17, Peter accepts that in killing Jesus the Jews acted in ignorance. They didn't really know what they were doing. Isn't that what Jesus said when he prayed, "Forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Isn't that what Paul says when speaking of religious leaders in 1 Corinthians 2: 8: "If they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Peter says, "I know you acted in ignorance."

Peter also explains in verse 18 that their rejection of Jesus, the very fact of having killed him, did not thwart God's plan. God even used the evil intentions of the people to accomplish His own purposes. "But in this way God fulfilled what he had announced in advance." But the fact

of having acted in ignorance, the fact that God sovereignly acted to accomplish his purposes, does not change the fact that the people are guilty of having put the Messiah to death. It doesn't change the fact that the people's sin is serious. Nevertheless, the grace of God is still offered. Forgiveness of sin is still available. The God of grace is still ready to wash away such grave sin. But God requires repentance. Verse 19: "Repent therefore and turn again"

The "Repent" of verse 19 literally means, "Change your mind or attitude." Peter said to the crowd, "Change your attitude towards your sin. Recognize that you have sinned and that your sin is very serious. Repent! Change your attitude towards Jesus. Change your mind about his true identity. Instead of rejecting him, embrace him. Instead of banishing him from your life, let him rule your life. Instead of seeing him as someone to despise, worship him. Trust him.» Peter says to them: « Turn again ». It means, turn away from your hostility towards Jesus and turn to him in gratitude and love.

There is wonderful logic and flow in Peter's argument. It is as if he says, "Now that you understand who Jesus is, now that you understand your sin against him, put your faith in him and repent! If you have really understood who Jesus is, if you have really understood the gravity of your sin, you must absolutely believe in him and repent."

And it is true that the only appropriate response when one sees Jesus as he really is and when one sees his own sin, is to bow down before him in repentance and ask for his mercy. To say that one is a believer when there is no repentance, there is no change of life or attitude, that does not make sense! To say that you believe in Jesus but do not want to repent is nonsense. What Jesus do you believe in? The Jesus of the Bible demands total submission to his will. He demands a life devoted to him, a life of repentance and obedience. Understand the need for repentance.

Understand the blessings promised in Jesus.

The Bible could be summed up by saying that it is a book filled with promises from God that are fulfilled in Jesus or that will be fulfilled in Jesus. And in this preaching of Peter, there are three promises, all three based on the person of Jesus. These are promises of blessing for those who believe in Jesus and repent of their sin. V19 - remission of sins V 20 - refreshment from the Lord V 21 - restoration of all

The remission of sins (V19) - Yes the people committed a serious sin by killing Jesus but look at what God says through the mouth of Peter in verse 19: "Repent, turn again so that your sins may be blotted out" Dear friends, understand this. Verse 19 is among the most encouraging verses in the whole Bible. Peter is speaking to those who killed the Son of God, the prince of life. They are responsible for the death of Jesus. Is there a more serious crime? Yet God is ready to forgive them for this terrible sin. God is ready to erase everything. And it's not that God takes a cloth with a product to wipe the whiteboard of our life. The debt of sin is erased because it is covered by the blood of Jesus, the one the people killed! But the blood even covers the sin committed against Jesus. And if God is ready to wash away this sin from the people in chapter 3, won't He be ready to wash away your sin, mine too? Everything can be erased, even the sin that you are hiding from everyone. All evil, thoughts, words, attitudes, for those who repent, all is erased, forever. What a huge blessing. Peace with God because sin is forgiven.

Refreshment from the Lord (v20) - God is not only the God who remits our sin, He is also the God who refreshes our heart, our soul. He fills us with his goodness, with his grace. During this life on earth, with struggles, temptations, trials, we go through periods of spiritual drought, days of darkness, don't we? We groan. We stumble. We have heavy burdens to bear. But Peter is speaking here of times of refreshment. There are times when we are fully aware of the blessing and spiritual refreshment from God. We experience seasons of deep joy and peace in Christ. God fills us with his love and goodness. God takes us by the hand and makes us lie down in green pastures, he leads us near still waters. He restores our soul. We enjoy his real presence in prayer, in his word, in worship. We experience intense, deep, refreshing happiness in Christ. This is what is promised to those who repent. It's a huge blessing.

But beware, if there is no repentance, we should not expect this refreshment from God. It is promised to those who repent. If we are not ready to repent of the sin in us, we should not think that we will be able to enjoy the refreshing fellowship with Jesus. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6: "What fellowship can light have with darkness? ". Perhaps the reason a Christian experiences little refreshment is because there is little repentance in his life. Perhaps if we experience little of the light, the warmth of the face of Christ, it is because we refuse to destroy the walls of sin that block the heat and the light. Isn't that a real motivation for repentance, knowing that through repentance we will enjoy more of God's refreshment? Remission, refreshment.

The Restoration of all things (21-26) - If the first two blessings are for this life here on earth, the third is a blessing which the Christian will fully enjoy when Jesus returns. In verse 20, Peter announces that the Lord who refreshes is also the Lord who will send "the one appointed for you, Christ Jesus." God is going to send again, his Messiah, his Christ, Jesus. In verse 21, Peter explains that for now Jesus had to go but not forever. He is the one "whom heaven must receive until the time of restoration of all the things about which God has spoken through the mouth of his holy prophets of old".

There will be, says Peter, a future restoration. Jesus has already brought about the restoration of the lame man(v16) and Jesus Christ will return for the restoration a new heaven, a new earth. He will return to restore a world of peace, joy, holiness, justice, a world where there will be no more tears, no more suffering, no more evil, no more death. It will be the restoration of a world where we will enjoy perfect fellowship with one another but above all with our God. This is the promised blessing for those who, in faith in Jesus, repent.

Peter said to his listeners in verse 24: "All the prophets who have spoken since Samuel and his successors have also announced those days." In verse 25 he calls them "the sons of the prophets and of the covenant" and says "These promises are for you! These blessings are offered to you. It is to you that God sent his servant, to bless you. Understand this well! You've already made mistakes about Jesus, but the door of God's grace is not closed. Repent and you will receive all of these blessings". Remission, Refreshment, and Restoration.

What a tragedy it is to be mistaken about Jesus Christ. When we do not see Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfillment of the Scriptures, glorified by God, risen, the Holy One, the Righteous, the Prince of life, when we see him just as a man, we end up rejecting him, we end up excluding him from our life. We see him as an accessory in life and not as King, the Lord of life. We see him as handyman, a friend who is there when things go wrong but not as the savior that we desperately need. Have you understood the true identity of Jesus? Who is Jesus for you this morning? Is he the Jesus of the Bible or the Jesus that you created for yourself, the Jesus of your imagination? Savior, Lord or occasional handyman?

If the English pastor had recognized Prince William, what would that have changed? Not a lot. They might have exchanged a few words but no more than that. But for those who recognize Jesus Christ, who trust him, who repent of their sin, the reward is more than a few words exchanged. The reward is the remission of sin, blotted out forever, it is a life of blessing, of being refreshed abundantly in this life and an eternity with Christ in the new earth restored at Jesus' return.

In chapter 4 verse 4 we read that many of those who heard the word believed. May it be so for us too.