

Acts 3:19-26. ¹⁹ Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰ and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. ²¹ He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. ²² For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. ²³ Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.’²⁴ “Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. ²⁵ And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’ ²⁶ When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

A family heirloom is placed in your hands. This is yours to keep. The item has value and meaning. This is yours to care for, appreciate, and hand down. What an honor! What a privilege! A father proudly passes it down to his son or daughter and this treasure is to be saved and passed on to the next generation. It is a treasure that is to be enjoyed for generations, is entrusted to you. How precious!

Time goes on however and that gift, that heirloom is neglected and mistreated. What now?! Imagine, being in their shoes. The Israelites, the sons of Israel, the children of Abraham were the keepers of the promise. The Jews of Jesus's time were members of this chosen family through which the Messiah would come. This was the promise made to Abraham, the covenant cut by God and renewed through the centuries; a special prophet, a priest, a king, a Messiah, would come to bring redemption and salvation to God's people. These sons and daughters of Abraham had been entrusted with this precious heirloom and along with the covenant they had been handed the very words of God, the mouths of the prophets made holy when they declared with divine authority, "Thus says the LORD!" From Moses to Samuel down through all the prophets God spoke to his people and the promise of the Messiah was the golden thread throughout. Prophet after prophet spoke of the one who was to come. And could it be?! Had they denied, rejected, yes even killed the one whom the prophets had foretold. Had they disowned and even murdered the very one who embodied the very promise for which they waited.

That's basically, what Peter and John were saying. Standing in Solomon's Colonnade, a place where the leaders of the Jews had called Jesus a liar and threatened to stone him to death, Peter and John now called out to these once chosen people. ***You handed him over to be killed... You disowned him... You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer (Barabbas) be released to you. You killed the author of life. Repent! (Acts 3:13-15)***

Imagine, how their hearts sunk in their chest. Think of the child who spills grape juice all over great-grandma's heirloom table cloth that only comes out at Christmastime. Imagine the grown man whose eyes well up with tears when he pulls the box that holds the family bible out of damp corner of the flooded basement. Was this precious treasure ruined? Was this their fault? What would the consequences and punishment be? Peter cried out to the Jewish people who had in large part rejected their Savior and this was his cry, "Repent!" They had neglected and mistreated the promise. They had been careless and mishandled this precious heirloom, but how

did God respond. The words that followed might have been a bit surprising, ***“Repent, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the LORD.”*** Their sins were great. Their sins were ghastly as they had caused the death of the Messiah. But in Christ their sins were forgiven. They had rejected and killed God’s own Son, and yet God’s immediate response was not to cast them away in anger but to pull them close in his faithful love. Jesus had come as promised and had died as the sacrifice to pay for all sins, even for their sins. ***Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped*** away, blotted out, expunged from the recorded and completely forgotten. God had the power and the goodness and the desire to forgive and restore his people. God had sent the prophets with the promise, and now he sent the apostles to share this message of pardon and peace. That heirloom was kept intact, that precious inheritance passed down to from one generation to the next. Cleansed, washed, redeemed, perfectly restored in God’s eyes, and made new each day.

Peter and John had just healed a crippled man and now as the attention of the crowds turned toward God used this stage as an opportunity to extend miraculous spiritual healing and relief, cleansing and refreshing through Peter and John. God spoke his holy precious Word through his apostle as Peter declared. ***Repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the LORD.***

Repent! The very word causes some level of discomfort in us, doesn’t it? Aware of our sinfulness the very word causes a lump to come up into our throat or causes our stomach to turn ever so slightly. *I have neglected God’s promises. I have denied and disowned my Savior. I have rejected him and left his commands stained with my impurities and my rebellion and my disobedience.* Like the man who may have let the family bible be destroyed we might be paralyzed with guilt and regret. Like a child who stained great-grandma’s heirloom tablecloth we run away in shame or we try to cover up our sin in some way that falls far short of solving the problem.

One the one side we are pinned in by shame and despair on the other side we might react with pride and denial. As soon as we hear the call to repent we become ashamed or we get defensive, we cover our ears or we run away. Repent! Confess your sin; admit your fault! Why? Why would I want to do that? Why would I want to go through that pain, can’t I just avoid it? And yet God calls us to recount and recall and confess our sins not to cause us pain, but rather, so that he may assure us that we are forgiven, so that he may assure us of his love.

There are seasons in our life when we might choose to ignore, deny, blame others, or just not think about our sin. We try to bury it, sweep it away, or run away and none of it works. God leads us to repentance so that he may set us free from shame and guilt on the one side and pride and denial on the other. As we confess our sins, God reminds us that he will release us from the guilt of our sin and he will bring refreshment and relief and renewal. In Psalm 32 King David, a man who knew a thing or two about the futility of trying to hide ones sins, tells us about this blessing of repentance with vivid detail. When ***I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”— and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD’s unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.*** ¹¹ ***Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are***

upright in heart! God leads us to repentance and confession not to rub our noses in our sins but to show us that he has a solution to the problem of sin in Christ. He leads us to repentance to set us free from guilt and shame and despair and pride. He leads us to repentance so that we may confess our sins to him and he may bring to us relief and refreshment and renewal as we fight against sin and live for Him.

