

Acts 3:12–20 When Peter saw this, he addressed the people: “Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this? Why are you staring at us, as if by our own power or godliness we have made this man walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and disowned in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. ¹⁴You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you. ¹⁵You killed the Author of Life, whom God raised from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶And on the basis of faith in his name, it is the name of Jesus that has strengthened this man, whom you see and know. This faith that comes through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. ¹⁷“Now brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, just like your leaders. ¹⁸But in this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through the mouth of all the prophets: that his Christ would suffer. ¹⁹Therefore repent and return to have your sins wiped out, ²⁰so that refreshing times may come from the presence of the Lord and that he may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Have you ever had one of those moments or days, or maybe for you it was a vacation, where you thought to yourself, “Well, it can’t get any worse?” Things happened in such a way or to such an extent that there was no possible way it could get any worse. You were stranded and you missed an appointment. The routine maintenance turned into a job 4 times more expensive. You or your spouse or your child got sick while on a trip. We’ve probably all have been in a situation where we said or at least thought the words: It can’t get any worse.

As those men of Israel sat there and listened to Peter’s mini sermon in the street, they must have thought the same thing. They had just seen something amazing. Peter and John found themselves in the sights of a street beggar, a paralyzed man who couldn’t walk. His request for money was answered with something even greater: “**Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.**” Peter took the man by the hand and he stood up, walked, and began jumping around praising God.

Suddenly Peter and John found themselves surrounded there in the temple, in Solomon’s Colonnade, where Jesus himself used to walk. Much like when Jesus did such miracles, the people were amazed and wanted more. They wanted more of this power. Peter used this opportunity to share with

them where this power came from: **It is the name of Jesus that has strengthened this man.**

Horror of horrors, the source of this divine power that made a paralyzed man walk, this power that they were so amazed by and wanted more of, was Jesus of Nazareth, whom they killed. It couldn’t get any worse.

Peter told them: **The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and disowned in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you. You killed the Author of Life.**” How could it get any worse? It hadn’t been that long. They remembered their demand — Give us Barabbas! It hadn’t been that long. They remembered their cries of “Crucify, Crucify.” It hadn’t been that long. They remembered their words — “Let his blood be on us and our children.”

It couldn’t get any worse. How could they have gotten things so dead wrong? The Savior God had promised to send, for whom their people had been waiting for literally for thousands of years, finally came, and they killed him in the worst possible way. I don’t want to beat this phrase to death, but seriously, it couldn’t get any worse! The one who had come to bring about a far greater kingdom than his own people had longed for, and rule with power greater than his own people ever imagined, was dead. And they killed him. Their only hope for escape, their only rescue from sin, death, hell, and the devil, and they turned on him and threw him away, they treated him like the worst human to ever live.

I asked “How could they…” but we know how. We know how because we do the same thing every single day. With every single sinful thought, word, and action we, too, disown **the Holy and Righteous One and ask to have a murderer set free.** For the murderer *is* Barabbas, but it’s also me, and it’s also you. For every sin we commit is a turning from God and turning to me and what I want. Every sin against God says, “Take Jesus away. Let me go free. Let me live how I want to live. Let me do what I want to do.”

And in that state of sin, it can’t get any worse. Turning against God, disowning Jesus, where does that leave us? With a sinful flesh that grows ever stronger and an ever weakening faith. A journey that picks up right where we left off before baptism — the road to eternal death in hell.

It couldn’t get any worse. Sometimes we use that phrase when making a decision. Should I or shouldn’t I? Well, it can’t get any worse — it can only get better. And that was the point of Peter’s sermon. At that moment

when we are brought to realize that our situation can not get any worse because of our sins, because we have no way out on our own, God swoops in...and it can't get any better. Peter continued: Yes, **you killed the Author of Life, whom God raised from the dead!** And you can imagine some of those men of Israel, heads dropping out of guilt, shame, and growing despair, jerking up at those words of Peter. "Wait, what?! God raised him from the dead?" And before they could voice any skepticism Peter quickly added, "**We are witnesses of this!**" And they had already seen the proof: **it is the name of Jesus that has strengthened this man, whom you see and know. This faith that comes through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.**

In the middle of our sins, with no where to turn, no where to go but down to the fires of hell, there's good news — the best news, news so good it can't get any better. The one they had killed was not dead. God's Son was alive again and there was a way to get out from under the guilt, shame, and curse of sin. Peter continued: **in this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through the mouth of all the prophets: that his Christ would suffer.**

From the general prophecies of the Christ's suffering pictured in the passover lamb's bloodshed, or the countless bloody sacrifices for sins throughout the OT, the concept should've been drilled in their heads: **without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness.** From the specific prophecy of Isaiah of the Messiah being **pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities**, the Christ's crucifixion and death should have come as no surprise to any faithful Israelite. There was an answer to their horrible sin. There was an answer to the punishment they deserved: **¹⁹Therefore repent and return to have your sins wiped out."**

Just like that, despairing of themselves and turning to God's Savior, Jesus, this time not to deny and condemn, but to believe in, to trust, and follow, they would find forgiveness for their sins.

Sadly many rejected this news. So disturbed were the Jewish leaders that these disciples would continue to preach about Jesus and his resurrection, they threw Peter and John in jail. The saving message of Jesus their Savior, the Easter announcement that Jesus had succeeded in paying the price of the sins of the world, his actions that made his words from the cross possible — Father, forgive them — were ignored and covered up. It couldn't get any worse again.

Let's not make the same mistake. Let's not ignore this message that has changed our lives in that moment where things couldn't get any worse, suddenly they can't get any better.

That's what Easter does. And not just one day a year. Not just one season a year. But now and forever. Once things couldn't get any worse, but now, after Easter, now things couldn't be any better. Easter takes the greatest threats to what truly matters, the heaviest things that weigh on our minds and says, you don't need to worry about these things. Sin and how we can stand before God — taken care of. We have a Savior who has taken all our sins away and who's perfect life is counted to our credit. Death? We have a Savior who died in our place and rose again, making death for us only the doorway to life the way God always meant it to be for us. The time between now and then? If God didn't withhold his own son but gave him up for us to meet our greatest needs, and if Jesus suffered death to make God's gift a reality, we can trust that God will see us through whatever comes our way, and that Jesus will be with us through it all. As he greeted his disciples in our gospel reading, so his words greet us every day — peace be with you.

Where does that peace come from? Understanding how bad it was without Jesus, and how good it is now with him. That truth is kept in focus by living a life of repentance: Constant sorrow over sin, so that our spirit is broken, broken over how sinful we are, how lost we are on our own, so that we have no other option but God's saving grace. And so a life of constant turning to Jesus and the forgiveness he won for us. That peace is so palpable on Sundays like these, when Easter, the readings, the hymns, the prayers are still fresh on our minds. But that peace is for all time and every situation.

At times we struggle, we suffer, we fall. Satan may make us question if this peace is real, or, if it's for me. If it was for those men of Israel, directly responsible for killing the Author of Life, it's for you too. I don't think we could imagine a situation in our lives where things were worse than that.

So take that peace with you for yourself and for those around you. Take it without you for those times when you think things couldn't be any worse. And then thank God. Thank God for Easter. Thank God for Jesus. Thank God for his Word. Things couldn't be better. Amen!