God calls us to repent and then he immediately tells us why, so that your sins, your guilt may be washed away. He extends this gracious invitation. ***Repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out and times of refreshing may come.*** This is the covenant that God has given us. This is the promise that we have in Christ. This is the heirloom that we get to pass down. Forgiveness and pardon in Christ so that we have peace in our current relationship with God as well as the certainty of everlasting peace in the restored paradise of heaven.

It was what the prophets foretold. It is the message fulfilled in Christ. A Savior has been born for us. He was perfect in our place. He died to pay for every one of our sins. His message of free and full forgiveness sets us free to serve our God in thankfulness to turn away from sin and love God and love our neighbor. Through God's working in us repentance we are redeemed and restored, refreshed and renewed until Christ comes again and makes all things new.

In a way, it might seem odd for someone to walk in off the street and to hear that one of the first things that we do in worship nearly every week is that we confess our sinfulness. Those who have not been shown the value of this practice can't quite see its value. But that's what we do, because we know and believe in the meaning, the value behind this custom. In a way, this is a family heirloom that has been preserved and passed down through the church for our spiritual benefit. We confess our sins and we know that God hears us and that he promises to respond with pardon and peace. Even though we have sinned and denied him throughout the week he stands waiting with his open arms to embrace us with his love to give us healing and relief. With genuine sorrow and contrition we confess our sins and he responds with faithful mercy. We take this sin that weighs on us and we give it to God and he forgives us and it is refreshing. Through his called servant, words of absolution are made holy by the declaration of God, he announces his forgiveness upon his people and brings relief and refreshment and renewal. This is the precious heirloom that has been passed down to us and the truth that we pass on to the next generation. Acknowledge your sins before the LORD and he forgives the guilt of sin. Confess your sins to LORD and he will purify you from all unrighteousness. God will help you turn from those sins to live in thankful service to God. May God give you strength to live according to his will. Confess your sins to each other and forgive each other as Christ has forgiven you. This is the precious inheritance and way of life passed down to us in Christ.

In a way, it might seem odd, for someone to walk in off the street and to hear us describe a baby that is just a few days old as sinful and in need of forgiveness. But he is, and we are. We are all sinful from birth. Our first parents failed to follow God's commands, they left God's commands stained, and tattered, ripped, and ruined and they passed down this to us. And we added to the problem. From life's first cry to our final breath we daily sin much. And yet God in his mercy washes away our sins. He makes us his dear child through simple water and his powerful Saving word. He refreshes and renews us day after day with this covenant of his love. In Baptism God says to each one of us, *"You are mine. You are loved with an everlasting love. You are connected to*

Christ and his perfect life and his holy sacrifice.” This is the precious heirloom that has been passed down to us and this is the truth that we pass onto the next generation. Others might not understand the meaning or the value of this precious gift, so it is our honor, it is our privilege to remind our children of the blessings of their baptism. We get to celebrate God’s forgiveness and love with them. We have the honor of teaching them the truth of Christ’s undeserved love displayed in this sacred act of God. Baptism is a washing of rebirth and a renewal by the Holy Spirit. In baptism, we are daily washed and renewed in the life-changing forgiveness Christ has won for us. Tap into this for your own daily benefit as you fight against personal temptation, and pass it down to the next generation as a precious heirloom, an eternal covenant, and a treasured inheritance that we members of the family of God carry with us as we live for our Father until the day Jesus, our brother, comes again.

In a way, it might seem odd for someone who walks in off the street to find out that in the days before Christmas we use the time of Advent as a time to acknowledge our sinfulness. Instead of merely filling this time with the sights and sounds and smells of Christmastime, we also use this time to prepare our hearts. We use this time as a time of repentance. The season of Advent serves as a helpful reminder of the why Jesus had to come before we hear once again the how it is that he came. Jesus came as a child born in Bethlehem (that is the how) to live in the place of sinners, to die as the sacrifice for sin that we needed (this is the why) and now he dwells in heaven interceding for us until he comes again to restore all things back to the perfect paradise that was lost.

To appreciate the gift of the baby born in the manger we must realize this is a gift that we so desperately needed. This is what the Scriptures foretold. This is the prize and the gospel that has been passed down to us and has been and will be a blessing to all people. Jesus came to pay for our sins, to blot out all the transgressions of the world. Your sins and mine. This is an heirloom of utmost importance, this is the precious gift for families to pass down from generation to generation.

God promised and sent a Savior, even for sinners like us. Jesus was rejected by those he came to save, he was disowned and denied by the very ones to whom he was promised, and yet he came and served as our perfect and willing substitute. Christ our Savior, kept every single command of God, and he restored the relationship human beings have with God. He washed away our sins, blotted out every stain of our sin with his holy precious blood. He brought us peace that is renewed daily whenever his gospel is proclaimed to us.

We mess up day after day and yet Jesus does not immediately cast us away or cut us off, in his perfect love he calls out to us through his message of repentance and his desire is to place us in the presence of God the Father so that He may smile upon us, wrap his arms around us and forgive us. We mess up day after day and yet Jesus in his tender mercy and power turns each one of us from our wicked ways as he daily creates in us a new heart that serves God in thankful obedience as we turn away from sin and live for our God.

This is the heirloom that is placed in your hands. This message of repentance and forgiveness, this gospel, is yours to care for, appreciate, use, and hand down. What an honor! What a joy! ***“Repent, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the LORD.”***